


The Islamic religion in prison and Moroccan women prisoners in Spain

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Abstract: The main aim of this paper is to investigate how Moroccan women prisoners interpret and practice their religion in prison and the consequences of this in their lives, on an individual level and on a group level, in short the role religion plays for them in prison. Based on the qualitative method, and by using in-depth interviews as the investigative technique, the results show that, in general, religion brings important benefits such as psychological well being, helping the women prisoners to adapt to prison life, alleviating the pain of separation from their children and giving them hope for the future.

However, the Islamic religion is the principal point of difference among the Moroccan women prisoners, according to the degree of influence that they exercise over each other which is influenced by various factors: where they come from, their socialization process and for the time that they have spent in prison. Based on these factors three distinct profiles for Moroccan women prisoners have been identified which differentiate them as women and as prisoners. In short, our results show that religion is key to understanding the identity of these women in prison. Our work opens a new line of investigation that encompasses religion, gender, nationality and prison not addressed until now.

Keywords: Islam; Social contexts; Prisoner profiles; Moroccan women; Spanish prisons.

ES Religión islámica en prisión y mujeres marroquíes presas en España

Resumen: El objetivo principal de este trabajo ha sido investigar cómo las mujeres marroquíes presas en España interpretan y practican su religión islámica en prisión y qué consecuencias les reporta esta práctica en sus vidas, tanto a nivel individual como de grupo, así como el papel que juega la religión Islámica en prisión para ellas. Basándonos en la metodología cualitativa, utilizando entrevistas en profundidad como técnica de investigación, los resultados muestran que, en general, la religión les aporta importantes beneficios, como bienestar psicológico, ayudándolas a adaptarse a la vida en prisión, aliviando el sufrimiento de estar alejadas de sus hijos y dándoles esperanza para el futuro.

Además, la religión islámica es el principal elemento que las diferencia entre ellas, según el distinto grado de influencia que ejerce sobre las mismas lo que viene dado por varios factores: por sus contextos de origen, por sus procesos de socialización y por el tiempo que llevan en prisión. En función de estos factores se han identificado tres perfiles distintos de presas marroquíes, que las diferencia como mujeres y como presas. En definitiva, nuestros resultados muestran que la religión es clave para entender la identidad de estas mujeres en prisión. Nuestro trabajo abre una nueva línea de investigación que engloba religión, género, nacionalidad y prisión, no abordada hasta ahora.

Palabras clave: Islam; Contextos sociales; Perfiles de presas; Mujeres marroquíes; Prisiones españolas.

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1. Introduction

Despite studies of religion in prisons and in prison populations being relatively recent, there are now many studies which analyze aspects of how to manage religions in these penitentiaries (Clear and Sumter 2002; Dammer 2002; Beaman and Winnifred 2013; Becci 2011; Fabretti 2014; Sider and Unruh 2004; Becci and Knobel 2014), the contribution of religion in how prisoners adapt to prison life (Clear, Hardyman, Stout, Lucken and Dammer 2000) and, primarily, proving the positive role that religion plays in the re-education of the inmate (O'Connor and Perryclear 2022; Fernander, Wilson, Staton, and Leukefeld 2005; Kerley, Matthews and Blanchard 2005; Beckford 2009; Lane 2009; Schroeder and Frana 2009; Johnson 2012; Manchado 2021; Restrepo and Moreno 2011; Rostaing, Galembert and Béraud 2014; Sanhueza 2019). However, there are few specific studies about the Islamic religion in prison (Astor 2014; Beckford, Joly and Khosrokhavar 2005; Furseth and Kühle 2011) and even less that focus on religion and women prisoners (Turner 2008; Stringer 2009; Cunningham-Stringer 2009).

Published studies on religion and prison in Spain (Gallizo 2009; García 2000, 2008; Griera and Clot-Garrell 2015; Griera, Martínez-Ariño, Clot-Garrell and García-Romeral 2015) do not specifically analyze the role religion plays in particular groups of women prisoners. This article focuses on Islam and a specific group of female inmates, Moroccan women prisoners in Spanish prisons, never before specifically investigated; this research involves a new approach to religious studies, which takes into account religion, gender and the analysis of a particular nationality in a specific prison environment, as a total institution, not addressed until now. This scientific contribution constitutes the strongest part of the research and paradoxically one of its limitations as there is no published material on this topic. Specifically, we ask two questions: how do Moroccan prisoners interpret and practise their Islamic faith in prison and what are the consequences of this practice in their lives as women and as prisoners on an individual level and on a group level. With this end, we will study firstly how is the collective of Moroccan prisoners in Spain and, secondly how is the relationship of women and the Islamic faith in Morocco, their country of origin.

