



Participation of Moroccan Women in Politics Gains and Challenges

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Introduction

- The present lecture seeks to show how Moroccan women's civil society activism succeeds in providing women issues as a channel through which laws and institutions could be changed and through which struggle against Institutional, social and marital violence could be carried out.
- This will be shown through:
 - a. The historical evolution of women from the post-colonial state feminism to the state of democratization ideology.
 - b. The role of Moroccan Feminist movements in the promotion of Women's political participation in Post Arab Spring era.
- It is of paramount importance to the purposes of the present lecture to point out that the meaning of politics (Sadiqi,2004):
 - Binary division of formal/informal  personal and informal participation in grass root based activities
 - It is also not limited to the participation in legislature  hard work to sensitize the masses by using empowering strategies to get more legal rights



Moroccan women proved their outstanding success and skill as leaders in this respect.

1. The Historical Evolution of Women from the Post-Colonial State Feminism to the State of Democratization Ideology.



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It is merely by putting Moroccan women's relationship to politics into its historical context that one can really understand the continuous efforts women made in order to obtain their political rights and the big challenges they face, which make their long journey of activism very specific

Protectorate phase (1912- 1956)

- The emancipation of women was not encouraged either by the nationalist leaders or by the French colonizers,
- The tension between colonizers and nationalists lead women to promote some political and ideological issues at the expense of their own issues
- It is very interesting to emphasize the fact that the women issue was not the top priority for the state at that particular moment of the history where Morocco has just liberated itself from the French colonizer
- In that period , only a few women , who belonged to families with male nationalist leaders, participated in the national liberation movement in struggle for independence

- Examples:

- Malika Fassi, who belonged to the family of the influential national leader Allal Fassi, and who took part in signing of the manifesto of independence in January , 11 1944
- Akhawat Assafa association , Purity sisters Association, who chose to speak as one voice and they were considered the first women to problematize women issue in Morocco by publicly demanding changes in the family law and discussing the sensitive issues of marriage , divorce , polygamy and dowery .



Phase of The State Feminism Construction (1956-1970)

- Emergence of state feminisim,
- Tension between tradition and modernity,
- Codification of the Personal Status Code with the help of religious leaders (e.g. That consisted of legalizing polygamy, making the minimum age of marriage for girls 15 and 18 for boys)
- What is striking at this particular historical period is that:
 - The woman's issue was not an issue on the political agenda
 - The woman question was only to be solved within the large scheme of state building.
 - Women's problems were treated under the socio-cultural rubric (from independence, 1956 to the mid 1970's).
 - Women were by no means viewed as agents of change or likely to contribute to the modernization of the country.



The Liberation Phase

- This phase was characterised by:

The emergence of the leftist and social parties at a national level + The international pressure and globalisation at the worldwide level

- The state started to loosen its iron grip over the leftist parties and it allowed more freedom of speech in the public arena.
- Many women from different social classes joined political parties and created more sectors on women issues calling for more social equity and human rights.
- Women become more aware of their roles as real agents of change at the level of education, job market and at the level of democratic political rights
- Equally important, the leftist socialist movement politically exploited the international pressure.
- According to Sadiqi (2004), two trends emerged out of these socialist movements : a trend of women pushed for socialist equity through party line, and the second trend of women through partisans of social movements stressed the gender issue.
- It is this trend of women who contributed to the emergence of civil society in Morocco.



- Examples of the pioneer activist associations:
 - The Moroccan Association of Democratic women (Association Marocaine des femmes Democrates)
 - Feminine Action (L'Action Féminine)
 - Bridges : (Joussor)
- These women whose main concern was to make their voice heard without being controlled by men focused on the following issues such as :Legal and political rights, rural women and women's jobs.
- These were prominent parts of the overall progressive and human rights promotion of the mid 1980's onwards
- Morocco knows the adoption of the convention banning any form of discrimination against women (CEDAW) gave a considerable push to Moroccan women's political struggle for more social equity and rights
- At that time, the country knew the emergence and rise of independent and semi dependent women's organizations, associations and groups. Moroccan women's organization was concerned with the building up of developmental projects that targeted rural women and children (see Ennaji, 2010)

- Both rural and urban women favored development projects rather than being affiliated to official organization, which confirms the idea that women's activism and civil society played a vital role in changing the public space and democratizing it (see Ennaji and Sadiqi 2006).
- Many women acquire leadership skills and become experts in public affair management. Moroccan women's participation in politics has and is still being operated through the channel of NGOs and civil society .Those new NGOs targeted women's education, their judicial rights and their representations in leading positions.



- In brief, it can be said that from the 1980's, women's political participation was characterized by the interaction between the state neutrality, international influences and the Islamism.

