Part 1

Towards Cultures of Conflict Transformation

1 Three Moroccan Women's Liberation Journeys

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Context

In 2019, the Moroccan government's High Commission for Planning (HCP) reported that 8 out of 10 women in Morocco have been subjected to at least one act of violence in their lives. It also noted that 'the marital setting remains the living space most severely afflicted with violence', with a prevalence rate of 46.1%, which means that 5.3 million women in Morocco are victims of psychological, economic or sexual violence (Haut Commissariat au Plan, 2019). According to the same source, 13% of women are assaulted in public spaces, representing 1.7 million women – 16% in urban areas and 7% in rural areas. Violence is most prevalent among women between the ages of 15 and 24 (22%), unmarried women (27%), women with a high level of education (23%) and employed women (23%), and violence against women within public spaces covers sexual harassment (49%), psychological violence (32%) and physical violence (19%).

Official communications present Morocco as one of the few countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to have undertaken significant measures to counter violence against women and redress gender inequalities. This was prompted to some extent by pressure exerted since the 1980s by women's rights movements, which have mobilised to promote gender equality and the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence. Actions (studies, campaigns, protests, etc.) have resulted in legislative reforms and heightened public debate on violence against women (VAW) within Morocco. A first step was achieved in 2004, with the amendment of the Moudawana, or 'Family Code' (Morocco Code Pénal, 2004), which for many years had been widely deemed as discriminatory against women.[1]

After his accession to the throne in 1999, the King of Morocco was determined to promote the idea of a modern and progressive kingdom in which women are fully emancipated and have full rights as citizens:

'the reform of the Moudawana appears to be the beginning of a legal and social revolution consecrating the equality between men and women and improving women's rights within the family structure' (Murgue, 2011: 15). The Moudawana reform enabled, among other things, the raising of the minimum age for marriage, and the amendment of divorce procedures, children's custody arrangements and conditions for polygamy. However, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for women's rights considered these reforms to be ineffective and merely theoretical. Sadiqi (2008: 336) declares that even if this reform 'strengthens the position of women in the private and the public sphere, the issues of implementation of the law and religion still remain'. Clearly, she claims, 'the impact of patriarchy, tradition, illiteracy and ignorance' continues to hinder women from reporting crimes and claiming their rights. This is especially relevant given that there are still several uncertainties and gaps in the legal framework that keep many women marginalised.

Over the years, a series of reforms and measures to advance women's rights have been adopted. The 2011 constitutional reform, triggered by the Arab Spring uprising, devotes significant attention to gender equality and women's rights at large. The reform stands out for its incorporation of the term 'woman' as an entirely independent category on a number of occasions as well as the term 'citizen' (in its female form in French and Arabic), previously unused in prior texts, which brought the constitution up to universal terminological gender standards, which is itself a major step forward (Sabbar, 2014). The 2011 constitution's preamble states that 'The Kingdom of Morocco is committed to banning and combating all discrimination against anyone on the grounds of sex, colour, creed, culture, social or regional origin, language, disability or any other personal circumstance whatsoever' and the constitution itself features a fuller articulation of the concept of gender equality than was present in the 1996 constitution.[2] Article 19 asserts that:

> The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character, enounced in this Title and in the other provisions of the Constitution, as well as in the international conventions and pacts duly ratified by Morocco and this, with respect for the provisions of the Constitution, of the pillars [*constantes* in French] of the Kingdom and of its laws. The State works for the effective implementation of parity between men and women. An Authority for parity and the struggle against all forms of discrimination is created, to this effect.

Some other examples illustrate similar commitments and efforts undertaken by the Moroccan parliament, including labour code reforms prohibiting gender-based wage discrimination (2003), changes to the Citizenship Code allowing Moroccan women married to foreigners

the right to transmit their citizenship to their children (2007) and the adoption of law no. 11-15, reorganising the High Authority for Audiovisual Communication (HACA) to combat – among other things – all forms of discrimination and stereotyped images that undermine the dignity of women (2016).

Furthermore, 2018 was another significant year, as the government passed law no. 103-13, which criminalised VAW, describing it as 'any material or moral act or abstention based on discrimination on the grounds of sex resulting in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm to the woman'. Women's rights groups regard this law as 'a modest step forward […] which does not comply with international norms' (Assouli, 2018)[3] in the sense that it does not recognise marital rape as a crime and contains considerable vagueness regarding the measures to be undertaken for victims of domestic violence. According to Kasraoui (2020), international human rights lawyer Stephanie Willman Bordat states that law no. 103-13 is 'vaguely formulated and does not set up any concrete measures for protecting women subjected to violence'.

With regard to its international commitments, Morocco has, since its independence in 1956, ratified and adhered to several international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1979, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) in 1995, with its 12 axes, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It should be noted that on 8 April 2011, Morocco withdrew its reservations to the CEDAW concerning article 9 (transmission of nationality to children) and article 16 (equality in marriage and divorce).[4]

The general approach adopted by successive Moroccan governments has been to assimilate international law, particularly in the field of human rights, with colonialism, and in its reservations against international conventions the Moroccan government contests the universality of human rights, seeing them more as a matter of Western hegemony (Glacier, 2015). Yet, civil society organisations involved in women's rights continue to criticise enacted laws as being insufficient, since they contain numerous ambiguities and are open to arbitrary interpretations by judges, who do not always find in favour of women.

