Tensions between Religion and Feminism in Muslim Communities in Mallorca

A Qualitative Analysis of women's lived experiences

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1 ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into the relationship between religion and feminism in the context of Muslim women residing in Mallorca. The study conducts a qualitative analysis to evaluate the impact of defined gender roles on their everyday experiences. We compare Islamic and secular feminist theories with the viewpoints of young women in Mallorca to determine how individuals engage with religious ideals that may contain misogynistic content. We also examine whether women are disproportionately affected by societal judgment, its impact on their sexual autonomy, and the role of marriage in reinforcing or challenging structural gender inequalities. The conclusions of this research shed light on the complex experiences of these women as they navigate their place in a society shaped by faith, culture, and evolving feminist discourse.

Keywords: Women in Islam, Islamic Feminism, Secular Feminism, Gender Roles, and Sexual Autonomy

2 INTRODUCTION

Do Muslim women in Mallorca experience a tension between Religion and Feminism, and how do these possible tensions impact their lived experiences?

In Islamic cultural and religious belief systems, gender roles are often clearly assigned. Some view the division of roles and tasks based on biological constitutions as necessary for securing the liveliness and security of the family, as a way of securing that each member apports to the family with their best natural faculties whilst others consider it to promote the idea of inherent differences in value between the sexes.

The rhetoric behind Western discussion of women's position in Islamic societies and vice versa are similar in that they are both inextricably linked to women's sexuality. While Western media present the Muslim woman as a figure of oppression, symbolised by fanatical concern with women's bodies, condemned to accepting men's polygamy and the oppressive nature of the veil, Muslim societies critique that Westerners oppress women by judging their worth as persons based on their physical attractiveness, seeing the critique of polygamy hypocritical when adultery, serial remarriage and single motherhood is common in the West (Ali, 2006).

The idea that Western ideals of female autonomy represent a developmental advance over other values and identities, worthy of rejecting one's own attachments and identities recalls a colonial, Orientalist[1] construction that victimises and essentialises Muslims. Postcolonial and Islamic Feminists argue that the liberationist discourse, which claims to free women from their "oppressive cultures and religions," is another form of American imperialism and Islamophobia (Weir 2021: 60). On the other hand, feminist critical theorists still tend to view religion as the "opiate of the masses" and cultural identities and attachments as primarily oppressive (ibid).

This raises important questions regarding how to define oppression, and if it would include women who may choose to be part of structures that view women as unequal to men. Women such as those Mahmood works with in Cairo, who chose to be part of an "Islamic revival movement" which promotes these inequalities. It is hard to know how individuals live a religion that shapes their lives. When the text interacts with the reader or listener, one may subconsciously prioritise

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[1] Edward Said's influential work, Orientalism claims that this style of thought is based on an epistemological distinction between "orient" and "the Occident" which creates an inaccurate and degrading image of Muslim culture and society. (1979:2)

certain parts of the text that feel more identified with. Although this paper centers greatly upon them, and they are of great importance among Islamic sectors, scholarly discussions around the interpretation of Islam need not apply to the lived realities of Muslim women (Mahmood 2002: 575).

This proposal aims to investigate, via a sample population of young Muslim women in Mallorca, how the women at the centre of this political debate view their position in society, and how they experience gendered roles and traditionalist lifestyles. It seeks to explore how religion and culture are expressed among those who cohabit in two cultures with different expectations of them and different ideals of morality, justice, and success.

Morocco was deemed a favourable choice due to its cultural similarities with the area, stemming from its geographical proximity and shared historical heritage. The influence of Muslim occupation in Iberia for nearly eight centuries is evident in the irrigation system, the Spanish guitar, and over 4000 Spanish words rooted in Arabic (Cano, 1999: 53).

The specific context of rural Mallorca, a conservative, generally reserved society, possibly due to its geographical isolation (Bonnín, 33) was deemed appropriate to compare against a Muslim nation with a relatively moderate interpretation of Islam, such as Morocco. One significant difference is that while Mallorca has undergone a recent secularization of Christian values and behaviours, this has not occurred among Muslim citizens. Thus, it is an ideal geographical context to analyse the influence of religion on one's self-conception.

Needless to say, reconciliation of faith and feminism need not mean that women must live lives opposite to traditional female roles of motherhood. Nevertheless, we will consider whether they have thought about other options and had the real opportunity to pursue them. It also need not be that they identify as feminists, but we seek to inquire how being a woman affects their identity.

As an unavoidable outsider to the topic, I have tried to be self-aware so as not to fall into the trap of Eurocentric superiority, however, I cannot extricate myself from this positionality, of my own conceptions of what it means to be a woman; affecting both how I understand the issue, and how I will be interpreted by others.

2.1 HOW DO WE DEFINE FEMINISM?

As aforementioned, the topic of who decides that religion is oppressive to women, and what power relations are inherent in such a decision is highly relevant as the act of defining it constitutes an exercise of power in itself (Salem 2016). Reproducing agency as central to these debates remains a strongly liberal concept. Following this, our definition of Feminism will be open to different conceptions of equality.

The ambiguity in this definition serves to underscore the need for feminism and the significance of accommodating various perspectives on the matter. It emphasizes that female oppression exists worldwide, with women responding in diverse ways. Each response striving for gender equality is considered a form of feminism.

Interestingly, none of the interviewees exhibited a strong attachment to specific feminist authors or principles. However, they all held feminist concepts as fundamental to their life principles, including the belief that both men and women should participate equally in managing households, and that mutual respect is vital within a marriage. This underscores the idea that both women's and men's voices should be treated equally.

All over the cultural spectrum men have exerted power over women´s bodies. The persistent fixation on and unidirectional authority over women's beauty remains urgently necessary for male culture to maintain itself. This fixation persists because it holds onto one of the last unexamined privileges from the antiquated list of masculine entitlements – the right assumed universally bestowed upon men by divine or natural forces to exert authority over the women they desire (Wolf 2015: 91). From this pressure source, patriarchy maintains a stronghold over women's self-perception.

Capitalist patriarchy exercises control over women´s bodies by focusing so hard on their beautification that they become commodified as objects for the gratification of others, rather than as complex individuals with diverse roles and identities.

Islamic patriarchy does so by hiding and forcing their bodies out of the public sphere out of fear of how people can react to their beauty. An intense fear of women's fatal attraction and men's lack of will to resist her identifies women with chaos and the universe's anti-divine and anti-social forces. (Mernissi 2011: 50)

2.2 SOCIAL AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS: MINORITY RIGHTS, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Concern over women's position in Muslim culture from a western standpoint is often entwined with broader political debates, creating an "us versus them" civilisational discourse. (Mahmood 2002: 339–54.). Historical contexts, like the Algerian war, fuelled the idea that Muslim women need saving from their "terrorist" misogynist male countrymen to create societal friction and justify intervention.

This debate frequently leads to cultural relativism, where valid criticism against female oppression is silenced in the name of multicultural tolerance. It almost seems that one is forced to either generate anti-Muslim hate speech that supports foreign interventionism and bigotry or defend Muslims against all criticism thereby endorsing Islamic fundamentalist groups (El Masrar 2018: 7).

Muslim feminist discourse faces challenges as their proponents (such as Ibtissam, Hirsi Ali, Irshad Manji, and Mona Eltahawy) are accused of catering to Western stereotypes about Muslim women, promoting Islamophobia, or racism. However, the flip side to this argument is that opening the dialogue to analyse diverse approaches to Islam helps challenge the reductionist views of Muslims. Both secular and Islamic feminists seeking to reform Islamic thought legitimise the right to speak about women and Islam, promoting constructive debates among Muslims and non-Muslims as well as challenging fixed authorities (Pepicelli 2008: 99).

Ibtissam also calls for feminists in the West's responsibility to provide a platform for Muslim women's grievances to be heard, given that they are not subjected to blasphemy laws, which limit the possibilities to criticise the sacred and rebel against conventions.

According to Lerner, patriarchal thought has maintained its hegemony in Western civilisation not due to its superior content, form, or achievements compared to other thoughts, but rather through the systematic suppression of other voices. Individuals from various backgrounds—women of all classes, men of different races or religious beliefs—deemed deviants by those in power, had to be discredited, ridiculed, and silenced. Above all, they were excluded from the intellectual discourse (Lerner 1993: 297). While women's demands in revolutionary movements historically remained marginalised (such as women's inclusion in the Declaration of the Rights of Man), conservative political groups consistently used the threat of feminism as a central issue. They made the repression of women's organisations an inevitable and essential feature of their political program (Lerner

1993: 294). Reflecting on historical silencing, it becomes evident that struggles must be viewed through intersectionality; antiracism cannot disregard women's struggles.

