The Challenges of Being Non-Muslim in a Muslim-Majority Society:
The Case of Moroccan Bahá'ís

Dr. Ouahiba Er-Raid[1]

École Normale Supérieure,
University of Moulay Ismail, Meknes, Morocco

Abstract

Life for non-Muslim religious minorities in Morocco isn't easy, even though the constitution says everyone has the right to practice their faith. Some communities, like the Baha'is, have shared stories about how tough life can be under these conditions.

Objective: This study aimed to explore the most important challenges Baha'is face in Morocco as a Muslim country, and how they manage these issues within a predominantly Islamic society. The study addressed two research questions related to the challenges faced by Moroccan Baha'is and strategies for managing them.

Method: The study adopted a qualitative approach. To collect data from respondents, semi-structured interviews were used. Since the data are qualitative, qualitative content analysis (QCA) was used for data analysis.

Results: The findings showed that Moroccan Baha'is struggle to get official recognition. They face religious, legal, and social challenges that complicate their daily lives. The findings also revealed that Moroccan Baha'is use different strategies to manage these challenges.

Conclusion: These findings give important insights about the challenges Moroccan Baha'is face and how they manage them. They can also help in dealing with these challenges in other predominantly Islamic countries.

Keywords: Baha'i Faith, Muslim majority, religious minority, religious freedom, pluralism

[1] ouahibaerraid@gmail.com

Introduction

Morocco is known for its image of religious tolerance and moderate Islam; nevertheless, it presents a paradox when it comes to non-Muslim citizens, especially members of the Baha'i Faith. Although the Moroccan Constitution of 2011 guarantees everyone freedom of religion, it doesn't always work that way at the practical level (Darif, 2017; Hanafi, 2020). The Baha'i community, while a small number, faces persistent challenges stemming from legal invisibility, social marginalization, and religious stigmatization.

This article examines Moroccan Baha'is' challenges as a case study in the broader discourse of religious pluralism and minority rights in Morocco. The Baha'i Faith, which originated in 19th-century Persia, is often perceived in Islamic contexts as a deviation from Islam and, therefore, heretical (Dialmy, 2020; Schriber, 2016; Wainscott, 2017). In Morocco, this perception has translated into many challenges the Baha'is face. As a result, Bahais find themselves in a precarious position: citizens of the state, yet unacknowledged in law and marginalized in society. More precisely, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (i) What are the challenges faced by the Baha'is in Morocco? (ii) How do Baha'is manage these challenges within Morocco as a predominantly Islamic society?

To address these research questions, the article draws on existing literature in religious studies, legal analysis, and human rights documentation. Through a qualitative and analytical approach, it explores the multidimensional exclusion of Moroccan Baha'is and considers how their experience challenges the narrative of pluralism often associated with the Moroccan state. Ultimately, the article aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on the brief history of religious minorities and religious freedom in Morocco.

Research Objective

As stated above, this study seeks to explore the challenges Moroccan Baha'is face as a religious minority in Morocco and how they navigate them. This study has two main objectives. The first objective concerns the main challenges Moroccan Baha'is face in contemporary Morocco. The second objective is about the essential strategies they use to cope with these challenges.

Research Questions

Since this study has two objectives, two research questions were formulated. The first objective is about the challenges of the Baha'i community. The second one focuses on the strategies they use to manage these challenges. The two objectives were formulated as follows:

RQ 1: What are the challenges faced by the Baha'is in Morocco?

RQ 2: How do Moroccan Baha'is manage the challenges they face within Morocco as a predominantly Islamic society?

1. Religious Minorities in Morocco: A General Overview

At the level of religion, the dominant religion in Morocco is Islam. Yet, other religions have existed in Morocco for centuries: some had existed in Morocco before Islam reached Morocco, such as Judaism and Christianity; other religions reached the country recently, namely the Baha'i Faith.

1.1. The Jews

The Jewish presence in Morocco dates back over 2,500 years, to the time of the Carthaginian state. The Jews first appeared in the Maghreb as a result of Phoenician influence. They came under Roman domination later on (Laskier & Reguer, 2002). After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Emperor Titus in 70 C.E., many survivors chose North Africa as their refuge (Chouraqi, 2001, p. xvii).