1.1. Moroccan women prisoners in Spain

Morocco is the third ranked country in the number of foreign women incarcerated in Spanish prisons, after Colombia and Romania; it is also the country with the largest number of women prisoners from the African continent (Spanish Interior Ministry 2021, 313-314). One of the factors that explains this high number of Moroccan female inmates is the fact that Morocco is the main producer and exporter of cannabis resin, or hashish, to Europe through Spain and Portugal, mainly from the Rif area (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction 2014). In fact, almost 29 percent of the Moroccan women are in prison for offences against public health (Spanish Interior Ministry 2021,301), specifically for trafficking hashish. In that respect, a link between context of origin and type of crime is pointed, specifically drug trafficking by Latin American women, who traffic cocaine, and Moroccan women, who traffic hashish (Ruiz-García & Castillo-Algarra 2014). The criminal profile of the Moroccan prisoners has coincided with international research since the 1990s, which note the homogeneity of the offences committed by women, with the principal crime being that of drug trafficking (Wilson 1993; Fagan 1994; Chesney-Lind 1997; Cunha 2009).

Apart from the criminal profile, research has also shown that women delinquents worldwide share common pre-imprisonment problems stemming from their contexts of origin: poverty, precariousness, black market economy, discrimination, among others (Bailey, 2013; Barnes & Cunningham, 2014; Glaze & Maruschak, 2009; Greene, Haney, & Hurtado, 2000; Lynch, Delhart, Belknap, & Green, 2012), establishing that the social, cultural and economic characteristics of the context of origin of the women prisoners contribute to their processes of social exclusion and victimization and are linked to the women's crime (Wood et al 2002; DeHart 2008). Next we will analyse one of the elements that characterizes the context of origin of Moroccan prisoners in Spain, the Islamic faith, and specifically how Islam affects the lives of women, on a personal and family level, in these contexts.

1.2. Women in Morocco and the Muslim religion

With regard to the Muslim religion, there are different perspectives that address the multiplicity of existing interpretations of Islam in Morocco, depending on the area of the country, as well as their influence on societies and on the role of women in them (Garibo 2007; Desrues 2009; Terrón, 2012). Because of this, it is not easy to establish a profile of Moroccan woman, due to the heterogeneity of the female population in this country, at the heart of which lie family structures that are almost tribal and patriarchal, alongside others that are more modern; therefore urban women and rural women are on the one hand two enormously different realities and, on occasion, opposites.

In respect to women, the Koran and the Moroccan Family Code enshrine the role of women as wives (Abkari 2008). This role is accentuated in rural areas, confining the woman to the role of a dutiful wife and a self-sacrificing mother, with a crucial place in providing for the family, doing the housework, bringing up children and working in the fields (Arabi 2005). The woman is, therefore, a key part of the family, indispensable but invisible (Dris-Ait-Hamadouche 2008). Besides these roles, a woman in rural areas is obliged to marry

the man chosen by their parents and then to submit to her husband and also support him and the rest of her family by working both in the home and outside it (Ajaouani 2014).

On the other hand, despite the fact that the Mudawana (the Moroccan Family Code) stipulates that the minimum age to be married is 18, however in article 20 of the code it is stated that the head of the family can authorize the marriage of a minor under certain circumstances while specifying the reason and motive. Due to this norm, the number of underage marriages authorised by the tribunals has increased; between the years 2011 and 2018, 85% of applications received were authorized, leading to the approval of 32,104 underage marriages only in the year 2018. Of these applications, 98% were from a rural area (EFE, 2019).

Another of the precepts established in Islam for women is the use of Islamic dress which includes the veil. The use of the veil in the Koran has a three dimensional function: to hide from sight, to create a boundary and to create a prohibited space (hidden by the hijab). When Islam was revealed to Mohammad, the tradition of using the headscarf acquired a religious perspective which served to distinguish practising Muslims from the slaves, who, on the contrary, were prohibited from wearing these types of clothes. At present, and since the middle of the last century, a large part of Muslim women who have a certain level of intellectual development feel free to either cover, or not, their heads with a veil (according to what is permitted in their respective countries); instead, Muslim women living in rural areas, who due to their economic and family circumstances have not been able to attain medium or higher level education, continue dressing with the veil. This happens in Morocco, where the use of the veil is still imposed in rural areas due to the traditional interpretation of Islam in these areas.

