

Framing Women's Issues in Algerian Non-governmental Organisations

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Abstract:

Several techniques and tactics are used by Algerian non-governmental organisations. This study aims to look at some of the feminist approaches used by women's NGOs, including the focus on specific issues concerning women's rights, status, or opportunity and attempts to influence public opinions. By examining how NGOs have framed women's issues to empower women and the general public's perception regarding women's NGOs. This study opts for a mixed method that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. More precisely, it uses a structured questionnaire distributed to 200 respondents and semi-structured interviews directed to NGO administrators from four different NGOs. The results reveal several frames in which issues of women's status and rights were shaped. NGOs frequently employ culturally appropriate tactics and select the appropriate discourse. Finally, Algerian NGOs employ the framing method to explain women's empowerment in a way that is appropriate for the local people, thereby regaining credibility and acceptance among the local population.

Keywords: Algeria; Framing; women's issues; NGOs

Introduction:

A non-governmental organisation is a non-profit, volunteer citizens' group that is organised on a local, national, or international level. NGOs provide a variety of humanitarian and service tasks, bringing public concerns to governments, promoting and monitoring policies, and encouraging political engagement through the distribution of information. The growth of NGOs over the past decades has given them an increasingly important role and led them to form a distinctive sector within civil society. NGOs are currently used to describe a wide range of organizations. There is

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no universally agreed definition of an NGO, and the term has various meanings depending on the context.

According to Eyban (2010), NGOs use a variety of techniques to negotiate gender mainstreaming developments. Framing issues is a technique for presenting them in a specific way to convey a specific message to a particular audience. This article aims to examine how NGOs have framed women's issues to empower women and the general public's perception regarding Algerian women's NGOs. The study opts for a mixed method that combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. It employs a structured questionnaire sent to 200 people and semi-structured interviews with NGO managers from four distinct organisations.

Devriese (2008) is an example of a growing feminist approach of rejecting secular human rights discourse in favour of pre-existing Islamic frameworks. Rather than using explicit feminist terms like "liberalism" and "gender equality," which are seen as "Western and destructive," they employ tools that incorporate cultural and modern aspects, such as scientific facts to explain psychological issues or Quranic verses that refer to women's rights and freedom of choice (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2007). So, how do Algerian NGOs frame women's issues?

Literature Review

Framing Definition

Allan et al. (2010) define frames as "culturally unique" and "socially generated," with selectivity playing a significant role in presenting or removing specific assertions regarding concerns and problems, as well as constructing legitimate and acceptable frames in a given setting (Allan et al. 2010,30). NGOs employ frames as one of their techniques for emphasizing specific issues and advocating for them as legitimate. The complex nature of issues surrounding women's rights and statuses in Algeria requires that they must be addressed in proper, legitimate, and acceptable ways. For example, religious discourse is highly advantageous in discussions regarding women's issues.

Strategic ambiguity

According to Rosalind Eyban (2010), negotiating change encompasses a variety of strategies for avoiding confrontations with other NGOs, such as using ambiguous language to refer to a similar goal. The

"strategic ambiguity" gives people the freedom to interpret these broad statements as they see fit. To give themselves tactical leeway to manoeuvre in complicated, dynamic civilizations, feminists purposefully withhold clarity on women's parity.

Eyban (2010) goes into greater detail about the 'vague statement' strategy adopted by most actors who deal with women's issues in Arab countries. NGOs, for example, may speak of 'women's engagement in society,' which, as Eyban points out, can have a variety of meanings and consequences. NGOs can use this strategy to promote change without damaging the dominant culture. However, feminist approaches differ from conservative to liberal.

George (2007) claims that NGOs are culturally framed to construct meaning and form issues in ways that suit their audiences' and participants' cultural identities. This includes gender-based evaluations of women's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that communicate distinct regional national norms. According to George (2007), however, these cultural frameworks are not completely stable and fluctuate greatly depending on when they are adopted as well as the goal and structure of the implementing NGO. Furthermore, the impact of these frames vary, and depends on the character and ideology of each society, as well as its gender dynamics, they may yield "uneven" consequences (George, 2007).

Methodology

The Methodology is a set of guidelines and methods that serve as the foundation for research. Quantitative, and qualitative techniques are the most commonly used methodological approaches. This study opts for a mixed method that combines both approaches. It used a structured questionnaire distributed to 200 respondents and semi-structured interviews directed to NGO managers from four different NGOs. The females between the ages of 30 and 65 in Algiers. All of the interviews were planned ahead of time and held in semi-formal settings, both within and outside of NGOs. This study used non-probability samples that were purposefully designed to include various sorts of NGOs that focus primarily on women and offer women's programs. Algerian national, advocacy, professional, internet-based NGOs and religious charities are included in this sample. The NGOs

that were investigated in this study are listed in Table 1, along with their fields of interest, as well as the number of interviews performed in each NGO. The findings of the study are intended to add to the body of information about the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in shaping Algerian society. The study is guided by the following questions: How do these tactics contribute to women's empowerment in non-governmental organizations? What factors impact NGOs' decisions about which strategies to use to promote women's empowerment?