When Morocco became a Muslim country, the Jewish situation changed to that of Dhimmis. Islam guaranteed the protection of Jews in Morocco since they were considered People of the Book. Yet, the life of Jews under Islamic rule was not always a peaceful one. Chouraqui (2001) explained that the coexistence of the Jews with the Arab conquerors lasted more than a thousand years, but it was "alternating between periods of splendor and periods of obscurity" (Chouraqui, 2001, p. xvi).

Throughout Islamic history, Jews mixed with other ethnicities and made their own communities in all Maghrebine countries, such as Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. They even started adopting Arabic and Amazigh as languages in their daily life. Most often, they worked in simple jobs like artisans, blacksmiths, and traders. Very few Jews were able to secure high jobs within Moroccan society. In some cases, some of them were very close to the king and occupied key positions.

During the seventeenth century, Moroccan Jews moved to live in separate quarters called the Mellah. In the Jewish Quarters (*Mellahs*), Jews lived together and had their own laws and Jurisdiction. In 1807, Fez city became for the first time a center for Jews in the Maghreb. Historically, Fez contained the first Mellah, which was established during the rule of the Marinids in 1435.

In the second half of the twentieth century, upon the return of Mohammed V and the declaration of Morocco as an independent country in 1956, Moroccan Jews received full rights. However, because of the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, they started emigrating to Israel, and their numbers substantially shrank. By 1967, more than 250,000 Jews had already left Morocco in different directions: some of them went to Europe and the USA, while most of the Jewish families chose Israel as a land for settlement. Nevertheless, a small number of Jews refused to go abroad and preferred to stay in Morocco as their homeland (Boum, 2010; Levy, 2001)

According to Jewish community leaders, there are today between 3,000 to 4,000 Jews in Morocco. The majority of these Jews (about 2,500) are concentrated in Casablanca. In Rabat and Marrakech, the Jewish communities are very limited, with about 75 members in each city.

1.2. The Christians

The presence of Christianity has a long history in Morocco. It had reached Morocco through different sources before Islam took control of the land. The main factor remained the invading forces that ruled Morocco, namely the Romans.

Unlike Judaism, Christianity disappeared from Morocco with the coming of Islam (Decret, 2009). When Islam became the official religion of the country, Christians either converted to Islam or left the country for good to avoid the status of becoming *Dhimmis*. The situation of the Christians became worse with the invasion of Spain by Muslims in the eighth century (Daniel, 2009).

However, the twentieth century contributed to a strong return and revival of Christianity in Morocco. The French and Spanish colonization of Morocco in 1912 brought a huge number of Christians who settled in and controlled Morocco for about half a century. The Christian colonizers of Morocco used several means to convert Moroccans to Christianity during the Protectorate. When Morocco became independent again, some of these converts either left Morocco or preferred to keep their religious affiliation hidden to avoid being accused of apostasy, proselytization, or treason. A well-known case here is the example of the Moroccan Christians who faced severe accusations in the city of Mohammadia in 1987 (Darif, 2017, p. 44).

Today, the Moroccan Christians are again becoming more visible, and their number is growing substantially. This visibility is due essentially to external pressure that has directed severe criticism of the Moroccan treatment of religious minorities. Activists, such as Brother Rachid (Hammami), are constantly denouncing Moroccan policy toward Moroccan Christians. Very recently, Brother Rachid (born in Morocco in 1970) sent a video message to the King of Morocco asking him to interfere and put an end to the daily pressures that Moroccan Christians suffer from.

1.3. The Baha'is

The Baha'i Faith in Morocco cannot be understood without giving a brief overview of its development and roots. Moreover, Baha'ism cannot be understood without unraveling its strong links to another faith, that is, Babism. Therefore, what is Babism? And how is it connected to Baha'ism?

Babism as a religion started in Iran during the reign of the Kingdom of Qajar dynasty in 1850. Then, it moved to other countries, namely Baghdad, Turkey, and Palestine. To understand Babism, it is necessary to answer questions such as "Who is the Bab?", "What does Babism mean as a religion?", and "What are the central beliefs of the Babis?"