Unquestionably, despite the fact that Morocco is highlighted as an exemplary model in terms of advances in the role of women in an Islamic country (Benlabbah 2008), in rural areas there is a traditional Islamic interpretation, which entails a series of obligations for women, such as the obligation to wear a veil or a headscarf, to be a wife and submissive to their husband, arranged marriages or even marriages of minors, that involve taking girls out of school and denying them the opportunity of training for the labour market. For this reason, knowing which is their area of origin in Morocco is fundamental, as this allows us to understand their own interpretation and practice of Islam, specifically for Moroccan women prisoners in Spain.

Therefore, to learn how and to what extent Moroccan female prisoners practice their religion in Spain and the role it plays for them in prison, we need to identify first their places of origin, to understand how they interpreted Islam in their communities, as well as how Islam affects their lives as women and as prisoners.

In this article we will present the results of our investigation, which has the following objectives:

1. Identify the places of origin of the Moroccan women prisoners and analyze their interpretation of Islam in this context.
2. Analyze how this interpretation of Islam influences the lives of these women, specifically, whether and which gender roles it imposes on them, before entering prison and while in prison.
3. Study how they practice their religion inside prison.
4. Finally, investigate the role religion plays in their experience as women and as prisoners.

2. Method

2.1. Research Structure and Techniques

The research on which this article is based has been carried out with a qualitative emerging design, in which the data from interviews were analyzed. Moreover, this research includes, in addition to a theoretical, bibliographic and documentary review, an analysis of Spanish prison statistics from which data regarding the nationality of female inmates in Spain were obtained. This information helped us to select the prisons in which to carry out our field work. A qualitative methodology of an exploratory nature was employed and data were collected by means of in-depth and semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed us to obtain more complete and in-depth information, the possibility to clarifying doubts during the process and, for the interviewees, to express their points of view.

Through the analysis of the interviews conducted with the female inmates, we have been able to reconstruct the reality of the Moroccan women imprisoned in Spain, the social and cultural processes, marked by their religion, in which they have taken part, both before entering prison and while prisoners; what they have felt and what they have experienced as Muslim women and as inmates.

2.2. Fieldwork and participants

The fieldwork was carried out in nine Spanish prisons, which were selected based on the number of Moroccan female inmates. The only selection criterion regarding the participating inmates was that they were Moroccan. Out of the 43 in-depth interviews, 20 were conducted with members of prison staff. These interviews explored their knowledge and experiences with the Moroccan inmates, and allowed us to contrast and contextualize the information obtained through the interviews with these women, especially regarding how they manage their religion in prison, how they practice the rituals and how these Moroccan women are as inmates. The other 23 interviews were conducted with Moroccan inmates. Tables 1 and 2 provide a profile of participants. The inmates interviewed do not use their real names, to preserve anonymity.

Table 1. Members of prison staff interviewed

Professionals	Number
Prison director	3
Treatment subdirector	2
Medical subdirector	2
Women's educator	2
Women's psychologist	2
Women's prison guard	3
Women's social worker	1
Prison teaching staff coordinator	1
Prison supervision court judge	1
Lawyer specialising in foreigners	1
Men's educator	1
Production manager (production workshops)	1
Total	20

Source: Own elaboration based on field work

Table 2. Moroccan female inmates interviewed

Inmate	Province of origin	Age	No. of Children	Offence
Aminaha	Al-Hoceima	25	3	Robbery
Carissa	Nador	26	1	Offence against public health
Esma	Tangiers	26	2	Offence against public health
Fahima	Chefchaouen	35	1	Offence against public health
Karima	Nador	37	2	Offence against public health
Lina	Tangiers	30	1	Offence against public health
Malika	Tangiers	29	3	Offence against public health
Nabila	Tetouan	33	2	Offence against public health
Sahra	Al-Hoceima	32	3	Offence against public health
Shakira	Al-Hoceima	39	3	Offence against public health
Tahira	Al-Hoceima	41	4	Offence against public health
Abiba	Tetouan	50	3	Human trafficking
Farah	Ceuta	56	None	Offence against public health
Jalila	Kénitra	23	None	Offence against public health
Rafiya	Taza	41	3	Offence against public health
Ranaa	Taounate	36	2	Offence against public health
Nasirah	Kénitra	26	3	Offence against public health
Naila	Ceuta	24	2	Human trafficking
Sabira	Melilla	39	4	Offence against public health
Sauda	Tangiers	29	3	Offence against public health
Suraya	Tangiers	27	2	Attempted murder
Yasmin	Kénitra	30	2	Offence against public health
Yaminah	Al-Hoceima	35	3	Offence against public health

