

A Grounded Theory Study of Gender Dynamics in Business in Moroccan Private Schools

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Abstract: This study combines empirical research into the management of private schools in Morocco with a critical review of some of the dominant theoretical frameworks developed by North American and European researchers to understand the impact of gendered social structures on attitudes of and towards female private school owners and their approach to their managerial activities and the business output as a whole. The first part of the thesis excavates the legacy of Morocco's complex colonial and post-colonial history with specific reference to the private school sector and provides a critical foundation of the research subject contextualisation. Using grounded theory, my empirical research starts with the replication of Geert Hofstede's 2013 Value Survey Module (VSM), initially to a pilot study of 76 (67 female and 9 male) private school teachers and management teams in the region of Agadir in Morocco. Analysis of the results of the VSM found that its definition of Masculinity and Femininity produces incoherent results when applied to these settings. Further, the score for Morocco published by Hofstede in 2003- and the one obtained as part of this (2017-2019) research were on opposing poles 53 and 11.5, respectively. The limitations of the results of the VSM required further empirical research through ethnographic observations and interviews with the owners and/or managers of these private schools. This qualitative research found that women, more than men, tended to distance themselves from set characteristics attributed to a gender, and instead put forward the common interest of the organisation as their critical value motivation. Success and motivation were not gender-bound, and gendered norms were seen as circumstantial and not fundamental. The research found that male and female dynamics were governed by economic imperatives rather than by gendered norms. I use this historically grounded reading of Moroccan-specific gender dynamics to challenge the universalist assumptions of cross-cultural management approaches such as Hofstede's. My research provides the basis to deepen our understanding of the context and impact of gender dynamics within business organisations in other regions of Morocco. It is research that remains alive to the impact of globalisation on southern political economies—in and through being anchored to the specifics of historical, linguistic, and cultural places.

Keywords: Grounded Theory, Hofstede, Morocco, Post-colonial, Gender, Education

1. Introduction

Does it still take a woman to teach and nurture and a man to lead and rule?

Is a female teacher better than a male teacher for the 6 years old child?

Which is more Masculine: European or African societies?

Which is more authoritative in Arab countries: Men or women?

Which is closer to Europe: England or Morocco?

Is entrepreneurship and family compatible?

Would you rather work under the commands of a man? or a woman?

Would you only recruit men, or only recruit women? Is that sexism or are you keeping households economically afloat?

Would you use a framework that guarantees arithmetic precision in assessing organisational gender throughout nations, worldwide?

Take a minute and think about it...

The present introduction is taken as an opportunity to situate the study within its interdisciplinary landscape.

1.1 Morocco and the Enterprise: a Northern Perspective

A woman is in the minds of many more nurturing; she understands and acts in a better moral way around youngsters. Through this logic, teaching has been established as 'one of the highly feminised "semi-professions" like nursing and library-keeping. Feminisation has contributed to teaching's low status. Teaching's low status has allowed its feminisation' (Boyle, 2004 [no pagination]). Kachuck (1981) argued that supply and demand market factors were 'inextricably intertwined with the ideology of a woman's place'. She explained that schools, in their

role of maintaining the existing social order, perpetuate social hierarchies; women are (in this view) teaching male-dominant values, and therefore establishing the acceptable knowledge and rules of behaviour in schools and society. Anker (1997) argues that the characteristics of female occupation mirror the common stereotypes of women and their supposed abilities. A notion of cultural stereotypes being fed into the education system is furthermore prolonged because 'many pioneers in women's education espoused the logic of their replacement to be trained by female teachers' (Drudy et al., 2005, p. 18).

The feminized features of the education domain mark the private school sector in Morocco and emphasise its characteristic as a business that privileges women as the main creators and directors. It feeds on - and is fed by - the fact that the core service is education, which is still today seen as a feminine occupation and reported as a female-friendly recruitment field, both in the private and the public sectors. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development reported that 92% of all primary teachers were women (2017), qualifying teaching as a woman's world that is subject to a worrying 'slow but steady feminisation' (OECD, 2020 in (Katsavora, 2020) [no pagination]). The new entrepreneurial sector belongs to "Madame" colloquially referring to the "Modern, Moroccan female-boss".