How can a Western atheist approach this without offending? Reformists like Irshad Manji and Maajid Nawaz propose consciously separating religious doctrines from religious individuals to create a safe space for debates. They argue that religious ideas do not possess rights; the individuals who adhere to them do.

While acknowledging the importance of maintaining identities, it should not hinder our ability to discuss each other. The perceived "other" is also part of "us" in many ways, constituting a significant present identity in Europe and an essential element of our shared history, particularly in Spain.

2.3 RELATION TO HUMAN RIGHTS:

Human rights systems in traditional Islamic societies

The fundamental secular issue is an inescapable factor of the debate. Namely the transfer of power from a transcendent divine being to an ordinary individual living everyday life (Mernissi 2011: 23). Be it by accepting the human rights doctrine as a rational system to preserve the wellbeing of individuals, or simply rejecting certain aspects of the religion deemed no longer applicable in the present. Framing the debate around female autonomy reveals the liberal ontology from which I outset. This conception assumes an individualistic premise, which is "a key part of the secular metanarrative that informs feminist scholarship today" (Salem 2016: 5). The alternate idea of a higher being that transcends the individual is also a transgression of the liberal worldview, in which autonomy is central (ibid).

Whilst the Human Rights system primarily acknowledges the rights of individuals, traditional Islamic society generally focuses on the will of the group. According to the Moroccan sociologist, Fatema Mernissi, individualism in traditional Moroccan society is seen to disturb collective harmony. Individuality is discouraged and private initiative is considered "bid'a" (translated as "innovation" it refers to adding or omitting something from religion, considered as an instance of disbelief), which constitutes errant behaviour. The philosophical idea of the individual in a state of nature, she states, is non-existent (Mernissi 2011: 21).

The UDHR has been ratified by most Muslim countries without recourse to religious arguments, emphasising human reason or rationality as the ultimate arbiter of rights (Ibn Warraq 2003: 293). This ratification has been accompanied by an increased awareness of international law and civil rights.

However, there are varying perspectives on how Islam relates to the UDHR. While it has prompted some to examine inequalities said to be mandated by Islamic law critically, other Muslims respond by defending discriminatory rules as measures designed to protect "women, the family, and morality" (MacQueen 2008: 14), alternatively, by recalling the inviolate nature of the Qur'an, which remains seen as the word of God Himself, valid for all times and place, whose ideas are absolute and beyond all criticism. To question it is to question the very word of God, and hence blasphemous. (ibid: 294).

Mernissi in fact sees a clash with the very first article of the UDHR (All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights), considering that the "foundation of (Islamic) cultural existence and identity is the inequality of the sexes". (Mernissi 2011: 23)

Irrespective of formal ratifications and legal protections in Morocco and Spain, the enjoyment of Human Rights requires a social and cultural context where individuals understand, appreciate, and demand these rights for which one's self-perception is crucial.

3   CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

Experiences of religious women in a rural area

Existing research has highlighted the importance of economic empowerment and access to education for female emancipation. Some articles indicate that Muslim women in the West have increasing agency and participate in a "reform" which takes the most crucial aspects of their faith as arguments against oppressive traditions (such as Salih, Sierra and Moazami et al). Research concerning Moroccan women in Spain reveals that young women are encouraged to pursue education and academic success. However, they are also expected to conform to specific traditional gender roles aimed at preserving cultural values, family honour, and virtues such as decency and morality (Mendoza et al., 2021: 7). Many of these women must accept surveillance and control imposed by

their families in response to perceived "dangers" from the broader society and interactions with men outside their kinship circle (ibid: 8).

Evidence suggests that the religious component of immigrant identity has added significance when divorced from its original environment. It acts as an anchor in identity resistance, maintenance, and cohesion in the group. (Duderija 2007: 147). Moreover, whereas in a Muslim country, one is naturally a Muslim, regardless of how seriously they take the practice of Islam, in the migratory context religion takes on an added importance in one's identity (ibid: 145).

Moghadam (2013: 168) states that women who internalise the notion that Islam or their community is in danger, tend to relegate or postpone the issues of female equality and empowerment. In an intent to try to demonstrate that they are genuinely rooted in their own culture, rather than "foreign" ideologies, they often adjoin to fundamentalist readings, or Islamic feminism (ibid) and reject women's rights issues as a Westernized concept.

Research into the socio-economic and cultural standing of Muslim women in the Western diaspora often concludes that economic challenges stemming from single-income households are the primary factor driving female emancipation (Abrahams 2022: 10). Coupled with increased access to education, including religious education, women gain agency and the ability to assert their rights.

Qualitative research on the topic by Moghissi, Farahani, and Dwyer, while valuable, tends to avoid exploring more controversial subjects to prevent perpetuating stigmatising generalisations. For example, their studies often do not thoroughly address how increased agency influences participants' views on religious norms, whether they feel constrained by imposed sexual modesty, or if hierarchical gender roles persist. While some studies have begun to address these issues (Such as Slimani, Salih and DJ Shield), it remains a gradual process involving multiple perspectives and sensitive inquiries. While I may not address all the questions that arise, my objective in contributing to this growing field, which dares to pose more complex questions, is to create a space where non-academic religious women can voice their experiences on their own terms, unrestricted by predefined narratives.

Notably, studies on Muslim women in the Western context primarily focus on migrants living in urban or unspecified areas (Abrahams: 10). We consider it important to recognise that the context of religious women in rural areas significantly influences their lived experiences. Although our hypothesis expects women in rural areas to hold more conservative and religious standpoints, this does not necessarily imply that they have not questioned their societal position or are experiencing false consciousness.

Discussions about the impact of religion on women are incomplete without an understanding of how religion is lived and interpreted. It is possible that contentious sections of religious texts are disregarded without a conscious effort at reinterpretation or reform. Conceptualising religion as a positionality could be a valuable approach to conducting research that doesn't pre-emptively dismiss the experiences of religious women as inherently patriarchal.

4 MATERIAL

I aim to distance this study from the age-old West versus East narrative by dissociating the idea that secularism or feminism is a Western concept, concentrating on ideas, theories, and materials from people culturally ingrained in Muslim-majority countries.

The material used in this study can be categorised into two major groups: Islamic and Secular feminist theory, and personal accounts. The theoretical framework and analysis draw extensively from feminist literature. Feminist research plays a dual role in this study, contributing to the establishment of two theoretical answers to the research problem and offering insights into Islamic scripture.

The project primarily explores feminist considerations surrounding women's positions in Islam, presenting topics as intrinsically related to religion. However, the actual reality may differ significantly, some elements presented are cultural interpretations which may or may not be derived from religion. While we have considered the cultural contexts of Morocco and Mallorca to some extent, it is important to recognise that there is a possibility that some Islamic feminist critiques may not precisely align with the Moroccan context. The authors we referenced come from diverse backgrounds, including Egypt, Iran, Canada, the United States, and Somalia, each with unique socio-political and cultural contexts. To address this potential issue, we have compared and contrasted the insights provided by these authors with those of Moroccan feminists and Moroccan law.

The inclusion of such diverse feminist theories could be seen as a limitation in the project, as the extensive and varied material may lead to somewhat confusing conclusions. Moreover, the comparison between Western and Muslim feminist theories, dotted into the analysis may seem

irrelevant to the research question, however, this approach aims to contextualise realities. For instance, within the realm of sexuality, there is no universal definition of "right" or "normal." This approach also clarifies that the paper does not wish to criticise Islam under the assumption that Western secularism does not share these same problems.

In addition to feminist theories, we have included qualitative interviews conducted with women in their mid-twenties who grew up in Mallorca (either since birth or from early childhood). We collected 6 qualitative interviews of 5 women who are married and 1 single. We primarily referenced information from 3 interviews, representing three backgrounds. One is of a single woman with a university education, another is married and has a stable job, and the third is married but doesn't have a stable job.

This age group corresponds to the early years of marriage or the period just before it, a time when gender roles within marriage may be evolving, and sexuality may play a more significant role.