To choose the most relevant methodologies for the Algerian setting, it was necessary to reflect on this perspective during the planning phase. To construct a methodology that would not only be appropriate to apply in such a society but also effective, the researcher had to pick and choose several methodologies and sources of literature.

Data Analysis

It is crucial to take a gander at how organisations frame issues to engage women to be empowered. Women's issues are being framed in a new light. Issues framing is a method for introducing them with a certain manner in mind to pass a particular message to a specific crowd.

The use of broad concepts

The interview analysis resulted in several interesting frames in which issues of women's status and rights were shaped. One frame is the use of broad concepts, which appears in most of these NGOs' mission statements. Like NGO1 forum, titled "Women's involvement in national development". NGO 1 invited a recognised guest to discuss regulations concerning women. The discussion was about women in the workplace and business according to the manager. "This event provided a great chance to talk and reflect on women's position in Algeria," the manager said. This forum's audience included both men and women, and several ladies talked to the audience about their own experiences. NGO 1 has concentrated more on women's empowerment by presenting businesswomen's success stories. Another frame is to debate these issues about women in the context of a topic that is already considered credible, such as work. Finally, calling and shaming

techniques, which rely on labelling and humiliating those who discriminate against women, are less commonly used.

As Eyban (2010) points out, the use of vague utterances can include a variety of perspectives, ranging from those who support women's traditional roles to those who promote women's political participation. Negotiating change typically necessitates employing a variety of strategies to avoid potential confrontations, such as the deliberate use of ambiguous language when referring to a common goal and allowing people to make their assumptions about what this broad statement implies.

Genuine issues

In Algeria, employment and education have become an arena for debating women's issues, and this topic has become a standard discussion subject. According to Metcalfe (2011), due to the religious and cultural background in such Arab communities, chances in terms of education and employment have been moulded, and are eventually referred to in this context as 'empowerment.' The Algerian cultural and religious framework has profoundly influenced and negotiated the peculiarity of women's empowerment. This is what NGO 1 is all about: "demanding social fairness for women in the workplace and all spheres of work-related issues and attempting to influence policies and regulations in this way". Although NGO 1 advocates for women's empowerment, they avoid using concepts such as empowerment or equality and instead focus on a specific issue (work and employment) that is culturally acceptable to support (Paterson, 2008). Paterson in contrast to much of the other empowerment literature believes that women's empowerment should include the local traditions of women's lives. As a result, NGO 1 is an example of an NGO that chooses an acceptable frame - employment – to begin its lobbying on other women's issues. An approach to using frames is to focus on specific issues and lobby for solutions.

NGO 1 also claims that they prefer to use terms like "social fairness" instead because the term "empowerment" may elicit hostility. NGO 1's manager stated it this way:

"We do not use the terms "empowerment" or "equality" [as] we believe men and women are not equal because women go through distinct biological stages than males, such as childbearing. Women, particularly at work, seek social fairness [and] family-friendly working conditions. "

(Female, 30s)

NGO 1, which specializes in women's workplace activism, considers the term "social fairness" to be more accurate and less problematic. As a result, while speaking with the government on policy, they employ the term "social fairness" instead of "empowerment" or "equality," opting for more relevant, effective, and tactful terms that demand equitable treatment for women in all aspects of the workforce. Their objectives are more likely to be approved as a result of this than if they concentrated on equality, and they are more likely to achieve cultural changes that improve women's positions and rights.

Women in several societies, according to Abou-Rabia-Queder (2007), do not use the terms "feminist" or "gender equality" in their activism; instead, they translate these notions into the vernacular of their cultural setting. Feminists, according to Eyban (2010), purposely avoid clarity about women's equity as a safeguard for acting in a complex society with dynamic value systems. This dynamic is relevant to the Algerian setting, because, choosing the proper term for a given audience in a certain location and time is critical for generating mass support and avoiding undesired hostility (Metcalf, 2011).