1.2 Private Primary Schools: an Invisible Cash-cow

According to the Moroccan Ministry of National Education (2014), the private sector accounted for 10% of the national education/teaching workforce, around 60% of whom are female teachers in primary schools. They are rarely found in the managerial levels of businesses. The percentage of women holding managerial roles of listed companies averages 11 %, while that of female union representatives merely reaches 0.40% (ESEC, 2012). Little is reported on the particularities of the private schooling sector, underlining an unreported aspect of the movements in this area.

Investigating this business environment is simultaneously challenged and informed by the lack of reported data and information regarding its particularities. This specific segment is quasi-invisible, moving and burgeoning undercover. Although it is acutely proliferating, and despite there being specific degrees and years of professional experience required as prerequisites to becoming school runners, managers, and teachers, little information is made available to the public. It is similar in its reported existence to those informal work categories in developing countries; where women are the main actors but where their participation is omitted due to the lack of a clear definition of educational or vocational paths leading to such forms of entrepreneurial economic activities. In Morocco, it is referred to these activities as the Informal Sector (le secteur informel).

The understanding of the concept of the informal economic sector emerges from the fact that female labour is often studied and reported-upon through distinctive biases that underline its defining features (Rodary, 2002): The first feature is that women's economic participation and labour is approached almost exclusively through the waged work structures. This automatically excludes the types of work that do not belong to a defined structure, and that happen at home or in informal settings (streets, Hammams / public baths, wedding venues... etc.). Secondly, the work of women is often associated to the schooling of girls/women, therefore excluding types of work that do not require a traditional form of learning or that are not formalised with the obtaining of a diploma. The third feature is the association of women's work with an immediate exposure to the public sphere and how it excludes all types of work that happen at home or in a customer's house. When looking at Morocco, the first two parameters are extremely representative of the context at hand. The third one, however, does not fully apply to this study, since schools are likely to start from homes, concerted rooftops, or garages.

1.3 Moroccan Gender: A Southern Perspective

According to Fatima Sadiqi, 'Moroccan culture is of type that strongly constrains the behaviour of men and women' (Sadiqi, 2003, p. 17). This country that is outwardly homogenous and mono-religious is deeply heterogeneous in nature, aligning Mediterranean, Arab, Amazigh, African, Muslim, Modern, and Traditional as its defining identities. Authors describe this multitude of identities as incoherent to anyone looking for the secure and comforting logic of Cartesian 'rational behaviour'. Mernissi (1987) explains that 'If we try to grasp the complexity of the situation in which individuals act and reflect on their actions (...) then what seems incoherent becomes intelligible in its existential context' (Mernissi, 1987, p.12). The fact is that Morocco's history is based on a tradition of orality and is therefore still incomplete. Gender politics, feminist projects and thoughts are furthermore 'imbricated in modern and traditional discourses on religion, culture and the nation' (Ftouni, 2011, p. 163).

Gender perception and subversion in Morocco could be considered as the result of distinctive components: Geography, Islam, Orality, Multilingualism, Political system, Economic status, History, and Social Organisation (Sadiqi, 2003). Eight complex components are considered in the elaboration of an interpretation of gender dynamics in one country, as opposed to frameworks that develop models that allow the definition of gender across all cultures, globally.

Sadiqi's (2003) linguistics and history-based framework and Mernissi's (1987) sociological one both conclude that gender dynamics are dependent on Family, Education, Economic activity, Religion, Tradition, Sex, and Modernity. An approach that offers a technical advantage in addressing the concern raised by this study's rationale, which is the generalisability and the standardisation of the traditional scientific method in studying the diverse and complex sociological matter. It is in turn an argument that sustains the idea that social issues are directly linked to the way power and hierarchies are diffused in a specific area and under specific conjunctures; they can therefore not be critically examined through approaches that are detached from these specificities. What is more engaging in a local sociological reading of gender dynamics is that gender subversion comes as a naturally constructed and lived notion alongside gender perception, rather than a bi-standing collateral event that is independent or alienated from the main concept of gender (Sadiqi, 2003).