5 METHODOLOGY

DEDUCTIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

We have chosen to use Thematic analysis for this research. The process typically consists of six steps: familiarisation, initial code generation, theme identification, theme review, definition, and report production (V Braun and V Clarke 2006). We have used a deductive method which consists of approaching the data with themes expected to be reflected there, based on existing theory and knowledge. Therefore, the themes and processes have been slightly modified with respect to what Braun and Clarke suggest. The thematic analysis is conducted at a latent level, looking to examine underlying ideas and assumptions from the content of the interviews.

Strengths and weaknesses of using this method.

Analysing qualitative data through the thematic analysis method has its benefits in terms of its flexibility to uncover unexpected insights into people's views, opinions, experiences, and values. However, the method's reliance on the researcher's subjective decision-making can also lead to imprecise or unreliable results.

Religion and sexuality are sensitive topics that often elicit strong emotions which can result in difficulty to systematically organize with a structured method of analysis. We considered this method adequate for its flexibility in order to attempt to attend to the uncovered subjugated knowledge of the diversity of women's realities that often lie hidden and unarticulated (Biber 2013: 264).

Handling of Personal Data

To maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the interviewees, the data is presented in a way to ensure anonymity. Pseudonyms were used and the specific town has not been mentioned. After transcription and analysis were performed of the interviews, the digital recordings were eliminated, and the personal data was erased from the transcripts.

FOUR PHASES

Phase 1: Familiarization with the data

a) **Familiarization with the theory**

During the project, a major challenge was faced in determining whether the idea that Islamic faith could be in tension with feminism was based on misconceptions of what Islam entails. The initial and most comprehensive step of the project involved a theoretical analysis of gender and womanhood in Islam. However, only a portion of this analysis was included in the final draft.

While I found some theologically sanctioned sexist norms and behaviours, I was unsure about the similarity of patterns across various forms of behaviour and how to assess if they collectively contribute to a systemic issue, and if so, how deeply ingrained such issues may be (Bränmark 2021: 249).

b) **Familiarization with the field study and data**

This phase focused on building rapport and connections with the research community. It involved developing relationships, spending time in the community, participating in events, and recording observations through a field diary.

Developing rapport greatly improved the quality of the data as creating a trusting interpersonal relationship was essential for the interviews. Participant observation has also been a source of more organic information, as the answers received from the participants in the interviews was influenced by the presence of a recorder, which sometimes hindered participants' ability to answer freely without concern for potential judgment.

Phase 2: Establishing Themes

In order to engage with all the issues raised in the research question, we subdivided the topic into various matters to discuss. The sections represented issues voiced by the Feminist theory.

The first theme explores *women's autonomy over their own sexuality* and the critical importance of this autonomy. It underscores the challenges women face, such as compulsory virginity before marriage and enforced passivity after (Slimani, 2020: 19-20).

The second theme provides a theoretical analysis of the interplay between *social control, honour culture, and firmly assigned gender roles*. It discusses the societal expectations that place the burden of family honour on women and the consequences of failing to meet these expectations.

The third theme investigates *marriage as a "gender-differentiated institution"* and the implications of this perception, with a focus on the roles and expectations placed on women. It explores the justification of these roles within religious contexts and considers the potential impact of these roles on gender equality.

The final theme explores the *veil, not merely as a religious symbol but also an expression of femininity and purity*. We then discuss the aesthetics of veiling and the dichotomy between the "aesthetic body" and the sacred body in Islamic culture.

Phase 3: Defining Measurables or Observables to Look for in the Material.

In this phase we established a criteria for identifying gender-related dynamics within religious and societal contexts. Our primary objective was to define measurable or observable elements that shed light on the presence of sexism within religious faiths and wider societal structures. This examination aimed to move beyond surface-level observations and uncover systemic patterns and disparities in gender-based norms and obligations. We established the following criteria, based on the most common conflicts voiced in Secular and Islamic feminist theory

1. How do participants react to Qur'anic scriptures that appear to endorse female inequality? (These specific sections will be detailed in the Analysis section.)

    a. Asses the awareness of these passages.
    b. Determine if women have the agency and space to question verses that may be perceived as morally outdated in the context of contemporary society.
    c. Assess if they are willing to reinterpret or challenge Islamic values at odds with feminist principles.

2. Are women disproportionately affected by collective judgment?

    a. Assess whether participants notice disproportionate judgment towards women.
    b. Limitations this imposes on their Sexual Autonomy.

3. Does the institution of marriage impose on them a system of structural subordination?

    a. To what extent do participants' family structures and marital relationships reflect a rigidly gender-differentiated structure?
    b. Are there noticeable differences in the distribution of domestic responsibilities, decision-making authority, and power dynamics within their families and marriages?

Phase 4: Interviews

In conducting the interviews, several techniques were employed to ensure the utility of the collected data.

Question Design

Following the guidance provided by DiCicco et al. (2006: 317) questions used in the interviews were semi-structured. They began with broad, open-ended inquiries, reflecting the exploratory nature of the research. As responses were provided, I tried to assess how much the interviewees were willing to share and focused on themes they were more willing to discuss. This iterative process, although potentially resulting in a reduction of data, was conducted to enhance the reliability of the collected information. Neutrality was prioritised over debate. For instance, when interviewees

were unwilling to discuss certain Quranic verses or were unaware of them, these topics were not extensively pursued.

Selection of Interviewees

The selection criteria for participants were based on age, long-term residence in the rural town, and self-identification as Muslim. It's important to acknowledge a potential source of bias in the selection process, as participants needed to be willing to participate in interviews, te

To mitigate selection bias, efforts were made to include a diverse range of participants with varying marital statuses and educational backgrounds. Notably, only one of the women had received a third-level education, a deliberate choice aimed at better representing individuals from rural or small-town backgrounds. It's worth noting that the project was not explicitly designed for comparisons across these factors, and as such, we did not disclose specific information about individual participants to maintain their privacy while ensuring the study's impartiality.

Establishing Truth Value

Recognizing the inherent challenge of faithfully representing interviewees' voices with transparency, a range of techniques was employed to endeavor to provide the most accurate representation of the interviewees' expressed views. These techniques encompassed asking interviewees to elaborate on their responses, meticulously recording and transcribing the interviews, and cross-referencing their statements with those made in other conversations conducted during the field research.

Interview analysis

In interpreting the concept of free autonomous sexuality, the consideration of theories from Sexology and Social Psychology was contemplated. These theories could have assisted in evaluating the impact of sexual autonomy and well-being on individuals and determining if sexuality within a partnership is rooted in mutual desire. Notably, the "Model of Self-Determined Sexual Motivation" by Brunell and Webster was among the theories that held potential for this purpose.

However, it was decided that Islamic and Secular Feminist theory was more appropriate as it was necessary both to designate the issues and themes, but also foresee interior dynamics and reasons behind certain behaviours and actions.

6   CONTEXTUALISATION

LEGAL RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS IN MOROCCO

We have included a chapter on family law to contextualise the changing collective morality, following Durkheim's conceptualisation of law as an expression of a society's collective conscience.

Durkheim considers that repressive sanctions (that is, those that impose a disadvantage to the perpetrator) are an expression of the shared outrage against acts that offend the collective morality (Durkheim 1893: 43). According to his analysis, restitutive sanctions, which relate to a violation between limited and particular sectors of society generally does not offend the entire collective consciousness, instead, it inconveniences or harms only the plaintiff or complainant. In the case of a society with a strong principle of Honour, we propose that this differentiation is not so relevant. That is; although some laws mentioned are retributive, and others restitutive, their sanctions all relate to a violation of the collective consciousness.

Moroccan Family Law

Morocco has experienced relative progress after the reforms of King Hassan II (Akbarzadeh and MacQueen 2008: 25). These reforms sought pragmatic solutions through enlightened open ijtihad (juridical reasoning open to continuous contextual debate), granting human and citizenship rights equally to all Moroccans, women, and men, respecting holy divine religious references (Preamble, Mudawanna, 2004).

Nowadays, Islamic norms in Morocco are mainly found in the law of family and inheritance, codified in the Mudawwana; in limited parts of the law of evidence; and some areas of the law on immovable property.

On the formal level of Moroccan legislation, the possibilities of conflict between Islamic law and human rights norms are mainly in the relationships between men and women and between parents, especially fathers, and their children, as regulated in family and criminal law. (Buskens 2010: 128). The law governing marriage, divorce, parentage, inheritance, child custody and guardianship (Mudawwana) was reformed in 2004, becoming the first time Islamic family law was part of parliamentary debate in Morocco (Buskens 2010: 108). Although the applicability of Human rights

and women´s rights was raised, considering them from a secular perspective was not considered (ibid).