There are other criticisms regarding the gaps in communication and in women's knowledge about the provisions of laws, as many women are unaware of their rights and therefore unable to claim them. Civil servants themselves are not often properly trained on new legislation nor on the appropriate procedures to be adopted when dealing with a woman subjected to violence. The reforms, described as promising and progressive in the literature, also appear to be limited in scope given that the dominant laws

regarding the Civil Code (marriage, inheritance, divorce, etc.) in Morocco are largely Sharia-based.[5] Civil society organisations argue that these efforts remain a work in progress, full of good intentions. More steps are needed to ensure greater efficiency (e.g. trained staff, clearer texts, a detachment from religion, a considerable awareness-raising operation and, above all, genuine application of the laws). Gagliardi (2018) considers that reforms initiated over the past 20 years by the Moroccan government have not substantially addressed structural inequalities for women (see also Assouli, 2018).

As for civil society and its role within these reforms, the early feminist movements came primarily from the political left and were organised in the 1980s (Alami M'Chichi Houria, in Naciri, 2014). Drawing largely on CEDAW's provisions, the movements raised awareness among decision-makers and the general public of the injustices and violence suffered by women, and advocated for gender equality. The first feminist association to be founded was the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM, 1985), followed by the Union de l'Action Féminine (UAF, 1987), the Association Marocaine des Droits des Femmes (AMDF, 1992), the Ligue Démocratique des Droits des Femmes (LDDF, 1993) and Joussour-Forum des Femmes Marocaines (1995) (Naciri, 2014).

Gradually, there has been a shift in the approach of feminist organisations, moving from indignation towards a more sustainable and effective approach through strong advocacy (Naciri, 2014). As a result, new forms of mobilisation have been introduced (Naciri, 2014), such as drafting parallel reports alongside the government reports on the implementation of the CEDAW in 1997 and 2003. These alternative reports brought together a number of feminist and human rights organisations to elaborate a common analysis and suggest recommendations, re-appropriating public space by organising demonstrations (Garçon, 2000) and organising large-scale communication campaigns, in particular the 'Printemps de l'égalité' ('Springtime for Equality').[6] They do so through media involvement and by handing out documentation and flyers at railway stations, the exits of government offices and schools, and setting up and expanding listening, information, and legal assistance centres for women subjected to violence, and so on.

Nowadays, with the advent of social media, an entirely new generation of intersectional feminist activists has emerged. They are organising themselves and carrying out their advocacy campaigns mainly, and sometimes exclusively, through social networks, thus engaging with a wider audience, to advocate for gender equality, to apply pressure for laws to be changed or enforced, or simply to act as a resonating box for stories and realities, thus shifting the prevailing dominant narratives.

Methodology

The following account stems from field work conducted by Racines (an international non-profit association working for the integration of culture in public policies for human, social and economic development) within the CUSP N+ (Culture for Sustainable and Inclusive Peace Network Plus), which involved engaging with three different groups of women in three different regions in Morocco in order to collect testimonies on VAW in the country.[7] The action was developed using an arts-based participatory project intended for gathering testimonies of women, triggering discussion on the issue of VAW and promoting a shift of perspectives and raising awareness of the issue in Morocco. Forum theatre was adopted as an arts-based methodology to collect data from women, and the initial questions raised concerned the way some Moroccan women perceive or experience violence and in various settings (both public and private), the way they express it and, most importantly, the means by which they deal with it.

On site, teams conducted three forum theatre workshops, each taking place in one of three Moroccan cities (Casablanca, in central Morocco; Tiznit, in the south; and Al Hoceima, in the north) – ensuring an equitable geographical balance between participants from urban and rural areas. Each workshop was conducted over three days and gathered around 20 women aged between 15 and 60. Participants were approached through Racines' existing network, with a view to establishing a climate of trust between potential participants and the workshop leader. Some of the participants were women from the arts and crafts sector who had previously been – either directly or indirectly – cooperating with Racines on different projects, while others were contacted directly by Racines' local partners, providing an outreach function and inviting women to attend the workshops. Criteria for selecting participants were designed to involve a diverse group of women, particularly in terms of age, social class, profession, level of education, ethnicity and urban/rural geographical location.

The choice of having only female participants was driven primarily by the observations arising from previous experiences, particularly ones involving mixed-gender participants. Usually, when women are in equal numbers with men in a gathering, they tend to restrain their answers while watching out for men's reactions, whereas in the case of women being a substantial majority, participants are more likely to forget about the male presence altogether and to respond without self-surveillance. For many women, this gives them a rare opportunity to express themselves openly and, more importantly, the women participants usually realise in these kinds of gatherings that they are not alone.