1.4 The Rationale

The subject of this research study is sitting at a crossroads between disciplines of sociology and gender studies on one side, and business organisational studies on the other. Thus, I opted for to look at the question of gender in business in Morocco through the Cultural dimensions' framework. In his model, Hofstede (1967-) conceptualised the different aspect of culture that interferes and shape the way employees work. Hence, he identified indexes of Cultural dimensions, against which employees from 102 countries were scored and collectively ranked (according to their country) on a scale from 1 to a 100. These Dimensions are: Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism. Uncertainty avoidance, Long-term Vs. short term orientation, Indulgence Vs restraints, and Masculinity vs. Femininity. The study focuses on the later since it is the dimension that measures gender roles in society and the extent to which cultures can be either masculine - with more assertive, achievement-concerned men -, or feminine - where the dominance is to nurturing and tender roles. Parallel to that, I opted to combine this framework with Mernissi's (1987) gender dynamics, where male and female realities are subject to a complex set of parameters, induced by private and public tensions and development, historically, culturally and economically.

As a result, I connected a seemingly theoretically unbridgeable gap by going to the roots of each framework and defining the building blocks of each theoretical perspective on what makes the Masculine and the Feminine. Figure 1: 'Merged Masculinity, Femininity and gender dynamics markers' summarises the merged theoretical concepts and the way they result in one coordinated reading grid of the masculine and the feminine from this stand point:

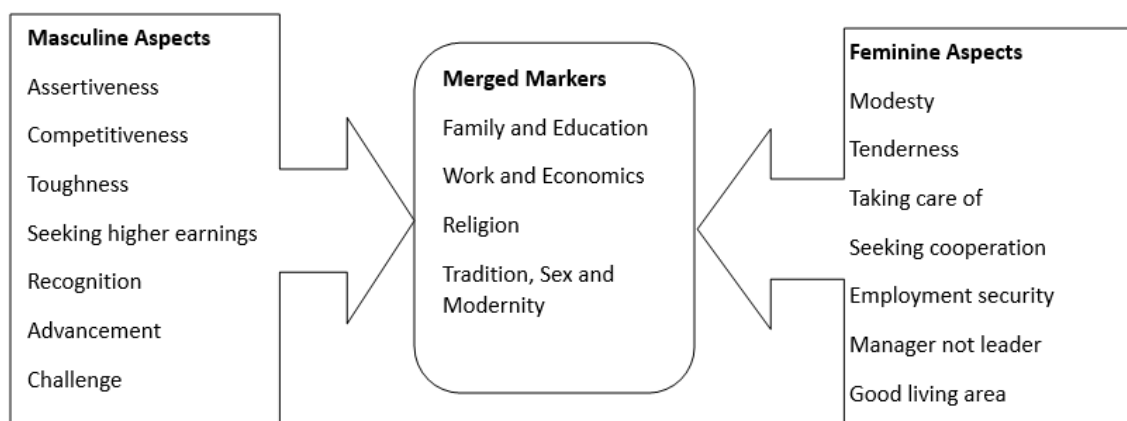


Figure 1: 'Merged Masculinity, Femininity and gender dynamics markers'

Hofstede's (Hofstede et al., 2010) assumes that that societies must be investigated and understood through the individuals' behaviours, and the functioning of specific aspects of their environments, such as families and school systems, religion, and consumer behaviours. Yet, the framework and specifically the Masculinity vs. Femininity

dimension appears to assume that 'all societies are knowable, in the same way, from the same perspective' (Connell, 2007, p. 44). I use Connell's Southern Theory to elucidate the occurrence of such assumptions in the traditional scientific approach.

1.5 The Aim

The economic output generated by the private schools, together with the way these micro-social organisations identify and process the cultural dynamics, also make them part of the global socio-economic landscape, feeding into and fed by the environment within which they thrive. It is this area of perpetual conflict and reversible reactions that determines the focus of this study and that opens a debate between what is presupposed and what is real in this unreported world, through the words of the main actors in the field.