The overriding principle of the new model is contained in Article 4, which states that the goal of marriage is "the formation of a stable family under the supervision of both spouses", whereas in article 1 of the old Mudawwana, it was stated that the husband was considered to be the head of the family.

The reforms raise the minimum age of marriage for women from fifteen to eighteen; establish the right to divorce by mutual consent; place polygamy and repudiation (unilateral divorce by the husband) under strict judicial control; make the family the joint responsibility of both spouses; rescind the wife's duty of obedience to her husband; and eliminate the requirement of a marital tutor (wali) for women to marry.

However, hereditary succession between a Muslim and a non-Muslim is still impossible, as between a natural parent and an illegitimate child (Art. 332). Articles 418 and 420 of the Muslim penal code excuse maltreatment, even if it "unintentionally results in death" if a spouse, or "head of the household" catches someone committing adultery.

In all practicalities, the reforms' significance largely depends on how judges apply the law in practice, who are currently giving preference to earlier visions of family life (Buskens 2010: 120). A final challenge is also ensuring that the public knows about and accepts the reforms.

7   THEORY: ISLAMIC FEMINISM AND SECULAR FEMINISM

Secular and Islamic feminism constitute two parallel but intersecting modes of feminism. While Islamic feminism relies on a religiously grounded discourse, taking the Qur'an as its central text, Secular Feminism draws on multiple discourses; from Islamic modernist to human rights and secular nationalist thought (Badran 2009: 300).

Islamic feminism can be broadly defined as an attempt to exercise influence over knowledge production and meaning making within Islam. Scholars in this field attempt to dismantle what they call misogynist interpretations of religious texts using different interpretive methodologies (Salem 2016: 9). This method is extremely relevant in Muslim-majority nations, as, for believers, the

theological definition of women and human equality is fundamental for any sociological, political, or economical rights and considerations to endure a significant change (Salem 2016: 10). Moreover, Islamic Feminism is also a relevant tool for women who want to vindicate their rights as women but are not interested or willing to abandon their religious beliefs and identity (Mendoza et al,11).

Contrarily, secular feminists generally agree that Islam cannot be degenderised into a neutral observer of gender relations (Mojab 2001: 137). They contend Islam endorses hierarchical gender-differentiated regulations for males and females and that reformers cannot "wish them away" (Kecia Ali 2006: 154) by doing intellectual somersaults. Lamrabet argues that women's rights are purposefully omitted or referred to in terms of domestic jurisdiction and marriage, whereas men's rights are mentioned as inalienable standards (ibid). Much secular feminist literature and activism such as that of Slimani and El Masrar is also dedicated to promoting a feminist agenda without entering into the religious debate.

ISLAMIC FEMINISM

Islamic feminists advocate for female equality through the study and interpretation of sacred and historical Islamic texts. They argue that the ultimate intent of the Qur'an is to grant opportunities for growth and productivity for *all* its earnest members and prioritise this message over other patriarchal passages. They promote a contextual reading of the book, considering the fact that in the background in which it was set, society was unabashedly patriarchal and androcentric.

Islamic feminists such as Amina Wadud, Mir-Hosseini, Asma Lamrabet and Fatema Mernissi advocate for a contextual reading of the Qur'an, viewing it as a moral, religious, and social pronouncement responding to specific situations. They hold that particular instances and exceptions such as inheritance laws or the ownership axiom in marriage, should not be used as a manual of directives, but to make conceptual ideas tangible.

Mernissi, in her work "The Veil and the Male Elite," brings to light how the Qur'an was, at the time of its appearance, a source of liberation, and argues that it was written with that intention rather than a series of direct instructions. A key dimension of Islam was a total revolution vis-à-vis the Judeo-Christian tradition and the pre-Islamic period with regard to women, embracing their intellectual abilities, power, and sexuality.

However, she posits that the misogynist trend within Islam reasserted itself largely due to certain words and practices falsely attributed to the Prophet (Mernissi 2006: 86, 87). Many Hadiths were written from a recollection of the prophet's entourage, the veracity of which was subject to discussion among his other Companions, who considered these recounts to be imprecise and unreliable (Mernissi 2006: 79). For example, Al-Bukhari included many misogynist ideas attributed to the prophet, which were thoroughly refuted by Aisha, (The Prophet's longest lasting wife and well-respected contributor to religious knowledge). Hadiths such as "I do not leave after me any cause of trouble more fatal to man than women" and "I took a look at hell, and I noted that there women were the majority".

Abu Hurayra's Hadith, which according to Mernissi "saturates the daily life of every modern Muslim woman" is still source of enormous religious controversy, from its inception to today.

The same has been said to occur in Christianity, after nearly 2000 years of misogynist Paulist tradition dominating biblical interpretation, it was recently discovered and accepted that statements attributed to Paul were not authored or spoken by him but were the product of post-apostolic writers who ascribed the texts to him for greater authority. This includes the admonitions often cited such as that· women "must learn in silence and with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent" (I Timothy 2: 11). (Gerda Lerner 1993: 155)

Islamic Feminists propose to use Qur'anic regulations as only a starting point for the ethical development of the human being (Kecia Ali 2006: 150), emphasising the role of individual conscience and reason. Iranian cleric Sa'idzadeh considers that humans, endowed with the capacity to reason should not practice unquestioning obedience but be able to explain and justify something logically. (Sa'idzadeh quoted in Mir-Hosseini 1999: 256). One such conceptual idea or ethical principle is that differences between women and men are not of their essential natures; therefore, one should not attribute inferior values, capacities, or functions (such as that of weak, inferior, intellectually incapable, or spiritually lacking) to these differences. (Wadud 1999: Chapter 1).

Asma Lamrabet stresses how the Qur'an conceives women primarily as free human beings. She criticises rhetoric that compares women to coveted gems, sweets, or jewellery, as it is used to restrict and confine them, under the guise of "it's for her own good" (Lamrabet 2019: 93). According to Lamrabet, Islam defines women as possessing good sense, intelligence, and logic and advocates treating them accordingly.

Nawaz (2019: 77) is confident that if reformists can influence their fellow Muslims to avoid reading verses in scripture isolated from each other and of the general context, things would dramatically improve in the Muslim world. Such an approach would challenge and diminish the appeal of religious fundamentalist rhetoric while reframing misogynistic principles.

According to Younissi (2018: 319), the success of this agenda depends on whether Muslims worldwide accept the idea that Islamic scripture cannot be fixed to one meaning. The appeal to a fundamentalist reading is still strong today among those who prioritise other central messages in the Qur'an which state that "The Qu'ran is Kalamullah (the direct word of God) and that "One who interprets the Quran according to personal opinion he makes his place in fire (Hell)".

According to Gerda Lerner, taking religion into your own hands, considering oneself authorized and capable of challenging expert theological authority is in itself an act of feminist subversion (Lerner 1993, 154). For her women the first evidence of feminist subversions were Bible critics who didn't accept theological definitions which defined them as inherently inferior or capable of reasoning. Without making any special claims for their right to preach or teach, women did both, appropriating and using the Bible for their own purposes. (ibid)

SECULAR FEMINISM

Secular feminists don't believe that Islam can be a functional means to advance women´s rights. They contend that the calls to return to the "origin," "purity," or "authenticity" within Islam which we have seen proposed in the previous chapter have never benefited women (Ibtissam 2014: 106). The experience of Islamic Republics that did just that has reinforced traditional patriarchal systems (Mojab, 1995: 8).

Secular feminists assert that a distinct Islamic discourse portrays women in a monolithic framework by emphasising the "status or rights of women." This discourse, notably, does not extend the same categorisation or specific references to the "status or rights of men." Such a practice effectively perpetuates the notion of an "Islamic standard," which idealises a man as the embodiment of "human nature" or "human being" in all its completeness and grandeur. Consequently, this perspective positions women as structurally subordinate, deficient, dependent, and eternally stigmatised, as they cannot reach the universal standard embodied by men.

Ibtissam raises critical questions about Islamic Feminism, contending that their struggle aims for Muslim women to settle for a world where their best hope is a compromised alliance with religious

patriarchy (Ibtissam 2014: 126). Kandyoti underscores that, while it is essential to highlight egalitarian verses within Islamic texts, there are also inconvenient verses that cannot be ignored. Verses such as those sanctioning violence for offences such as apostasy, adultery, blasphemy and even something as vague as threats to family honour or the honour of Islam.