Touchy issues: domestic violence

NGOs typically focus on a specific area or issue that requires change and attention. Joachim (2003), on the other hand, provides a more extensive description of how NGO agendas might be strategically framed, stating three stages: the problem's definition; ii) the proposed solution or policies to address the problem; and iii) the motivations and arguments for political actions (Joachim, 2003,252). NGO 2 is also involved in advocacy, namely in the area of domestic violence. The topic of domestic violence has entered mainstream public discourse. This NGO was founded to address domestic violence issues. As a result, what had previously been considered taboo' spilt out' into the public. Domestic violence cases, however, remain difficult to deal with legally due to the nature of Algerian society. "There are no stringent [current set-up] organised courts for such cases as domestic violence." NGO 2's manager (female, 40s, Psychologist) expressed. However, we have taken effective steps in increasing awareness and assisting victims, and we are currently waiting for additional violence legislation."

Domestic violence, like breast cancer, was a touchy subject for discussion due to the nature of the Algerian country. According to the NGO's manager (a psychologist in her 40s), the subject of violence against children has long been ignored and unspoken about. However, the case of a girl named Khawla, who was tortured and killed by her father and stepmother and was reported in the local news, sparked public outrage due to the graphic photographs that were published. The narrative affected both the public and government and public calls to end violence against women and children were made. This topic was addressed in Algiers by NGO groups of doctors, psychologists, and activists. Workshops were held in hospitals, and participants included police, doctors, human rights activists, sociologists, and psychologists in discussions urging criminalizing and calling for banning domestic abuse. Surprisingly, the media's strength was the primary facilitator of the entire mobilization, with news releases serving as a vehicle for mobilizing the general population, officials, and activists. In the case of khawla, however, it took time for the government to make domestic abuse a serious crime.

Although public opinion has pushed the issue of domestic violence to the forefront of discussions, laws to tackle domestic violence is still lacking. Women's non-governmental organisations mobilise by creating strategic agendas that are very insightful, shedding light on the internal dynamics of a hidden process that is not always obvious to the common person.

When questioned about people's opinions of women's NGOs in general, 40.6 per cent of respondents said they receive either a huge acceptance or a lot of support, according to the survey results in table 2. Nearly 40% believe that people accept and support women's NGOs, implying a favourable impression toward them. The question was raised to see if there was any hostility toward women's NGOs, but no such hostility was detected, with the majority of respondents having a favourable opinion of them. Surprisingly, the highest percentage (27.8%) stated that opinions about women's NGOs are influenced by their orientations. This explains why managers avoid using certain terms and aim openly.

Naming and shaming strategy and "rebel"

The prevalent culture among NGOs of using appropriate frames to present women's issues has been highlighted. However, there are a few

women in NGOs who prefer to speak up and stand up for what they believe in. According to Abou-Rabia-Queder (2007), there are "rebel" female activist groups that are taking the hard road rather than the traditional negotiation process used by most women's organisations. The influence of specific terms on the audiences is crucial for any NGO. Because this tactic is so important for establishing support and legitimacy, members and allies pay close attention to the language they use. NGO 3 also developed a naming and shaming strategy (Eyban 2010), in which everyone who discriminates against women is named and shamed.

"It must follow its natural path, similar to how the West overcame discrimination against black people. They begin by campaigning that anyone who treats them unequally is depicted as backwards-minded, so anyone who discriminates against them will be labelled as such. ... [W]e took this step and are spreading the message that anyone who opposes women's participation in society is a backward, uncivilised individual. "

(Female, 30s)

These groups have family backing, but they are not generally acknowledged by society (Abou-Rabia-Queder 2007,80). As previously said, the manager of NGO 3 is a rebel who is not afraid to speak her mind when it comes to condemning women for not standing up for themselves. Another outspoken defiant was the manager of NGO 4, who openly wore short brightly coloured clothing to promote their organisation and said, "I am not doing anything bad," when confronted by religious conservatives. In contrast, the manager of NGO 4 was concerned about maintaining her style of clothes while promoting their organization in a shopping mall, and she was unwilling to alter her appearance. As previously said, a conservative man approached the manager of NGO 4 because she was wearing a brightly short dress. "I did not care what the man said," she commented in response to this. Instead of fitting in to make her life easy, she was not scared to exhibit herself in the way she desired.

Many people would consider her a rebel if she made such a statement, and that is exactly what she planned. As a result, this manager was unconcerned about how she was seen, and she was unafraid to respond to criticism. It is worth noting, though, that this incident occurred in Beb Ezzouar Mall, one of the city's most popular shopping centres. She answered the man with a powerful tone. The newly founded NGO 3 advertised itself at a shopping mall stand, as its manager explained: "We had a stand-in Bab Ezzouar mall to let people know about our organization and

to attract funds and support." This NGO carefully examined where to advertise itself, as shopping malls are very popular.