The research is investigating how gender dynamics – in their capacity as socially systemic gendered relations – are patterned within the organisations. The examination will determine how they influence the development of the entrepreneur, the running, and the output of the private primary schools. The research admits that thus far the lack of local studies and academic knowledge, or the dated nature of the scarce academic sources makes it so that it would be arguable to confirm how specific patterned segregations are embedded in this sector.

By doing so, and throughout its process, the research puts forward accounts of the context, collected from direct makers of this sector in Morocco from one side, and creates a stage where disciplines and sources are cross defined, both in nature and in method. Since the research admits that there are fundamental scientific truths have been somehow tainted with a form of obtuse vision that generally takes the known world as the source and then compares the other to it, the research is an opportunity to open up a dialogue between Northern and Southern intelligentsia, and reopen the borders between management and sociology.

2. Methodology

The empirical investigation was divided into two phases:

Phase one is the quantitative study of the organisational culture of male and female values and preferences in Moroccan private schools as businesses. The field exploration started with a pilot study, which used Hofstede's cultural dimensions framework. The study was based on the Value Survey Module (Hofstede and Minkov, 2013), involving 88 owners, directors and employees from 10 different private schools and ran for two months over June to August 2017.

Phase two is the qualitative investigation designed as a response to the methodological shortcomings and limitations of the VSM 2013, and the technicalities of ethical clearance and participants enrolment revealed by the pilot. Phase two consisted of semi-structured and closed-ended questions of eight owners and directors of different private schools between May and July 2019.

In combining qualitative and quantitative methods, and in allowing the research to feed into the field work and vice-versa, the study was seeking to establish a mechanism through which data would be sieved, and methods would be put to the test. Multiplying approaches enabled a better control of the coherence in the quality of the fieldwork. All raw data mined was allowed to inform the research design, and a subsequent step in the field work was only valid when it was not weakened by filed observations. The mixed methods strategy was one where every step filtered-out incoherency, and simultaneously, where the result of the research depends on the presence of all components, resulting in a context-specific, non-generic and up-to-date set of findings. The following illustrates the way the approach to this study was envisioned, namely Figure 2: My funnel strategy for mixed methods.

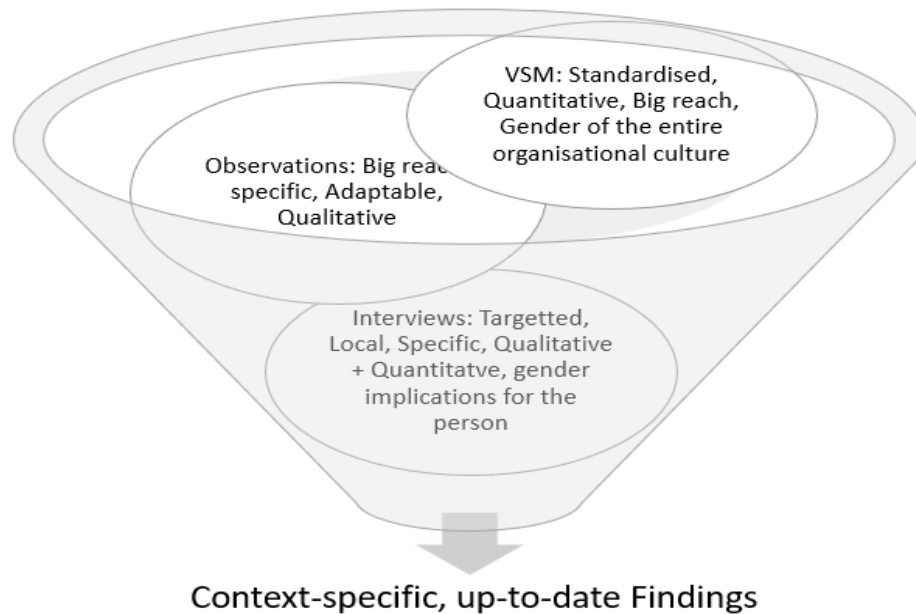


Figure 2: My funnel strategy for mixed methods

2.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed according to Glaser and Strauss (1967). It stems from a constant movement between raw data and analysis and therefore relies on ‘an analytic approach and features ‘a general method of [constant] comparative analysis’ (Corbin and Strauss, 1994. P. 273). It is furthermore suitable to research related to changes across individual and group behaviours - specifically within management. Goulding (2005b) explains that ‘the main thrust of this movement was to bridge the gap between theoretically ‘uninformed’ empirical research and empirically ‘uninformed’ theory by grounding theory in data’ (p: 41).