El-Masrar attributes gender-based violence to a false sense of honour, which, in her view, lacks a basis in Quranic commandments and arises from a deficiency in "social self-confidence." She believes it is the responsibility of Muslims themselves to redefine their relationships with sexuality and reeducate the younger generation (El Masrar 2010: 186).

8 ANALYSIS

8.1 COLLECTIVISM AND HONOUR CULTURE

How living in a Collectivist society affects Gender Roles

Recalling de Beauvoir's seminal thesis, the female gender role has been historically constructed as *the other*, in opposition to men. According to her differentiation between sex and gender "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Moreover, these gender roles are constructed in relation to each other.

Within Muslim society, Masculinity is often reinforced by assigning women to the confines of the home, and young men may assume the role of monitoring and controlling the behaviour of young Muslim women (Hopkins 2016: 4), whose utility is centred around their sexual organs. This justification of gender roles contributes to the belief that a woman's honour is linked to her "sexual purity" before marriage (El Saadawi, 2007: 31). On the other hand, a man's honour is deemed intact as long as the female members of his family preserve their hymens, irrespective of his own sexual behaviour (ibid:64).

Hirsi Ali asserts that this social control originates from the Quranic principle of commanding right and forbidding wrong[2]. This principle prompts adherents to intervene when they witness sinful

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[2] : "Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: They are the ones to attain felicity" (3:104). "Ye are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining

behaviour among believers. In cases where men perceive their female relatives to have committed an "irredeemable transgression," they may feel compelled to intervene. Protecting family honour often takes precedence over an individual's claim to dignity. Consequently, accepting one's community becomes essential for preserving personal dignity.

Virginity, once idealised and mythologized, has evolved into a coercive tool, used to confine women to their homes and justify constant surveillance. It is no longer merely a personal matter but a source of collective concern. (Livaneli 2013)

Salman Rushdie presents us with an interesting metaphor of how pervasive this social control can be over the mind of individuals in the Satanic Verses. The protagonist, Saladin Chamcha, finds himself in a holding tank for illegal immigrants, where he notices a disturbing transformation of incarcerated humans into various animals, such as scaly reptiles and hairy buffaloes. Saladin himself assumes the form of a goat and seeks an explanation from another inmate. The inmate mutters dryly, "They describe us. That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct."

Interview analysis: Honour Culture and Freedom of Faith

The perception of an honour culture which disproportionately blamed women for wrongdoing was clear in several interviews.

Some participants felt the weight of judgment, especially as men were often exempt from similar accountability. Francisca observed a perception that fathers were not responsible for child-rearing, which troubled her deeply "I don't know if it will change or not, but I've seen many people act like this".

She herself felt responsible over the behaviour of the younger generation, worried that might not follow "the right path", wear the veil correctly, or no prey. "They say that they are young, and that they'll have time to reflect.. but religion is the same for everyone from the age of 10".

what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah" (3:110). And later: "The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil" (9:71).

Sara expressed comfort with the concept of women bearing the honour of the family. For her, being part of the community and adhering to the expected norms brought a sense of comfort. She sees these limits as a means to bring out the best in herself, citing the unifying role of faith within their families. However, she also noted that the judgment and reactions to such situations varied greatly within the family and society. Respect for others' private lives was an important value instilled in her family. Aware that the question "Do you feel pressure to be accepted by your community?" was referring to honour culture, she clarified that her actions and limits are self-imposed. She also clarifies however that the fact that she has other professional aspirations influences this. For her, anything that means bringing out the best in oneself is seen as a good thing, she sees these external pressures as ways of supporting each other.

8.2 SEXUALITY: THE LIBERTY TO EXERCISE ONE´S SEXUAL AUTONOMY

Trumbach (1977: 24) posits that sexual behaviour carries profound symbolic weight in any society, mirroring its distinct cultural attributes. Building on this, Espin (1999: 124) emphasises that perceptions of what is sexual can vastly differ based on the cultural context. As Michel Foucault wrote in The History of Sexuality, sexuality is a "dense transfer point for power relations: between men and women, young and old, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration, and a population."

Sexual rights transcend mere privileges or trivial entitlements. The liberty to exercise one's sexual autonomy, to make choices about one's own body, and to pursue a safe and fulfilling sexual life free from any force, are essential needs and rights that everyone should inherently possess. (Slimani 2020:18).

"It is very little to me" said the suffragist Lucy Stone in 1855 "to have the right to vote and to own property etcetera if I may not keep my body and its uses in my absolute right".

Many women are bound to the societal expectations of maintaining virginity before marriage and assume docility post-marriage. Slimani questions if a woman living under such intense societal scrutiny is invariably hindered from fully realising her role as a citizen (2020: 19). History shows that suppressing these rights has facilitated male dominance across numerous societies. In the

pursuit of controlling one's body and leading an autonomous life for a fulfilling sexual journey, fundamental political rights truly hang in the balance. (ibid).

Diverse Perspectives on Right and Wrong in Sexual behaviour: A comparison between Western and Muslim Majority Societies.

Gender relations and women´s sexuality is the allegedly "sacred" aspect of culture and religion which theologians negate surrendering. The concept of a "freer" sexuality, associated with modernity, gives rise to concerns about controlling women's bodies and sexuality in immigrant communities. The valorization of sexual pleasure in modern Western societies can be both liberating and restricting for Muslim migrants (Espin: 125).

In contrast with Islamic honour linked to chastity, western women are associated with sexual freedom which is viewed as synonymous with "moral anarchy" and "sexual deviance" (Espin 1999: 125). Embracing women's freedom within the Islamic tradition is seen as a threat to social order and cultural traditions (Slimani 2020: 98).

Mernissi explains in l'amour dans les pays Musulmans, that Islam encouraged sexuality initially, as it saw no reason to render impure anything created by God. Islamic texts present marriage and sexual fulfilment as natural and desirable aspects of human life and religious practice. The Prophet Mohammed disapproved of religious celibacy, which is not practised in Islam. Contrary to Christian traditions, Islam dissociates sex from reproduction, permitting the use of contraceptive measures (Lamrabet 2019: 91).

Mernissi explains that contrary to Islam, the Christian concept of the individual is tragically torn between two poles - good and evil, flesh and spirit, instinct, and reason. Islam presents a more nuanced theory, in which instincts are regarded as pure energy, devoid of inherent moral connotations.

Although instincts are considered a natural, unavoidable aspect of humanity, the emphasis is placed on the individual's survival is contingent on adherence to a social order, which is governed by a set of laws determining the moral use of instincts.

Therefore, in the Muslim order, it is not necessary for individuals to eradicate or solely control their instincts for the sake of control; instead, they must utilise them in accordance with religious

law. Aggression and sexual desire, for example, serve the purposes of the Muslim order when channelled correctly; if suppressed or misused, they can threaten that very order (Mernissi 2011: 36).

Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, a Tunisian author, presents a similar view in his work "Sexuality in Islam." He suggests that the puritanical view of sex contradicts Islam's true spirit (1985: 151). He recalls an obscured version of a joyous fulfilling relationship, where the body is not constrained, and sex resembles a moment of prayer. He calls for a valorisation of sexual pleasure which is dissimilar to the "Western model", as it acheives sexual freedom achieved *through* faith.

Male vs female sexuality. Different expectations of male vs female sexuality

Despite the positive aspects of sexual freedom within Islamic principles, sex is seen almost entirely from the male point of view, therefore, as Ibn Warraq puts it (2003: 291) it would be an insult to Muslim women to see Islam as sex positive. According to Wadud and Manji, Islam's approach to sexuality reflects a double standard, where men are permitted sexual agency while women's sexuality is subjected to restrictions. A dynamic which perpetuates a division in which men are assumed to be morally weak, while women are expected to control their sexual impulses to compensate for men's alleged deficiency.

A famous quote referring to women's "duty" of sexual availability to their husbands is found in one of the Hadiths where Abu Hurairah reported the Prophet as saying "When a man calls his wife to come to his bed and she refuses and does not come to him and he spends the night angry, the angels curse her till the morning." (Hadith Sunan Abi Dawud 2141)

Mernissi posits that both men and women are considered to have similar instinctual drives, which, if frustrated, can lead to challenges in their faith and behaviour. However, while men's sexual fulfilment is guaranteed through an exegetical tradition which emphasises women's obligations to make themselves sexually available to their husbands (Kecia Ali 2006: 8)., and through practices like polygamy women are often distrusted precisely because they lack mechanisms to ensure their sexual satisfaction (Mernissi 2006: 57).