Discussion of Results

Among the strategies used by Algerian NGOs, in their attempts to discuss and convey concerns in a non-threatening and culturally acceptable manner, is to frame them by presenting issues in a specific way. As previously said, education and employment have established themselves as legitimate avenues for women's reform. According to the findings, many NGOs wisely used different platforms to draw attention to controversial instances and issues. Domestic violence, despite its link to a male-dominated society, is considered an appropriate topic for discussion, as are concerns like health awareness and employment legislation for women. This shift in public perspective of such a private issue was triggered by media, press reports and the cases, which turned into a matter of public opinion rather than a family issue, which led these organisations to advocate or raise awareness through their campaigns. Many initiatives might have gone unnoticed if it had not been for media tools. The example of domestic violence brings some issues to a national level of discussion, enabling the formation of non-governmental organisations to address issues and advocate for additional legislation also.

NGOs analyse their audiences carefully by framing issues in a culturally acceptable manner, employing effective language to portray a persuasive image. The various mechanisms used by NGOs to reach out to their target audiences, as well as the different perspectives expressed in the interviews, provide more evidence of Algeria's rapid societal changes. Several ideologies arise in the analysis, some NGOs were hesitant to accept what appeared to be Western models. Indeed, many non-governmental organisations appeared to take a step back from adopting the Western model, attempting to find a middle ground between traditional viewpoints and Western empowerment approaches. Women's education and employment would be the focus of such NGOs because they are viewed as genuine and non-controversial issues. Choosing the correct word for the right audience in the right context and at the right moment is critical for gaining widespread support and avoiding unwelcome hostility.

The language used to improve, empower, and raise their involvement was important. The key approach that was observed throughout the

investigation is framing and selecting the appropriate discourse. The use of local terminology, broad and ambiguous language, an emphasis on genuine issues and the presentation of convincing arguments strategically were all examples of how discourses were used tactically to frame women's issues. NGOs demonstrate that any future social advancement in Algeria will be more feasible with a religious framework.

Conclusion:

This article has focused on one of the most crucial strategies employed by non-governmental organisations in Algeria to address some issues related to women's empowerment. Including which frameworks are used to discuss empowerment. The investigation revealed that NGOs frequently employ proper and cultural frames. Thus, NGOs employ the framing method to explain women's empowerment in a way that is appropriate for the target people, thereby regaining credibility and avoiding unwelcome hostility. NGOs' operations with their goals and discussion of issues have other forms like forming partnerships, hosting events and inviting guests that can be further explored. NGOs should set more explicit goals to target their desired audiences. Furthermore, NGOs must obtain government backing, since this facilitates their initiatives while also emphasizing the importance of adhering to the Islamic framework. Working more on policy and law advocacy can also help to mobilise empowerment activities, as these NGOs provide an appropriate channel for mobilisation. These should be explored and assessed further to help NGOs do more effective work in the area of women's empowerment.

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Appendices

Tables and graphs

Table 1 List of Selected Algerian NGOs

NGO	Fields of interest	Number of interviews	NGO's Nature
1	Contribution to efforts and lobbying	1 Female manager	Chamber of Commerce
2	Domestic violence	1 Female manager	Social Charity
3	Women's empowerment	1 Female manager	A non-profit organisation
4	Charity housing	1 Female manager	Social philanthropy

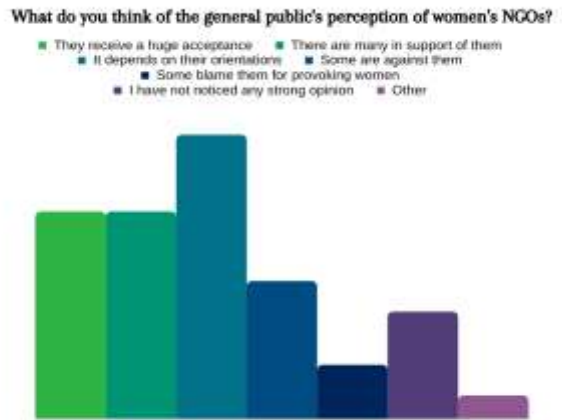
Source: From the sample investigated

Table 2. People's opinions of women's NGOs in general

What do you think of the general public's perception of women's NGOs?				
		Responses		
		N	Per cent	
	They receive a huge acceptance	27	20.3%	
	There are many in support of them	27	20.3%	
	It depends on their orientations	37	27.8%	
	Some are against them	18	13.5%	
	Some blame them for provoking women	7	5.3%	
	I have not noticed any strong opinion	14	10.5%	
	Other	3	2.3%	
Total		133	100.0%	

Source: Respondents' responses to the questionnaire

Fig.1. People's opinions of women's NGOs in general



Source: Respondents' responses to the questionnaire