Babism came from a person called the Bab, who claimed to be a prophet (he preferred to be called "manifestation of God") in Iran (Momen, 2007/2008). He also claimed that future changes would take place with the appearance of a new divine "manifestation" (Momen, 2007/2008). He was born in Iran in 1819 and started his mission in the Iranian city of Shiraz in 1842. In 1844, Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad Shírází, who was an Iranian Merchant in Shiraz, announced that he was chosen by God. He also heralded the coming of another chosen who was greater and more important than he (Momen, 2007/2008). On May 23, 1844, Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad Shírází, who was just twenty-four years old, announced in his house (after sunset) that he was the bearer of a long-promised divine revelation who would change the life of human beings. That announcement was the Bab's first declaration of his mission. That's why May 23 is considered a great day by the Baha'is, and they celebrate it annually (Momen, 2007/2008).

Later on, Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad Shírází took the name of the Báb (the Gate) and started gathering followers (Momen, 1986, p. 135). He selected eighteen of his disciples and named them the '*Letters of the Living'*. He later asked them to spread throughout Iran to spread his message and inform people about his mission. His chosen disciples were not all males because one of them was a woman who was given the name of *Táhirih*, which means "the pure one" (Momen, 1986, p. 135).

The message of the *Báb* spread quickly and was accepted by many Iranians who followed him in great numbers. His followers included hundreds of Muslims and Jews who became adherents of Babism in Iran (Momen, 2008). The Báb's success was, indeed, due to two essential factors. First, the country had been under the control of a severe political system headed by the Qajar Shah, Nasir-Din Shah, who ruled the country with an iron fist. Second, the dominant beliefs of the Iranian people are, in general, Shi'is who hold a strong belief in the coming of the Mahdi (Momen, 2008). They, therefore, took the Bab for the Mahdi. This idea is clearly explained by Momen (2008) when he noted: "Initially, many people thought that the Báb was claiming to be the gateway to the hidden Imam Mahdi" (p. 136).

When the Bab started his mission, Iran was dominated by Shi'i Islam, whose Imams did not believe in using violence against the leaders of the country to change the status quo. They rather stressed total obedience to the authority of the leaders of the country. Generally, Shi'i Imams did not agree with the use of jihad as a means to redress any abuse or misuse of power (MacEoin, 1983, p. 223).

The congregation of the Babis in Iraq opened the floor to another faith that was strongly connected to Babism: Baha'ism (Afnán & Hatchern, 1985; Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). Worthington (2011) explained this strong connection between the two religions when he said: "And even though this [was a] new religion, the Bábí Faith, … Bahá'u'lláh declared Himself a follower and began teaching others about it" (p.170).

Baha'u'llah himself recognized the strong link between the Babi faith and his new revelation represented in his teachings (Worthington, 2011, p.170). In his writings, he explicitly declared that he believed in the Bab and his revelations (Bahá'u'lláh, 1992). In fact, Baha'ism spread through Baha'u'llah as leader, his son Abdu'l-Baha, and his grandson Shoghi Effendi in East and West countries. They organized their community through the Universal House of Justice located in Haifa, Palestine (Abbás, 1982; Afnán & Hatchern, 1985).

In Morocco, the Baha'i community operates like an organization that is responsible for the management of Life in the country. It was first founded during the arrival of the first Baha'is who settled in Morocco in the 1950s (Er-raid, 2024). The Baha'i Community of Morocco deals with and manages the relationship between society and the administration of the Baha'is. It generally cares for their education, laws, celebrations, family issues, and social issues in Morocco (Smith & Momen, 1989). The members of the Baha'i Community of Morocco and Baha'is all take part in making decisions by sharing ideas and exchanging opinions about their issues in /daily life. The ultimate goal is always to reach a consensus and involve everybody in solving these issues (Er-raid, 2024).