El Saadawi offers a compelling perspective on how Islamic beliefs contribute to this dichotomy, reflected in the prevailing paradigm, which casts the man as the hunter and the woman as his prey. The hunter is encouraged to seek sexual experiences in order to showcase his virility and bolster

his masculine pride, for which he engages in passionate chases to tempt women. Meanwhile, the prey is depicted as a passive entity awaiting the actions of men, deriving pleasure and contentment solely from her subjugation (El Saadawi, 2007: 151).

This imbalance is not unique to Muslim ideology but extends to Western narratives of heterosexual sexuality. Susan Bredlau (2018) suggests that attaining affirmative sexuality (in the West) necessitates a two-fold transformation: women must unlearn their tendency for submissive self-objectification in the bedroom, while men must shed their antagonistic form of sexual expressivity, which often perceives women's desires as threatening, as they compete with their own.

Another important aspect to consider is that while sexual ethical standards may be changing, talking about one's sexuality is still highly discouraged in Moroccan culture. The practice of avoiding incriminating indiscretions regarding sex outside marriage is "woven into the fabric of Islamic legal thought" (Kecia Ali 2006: 73). By setting this topic as taboo there is a continued obstacle to transforming ethical standards (ibid).

Interview analysis: Do women feel like they have the liberty their sexual autonomy?

The meaning we derive from sexual autonomy is multifaceted and extends beyond the simple notion of consent (Pateman 1988). Ann Cahill's insights (2001) further emphasise this complexity. Consent reinforces the idea that men ask for sex and women concede (Pateman 1988). It can imply that the one giving consent is obliged to follow through, giving the recipient the right to claim harm if the consenting party doesn't fulfil their commitment. This complexity is heightened when considering that marriage often implies a lasting commitment to sexual consent.

During the interviews, there is a definite discomfort in discussing topics of sexuality, even among participants with whom a close relationship exists.

Although the responses reveal a range of attitudes and behaviours regarding sexuality the answers are curt and concise. Some women engage in conversations about their desires with their friends and family. However, others choose to keep such discussions within the confines of their marriage or avoid them altogether, deeming sexuality a private matter that should remain as such.

The taboo on talking about sexuality was made particularly poignant by one participant, who was "made aware" more or less about what sex meant before marriage, from ambiguous conversations with her aunts, in order "to know what would happen on her bridal night".

A single woman in the group seems entirely non-interested in sexuality, wearily stating, "I think if we put sexuality to a side, we would live happier lives, everything always has to do with our waist downwards".

It is essential to acknowledge that the discomfort experienced during these interviews may not wholly represent these women's relationship with their sexuality. Instead, the responses provided may reflect the image they wish to project.

The overarching narrative in these participants' stories is one of sexual passivity, with an almost exclusive focus on the desires and initiations of their husbands. Six participants revealed that it was consistently their husbands who initiated sexual encounters. This hints at a dynamic where sexual activity is perceived as a duty rather than a mutual desire. For instance, Sanaa's assertion (in a tone that states the obvious) that her husband invariably takes the initiative, to which her response has always been positive suggests that while "consent" exists, there is a lack of agency in her sexual life.

Sara highlights the importance of mutual consent in sexual activity. She underlines the freedom for either partner to decline, however, the reasons she mentions do not seem to include simply not feeling up to it, but that of illness. Even with more than a decade of marriage, she expresses that sexual desire seldom originates from her, but that she never declines.

Paradoxically, a suggested limited agency in partner-initiated sexual encounters contrasts with a nuance in their attitude towards self-pleasure. Participants exhibited a non-judgmental attitude towards masturbation, some even responding that they practised it.

The participants in our study overwhelmingly emphasised the importance of chastity. Sanaa explains that premarital sex would be too dangerous, as the mere thought of engaging intimately with someone and subsequently breaking up was deemed awful, she could not explain why, but she was in apparent distress at the mere thought of it.

These conservative views extend to societal expectations as all but one participant considered it adequate to include extramarital sex as a legal offence in Morocco. This underscores that such expectations are not merely personal choices but deeply ingrained social norms.

In the justification of why the veil is deemed positive, the differences between male and female sexuality are always brought up, it is stated to avoid male attention, which is assumed to be unwanted and crude. It is seen as a way of ensuring safety, thus implying that exposing female skin and hair is inherently sexual and dangerous.

8.3 MARRIAGE: IS IT A TOOL FOR STRUCTURAL SUBORDINATION?

The purpose of marriage

In exploring the dynamics of sexuality within the context of marriage, Mernissi postulates that the Qur'an discourages the idea of romantic love between spouses, considering it a potential interference with one's allegiance to God.

This idea is reflected in the Qur'an Sure (3:4), which warns against emotional attachment dividing one's heart[3]. Mernissi maintains that in his jealousy, Allah looks to weaken the conjugal unit through polygamy, repudiation, and placing a husband's role as master instead of a lover (2011: 125). She concludes that whilst the Qur'an promotes the harmonious expression of sexuality within marriage, it considers real love between husband and wife a danger to be overcome (2011: 122-123).

Women are thus perceived as a distracting element, primarily intended to provide the Muslim nation with offspring and satisfy the sexual instinct's tensions. The act of loving a woman is often described as a form of mental illness, a self-destructive state of mind. A Moroccan proverb succinctly puts it: "Love is a complicated matter. If it does not drive you crazy, it kills you" (Mernissi 2011: 51). Women should not be the object of emotional investment or the primary focus of attention; rather, devotion should be directed towards Allah alone through knowledge-seeking, meditation, and prayer.

In this context, marriage is not necessarily viewed as fostering a conjugal partnership. Instead, it is seen as a contract whose primary purpose is that a man acquires a woman's reproductive organ for sexual enjoyment. (Ibn Warraq 2003: 302).

Sex is even more strongly linked to marriage as it is the only area in which it is permitted to exist. Sex outside of wedlock is a criminal offence in Morocco it has strong consequences for women, who are labelled morally compromised (El Saadawi, 2007: 65) if they are discovered. The importance of female virginity before marriage is also apparent with the extensive practice of a medical check to prove women's hymens are intact or reconstruct hymens of women who have had sexual relations (ibid).

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[3] "Emotional attachment divides man's heart, and Allah hath not created man with two hearts within his body."

This viewpoint gains further complexity through the lens of fundamentalist ideology, which often reduces all interactions between men and women to sex. Consequently, professional, or personal endeavours outside the marital bond, that could be construed as affirmations of a woman's individuality, personal freedom, and dignity are reframed by certain Muslim thinkers as a degradation of her dignity and honour (Ibn Warraq 2003: 319).

Interview Analysis. What is the purpose of marriage?

The narrative behind Sanaa and Francisca's love stories follows Aqqad's hunter and prey narrative, the man was in love, and they conceded. Neither of them had taken notice of their husbands before they proposed. When asked what perceived qualities influenced their decision both answered that he be a good person and a hard worker. Francisca added that he prays and not drink, Sanaa that he love her and not lie.

They both appear to value their spouses' love and commitment over their own personal affection. Marriage is not seen primarily as related to love but as a joint project aimed at stability.

Sanaa married at 20, she claims to have had a pleasant surprise going to live with her husband, as she enjoys his company, she seems content with what she has, without much expectations over what marriage should entail.

Francisca married at 18,. She mentions that she thinks it best to marry later in life because you can have a clearer impression of what you want and have a better chance at finishing your education. She would rather her children marry "After 25.. or even 30!". For both her and Sanaa marriage was tough at the beginning as it meant leaving their home to go and live with someone new. "One day you're with your parents, and the next you're in another house, and it all depends on the person you've chosen. You can doubt your decision.. what if I chose the wrong man?"

During an informal group discussion discussing love, they asked if I had ever been in love. For the sake of a 9-year-old present, it seemed as though my response of "twice" was somehow adjusted to "once." When we suggested Sanaa must have experienced love with her husband, she laughed, suggesting that love wasn't much of a consideration.

When it comes to friendships with the opposite sex, the experience of Sanaa reveals varying attitudes within the community. Her transformation from having male friends during her studies to

distancing herself from such friendships post-marriage demonstrates an awareness of societal expectations.

Although she believes her husband shouldn't be overly jealous, her shift in behaviour suggests otherwise. Another participant candidly expressed scepticism about maintaining friendships with the opposite sex, as sexual expectations were assumed to enter the picture.