Source: Own elaboration based on field work

The interviews with the inmates focused on a list of topics that included their context of origin, their social and family situations and how they could practice their religion inside prison, what role Islam played for them as women and as prisoners and their opinions and experiences especially regarding the practicalities of their religion in prison. These questions are reflected in the different sections in which the results are structured. In short, what we asked in these interviews were open questions, related to the objectives of our research. The analysis of the answers to these questions is reflected in the different sections in which the results are structured. All these interviews were conducted in different spaces within the women's divisions of each prison such as school and meeting rooms, face-to-face with the subjects

and in private. Each interview lasted between an hour and a half and two hours. Interviews were audio-recorded after written informed consent was obtained. Participants were informed that their participation would be anonymous and that the data obtained would be used exclusively for this study. No incentives were provided for participation. All Moroccan inmates of each prison were invited to participate through their educators, with only three declining to participate. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The interviews were conducted in Spanish by the authors of the article. The majority of the inmates interviewed spoke fluent Spanish; only one presented any kind of difficulty and was subsequently aided by another Moroccan inmate.

The main criminal profile of Moroccan women interviewed is the crime defined as “offences against public health” in the Spanish Penal Code (Spain, 2021: chapter III, article 368 and following), specifically trafficking in hashish. Their ages varied between 25 and 56 and they were all mothers except for two (see Table 2).

2.3 Analysis

The information from the interviews was subjected to a thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2006) using the qualitative analysis package ATLAS.ti (Gallardo 2014). This program facilitated the integration of the information from the interviews into a critical hermeneutic unit and its subsequent organization, operation, and division into categories. These categories are intended to respond to the objectives of our research. As in any qualitative analysis process, some of them emerged in the first moments of research, through the theoretical and referential framework, and others emerged throughout the process, resulting in new categories being generated and the previous ones consolidated. An open coding, which has been guided by the data, was elaborated as the analysis progressed. Our methodological approach has not been a linear process but a dynamic one. The analysis of each category selected for this article has resulted in each of the results presented below.

3. Results

3.1. Contexts of Origin of Moroccan women prisoners, traditional Islam and gender roles

The main characteristic of the geographical region of origin of Moroccan female inmates is that of a rural region; specifically, most of the Moroccan inmates interviewed come from the north of the country, in particular, the Rif region, as well as the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla, located in the African continent (See Table 2). In the Rif area, the cultivation of hashish has traditionally been the main source of income for a poor and rural population, which is itself a culture (Chouvy 2008). This is seen in the words of some interviewees:

My grandmother and mother grew hashish long before it became the business it is now. But they were never in trafficking, they lived from the same cultivation. Now it's something different, you make a lot more money from trafficking (Tahira).

My people are very poor, there is no work for anyone, I have friends who have gone to the big cities, but I have to take care of my children and my mother (Yasmin).

As we have seen before, in rural areas of Morocco there is a very traditional interpretation of Islam, which imposes a series of social roles on women, both at a personal level and at a family level. Next, we will analyze how influential this traditional interpretation of Islam currently is, in the context of the place of origin of these women, in their lives and before and after their incarceration.

One of the principal roles that has become manifest in our research is that the women in these areas are obliged to marry the man chosen by their parents and then to submit to her husband, as established in the traditional interpretation of Islam. This has been shown in the interviews of the Moroccans interviewed.

In my family we have all married a cousin and we have never refused because we have seen it as normal, our parents arranged it from when we were little.... I assumed that I had to take care of my children because I am religious (Sahra).

The majority also claim to be submissive wives. Some of the prisoners also confirmed that obeying their husbands was what led them to commit the crime and be incarcerated.

I'm in prison because I obeyed my husband. I wanted to be a good wife. I didn't want to say no to my husband, and here I am, for helping to deal in drugs' (Nabila).

Me, no, it's my husband's fault that I'm here (Naila).

We found some cases of women showing a rebellious attitude towards the submissive roles assigned them, specifically against the obligation of obedience to their husbands and to economically maintain the members of the family.

I don't think we should have to obey our husbands. What about when your husband beats you or doesn't work? What happens when they're bad with our kids? Why should we have to put up with that? I think religion should be something different. And the men take advantage of it (Sauda).

However, the obligation of maintaining their children is assumed by these women and that they consider it their responsibility.