As a means to reach out to potential participants, teams drew up a call for participation to the workshop using a poster for each region, which was available in French and Arabic, and circulated it through Racines'

networks, using WhatsApp groups to gather regional partners of civil society organisations, alongside newsletters, posts on social media and printed flyers delivered by post to Racines' partners across Morocco. Each workshop required over a week of recruitment, and the workshops were conducted between February and April 2021.

The workshops were led by Maha El Boukhari, a Moroccan actress well known in the country. The three workshops followed a common structure and approach. The first day consisted of ice-breaking sessions between the women and a brief forum theatre training session. On the second day, women were actively invited to speak about their own perceptions of VAW and share personal stories drawing from their experiences. On the last day, the facilitator called on the participants to perform short scenes/roles drawing from their testimonies and, during these scenes, the participants played their own role in life along with that of their oppressor, whether it was the father, the civil servant, the older brother, the mother-in-law, the husband, the employer and so on. Mitigation measures were taken to address potential situations that might cause participants to feel vulnerability, embarrassment or a violation of privacy. During the process of sharing personal stories on day 2, the team asked the men who were present at the workshop to leave the venue altogether, to provide a safe space where women could express themselves freely. Moreover, throughout the workshop, participants were constantly reassured that the video-recording of the session could be stopped at any point if they were uncomfortable with it.

Following the workshops, 14 follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants, selected on the basis of their willingness and availability to engage more widely with the project. Interviews were conducted in person, all of them in Moroccan Darija – except one, which was held in Amazigh. Some were on site, while others took place at the women's workplaces or in their private homes.

Three Women. Three Tempers. Three Strategies.

Three women in three local variations of the same patriarchal context in three Moroccan regions (north, south and central) showed the same determination in a hostile environment, despite the initial shortcomings, with almost identical strategies of struggle and self-assertion: awareness, refusal to believe in the normality of patriarchal, male domination, desire for emancipation and, finally, strategies and actions for liberation.

Dikra from Al Hoceima (north), Souad from Casablanca (central) and Fatima from Anzi (south) were kind enough to describe their situations to us in more detail. These striking examples follow individually in order to show three variants of the struggle of Moroccan women who had decided to emancipate themselves from the patriarchal carcass. The aim was to pinpoint the triggers and determine each woman's strategy and

the convergences between the three approaches. The three women did not speak spontaneously, out of modesty, fear or shyness. It took 'theatre of the oppressed' workshop sessions to get them to speak freely, one group per region. The participants were artists (theatre and visual arts) and craftswomen or workers in the fields of textiles, jewellery or cooking.

The 'theatre of the oppressed' workshops were moments during which the women played, in addition to their own roles, the roles of those who oppressed them: father, brother, boss, colleague and so on. The playful aspect of the theatre workshops acted as a disinhibitor and a space for confession and psychological release, with some workshops ending in tears, while drawing sessions and interviews with some of the participants helped to verify information and clarify details.

Dikra was born in a village a few kilometres from Al Hoceima. As a young girl, she helped her father, a shepherd, to look after the livestock, and she helped her mother with the household chores. From an early age, she was responsible both for the herd and for her younger brothers and sisters when at home. Dikra, while continuing to talk about the moments of freedom she had had during her adolescence, pointed to the Spanish islet less than two kilometres from the headquarters of the association at which she was currently employed. She told us that when she was young, she used to swim to the island, but she quickly came back to reality, remembering that this period was, unfortunately, too short for her. Dikra comes from a Rifian society with quasi-insular characteristics, and the regular repression of its inhabitants and the long banishment by King Hassan II have kept the region on the social and economic margins. Its confinement has accentuated the reputation of its inhabitants as tough and stubborn people.

This form of marginality is based on a past of which the Rifians are very proud, and the Rif war in particular, together with Abdelkrim Khattabi's short-lived Republic of the Rif (1921–1927). It is also a very conservative region, with its diaspora in the Netherlands and Belgium influenced by rigorous and even Salafist Islam. The Rif is a region where women have long been marginalised and discriminated against, particularly in rural areas. Today, a large number of community organisations focus on the issues of girls' access to education and of underage marriage and on running advocacy campaigns and making their voice heard through public and digital spaces.

Souad was born in Casablanca. She had a brilliant education up to the baccalaureate and spent two years at university. With a degree (bac+2) in economics in her pocket, she worked in an import/export company, then, after a period of unemployment, some friends suggested that she join a social economy association in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Casablanca. At first glance, her fairly conventional life path showed no signs of patriarchy, domination or violence, but it was during the interviews and especially during the theatre workshops that additional life events full

of violences surfaced: 'violences' in the plural, actual or insidious, in the family, at school, in society and in the workplace. Souad chose to work in the social and solidarity economy because, she said, it allowed her to rehabilitate the sense of solidarity that she felt society had lost. It was a way of campaigning for a better society. She lives in Casablanca, the economic capital and largest city in Morocco, and the birth of the modern city corresponds to the creation of its port in 1913. It is a cosmopolitan and progressive city and has been the cradle and scene of several political liberation movements. Women generally have more freedom and opportunities in Casablanca than elsewhere in the country.