Accordingly, grounded theory is not only self-evident as a methodology, but it also joins the reasoning developed through the research in the way it takes a stance where empirical, systematic research should be at the heart of knowledge generating when it comes to contexts that have seldom been investigated.

2.2 Data Analysis for the Pilot: the VSM Index Calculation

The Masculinity/Femininity Index (MAS or Mas Index) is defined and calculated as follows, according to instructions provided by Hofstede and Minkov (2013)

Masculinity Index (MAS)

Masculinity is the opposite of Femininity. Masculinity stands for a society in which social gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. Femininity stands for a society in which social gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.

The index formula is $MAS = 35(m05 - m03) + 35(m08 - m10) + C(mf)$ in which m05 is the mean score for question 05, etc.

The index normally has a range of about 100 points between strongly feminine and strongly masculine countries. C(mf) is a constant (positive or negative) that depends on the nature of the samples; it does not affect the comparison between countries. It can be chosen by the user to shift her/his MAS scores to values between 0 and 100.

2.3 Data Analysis for the Ethnographic Study

The data was continuously analysed throughout data collection so that the empirical investigation could meet the needs of the field and those of the study. This started with the analysis of observations, which better informed the administration of the Pilot (Phase One) as well as the recruitment of the participants for the ethnographic study (Phase Two). For interviews, there were two distinct analysis approaches:

2.3.1 Data Analysis for Closed Interviews

First, a value was allocated to each answer, following whether it is a Yes, No, or Non-Applicable (N/A). These values were as follows: **Yes = 1**; **No = 0**; N/A = 2. Answers from the questionnaires were extracted and plotted on a table, using Excel, according to Participant name, Gender, and Value allocated to answer. Colour markers were also added to these values to help with visual recognition of a pattern in the occurrence of one: Green for Yes, Yellow for No, and no colour for Non/applicable. Results were then aggregated and analysed according to levels of similarity or discordance in answering, according to gender of the participant. This allowed a direct assessment of implication of the personal narrative within the Hofstede’s quantitative framework.

2.3.2 Data Analysis for the Semi-structured Interviews

All interviews were translated and transcribed manually, since there was no transcription program available that can transcribe the Moroccan dialect. However, using a transcription program (<https://transcribe.wreally.com>) that could slow down the speech pace was very helpful. I used NVivo to identify recurring themes and nodules. It helped by layering notions pertaining to gender dynamics in the organisations, either through their definition in Hofstede’s framework or in the way they came through participants’ accounts of their realities.

Thematic analysis took shape within the study as also a more organic analysis choice for its close relation with discourse analysis and grounded theory. A strategy that allowed the ‘interpretative story about data in relation to the questions and the encoding qualitative information’ (Boyatzis (1998), cited in Clarke and Braun, 2014, pp. 21–22) according to and therefore merge meanings stemming from the data and emerging codes coherently.

The analysis was made through the constant thematising and coding of emerging meanings in the realm of Masculinity, Femininity, gender dynamics, and the way these all are portrayed within the organisational environment, and beyond, according to the interviewees.

The research benefitted from this strategy in the way it provided a rich account of meanings and truths, which reflected in an extensive set of raw data. The treatment was challenging due to an extended work of translation and transcription, but it had provided a rich thematising ground added the findings in legitimacy.

The following (Figure 3) illustrates the evolution of the themes and the codes within the grounded approach of the field work.