I worked in the farm and ran my house, I worked all day, but I didn't have enough for my children.....I don't have any studies but I wanted my children to study (Sabira).

Here another of the traditional Islamic roles is evident, that of being mothers. In fact, this role appears to be fundamental for the Moroccan inmates. Out of the 23 Moroccan women inmates interviewed, 21 were mothers. In addition, 11 of them even have three or more children (see Table 2) and all of them mentioned their children in the interviews. When these women were arrested and sent to prison, the result was that their family life broke down and their separation from their children was particularly painful and traumatic, mainly due to the inability to keep up face-to-face family relationships because of distance and lack of resources.

It hurts me a lot, my children are far away, and very expensive to come to Spain to see me. My husband has come sometimes, but it's all a lot of money. And I really miss my children, that's the worst thing about being here. I did something bad, but I won't do it again. I want to go back home to my children (Yasmin).

Some of these women have benefited from support networks and arrangements for providing for and looking after their families, generally with the help of matrilineal networks: grandmothers, aunts, sisters-in-law, sisters or older daughters, so that when they were imprisoned, the children were catered for.

My children are with my sister and mother-in-law, but I don't like it because they're bringing them up their way and they have to do everything my mother-in-law tells them. (Nasirah).

Traditional Islamic culture, in addition to the role of mothers in which they have to work and take care of their children, also establishes for these women the obligation to look after their parents-in-law. The majority of the interviewees made no mention of this last obligation, which leads us to believe that they accept it. However, we have found cases of reaction to these precepts, which are considered impositions by some of them.

I didn't get along well with my in-laws, who made me work a lot (Tahira).

3.2 Practice of the Islamic faith among Moroccan women prisoners.

The right to religious freedom is expressly recognized in the Spanish General Prisons Law 1/1979, 26th September, article 54, which sets out that "the Administration guarantees inmates' religious freedom and will facilitate the means by which this freedom may be practiced." Thus, prison directors are obliged to communicate inmates' requests for spiritual attendance to their religious communities and to provide for the celebration of religious rites and festivals. Furthermore, Spanish prisons are open to ministers of various religious tendencies: Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelist, Jewish and Muslim.

With regard to Islam, article 9 of the Spanish State Cooperation Agreement with the Spanish Islamic Commission (CIE), approved in Law 26/1992, 10th November, guarantees prison inmates' rights to religious attendance, provided by imams or others assigned by their communities and authorized by the relevant authorities. Under Islam, imams do not enjoy any official recognition, since it is the community which legitimizes specific people to exercise religious functions. In order to avoid the risks that this might bring inside prisons, only members of the CIE are considered legitimate ministers, thus guaranteeing that religious attendance can be provided for without fundamentalism or radicalism (Gallizo 2009, 99). The cooperation agreements between the Spanish state and the CIE specify the following acts of religious attendance: practising the religion, provision of ceremonial services, moral and religious instruction and counselling and funeral rites; and the accords also allow for the main Islamic religious holidays to be held (al-Hijra, Ashura, Mawlid an-Nabi, Laylat al-Mi'ray, Eid al-Fitr, which includes Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, etc.).

However, despite being established in law, the majority of Spanish prisons do not provide for the assistance of imams for the male and female Moroccan prisoners.

Yes, according to the law the imams who come into prison are those authorized by the prison authorities. But the Moroccan prisoners do not trust them. In practice, there are no imams coming into the prison at the moment (Prison director).

In respect of Islamic festivals, Ramadan is the most important for Muslims and the most observed by Moroccan prisoners. Our field work enabled us to witness how the celebration was arranged in prison:

Around two weeks beforehand, the prison director sends an order to the sections informing them of the celebration and asks inmates to express their wish to participate. During the Ramadan month the rules of life in the prison section are changed; for example, those regulating mealtimes and hours spent in cells (Treatment subdirector).

The Muslim women inmates are allowed to access their cells before the nine-o'clock roll call at night, and not to have dinner with the other inmates. They can take their food to their cells in thermal containers to eat when the fast is over, during the night.

Throughout Ramadan, the menu has typical Muslim dishes like harira, which is the traditional Moroccan soup, specially cooked for these days, usually with bigger portions than normal, like on other religious celebrations like the Day of the Lamb (Women's prison guard).

Despite these measures enabling inmates to celebrate Islamic religious holidays, many of the Moroccan women prisoners interviewed were not happy with them:

How can I have Ramadan here with the bad food they give you and the hunger? If you don't have money to buy food in the prison store you can starve (Sahra).