Fatima was born in Anzi 35 years before the study and was married with two children. Her liberation started the day she decided to break free from the yoke of male exclusivity in the jewellery market, taking over the family business from her father and uncles, who made silver jewellery. She learnt the business with her father and began marketing her products with her neighbour, who later became her husband and was in the same field.

Fatima was born and lives in the southern region, where the Soussis (Amazigh people from the South of Morocco) have adopted orthodox Muslim beliefs and practices, which they have used to support a dedication to hard work, frugality and austerity. The largest Soussi villages are made up of separate hamlets that were originally small, autonomous political units.

In Morocco, some women are the lowest bargaining chip. From the moment they are born, they are insidiously indoctrinated into a process that prepares and perpetuates their domination, and throughout their lives these women internalise a series of norms. Resistance to the established order is severely punished and breaking conventions is heavily penalised within society.

Patriarchal systems deploy a variety of mechanisms, tactics and tools to hinder women's emancipation and keep them firmly in a submissive status. Dikra's, Fatima's and Souad's life stories are a close-up look at the way these insidious mechanisms are manifested in everyday life.

'It all started at school' - socialisation into heteronormative codes of masculinity

> A 'true woman' is a graveyard of desires, failed dreams and illusions.
>
> Les chimères collective

From an early age, young girls are socialised into heteronormative codes of masculinity that force them to internalise the idea that their rightful and most natural environment is the household, while the outside world belongs exclusively to men. Women seem to be destined to bear children, cook and take care of endless domestic chores, thus being deprived of opportunities for personal fulfilment, and they are also expected to obey

orders and accept punishments without questioning them. An effective first patriarchal tool that sets the stage is to prevent some girls' access to education, pulling girls out of school as soon as possible or, 'better yet', never sending them to school in the first place. Dikra recounted:

> My father said that girls do not need to study. My older sister was top of her class. After her final year of secondary school, my father would not let her go to the high school in a neighbouring village, despite the insistence of the teacher who believed in my sister's potential.

In order to ensure the normalisation of this masculine structure, multiple official institutions present women with a set of emotional and religious predicaments as undeniable facts and truths. Despite these, the three women's stories attest that motherhood is the most honourable and highest form of labour, and that women guarantee the continuity of human existence. In the *Encyclopaedia of Women*, Doctor Monsarrat sarcastically states, as cited by Chollet (2018: 79), that educating girls:

> […] must be done in the most altruistic sense. A woman's role in life is to give everything around her – comfort, joy, beauty – while keeping a smile on her face, without looking like a martyr, without bad temper, without apparent fatigue. It's an onerous task; our daughters need to be trained in this perpetual and happy renunciation. From the very first year, she must spontaneously know how to share her toys and sweets, and give what she has around her, especially what she values most.

Despite the progress observed by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning, girls' schooling remains a major challenge in Morocco. In rural areas, the challenge is aggravated by enrolment rates continuing to be very low. According to official statistics, 6 out of 10 girls living in rural areas do not receive any formal education (Chaker, 2021). It is worth pointing out that Morocco has undertaken many measures in this area, and access to schooling for all citizens without discrimination is underlined in article 31 of the constitution (Secrétariat Générale de Gouvernement, 2011). Similarly, the national education charter has always been considered a reference document for education system reform and was adopted by national consensus in 1999 with the objectives of combating gender disparities in basic education and encouraging girls' enrolment in schools in rural areas. However, the disparities between promises, stated intentions and lived realities continue to be glaringly apparent, and these disparities can be partly linked to the dominance of a patriarchal mentality, hierarchising individuals on the basis of their gender and seeking to limit women's functions to domestic, marital and motherly ones, while keeping them away from any activity that falls beyond the domestic arena. This was echoed by another participant in the workshops, Rachida:

> I grew up in an environment where women cannot express themselves, cannot choose, cannot have friends, cannot go to school and cannot dress the way they want. They also cannot go out and work. Everything is forbidden. The boys didn't go through the same thing at all. When I graduated from primary school, I had to move to a different school and neighbourhood, which meant I had to take a bus. That's when my father forced me to abandon school, telling me, 'In our family, girls don't take buses. It's either you learn *Harfa* ["a profession"] and work at home or forget about learning anything altogether'. I grew up in a very strict environment; I was not allowed to laugh or talk. And even when I got married, I did not know how to express myself or my feelings. It is not easy when you have never expressed yourself from an early age. It is only recently, when I joined the association, that I gradually started to speak up.

Similarly, Souad shed light on the fact that male domination starts with parental favouritism in raising boys:

> Girls are expected to do everything: to do well at school, to take care of household chores, not to have demands and certainly not to request anything, to dress appropriately, to be respectful and modest, not to go out…. As for the boy, even when he comes home at three in the morning, parents think that at least he did not spend the night out. When he is violent, they say he is just pissed off and that he will get over it.