Interview Analysis: What element of marriage legitimizes sex?

Sara maintains that the added value of waiting until marriage is that you've maintained yourself pure until that moment and been strong enough to do it. "It's an important moment, as it supposes a great change in your life, where you start to live away from your family for the first time. Many people in my town in Morrocco wish for that moment, as they don't have many other life options." She talks about the added significance of the father "giving away his daughter", who has also reserved herself for the occasion as something beautiful.

Marital roles in the Qur'an

One of the most famously quoted verses regarding the hierarchical relationships between men and women is the following verse

> *"Men are [qawwamuna .'a/a] women, [on the basis] of what Allah has [preferred] (faddala) some of them over others, and [on the basis] of what they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are [qanitat], guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those from whom you fear [nushuz], admonish them, banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then, if they obey you, seek not a way against them.*

> *Qur'an Verse 4:34.*

Many interpret the above passage as an unconditional indication of the preference of men over women, on the basis that men were created with superior strength and reason to women.

Wadud claims that this interpretation, ... is (i) unwarranted and (ii) inconsistent with other Islamic teachings. Unwarranted because there is no reference in the passage to male physical or intellectual superiority. She claims that the delineation of male and female functions are made to create a balance in human relations. Whilst men are praised for providing economically, there is also a verse indicating respect for the needed procreative capacity of women ('O humankind . . . have taqwa towards Allah in Whom you claim your rights of one another, and (have taqwa} towards the wombs (that bore you).' (4:1)) Neither has been ordained with inherent superiority.

Mernissi interprets that this verse means that men are *qawwamuna* over women *if* the two conditions exist. The first condition is 'preference', and the other is that they support the women from their means. 'If either condition fails, then the man is not *qawwamuna* over that woman.

Women working has become necessary to survive the current economic climate, which has modified women's dependent position within marriage. According to Lerner, a viable economic avenue for women, beyond marriage, alongside the presence of substantial cohorts of self-sufficient single women are essential conditions to enable women to envision alternatives to the prevailing patriarchal structure (1993: 291)

The concept of consent in marriage has gained legitimacy in Islamic revival movements. Women's rights activists draw on Islamic principles requiring the woman's opinion to be sought when a man asks for her hand in marriage. However, not marrying is socially stigmatised in Moroccan society. Married women are often viewed more positively than unmarried women, considered more "successful" and "trustworthy". This ascribes a social power to their status, generally finding themselves more socially secure than unmarried women (Sadiqi 2003).

Interview analysis. Marital roles at home

Both Sara and Francisca mention that the inner workings of marriage are largely hidden from the outside, often concealing inequalities and potential abuses.

A preliminary impression from the interviews is that while some feminist ideals of equal partnership and shared responsibilities are considered correct, the reality often falls short. This was observable by the contrast between what was answered during more formalised interviews, and conversations had during participant observation.

Ayaa and Zuhur expressed their expectations that husbands should assist with household chores. However, it became evident through participant observation that women predominantly manage

household duties, including cooking, and childcare, and seek help from other female relatives when they cannot manage.

In social gatherings, I frequently encounter inquiries about my marital status and culinary skills, with some even offering to find me a husband, often with an air of concern about my single status. During one such conversation, I turned the question around and asked in return. The response was a resounding, "Yes, of course, that's what we do."

Some other surprising responses came to light. When asked whether her husband assists with nighttime baby care, Sanaa responded with laughter and a straightforward "of course not.". However, she also mentioned that there was a period in which her husband was at home, while she was studying, and he took care of the household chores.

These gender roles don't necessarily imply submission; several participants emphasised that respect is paramount in marriage. Francisca mentioned that she and her husband approach disagreements with a balanced perspective, looking at issues from both sides to find mutually agreeable solutions.

On the other hand, Sanaa mentioned that her husband holds greater decision-making power within the household, citing men's "more rights" but only recalls polygamy. She neither fully supports nor opposes the Qur'an's allowance of multiple wives, but she clarified that she would consider leaving the marriage if her husband proposed it.

Sara advocates taking the good things from religion. She admits and worries that she hasn't studied the Quran intensively but has learnt the messages instilled in her by her family. It seems to her that justifying bad behaviour by religion is badly contextualised. Verses concerning women, she states, are no longer relevant as gender relations have changed.

8.4 IDEOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF CLOTHES: DOES THE VEIL EFFECTIVELY HYPERSEXUALISE WOMEN?

In her exploration of the experiences of "first- and second-generation Muslim migrants" adapting to U.S. society, Espin uncovered a common thread - "everyone had a clothing story" (p. 2). She concluded that clothing and acculturation mirror each other closely. "Clothing," she argued, is "an identifiable symbol of a changing consciousness" (Espin:126).

It is complicated to distinguish dress that is freely chosen from that which is worn out of habit, social pressure, or fashion. (Abu-Lughod 2013: 18). As stated by Nadal el Saadawi "Nakedness and veiling are two faces of the same coin" (Interview in Channel 4 News 2018). Whilst Western sexuality and clothing can be characterised by making a profit of bare and exposed female flesh, Muslim exploitation of the female is cloaked under veils (Mernissi, 2011: 179). In his attempt to grasp the logic of the seclusion and veiling of women and the basis of sexual segregation, the Muslim feminist Qasim Amin concluded that women are better able to control their sexual impulses than men and that consequently, sexual segregation is a device to protect men, not women. 11 (2011: 39).

In all monotheistic religions, there exists a profound tension between the divine and the feminine aspect, but perhaps nowhere is this conflict more pronounced than in Islam. Symbolically, Islam has chosen to obscure the feminine through practices like veiling, effectively attempting to conceal it.

All over the cultural spectrum, women interiorise the need to please the male gaze, prioritising their images of us over our own. The romantisation of men's lack of control over female beauty transforms compliments into poisoned chalices. This pattern, which leaves out women as individuals, extends from high culture to popular mythology: 'Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men to women but the relation of women to themselves." John Berger.

Therefore, the claim to one's body back goes in opposing senses within liberation movements. Whilst Western movements often repudiate the hyper-sexualisation of women's bodies, Muslim women are likely to claim the right to their bodies back from the male (husband or father's) "possession" (Mernissi, 2011: 180). This claim can be demonstrated by young women "beautifying"

their public image, by wearing a combination of sacred and aesthetic elements (Moazami and Salvatore 2003: 63).

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Interview Analysis: Why do women wear the veil? What image is correct for women to convey in public?

The participants found that the hijab succeeded in having men keep their distance because it creates a space cushion around them. Sanaa talks about wearing perfume and make-up as an "giving the opportunity to be badly spoken to" and dressing conservatively in order to "respect oneself". Conversely, another participant viewed wearing the hijab as a simple way to "avoid being noticed".

However, Sara remarks that Westerners seem more obsessed with the veil than Moroccans. Whilst her family respects her decision not to wear it, westerners often berate her on the reasons behind her decision. "Each is free to decide. My mother, for example, feels naked without it. (…) One dresses depending on what they want to underline, if you wear a shirt that covers your behind, people won't focus on it. "

"Dress style changes with time, Berber way of dressing for example was different, and women wore tattoos, which are no longer seen as appropriate. My grandmother for example, used only to wear a small turban, and her long hair was uncovered."

For Zuhur the appeal to the veil is ease and comfort. In contrast, Sanaa expressed her desire for comfort and style in her clothing choices. She finds fashion appealing and seeks beauty and comfort in her attire. She believes wearing the veil doesn't necessarily prevent adherence to conventional beauty standards.

9 FINDINGS

9.1 HOW DO PARTICIPANTS REACT TO QUR'ANIC SCRIPTURES THAT APPEAR TO ENDORSE FEMALE INEQUALITY?

The reality of the interviewees presents itself as much more natural and culturally grounded than the intellectual discussion surrounding it. The most significant distinctions in gendered behavior manifested in character. Whereas most of the participants noted having learnt "less than they would have liked" of the Quran, their responses and relationship with it varied based on their apparent self-assuredness and confidence. Nevertheless, none dared to critique the faith openly, yet they seemed oblivious that such criticism could be deemed treasonous.

For instance, Sara, a confidently conservative law student, feels free to take what she considers is good from religion, and by honouring these principles she feels pure. Despite expressing dissatisfaction with her religious education, she comfortably interprets the teachings and scorns those who don't contextualise them. She views religion as a luminously ethical belief system that brings goodness to its faithful adherents through abstinence from alcohol and lust and aiding the impoverished.