Here they don't know how to cook Moroccan food. When we're in Ramadan we have to eat what they give us and also we can't rest during the day. They make it so you don't want to celebrate it (Karima).

Apart from what we have mentioned above in terms of religious practice, prisons provide a specific menu for Muslim inmates, in line with Islamic precepts, throughout the year.

Despite this, the Moroccan women in general scarcely follow the Islamic precepts in prison.

The women are not as devout as the men, they don't follow the rules as much. The Islamic faith regulates from waking up until going to bed.....among men there is a rule that obliges them to follow the rules and precepts; among the women there isn't (Men's educator).

The women are not as strict about Ramadan, absolutely not (Woman's educator).

Following the terrorist bombings in Madrid on 11th March 2004, the General Prisons Board developed the New Programme for preventing radicalization in penitentiary establishments (1-8/2014), comprising a set of measures aimed at detecting and preventing processes of radicalization among Muslim inmates. With this in mind, security controls are tightened during Islamic religious festivals to avoid unauthorized persons carrying out religious instruction and to prevent fundamentalist recruitment among the women prisoners. In any case, radicalization affects Muslim males more than women; in fact, in Spain there are 11 Muslim women condemned for jihadist terrorist crimes compared to 105 men (Spanish Interior Ministry 2021: 309). This lesser radicalization of women is also perceived by the prison professionals.

The processes of radicalization are individual within the prison. The men with similar crimes experience it; the women don't. Those women in prison for jihadism were already radicalized before incarceration and they have no influence over the other women prisoners (Treatment subdirector).

Another result of the implementation of the programme for preventing radicalization in penitentiary establishments is that, although the legislation provides for places of worship within prisons, the General Prisons Board has banned prayer in the common areas of prisons when more than two inmates are together,

...with the intention that prayers take place in the cells to avoid concentrations of Muslim inmates (Prison supervision court judge).

The banning of praying together is for men and women. One of our missions is that they do not do it. They pray individually in their cells (Woman's prison guard).

In any case, the practice of praying at home and individually, is also normal for Muslim women on the outside. So, from the patriarchal concept of the Islamic religion, women are not obliged to pray in the mosque, they can do it better at home; in fact, their attendance is much lower than that of men, practicing their religion individually, so they end up being unseen in the practice of their religion (Kayal-Kharrat, Jiménez-Delgado, Jareño-Ruiz 2019).

3.3 Contexts of socialization, prison, Islam and types of women prisoners

We have found that the traditional Muslim religion does not exert the same influence on all women prisoners, but depends on the place where they were brought up and socialized. This has allowed us to differentiate initially, between two profiles of Moroccan prisoners:

1. Detainees brought up and socialized in Morocco: these inmates were born in Morocco, and lived there at the time of the offence. Only three of them were living in Spain, specifically in the Spanish autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, located in North Africa and bordering Morocco. These women belonged to the Muslim communities located there and maintained their original traditional culture. All of the inmates in this group had characteristics differentiating them from other female prisoners: they were normally married with children and they continued to wear the veil or headscarf and traditional Moroccan dress while in prison, which made them easy to differentiate them from others. In this respect, it should be noted that, in Spanish prisons, unlike other developed countries, no uniform is imposed, thus allowing inmates to wear their own clothes. In addition to clothing, they tried to maintain their traditions regarding food and the rest of the Islamic religious practices, even reproducing in prison their roles of subordination to the male head of the family. The internalization of this subjected women's role was reflected in submissive and obedient behaviour, marking them out as conformist, rule-abiding inmates.

The Moroccan women don't bother us and they always do what you say because they're used to obeying their husbands (Prison educator)

Other analysts have confirmed this situation (Ribas and Martínez 2003). Lastly, these women tended to form exclusive groups, easily identifiable in the prison yard of their units by their Muslim clothing, with

little relationship with other prisoners. We have seen this prisoner profile principally in prisons with a greater concentration of Moroccan prisoners.