She also explained that, in Morocco, women may benefit from their rights when they belong to upper social classes; however, most women of a lower social status are subjected to oppression and denied their rights.

Maryam related childhood memories which corroborate this gendered vision of patriarchy and which, in an insidious way, perpetuate the alienation of women and deprive them in the most ordinary matters:

> From childhood, everything is forbidden…. Unlike boys … I experienced this differentiated treatment with my brother, because we weren't treated the same. I used to tell my family: the only reason you don't treat us the same is because I am a girl. I noticed over the years that even the most educated parents did not treat girls and boys the same.

Underage marriage and patriarchy

One of the most common forms of VAW, and the one that impacts teenage girls in Morocco, is underage marriage. From childhood, some young girls internalise the idea that they should fulfil their marital and maternal duties as soon as possible; they are taught that their body is not their property and that they should safeguard their virginity for the sake of their husband-to-be. Not surprisingly, many girls in this situation do not get to choose their partners; instead, their families do so.

Fatima testified:

> It happened in 1990. On a beautiful sunny winter morning. I was preparing my homework, peacefully, when my father told me that I will have to quit school to marry a man he met in the village's weekly market. The next day, we headed to the *Adoul* office in Inezgane (southern Morocco).[8] I had no choice but to accept this fate chosen by my father. The *Adoul* asked me if I consented to this marriage. I did not answer. Everyone was looking at me in the room. Basically I wanted to shout '*No* – I don't want to get married; it's not my choice. I want to go to school. I'm only 14 years old!' But, I could not say it and I remained silent. This long moment of silence prompted my father to remind *Adoul* of the popular proverb 'Who does not say a word consents'. Within a month, I was told that I was going to get married; we signed the marriage certificate; we had the wedding celebration and I moved to another city with my husband. My brain was anaesthetised; I did not understand what was happening around me. Marriage was an unknown word for me. It was literally as if I was stepping into a void. I had a child the first year. My husband beat me up almost every day; I was not allowed to leave the house. My missions were household chores and raising my child. This situation lasted for years.

Underage marriages symbolise a girl's allegiance to her family, and particularly to her father. Prompted by economic circumstances, a married girl means having one less person to feed, although the reason is not always economic. Sometimes, it is a 'legitimate' handover of power; once the father no longer intends to control his daughters, but remains concerned about the family's honour, he passes on this authority to another man through the process of marriage. Zeina pointedly reflected on this point, stating:

> I was barely 16 at the time; I was a little bomb with uncontrollable curiosity. I couldn't imagine myself sitting at home all the time, and I was a little rebel, asking outrageous questions. I had a different mentality compared to those around me. I had the impression that I belonged somewhere else and wished I had been born in a European country. I could not see the difference between a boy and a girl. To me, both were the same and were supposed to be treated the same. My father, confronted with this situation, came up with a brilliant idea to get rid of me and my potential problems: withdraw me from school and force me to get married.

In Moroccan society, the belief that a pubescent girl is a woman and thus ready for marriage is as prevalent as ever, but this does not necessarily imply that she is physically and mentally capable of overcoming the repercussions of pregnancy. The World Health Organization (2011) states that the leading cause of death among women aged 15–19 is complications during pregnancy and delivery. Premature marriage deprives

young girls of their adolescence, and consequently of an important phase in their personal and physical development. Added to this, forced sexual relations and premature motherhood have a considerable impact on girls, whether psychologically, economically or socially. The practice of underage marriage generally leads young girls to drop out of school, to devote themselves fully to their new role. As a result, early-married girls find themselves trapped within the marital prison, with no prior knowledge of motherhood, which adversely impacts children born within this type of marriage.

As for Moroccan law, there are several gaps and insufficiencies. While article 19 of the Family Code (Morocco: Penal Code, 2004) sets the age of majority at 18 – 'matrimonial majority is acquired, for boys and girls, at the age of eighteen' – article 20 of the same code authorises families to request a derogation at the age of 15 and, depending on the circumstances and motives for the union, judges may grant one. Civil society organisations claim that this derogation is being used by the courts on a massive scale. In 2020, over 13,000 derogations were issued, out of nearly 20,000 requests (*Le Monde* & AFP, 2022). Certain families, having seen their requests rejected by courts, circumvent the law simply by marrying off their minor daughters using the *Fatiha* (customary marriage),[9] a bypass that confronts judges with a *fait accompli*, forcing them, basically, to legally recognise customary marriages. In this specific case, it should be recalled that in 1993, Morocco ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 June 1989, which sets the age limit for childhood at 18.

Several women internalise specific rules, many of which they consider to be normal. The various mechanisms of patriarchy – strongly rooted in Moroccan society and legitimised by religious and political structures – lead young girls to be convinced that their ultimate role is to be mothers, spouses and housewives, while women who seek a different path are labelled selfish, treacherous and 'sluts'.