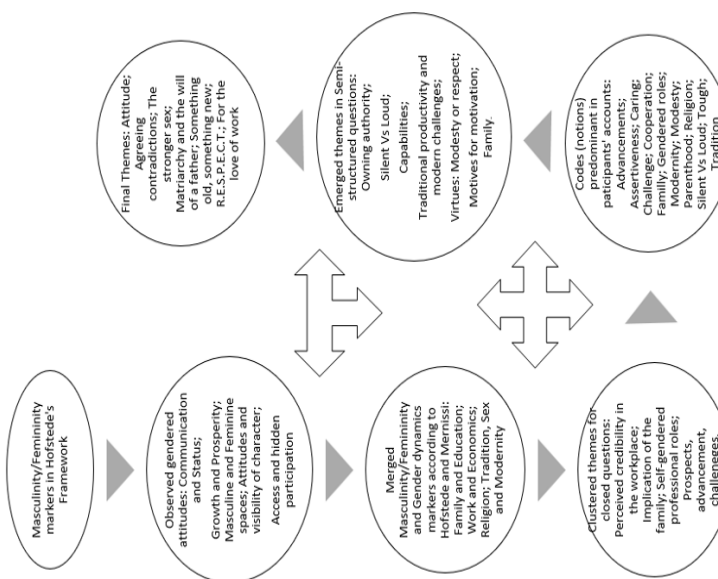


Figure 3: Chart illustrating the movement and relation between the codes and the themes evolution.

3. Findings

At a score of 11.5 on the MAS Index, the pilot study has concluded that Morocco has a very high Feminine organisational culture, which means that it is a culture where individuals are axed on values of security, cooperation, need to live in desirable area, and steer away from Masculine values that promote careerism, high earnings, love for challenges and recognition. This score is contrasting with the official score of 53 for Morocco published by Hofstede (2003-) and deemed inconclusive.

Apart from the statistical usage that revealed the gender of the organisational culture, and beyond its undeniable usefulness in linking the research to a first-time accessed field, the cultural dimension's framework quickly ran out of steam, and confronted the research with more perplexing questions than it answered. The very core of the Masculinity/Femininity dimension of Hofstede's organisational culture logic was already put to the test, at this stage.

Observations in-situ confound the original results of Hofstede's VSM in Morocco in doubt. As such, more women than men in organisations have more demanding duties, and career advancement and higher pay were the women's main aspirations. Contrarily to Hofstede's framework which established women as more likely to orbit around tasks and positions where they put forward their caring nature and seek friendly work environments, while men would privilege tough jobs, run after financial and career advancement.

This cohort represents a culture where both men and women have a positive stance towards work, ambition and assertiveness, rather than a gendered one. Men and women both answer in the same way rather than in differentiated, gendered manner where male participants would opt for career advancement and females for nurturing roles. Both men and women prioritise the implications of the notion of family in the personal sphere. Nevertheless, there seemed to be some patterns of gendered norms in the way tasks and jobs are perceived, but these patterns seem to be eclipsed by the extent strive for advancement and achievements in the careers of participants.

The findings of VSM 2013 and a deeper reading into the answering patterns revealed incoherencies in the way it defined gender and cultural normative implications for men and women in the private school sector in Morocco; which was the inception of a new concept, still anchored in what was arguably Hofstede's gendered markers. Moreover, these revealed incongruencies shed light on areas of questioning that pertained to authority, communication patterns, types of motivation, perceived capabilities, the role of tradition, religion or family.

The ethnographic interviewing revealed these cultural markers as themes through which gendered dynamics are created and extended, recycled and then fed back into the organisational environments. A few defining parameters must be underlined here, starting with the way communication is often non-verbal, although very revealing. Then, there is the parameter of rejection of adjectives such as authoritative, yet a complete appropriation of all attitudes that constitute authority. These first two parameters are found equally in both men and women participations. The next parameters, which ultimately divides this interviewed cohort based on gender is the ostentatious attitude of assertiveness adopted by women, when male participants were invariably reserved and neutral in their communication.