2. Prisoners brought up and socialized in Spain: these inmates are daughters of Moroccan immigrant families. These women had been educated in Spanish schools together with Spanish children, and felt closer to Spanish than Muslim culture. As Soriano (2008, 127) says, the identity of people is shaped throughout the life cycle, taking into account the contexts of reference; it is not something stable or fixed, but it is a dynamic process inserted into a specific context. Therefore, the process of socialization takes place in the family, and the parents are foreigners who behave as such, which gives rise to generational conflicts. Studies into second generation Moroccan immigrants in Spain have shown that when parents require their children to observe certain precepts of Islam, this leads to a generational conflict particularly among the girls (Kayal-Kharrat, Jiménez-Delgado, Jareño-Ruiz 2019). In addition to this, as Pamies (2006) observes, these teenagers take part in “everything that’s bad” in the host society, acquiring habits seen as undesirable for good Muslim girls, such as the wearing of Western clothing, acquiring Spanish youth leisure habits such as consuming alcohol and tobacco, going to bars and discos, etc., even school absenteeism and drug use, prevalent among some sectors of the Spanish youth. The consequence of this is that the family’s prestige falls among the Moroccan immigrant communities they belong to. This second group of Moroccan inmates barely differed from their Spanish counterparts, dressing in the same way, smoking tobacco and behaving similarly.

I had nobody who could help me. I agreed to bring drugs into the country because I had friends who did it. I’d met them in my neighbourhood some time before. I was unlucky and now I’m in prison (Carissa).

Among these young women, we found that it was normal to have sentimental relationships with young Spanish men, and thus they were also stigmatized by their communities and even repudiated by their families, sometimes even suffering threats and physical aggression from male family members. On occasion pressure from the family became unbearable and forced the young woman to run away.

I ran away from home. I had problems with my father because he wanted me to marry a cousin that I didn’t want and I left with my boyfriend who was Spanish (Jalila).

Apart from these two profiles of Moroccan women prisoners, during our research we came to identify a third profile, one integrated by prisoners who have been raised and socialized in Morocco and have been serving a Spanish prison sentence of more than one year. This group has experienced, during their time in prison, a process of progressive alteration, which has started to dilute their identity as Muslims and resulted in a relaxation of their customs. These women have stopped dressing as Muslims and have adopted behaviour and attitudes like the rest of the non Moroccan prisoners.

The change can be seen from when they enter, with their Islamic dress and the time they are here, they progressively change and behave and dress like the other prisoners. Look, after a few months on the block they only put on their Islamic dress when they communicate with their husbands or other people on the outside, for fear of being disowned by their families (Woman’s prison guard).

One of the behaviours that some of these prisoners adopt is establishing a sentimental relationship with another prisoner, something common among the rest of non Moroccan prisoners, and we can see them embracing their partners in the common areas of the block.

These prisoners have their husbands on the outside, but other non Moroccan prisoners as partners. This is frequent between the women because they have different affections than men (Woman’s prison educator).

Despite all this, this third profile of women still recognise themselves as Muslims.

3.4 The role Islam plays in the lives of Moroccan women in prison

The function and meaning of the Islamic faith for Muslim women in prison is different for each of the three identified profiles of Moroccan women prisoners. So, for the two prisoner profiles who were raised and socialized in Morocco, equally for those who maintain their Islamic dress and customs in prison as for those who abandon these traditions, their faith functions as a support mechanism and a means of adapting to the prison. Belief in Allah becomes a bedrock which, in many cases, provides them with the emotional strength they need to face prison life.

My life doesn’t end here because I don’t want it to and because I’m not alone. Allah is with me and He’s my strength, and I can carry on and one day I’ll get out, because I wasn’t born in prison (Fahima).

Allah gives me strength for when I get out of here (Sauda).

I don’t know if it’s my faith or what, but I know that my children are growing up, they’re fine. I’m always praying. What gives me strength is God (Rafiya).

In short, the Islamic faith improves the levels of adaptation to prison life for Moroccan women and minimizes the most unpleasant effects of imprisonment. Together with this function, the Islamic religion seems to contribute to improving the inmates’ psychosocial wellbeing, their hopes and expectations for the future.

I have great strength inside me. There are different types of freedom, the only thing I don't have is physical freedom, for the rest, thanks to Allah I have it (Saouda).

One day I had a terrible pain and I had to relieve it only by praying, because I went to the infirmary and got tired of waiting for the doctor, so I lay down on my bed and I started to pray and pray and I fell asleep praying deeply, with the best of my faith, and when I got up for the roll call I'd already forgotten about the pain (Yasmin).

This shows the role played by Islam for these Moroccan women: it is a vital support for them, both in their lives and in prison.