Fatima's story resembles hundreds of life accounts from other Moroccan women. All these stories have the same pattern; in patriarchal societies, a woman is first her father's property, and then her husband's, or her brother's if she has one and is unmarried. Within families, a hierarchy is naturally established in that fathers retain decision-making authority, given that they wield economic power, although there are cases where daughters endure family oppression despite contributing considerably to the family's finances, if not assuming full financial responsibility. Clearly, girls' financial independence on its own is not sufficient to stand up against the status quo. Some girls and women prefer marriage, believing it to be an escape route from parental prison and an opportunity to obtain freedom, before they realise that this is merely a matter of shifting prison settings. As Dikra stated, 'Many girls have resigned themselves to their situation while waiting for a husband to rescue them'.

Women's domestication

> Within the family, men are the bourgeoisie while women are the proletariat.
>
> Friedrich Engels

The women's stories highlight a set of findings. A common denominator is how society is not fundamentally against women working, under the right conditions. The majority of women taking part in the workshops were craftswomen, making silver jewellery, sewing and cooking, for example. They had been introduced to the professions by their families, starting in childhood, and work often took place in the family home's workshop, generally situated in a basement, on a terrace or in separate areas of garden courtyards. The products created by women are sold to retailers and storekeepers, as women are never allowed into the markets.

Working constitutes a many-sided burden for women. They not only work hard in the shadows, but also receive no decent remuneration for their efforts. As Rachida testified:

> Even though we worked every day and all the time at the workshop, my father wouldn't pay us, claiming that the money went into the family savings and, if we ever needed something, he would buy it for us. Consequently, we have never actually received any money, although we wanted to be independent and purchase whatever we wanted. Meanwhile, my brothers, who worked with us, were always walking around with money. Our financial independence terrified my father.

Another major constraint raised by women was their difficulty in accessing markets and selling their products, as Mina indignantly recounted:

> Our village [Anzi] is very conservative and women are under constant surveillance. I have spent most of my life in the workshop, designing jewellery, in all kinds of styles, designs that people really liked. I wanted to be in direct contact with sellers, the people who purchase, and be able to talk about my pieces and the creation process and all the stories behind them. This wasn't an obvious thing to do; as soon as I raised this topic with my father and suggested going with him to the market, he always responded exactly the same way: 'Women of good families do not talk to men who are not relatives; they do not bargain on prices. The market is a man's domain. If you go there, you will bring dishonour upon the whole family.'

Fatima, a native of the same village, added more contextual details and, more importantly, her own thoughts on this difficulty, which she deemed unjustified and unfair:

> We have always worked with my sisters in the workshop at home, while my father and my brother were in charge of selling products in the market. The front door was our boundary. It was strictly forbidden to go to the market and talk to the owners of jewellery stores. If we did so, we would be banned from our family and the village for the rest of our lives. Our village is very conservative; for example, we cannot go to a public administration office on our own without a male relative, nor can we take public transport on our own. This means that going to a market – as a woman – and socialising with men is simply not possible, which I consider to be very unfair towards us.

According to women's accounts, those who do access markets and establish contacts with sellers experience yet another sort of difficulty: their credibility and know-how are questioned by sellers. Fatima commented:

> When I finally had access to the market, the sellers doubted that it was me who created the jewellery, using the pretext that it takes a huge physical effort to make them, and manipulating fire is very dangerous for women. They said: 'How do you expect me to believe you? Women are not capable of doing dangerous tasks like that!'

Mina echoed this, pointing out that it is because women are extremely rare in markets that sellers can afford to lower prices or refuse to buy from them. One seller told her:

> I have never bought from a woman; I do not believe you made this jewellery item. This market is a place where men buy and sell. Your prices are high. Why would I give so much money to a woman?

The villages are usually small and almost everyone knows each other. Sellers already have a pejorative attitude towards women who transgress family rules. Therefore, in markets, they either avoid buying from them out of fear of being considered accomplices in women's subversion or take advantage of the context to reduce prices while discrediting the women.

Souad raised another key point, that of housework, which she considered to be the most arduous part of a woman's life:

> Women work hard. First, they work in the sewing workshops or agricultural land, but once they return home, another heavy labour awaits them, that of the endless household chores, looking after the children and their every need. And for this work there is no remuneration. Imagine if a man hires a domestic maid, he will have to pay her a fortune, and when it is his wife, that's by default. If she dares to complain, she is immediately accused of being an unworthy wife and mother.… This is a task assigned to women simply because they are women.

It seems that household chores are not deemed worthy of compensation. Engels' statement in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that 'Within the family, men are the bourgeoisie while women are the proletariat' (Engels, 1884: 39), reminds us that women, by doing housework, generate an added value which is not acknowledged by the dominant economic regime, and that assigning them to housework, with all its associated duties, only keeps them within class exploitation. Gisèle Halimi (1992: 166) argues that:

> The housework done by women at home, i.e. cooking, is considered the most alienating and degrading household chores, which cut women off from reality and shut them in, and are considered to have no exchange value. In order for this to continue, for women to continue to be what Engels calls 'the first servant' within the family, they have to be excluded from social production. This is what the family has been used for, and how it oppresses women. The man in the forum, the woman at home. By riveting her to alienating and unpaid tasks, we almost certainly ensure her complete dependence.