The literature on the Baha'i Faith and Baha'is as a religious minority shows that the topic is underexplored in the academic field. There is a total absence of studies on Baha'is and their status in Morocco (Er-raid, 2024). Although this religion reached Morocco in the 1950s, there seems to be a total lack of interest in this topic in other fields such as media and religious studies. Moreover, it seems Moroccan people know very little, or nothing, about the Baha'i Faith and its core beliefs as the most recent religion in Morocco (Er-raid, 2024). This marginalization leaves a lot of nagging questions about this religion in Morocco, namely: why is there so much mystery about this religion in Morocco? And why do Moroccan Baha'is face several challenges and suffer from marginalization in this Islamic country?

2. Related Literature

Scholars in the field of religious freedom highlight that religious freedom is an integral part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The literature shows that context plays an important role in defining the "contours" of religious freedom (Grim & Finke, 2011; Longva, 2011). Therefore, the way these scholars define religious freedom and the context where they operate reflect the complexity of the concept and how it is perceived in places like the East and the West.

Western scholars generally argue that religious freedom in all countries should be in line with Article 18 of the UDHR. Esposito (2002/2003) and Browers and Kurzman (2004) explored some of the core issues religious minorities face in the Middle East and North Africa, such as constitutional and legal laws. These scholars highlighted the gaps between international laws on human rights and Islamic values.

Grim and Finke (2011) examined religious freedom and the effects of denying it in several countries. They explained that they "use the term 'religious freedoms' to mean the freedoms embodied in Article 18 of the 1948" (Grim & Finke, 2011, p. xiii). They found that there was a positive correlation between a lack of religious freedom and violence: According to Grim and Finke (2011), "restricting religious freedoms is associated with higher levels of persecutory violence" (p. 250).

In contrast, scholarly literature in the Middle East on religious freedom is very limited. Scholars, such as Ghanea (2004/2004) and Modood & Sealy (2021), studied religious freedom and multiculturalism in different countries, including Islamic and European countries. They found that religious freedom is defined differently in the Middle East and North Africa. They concluded that Islamic countries do not fully allow or reject the Western conception of religious freedom. Ghanea (2004), for instance, conducted a seminal work on religious minorities in predominantly Islamic countries in the Middle East. She concluded that secularism alone would not improve the conditions of religious minorities in these countries; instead, suggested using Islamic frameworks to deal with the demands of religious minorities in Islamic countries (Ghanea, 2004).

As stated before, despite the immense work that has so far been done in the field of religious freedom, it appears that the literature on this issue in countries like Morocco is still very sparse. For example, most of the studies that have been conducted have largely focused on Jews and foreign Christians living in Morocco. As regards Moroccan Baha'is, it seems that this community is rarely investigated in Morocco.

3. Methodology

This study explores the challenges the Baha'is face as a religious minority and how they manage these challenges within Moroccan society. This section, thus, incorporates the research design, sample, sampling procedure, and data analysis.

3.1. Design of the Study

This study is based on the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was chosen for two main reasons. First of all, the nature of the research questions requires the use of this approach. Second, the data collected is qualitative. To analyze the data qualitatively, this study uses qualitative content analysis (QCA). Qualitative content analysis has many advantages. One of the advantages of content analysis is that it can be used to analyze "any type of [human] communication" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 472).

The second advantage is that content analysis can help the researcher make inferences about any type of communication. For Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is "A technique that enables researchers to study human behavior indirectly, through an analysis of their communications" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18).

Accordingly, content analysis has the power to analyze people's behavior through their communications in different contexts. It can similarly help in making inferences that are "replicable". Above all, content analysis can help researchers analyze meaning at two levels: (1) manifest meaning which "refers to the obvious or surface content that is directly accessible to the naked eye or ear", and latent meaning, which "refers to the meaning underlying what is said or shown" (Krippendorff, 2004).

3.2. sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used as a procedure for this study for two main reasons. First, this procedure better fits the objectives and the nature of the study (a qualitative one). According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), "Researchers assume they can use their knowledge of the population to judge whether or not a particular sample will be representative" (p. 99). Second, since the Baha'i population is not very visible in Moroccan society, it is hard to safely use another sampling procedure to collect the data.

The sample for this study is relatively small. Factors, such as the small size of the community and the reluctance of its members to speak about their faith as a sensitive issue, contributed to the difficulty of including a bigger sample. The sample is, thus, composed of five Baha'i respondents who willingly agreed to take part in this study after they got permission from the Spiritual Office of Baha'i Affairs. Two females (A.B. and K.B.) and three males (H.B., O.B., and Y.B.) agreed to answer

the interview questions. The five respondents belong to different cities, such as Rabat, Sale, and Temara, and have different occupations.