Sanaa and Francisca have no knowledge of the mentioned scripture. They've learnt mostly what was culturally taught in the home, which is centred around the 5 pillars (Profession of Faith, Prayer, Alms, Fasting and Pilgrimage)

Francisca staunchly asserts that every Quranic teaching encountered carries inherent goodness, as she believes Allah wouldn't endorse wrongdoing. She diligently adheres to these principles and supports religion's influence in governance, considering the upheld principles as inherently virtuous (e.g., prohibition of extramarital relations or abortion). Conversely, she frets over younger individuals distancing themselves from religion, eschewing headscarves, and the like.

Following the intellectual debate between secular and Islamic feminists it seems hard to argue that Islam is a neutral observer of gender relations, as the Quran openly portrays women as structurally subordinate and dependent, unable to attain the universal standard embodied by men.

However Quranic verses didn´t necessarily influence the lived reality of the interviewed targets, but by a communitarian lifestyle with conservative morals. Despite advancements in governance and the economy, the "family" continues to hold paramount importance in Muslim culture

imposing upon women the task of preserving traditional values in the face of modernisation. A prevalent critique in this study applies to various Abrahamic faiths, with the prevailing notion that men are hazardous, unpredictable, and sexually unrestrained. Neither Muslim nor Western men are sexually incontinent, or inherently feminist and singularly capable of self-control, but such narratives shape our perceptions of reality. The pervasive justifications of female oppression effectively condition women to accept their own subjugation and men to perceive an unbridled possessiveness towards women as emblematic of their masculinity.

This analysis has seen these patriarchal gendered divisions as an inherent characteristic of Muslim culture within a rural context in Mallorca, as seen in how women conceive themselves sexually, romantically and professionally. They don't necessarily see themselves as inferior because of religious scripture, but they are very inhibited by collective honour culture.

9.2 ARE WOMEN DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY COLLECTIVE JUDGMENT, LIMITING THEIR ABILITY TO EXERCISE SEXUAL AUTONOMY?

The intersection of societal expectations and individual desires is a complex space that requires ongoing examination to better understand the nuances of female sexual autonomy in this context. While sexual decisions are profoundly influenced by personal and cultural factors, the societal expectation that women (and not men) should maintain virginity before marriage and assume docility post-marriage reveals a deeply ingrained double standard.

The concept that maintaining sexual relations outside of marriage is seen as degrading is firmly rooted. Furthermore, the apparent lack of consideration for female sexual pleasure within partnerships, where women often find themselves in a passive role, raises questions about the internalisation of these norms. Even though the Hadith emphasising sexual availability to wives may not be explicitly recalled, it may have been internalised by the participants, contributing to a lack of autonomy in their sexual relationships. The complexity of these dynamics underscores the need for ongoing exploration and understanding of female sexual autonomy in this context.

These findings raise critical questions about the extent of women's sexual autonomy within this community. The intricate dynamics of these relationships necessitate further exploration. The

participants' attitudes towards masturbation and their commitment to the importance of chastity highlight the complexity of their views on sexuality.

Drawing parallels with Christianity, sexual revolutions don't happen within a reformation of religious moral codes, but in the society where religion is practised (El Masrar, 2010). While many participants remain unaware of the Quranic sections that appear to endorse female inequality, societal expectations do wield influence. The family unit exercises significant control (Younissi 2018: 314), and cultural influence inevitably shapes individuals, as parents shape their children's worldviews (Halley in Okin 1999).

The most palpable hindrance the interviewees seemingly had to enjoy a free and full life was precisely, fear of judgement. The contents of the holy book have been much less relevant than expected, but there was a definite sense of what a woman´s life should and in these cases, look like.

The emphasis on family and community-based living offers valuable aspects as well. The mutual support woven into everyday life is palpable; evident proof lies in the women I interviewed successfully managing early motherhood without insurmountable burdens. Tasks are shared among mothers, sisters, and cousins, alleviating the weight often associated with the nuclear family structure I am accustomed to. Female-only gatherings exude joy, vibrancy, and a celebration of female sexuality. It's not necessarily all male privilege; in fact, women reign over the household, and men are welcome only to a limited extent.

9.3 DOES THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE IMPOSE A SYSTEM OF STRUCTURAL SUBORDINATION?

The interviews with the participants shed light on the significant transformations in their lifestyles compared to their mothers. These shifts are primarily driven by their educational and professional achievements. While traditional gender roles still exist, the respondents expressed a clear shift in their perspective. They are less willing to accept certain practices, such as male polygamy, and expect active male participation in household chores. They also emphasise the importance of respect within their marital relationships, signalling a growing desire for equality within marriages.

Despite these changing attitudes, substantial societal pressure remains to get married, especially for women. While women can accept or decline marriage proposals, they do not have the effective

liberty to propose to the men they took notice of. Women are still expected to marry, preferably in their twenties, therefore the choice of accepting a marriage proposal has its constraints.

Marriage, within this context, is perceived as a partnership aimed at stability, with less emphasis on romantic love and enduring passion. This perspective suggests that the emotional investment in marital relationships is limited, underscoring the subordination of personal desires and emotional fulfilment to traditional roles, maintenance of the family home, and male sexual satisfaction.

Notably, this marriage process shares similarities with customs from around six decades ago in Mallorca, where marriages were often arranged, and romantic love was not necessarily a central component. The introduction of love as a fundamental element of marriage is a more recent development and has brought its own challenges, as it confronts the inflated expectations placed on partners.

10 CONCLUSION

The Interview Analysis revealed a clear divergence in interpretations of religion among the participants. It was found that behaviours related to religious norms were often instilled through family traditions, rather than strict adherence to the Qur'anic text. Therefore, there were different conceptions of the most important aspects of religious observance. The participants' experiences demonstrated the intersectional interplay of religion, culture, education, and confidence. Although the analysis was written from the perspective or religious norms, we assume that these influences are intertwined.

Several respondents mentioned that they were not aware of certain passages in the Qur'an that could be interpreted as being misogynistic. Thus, the section dedicated to exploring different interpretations of sacred texts required a nuanced approach as we attempted to determine whether the conceptual ideas, even if the participants were not familiar with the specific passage, still resonated with them.

It became apparent that while some women navigated these tensions by interpreting religious ideas in ways that empowered them, others felt constrained by traditional gender norms and the fear of societal judgment. Some participants were hesitant to engage in meaningful conversations about religion, believing that religious norms were divinely ordained and beyond questioning. Others provided a more nuanced approach, accepting historical contextualization and interpreting norms

positively, such as seeing collective judgment as a driving force for academic and professional success.

The research encountered limitations in addressing sensitive topics, especially from an outsider's perspective, such as discussions related to sexuality and religion. The participants understandably wished to portray their religion and culture in a positive light. However, participant observation bridged gaps, enabling more natural conversations and observations to complement the interview analysis. It is important to recognize that the external validity of this study is constrained by the nature of the personal qualitative material gathered through a limited number of interviews. While the findings offer valuable insights into the unique experiences of the participants, they primarily represent an idiographic perspective and may not be broadly generalizable to a larger population.

To mitigate potential biases in future research, exploring women's perspectives on sexuality and marriage and comparing them to men's views might shed light on the significance of male virginity, considerations of female pleasure, and the meaning men give to marriage. Male interviewers could be involved in conducting such a project, as conservative attitudes towards sexuality and gender were identified in this context, and men might feel uncomfortable engaging in open discussions on these topics with a female interviewer.

In conclusion, I sincerely thank the participants and the wider community for their openness and warm hospitality. There has been a noticeable willingness on both sides to create alliances and to get to know each other's cultures. I am extremely glad to have chosen this topic as it has brought me closer to a community I've long been curious about but often hesitant to delve into. This research has not only deepened my understanding but has also brought me immense joy, as I've been included in festivities, challenged to improve my dance moves, and witnessed the beauty of having a wide community as a robust support system.

Our friendships thrive despite acknowledging that silent judgments may exist; however, this is overshadowed by genuine curiosity about each other's ways of life.

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11.1 INTERVIEWS

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Interview with Francisca 26th of January 2023, Mallorca

Interview with Sara 23rd May 2023, Mallorca

Interview with Sanaa 2nd July 2023, Mallorca

Interview with Zuhur 23rd July 2023, Mallorca

Interview with Ayaa 27th July 2023, Mallorca