Souad's testimony supports this quote by referring to the potential logic behind the entire setup:

> I believe that by overwhelming women with work and responsibility, the idea is to prevent them from having their heads free to rethink the world and to minimise any attempts at subversion. You know, it happens in all social classes, even a woman who can afford to have household help, she simply assigns these tasks and acts as mediator, but ultimately she remains the primary person responsible *vis-à-vis* her husband, when it comes to cleaning the house, providing food, looking after the children….

This once again points to a mentality that seeks a single unified model, namely that of an obedient woman who never questions the status quo, works uncomplainingly and settles for a life made up of minimum needs and rights with no demands.

A significant part of patriarchy remains firmly established by law. It is still current, given that the reform of the Family Code (the Moudawana) continues to be a matter of debate. For instance, women are entitled to half a man's inheritance. Polygamy is still permitted by law, although recently the legislator brought the obligation of consent from the first wife into law.

Patriarchy is synonymous with violence; it runs against women's emancipation or their right to pursue an education when the decision is taken by the father or the husband. Besides its insidious nature, this violence is structural since it is still legally authorised.

Liberation Tactics – Echoes of Emancipation

> If not me, then who? If not now, then when?
> José Balmès

Insidious violence is deliberately kept out of sight. It places women in extremely vulnerable positions. The consequences of such violence may not always be obvious, nor is being a victim of it sufficient to grasp it. These forms of violence are deeply rooted within social structures. Each of the three women has chosen a different path to face the alienation and discrimination she experiences.

Dikra, who has always felt she was missing out on something, relates her problems, from the smallest to the biggest, directly to the fact that her father would not allow her to go to school. She realises that, if she solves this issue, her whole life will be much more fulfilling. After her teenage years, Dikra's life was full of resolutions. She assiduously attended literacy classes to learn to read, write and count. She realised that being illiterate reduced her participation in the world, because she did not understand what was around her. She gave examples as simple as reading traffic signs, the names of shops or writing the articles for the association she later set up: 'the day I learned to read and write, I felt like a different person'.

In the same quest for emancipation, Dikra obtained her driving licence. She needed independence, the freedom to move around. She set herself up as a caterer for events, companies, weddings and so on. She says she uses the cooking her mother taught her, not as a tool for her husband to enslave her but to turn into a profession. Her husband now helps her with the preparations and deliveries, and Dikra is now president of an association that runs cookery classes for young girls in her town.

Fatima, for a long time outraged by the restrictions on her access to the jewellery market, decided one day to penetrate it and confront all those male sellers, convinced she was doing the right thing: 'One day, I took my merchandise and went to the silver jewellery market in Tiznit. No one had ever seen me in the *souk* [market] or even in the corner shop.' She traces her liberation to the day she decided to break free from the yoke of male exclusivity in the jewellery market, and she expresses her emancipation in two words: *dert boom*. In Moroccan *Darija*, this literally means 'I exploded' and 'I hatched', in the figurative sense.

Maryam made an extremely sharp statement in saying that the war against patriarchy begins with a war against ourselves and by unlearning what we have absorbed over the years:

> My emancipation upset a lot of people, including my family. To name me, they say 'the slut who left her household'. At the beginning, it bothered me. Afterwards, to resist and provoke people, I began to present myself as the slut who decided to emancipate herself. If emancipation is synonymous with being a slut, I would rather be a slut than an oppressed girl from a good family.

She has taken up all these vulgar terms used against her, to further provoke those who fail to recognise her fight and oppose her emancipation.

Fatima, meanwhile, no longer wants to wait for someone to come and rescue her:

> Patriarchy chooses to dismiss our emancipation. Women who aspire to freedom are considered traitors, selfish and sluts. Time flies. I won't wait for associations to come to defend me or for laws to be changed so that I can be free.

The testimonies of these women present the insidious violence exerted on women in Morocco and the strategies deployed by women to escape their dominated condition. Fatima recalled numerous dramatic episodes from her own past, before outlining the path she followed:

> I was taken out of school when I wanted to become a doctor. I was forcibly married when I was only 14 years old. I was imprisoned at home, when I wanted to discover the world. I was never able to put on the clothes I wanted. I have never been able to express my opinion freely. This suffering lasted 35 years. Then I decided to end it. To be free and happy again. I got divorced, started working and I moved to another city. It is funny when I think about it. It was a movie that sowed this idea of freedom in my head – *The Open Door* – particularly when Faten Hamama challenged the misogynist mentality and archaic traditions.[10]

Fatima and Maryam became aware of their condition and transformed their anger into indignation and resisting the status quo. Fatima's trigger was Faten Hamama; Maryam's trigger was anger. After years of suffering, she decided to end the injustice she was encountering. Just like Fatima, Mina too had chosen a life partner who also supported her fight against patriarchy. He was an accomplice and an ally in every decision she made and a constant companion.