3.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis (QCA) was used to analyze interview data and to answer the research questions formulated about the challenges Baha'is face as a religious minority. In this analysis, the main steps of qualitative content analysis were used. The first step used was "unitizing", which "is the systemic distinguishing of segments of text–images, voices, and other observables–that are of interest to an analysis". In the second step, "codes" were used to identify most of the themes in the data. After that, several codes were gathered and reduced to a limited number of codes. In the last step, the major themes and sub-themes were identified ("identification") and analyzed qualitatively (Krippendorff, 2004).

4. Findings

Analysis of the data of this study has shown that Moroccan Baha'is face several challenges. Three major challenges stood out while analyzing the interviews. These three challenges are: (i) religious, (ii) legal challenges, and (iii) social. The findings revealed that Moroccan Baha'is use several key strategies to cope with their challenges.

4.1. Challenges Faced by Baha'is in Morocco

4.1.1. Religious Challenges

One of the major challenges that the Baha'is face is the lack of legal recognition of the Baha'i faith and identity. Unlike Moroccan Jews, who are considered a Moroccan religious component in the Moroccan Constitution, Moroccan Baha'is are not recognized as a Moroccan religious component. Despite their existence in Morocco since the 1950s, the Moroccan state does not consider the Baha'i Faith a religion and treats its adherents as Moroccan Muslims. However, the Baha'is do not consider themselves Muslims and ask for official recognition of their religion as indicated in the Moroccan Constitution of 2011. Indeed, Article 3 of the Moroccan Constitution states that ''Islam is the religion of the State, which guarantees to all the free exercise of beliefs'' (Maghraoui, 2009/2011).

Restrictions on worship and religious texts are the second religious challenge raised by the Baha'is during the interviews. Due to their status, Moroccan Baha'is are not allowed to worship or wear religious symbols in public. Likewise, they are also not allowed to establish their places of worship called *Mashriqu'l-Adhkar* (Baha'i Temples) in the Baha'i Faith. As a consequence, they are always forced to organize their religious celebrations in private houses. These celebrations are not legally authorized by the state, but they celebrate them in a discreet manner. That is, Baha'is often run the

risk of being arrested for '' unlawful assemblies. During the interviews, Baha'is gave several examples of occasions when Moroccan authorities did not allow them to organize their religious celebrations. One of these examples is given in the following testimony by one of the respondents (H.B.):

> *We had a celebration of a special memory, which is very important in Morocco. We were so happy because we wanted to celebrate it especially. We invited friends and enthusiastically prepared for the celebration… we wanted to rent a house (…). Of course, we wrote a request for that, but in the end, we were not given permission. As a result, we* **were deprived of celebrating.**

4.1.2. Legal Challenge

Moroccan Baha'is think that non-recognition of the Baha'i Faith in Morocco resulted in several legal challenges. First, the Moroccan state refuses to accept Baha'i marriages and considers them illegal. The only marriage certificates that they are allowed to have are Islamic marriage certificates performed by ''religious notaries'' (*'Aduls*) despite not being Muslim.

All the Baha'i respondents complained about this issue, which, according to them, makes them live in an absurd condition (they call it a form of "*religious falsification*") that they can never refuse. To illustrate, Baha'is are required to present themselves as Muslims to make if want their marriages legally recognized; that is, they are compelled to marry under Islamic rites:

> *For example, the Baha'is, the Christians, or the non-religious, however, do not have this possibility. So, in legal matters, they are dealt with as Muslims. Therefore, when the marriage certificate is done in an Islamic way, this is some sort of (legal) falsification because you are not doing it in accordance with the religious tradition you belong to.* (K.B.)