In addition to this function, for the first prisoner profile of those raised and socialized in Spain and who use Muslim dress, we have seen that Islamic religious practice in prison strengthens the feeling of belonging to this group among themselves as Muslims, reinforcing their identity and differentiating them from Spanish and other foreign inmates who follow other religions or who are agnostic. The Islamic religion fulfils a fundamental role for this group of women inside prison: it defines them as prisoners both at an individual level and at a group level. This does not occur with the other profile of Moroccan prisoners, those who have been raised and socialized in Spain. For this group of inmates their Muslim religion does not appear to have any meaning in their lives. What's more, we have found some cases of a rejection of the precepts of Islam and the traditions this entails for these women, because not only do they not follow these precepts but they consider some of these precepts as a controlling tool.

Why can't we be free? Why can't I live my life how I want?! (Jalila)

4. Conclusions and proposals for action

Our study has a double contribution: to the literature on religion and prisons, and to the study of the relationship between religion and women in prison from a gender perspective. Furthermore, this is done through the analysis of a specific group of female inmates, Moroccan women inmates in Spain, with the objective of investigating how these women experience their Islamic faith in prison and what role it plays for them.

Our results have allowed us to identify the existing relationship through the contexts of origin of the prisoners and the traditional interpretation they have of Islam, as well as the gender roles that this interpretation of Islam imposes on them in their contexts of origin, that span from being obliged to marry a man chosen by their family, including as minors in some cases; to being a mother; running the house and all the members of the household including in-laws and finally the obligation to maintain and support the household. These roles are so internalized that they continue to influence their lives in prison, personally and as prisoners. Therefore, they are identified as submissive prisoners by the prison staff and they continue, as a priority, to exercise their roles as mothers and take care of their households from prison, for what it is worth, through different strategies.

However, the influence of these precepts of Islam are not the same for all women. In this sense we have identified three different profiles of Moroccan women prisoners according to their place of origin and to their process of socialization, differentiating those born and socialized in Morocco, who were born and brought up in a traditional interpretation of Islam, from those socialized in Spain, daughters of immigrant families, who have grown up and been socialized in the Spanish western culture. And within this first profile of prisoners that were raised and socialized in Morocco a third profile appears of those who have spent more than one year in prison. Despite these two profiles of Moroccan women prisoners sharing the same Islamic faith, this third profile has experienced a process of alteration, adopting attitudes and behaviours of the rest of the non Muslim prisoner population. In each of these three profiles their identity as women are different; these identities are determined by whether or not they follow traditional Islamic values that affect how they feel, think, and even their clothing and behaviour.

In respect of practicing their religion, despite the Spanish penitentiary system guaranteeing prisoners the right to practice and perform the precepts of Islam and celebrating the festivals, such as Ramadan, providing a Muslim diet all year round and the possibility of dressing in Islamic dress, the Moroccan prisoners however, scarcely follow these precepts. Only women who correspond to the first profile, those who have been socialized in Morocco and have only spent a few months in prison, show a greater following of these precepts, above all in reference to dress, which converts them into an easily identifiable group in prison. This at the same time strengthens their identity as women and as Muslims.

Because of security regulations to help prevent the radicalization of Muslim prisoners, Moroccan prisoners are not able to pray together in the prison yard, but only alone in their cells. Nevertheless, this is how they practiced praying before their incarceration in that from the patriarchal concept of the Islamic religion, women are not obliged to pray in the mosque, thus practising their religion, in general, individually.

For the two prisoner profiles of Moroccan women socialized in Morocco, their faith plays a positive role for them in prison: it helps them to adapt to prison life, withstand their confinement, helps relieve the suffering of being separated from their children, gives a feeling of psychological well-being and even helps them see a positive future.

Our research shows that the Muslim religion, as well as being one of the principal factors in helping Moroccan prisoners adapt to prison life, is also the principal element that differentiates it, in that the degree of influence to which their faith exercises over them determines their identity both as women and as prisoners. At the methodological level, the application of qualitative techniques, such as in-depth interviews, has offered us enormous possibilities of research, analysis and interpretation; it has allowed us to address

new dimensions of the complex phenomenon of the relationship between Moroccan women prisoners and Islam and their life in prison. Finally, having not been investigated before, this represents the strongest point of this research, and at the same one of its limitations as no research has been published before on this topic.

The information provided by our article in this respect is entirely the result of our fieldwork. In this sense, our research contributes to the scarce research on religion and women prisoners, highlighting the function that the Muslim religion has on Moroccan women prisoners in Spain, and opening a line of research on religion and specific collectives of women inmates, which studies certain aspects according to their culture, contexts of origin, socialization processes and the role of religion for these groups of women in prison. We consider it necessary to continue focusing on this new line of research from different perspectives and with an integrative and gender approach.

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