Conclusion

Souad provides the conclusion as she made it her mission to work towards empowering other women in her district by offering learning, and thus work opportunities, and by organising sorority clubs where women can get together in a safe space and speak out:

> Among the negative consequences of such violence against women is an unbalanced society. A shaken, impulsive and hopeless generation. It is often said that mothers are schools, but how can they be when they have been humiliated? The problem is right there. When society demeans women, it inevitably produces unbalanced children after 10 or 15 years, who will themselves be harmful to their surroundings. Governments

> could implement policies brought in from abroad, designed by experts. It would not work, because there is no one to implement it. Because when you humiliate women, you undermine their dignity and you treat them as second-class citizens. That is when we, as a society, are going to pay the price, and society is already paying the price for this degrading treatment inflicted on women. You forbade women from going to school, so maybe their children will be educated to a certain level. But imagine if we allowed those same women to have access to education, imagine what their children would be like.
>
> Not to mention the delinquency that is directly linked to the fact that if women do not have access to all their rights, society pays heavily for it. And we are paying heavily. Just look at the people living in extreme vulnerability; they have reached an unimaginable bottom. So, let us put a stop to it!

And Myriam said:

> There are no miracles. I had to do a lot of research to accumulate the arguments and kill the unfounded opinions given by people, including my family. Today, I succeeded in imposing certain rules inside the house: collective vote on decisions, freedom of expression for all members, mansplaining is not allowed, and encouraging women to speak. It took me a while, but I noticed that I managed to install new habits that would not have been possible back in the day.

The liberating triggers shared by these women recall once again that change must originate from people themselves, and understanding acts of systemic violence, and articulating them using the right wording, contribute greatly to deconstructing patriarchy. In the words of the character Shams in the book *Soufi mon amour*, 'I learned by unlearning everything I knew' (Shafak, 2011).

Social stability is essentially based on equal opportunities and democracy shaped by emancipated citizens. This will never be achieved as long as half of society (women) is excluded by discriminatory laws and long-established traditions and is being treated as second-class citizens. Society's wellbeing is assessed by the way in which its women and girls are treated and, more fundamentally, how different minorities live and whether they genuinely perceive themselves to be fully fledged citizens. In their own way, these women epitomise 'shards of radical potential buried in the sedimentation of the political present' (Kramer, 2019: 12).

Beyond any attempt at conceptualisation or generalisation, this text is based on three accounts from bearers of valuable insights who bring together observations, formulations, behaviours and strategies that we saw and heard from a number of women during our tour of the three regions. Although their contexts are similar to a certain extent, with regional

variations, no woman is representative of the others. Their struggle for emancipation is first and foremost an individual one, even if the three women have had allies who have supported, helped and encouraged them. Our role, as civil society, is to propose forms of collective organisation to better structure the action and amplify the impact.

Notes

(1) For instance, under the old Family Code, husbands had every right to divorce their wives without recourse to the courts, which was a flagrant injustice to women. The 2004 reform put an end to this violence, as stated in article 78: 'Divorce is the dissolution of the marital pact exercised by the husband and wife, each according to the conditions to which they are subject, under the control of justice and in accordance with the provisions of the present Code'.

(2) The 1996 constitution merely emphasised that 'all Moroccans are equal before the law' and that 'men and women enjoy equal political rights'.

(3) President of the Fédération des ligues des droits des femmes, interviewed by the TAFRA Center research team.

(4) Article 9 (2): 'States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.'
Article 16: 'The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount.'

(5) The term 'Sharia-based' references the religious directives with which Muslims comply.

(6) 'Springtime for Equality' (Printemps de l'égalité) is a coalition created in 2001 by nine feminist organisations to monitor the work of the commission in charge of reforming the Moudawana (Family Code). The coalition subsequently grew to include 26 associations working in the field of democratic advancement throughout the country (Naciri, 2014).

(7) The project also included: (1) a mapping of VAW in Morocco, illustrating how actors dealing with violence are geographically located, what sort of violence they tackle and their legal status and contacts; (2) a study providing an overview of gender-based violence in Morocco, in terms of the legislative framework, statistical data relating to this issue and a description of the various forms of violence prevalent in Morocco; and (3) individual interviews with actors involved in the field, in order to complement the documentary research.

(8) *Adoul* are traditional religious notaries hold the duty of writing authenticated certificates in areas relating to personal status and real estate affairs.

(9) Al-Fatiha is the opening sura of the Quran. Composed of seven verses, it emphasises God's sovereignty and mercy. It is used to declare marriages granted and blessed by God.

(10) Faten Hamama is an Egyptian film and television actress and film producer. *The Open Door* is an Egyptian film directed by Henry Barakat, which follows the life of a young Egyptian girl from a middle-class family. Laila, the main character, has been appointed to symbolise both oppression and struggle, and the events of the film unfold alongside the political circumstances of Egypt's past, from the revolution of 1952 to the Tripartite attack on the country. According to the film, political circumstances have impacted Laila and guided her pursuit of freedom in a patriarchal repressive society.

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