Another key legal challenge for the Baha'is is the lack of personal status laws that include the Baha'is as a religious component of Morocco. Since the personal status laws in Morocco are grounded in Islamic jurisprudence (Maliki Islam), issues such as inheritance, marriage, divorce, and child custody are generally governed by Islamic laws. Because Moroccan Baha'is are not officially recognized by the state, they face serious problems in matters like divorce and inheritance. The Moroccan family Code (*Mudawwanat al-aḥwāl ash-shakhṣiyyah*) is, to a large extent, based on Islamic rules and principles, which results in depriving Moroccan Baha'is of important rights, as they cannot find their legal place in courts where these laws are put into practice. A telling example here is that of inheritance: Baha'is are not allowed to benefit from inheritance since they are not considered Muslims.

4.1.3. Social Challenges

In addition to religious and legal challenges, Moroccan Baha'is have to deal with different social problems. These social problems or challenges are complex and multifaceted. Data findings of this study revealed the intersection of several factors that contributed to the rise of a number of issues that Moroccan Baha'is have to grapple with on a daily basis. These issues include discrimination, rejection, marginalization, invisibility, intolerance, harassment, and stereotypes, among others.

The widespread ignorance among Moroccan Muslims about the Baha'i Faith and its belief system has led many Muslims to treat Baha'is as heretics or apostates (Berry, 2004; Pink, 2003). These findings are similar to what has been found by other scholars in other Islamic countries like Egypt, Iraq, and Iran (Smith & Momen, 1989; Ghanea, 2004). Generally, Moroccan Muslims have little or no information about the Baha'is and their belief system. As a result, Baha'is become invisible or marginalized. Radical Muslims, on the other hand, reject the Baha'is altogether and consider them apostates who have left Islam for another religion. Some radical Muslims go even further to accuse the Baha'is of serving foreign agendas. These accusations have had serious consequences on the Baha'i community in Morocco, as they sometimes suffer from harassment or social discrimination (Er-raid, 2024). For example, social discrimination, intolerance, and rejection can become sometimes unbearable, as a Baha'i respondent explained:

> Moroccan society **should accept differences**. Personally, I had a relationship with a woman and wanted to ask her to marry me. When I told her I was Baha'i, **her attitude and behavior changed** immediately. That was her stand. I think people **should have a different view on the differences** that might be in Moroccan society. (O.B.)

From what has been said so far, it becomes evident that Baha'is consider themselves Moroccan citizens and find it hard to understand why some Moroccan Muslims have negative attitudes toward them. They think that these attitudes should change within Moroccan society today.

4.2. Challenge Management

The findings of this study show that Moroccan Baha'is adopt different strategies and solutions to cope with the challenges they face as a religious minority.

In response to religious challenges, Moroccan Baha'is use different strategies. Since they cannot practice their religion in public, Baha'is prefer to practice their faith at home. Prayers are practiced privately at home, and religious celebrations are organized in private houses in discreet manners to avoid social stigma and legal sanctions. Indeed, Baha'is have strong community networks that allow them to organize religious celebrations in a very organized way.

To deal with legal challenges, Baha'is use sophisticated strategies, such as legal navigation and compromise. They never seek confrontation with the state or society. Despite the legal pressures that they face, Moroccan Baha'is remain peaceful, abide by the law, and respect authorities. A Baha'i respondent explained this strategy as such: "It's important to note that Baha'i teachings emphasize obedience to government and respect for the laws of one's country. As such, we navigate these legal frameworks with a commitment to both our religious principles and our civic responsibilities". Another example of how the Baha'is manage legal challenges is that of marriage. Although Baha'is are not Muslims, they willingly accept using Islamic marriage certificates when they get married. Baha'i obedience to government is also displayed in their respect for the Moroccan Penal Code, despite some reservations about articles such as Articles 220, 221, and 222. For them, these articles should be reconsidered because they treat religious minorities as Muslims. This issue was explained as such by one of the Baha'i respondents: ''In the Penal Code, there are many laws which are considered restrictions on religious freedom, such as public breaking of the fast or shaking the faith of a Muslim'' (Y.B.).