This ethnographic phase has also revealed the universality of the significance of the role of the mother in the family, where most participants spoke of the strictness of their mother, and her pivotal role in steering the gendered dynamics within the family. Equally, the notion of contradiction was prevalent in all participations. Respect and capabilities were the two aspects on which men and women positioned their narratives and perceptions in extreme contradiction. First, on respect, women were very expansive and described the centrality of the notion of respect in their life, while men spoke furtively about respect in terms of codes of conduct in the workplace. Second is the notion of male and female capabilities, where women were reiterating that they were more capable than men, that their caring and conciliating inclinations were added values that men would struggle to bring to the table, while men saw that women's nurturing nature, their socially allocated normative roles and their frail physique confirms a form of weakness in women, which inevitably rubs off their approach to their entrepreneurial and managerial duties.

The notion of motivation, which is the focal point of Hofstede's theoretical framework was categorically removed from its ties to gender, and placed as a response to the socio-economic realities of the participants. They did not seem to grasp the reasoning behind the pursuit of certain work/live goals (expressing feminine inclinations according to Hofstede) when money and career advancement were an option. All female

participants showed great motivation and enthusiasm for the pursuit of recognition and pay raise. Work was itself a motivation for all the women in this interview.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout the research, many themes have emerged to guide the reading and queries of the empirical data in parallel with the theory which became central in explaining the cultural implications of the gendered dynamics regulating primary private schools' organisational environments in Morocco. These themes were: owning authority, silent and loud, capabilities, traditional productivity, virtues, motives and motivation, and family. They were the recurring notions that came through observations and interviews of the participants, from the very specific angle of the masculine and the feminine within the organisational environment and their implications for motivation. These were then sifted to finally give place to concepts that, according to the participants' narrative, delineated the crux of how they lived their normative roles and the scope of these concepts in their private and public lives. The concepts were: attitude, agreeing contradictions, the stronger sex, patriarchy and the will of a father, something old something new, respect, for the love of work.

The concept of authority and Hofstede's Masculinity, and that of respect and attitude, are used interchangeably with gender in this context. I argue that this undermines the scope of a framework that is intended to give precise, financially sustainable management recommendations due to an evident amalgamation of notions. The third concept discovered by the study is that of the stronger sex, or how female and male narrative have completely opposed views on the stronger gender, and the way these views are perpetuated through societal expectations and refuted by women while invisible to men. Also, the notion of motivation and its gendering within Hofstede's framework, and the way it crystallises a form of mislabelling of feminine and masculine aspects, translates in a near context-blindness from that perspective. Likewise, the study exposed the prominent role that the family plays, shaping a locus where the limits of religion, tradition, past and future are continuously put to the test, and where the patriarchy finds its confines within a more dominant patriarchy. Further, I argue that the concept of communication styles in cultures and the sensible role of non-verbal communication in changing the meanings is of central importance to such cultural examinations.

Hofstede's Cultural dimensions framework is representative of a traditional Northern vision of knowledge creation and dissemination, and it is therefore important to understand the differences between Northern perspectives and the Southern realities of the feminine and the masculine. This is also an opportunity to shed light on areas where the Northern and the Southern struggle for mutual comprehension and where there are indications of concordance, including for example, where men and women's fight for a more equitable dynamics in the ultra-modern offices of western-based multinationals mirrored those taking place in small, informal businesses somewhere in Africa.

I conclude that methods and methodologies, and the angle of the investigation are as paramount to the sound running of the investigative study, specifically when undertaken in intercultural contexts. I therefore anchor my discussion in a holistic framework that cannot exclude the method from the finding, and vice-versa. The centrality of interdisciplinarity in knowledge generation, and the crucial role which multimethodological approaches play in reaching more conclusive findings - all the while challenging existing misconceptions or rectifying research trajectories -, is at the heart of the theoretical contribution aim of the present study.

Ethics Declaration

Since my research involve human participants, the cooperation of gatekeepers and took place outside the UK, I declare that I have obtained the Ethical approval from the FREP (Faculty Research Ethics Panel) and the DREP (Department Research Ethics Panel) at Anglia Ruskin University -Cambridge. I declare that no external funds have been acquired for the preparation and completion of this project.

AI Declaration

I declare that I have not used systems based on generative artificial intelligence (AI) In the preparation of this work.

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