To navigate social challenges, such as discrimination and intolerance, Moroccan Baha'is resort to sophisticated strategies. Baha'is believe in social unity and avoid hostility even when they fall victim to prejudice and intolerance. They often use negotiation and rarely complain about their sufferings. During the interviews, the respondents stressed their reliance on Baha'i principles, namely ethical conduct, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence. For them, the ultimate goal is to live in harmony, respect, collaboration, and peace:

> *I believe that Morocco's strength lies in its diversity and its capacity to embrace all citizens regardless of their religious background. The principle of unity in diversity provides a strong foundation for building workplaces where all can contribute their unique talents while remaining true to their religious convictions.* (A Baha'i respondent)

5. Discussion

Despite Morocco's ratification of several international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR (Article 19), which guarantees freedom of religion and belief, Moroccan law remains inconsistent in protecting religious minorities not officially recognized by the state (Maghraoui, 2009/2011). Studies in the field and the findings of this study show that this legal gap translates into daily uncertainties and restrictions, particularly in matters of religious freedom, religious **identity recognition, personal status,** workplace rights, and **legal association**. To cope with these uncertainties and restrictions, the Baha'is resort to different measures and strategies.

The most crucial legal challenge is the non-recognition of the Baha'i Faith in Morocco. The Baha'i Faith is not acknowledged by the Moroccan state as a legitimate religion. This absence of

recognition leads to legal invisibility in their personal and legal lives, namely, marriage and burial rights. In this respect, the findings of this study are compatible with what other scholars found about the status of religious minorities in Morocco (Maghraoui, 2009/2011; Er-raid, 2024).

Unlike the Jews who have their own religious courts and laws, Moroccan Baha'is live under Islamic laws and jurisprudence (Dialmy, 2020; Boum, 2013; Er-raid, 2024). They are, therefore, obliged to manage religious and social challenges. They are not, for example, allowed to practice their religious rites and prayers in public palaces or in workplaces (Vickers, 2010). Despite these limitations, Moroccan Baha'is prefer peaceful and non-confrontational strategies to avoid more pressure or negative reactions from the state, Muslim clerics, or society at large. One of the respondents (Y.B.) explains this Baha'i attitude as follows: "Regarding holy days, while the Baha'i calendar does include several significant observances, we typically manage these by using regular vacation days when needed. We don't approach this as a matter of asserting rights or seeking special treatment".

The findings further show that Moroccan Baha'is look at their future in Morocco in a very hopeful way. These findings reflect what has been found by other scholars in other countries as well (Ghanea, 2004). Moroccan Baha'is generally argue that Moroccan society is changing rapidly and Moroccan people are becoming more flexible and tolerant of religious diversity in the country (Er-raid, 2024). For Moroccan Baha'is, social cohesion and unity to build a better nation should be the ultimate goal of all Moroccans, regardless of their religious backgrounds: "The focus should be on how each citizen, regardless of background, can add value to the collective endeavor of building our nation" (a Baha'i respondent).

General Conclusion

This article has explored the multiple challenges faced by Baha'is in contemporary times. The findings reflect the complexity of these challenges, which can be categorized into three broad categories: (i) religious, (ii) legal, and (iii) social challenges.

The analysis of the findings showed that these challenges are caused by several factors. At the legal level, legal laws such as Article 220 of the Penal Code present real barriers to Baha'i adherents. At the religious level, religious discrimination and religious restrictions seem to be among the most crucial challenges. At the social level, Baha'is complained about issues such as social stereotypes, prejudice, intolerance, and stigma.

The findings showed that Moroccan Baha'is employ a sophisticated and thoughtful approach to managing their challenges. "Constructive resilience", flexibility, and optimism are among the essential features of this approach. Instead of using confrontation, for example, Baha'is prefer to

use non-confrontational strategies to deal with authority restrictions and social exclusion, or discrimination.

This study has, nevertheless, some limitations. The first limitation is due to the nature of the study as a qualitative one. Another limitation is the potential bias in the narratives of the respondents. Another limitation of this study is clearly the sample size (composed of 5 respondents). The geographical representation is hard to reach in this study because Baha'is are not easily accessible in Morocco.

For future research, scholars can take different measures to reduce the limitations stated above. A mixed approach can give better results when dealing with such complex issues. To make their results generalizable, researchers can use a bigger sample size. Finally, approaches such as critical discourse analysis (CDA) can help researchers delve more deeply into issues like identity, power, and ideology.

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