Phase of Democracy : the 1990's- and end of 2010's

- Morocco has known a new trajectory through the democratization processes it has known since the 1990's which has been blooming up to the 2010's .A turning point in the history of Moroccan movement: a shift for democracy
- A significant number of events happened from 1993 to 2003 which can be clearly shown in the consolidation of women's activism in civil society,
- Along these lines of democratization, in 1993 two women entered the parliament as elected members for the first time in the history of Morocco. Both women belonged to political parties for the first time: the socialist party and the Independence party
- In 1996 a new constitution was established, and 4 women were appointed as ministers later in 1997,
- Thus in 1997, women were designated by the late king Hassan II as secretaries of state in a government of 30 members (the 4 women were the first ones to enter into a Moroccan government : one of the women was responsible for the administration of Mines considered up to then a typical Male department. The remaining three women were responsible for the departments of sport, social affairs and the handicapped)



- In 1998, for the first time a socialist party took power. Only two women were appointed by the socialist party : One was responsible for the department of International Cooperation affiliated to the ministry of foreign affairs and the other for the department of handicapped.
- In 1999, Med Said Saadi, the secretary of state for the department of family and children proposed a plan for the integration of women in economic development which came to be known as the plan of Action. This plan contains 200 suggestions having to do with the family law in amendment in accordance with women's economic status and role.



- The opposition of the Islamists on the one side, and the women modernist associations and the leftist parties on the other side resulted for the first time in Morocco's history in a debate on women's legal status, which took national and international dimensions and the debate lasted over a whole year
- In Rabat, march 12, 2000 the huge National march by feminist NGO and the supporting Parties of the plan was organized on the occasion of women's day.
- A counter march in Casablanca on the same day was organized by the Islamists to demonstrate the strength of the Islamist movement in Morocco and also to express their discredit to the plan (see Sadiqi 2004).

- In 2000, Morocco witnessed the designation of the 1st woman minister after 54 years of independence. This female minister was responsible for women's issues, childhood and handicapped. In addition, three women ambassadors were designated.
- In 2002: Women NGOs and Non-Islamists called for a quota system to enhance more women to have access to the parliament.

- According to Sadiqi(2013), the events boosted women's presence in politics and civil society, which led to the promulgation of the 2002 quota system. During that period, 30 seats of the chamber of representatives are reserved for female candidates, 35 women were elected to the Chamber that year, and 34 were elected in 2007.
- October 10, 2003: the King's speech was qualified as historic by the feminists as he publicly stressed that it is high time that the family code had reformed after it had been unanimously accepted by all the members of the Parliament including the moderate Islamists. Until very recently, women were not all well represented in local politics
- January 2004: The New Family code was announced in the official bulletin
- On April 30, 2004, women were appointed in religious decision making positions, already known as an exclusively men 's domain .Women *Zaalimaat* (religious decision makers) were designated for the first time in Morocco.
- A woman was designated to sit on the high council of *Zulama* and 35 women were designated to sit in the local councils of *Zulama* out of a *total of 220* (e.g. a university professor was giving a religious lecture in front of the king of Morocco during the month of Ramadan)

- 2006: the establishment of the Nationality Law: Moroccan women married to foreigners can pass their nationality to their children.
- Since 2007, the charge of governors was no longer promulgated by men. 7 women head ministers, including the Health ministries, and the ministry of social development, family and solidarity

Constitution Reform Phase after 2011

- In article 19 of the New constitution, men and women enjoy the same equality, citing those who have economic character to struggle against all forms of discrimination. It is in that domain that is and should be manifested directly or indirectly the new constitutional dispositions .The Article 19 of the new constitution accords equality to men and women which derive from civic, political, social and cultural and environmental rights.
- Moroccan women's political participation after 2011 has witnessed the rise of a new generation of women who asked for the quota to have political representation of women in the Moroccan parliament and insisted on the principle of parity in decision making bodies
- The new generation has focused on its activism on calling for the freedom and equality of all Moroccans
- In 20 February Movement, the leadership alternates between men and women , the issue of concern including gender (issues, are commonly shared and discussed)
- Women of the February 20 Movement want to see truly representatives institutions and a political regime in which the king reigns but doesn't rule



2. Role of the Moroccan Feminist Movement in the Advancement of Women's Political Participation and Gender Equality in The Post Arab Spring



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- Since the Moroccan Spring in 2011, women's rights and civil society activists have been key indicators of the well-being of the State and of society.
- Women's rights and individual rights have become topics of open public debate, evidence of a significant evolution in public engagement and activism.
- Moroccan feminist movements can achieve their goals despite the excluded and adversely incorporated groups within these movements
- They foster greater political voice, even in the face of considerable obstacles



How do Moroccan Feminist Movements Proceed?

- They promote capacity building
- They establish income-generating activities, orphanages, shelters for battered women, or schools.
- They have taken different measures (lobbying, demonstrations, advocacy campaigns, and other reforms), to pressure the government and the private sector into undertaking solutions.
- They are also active in politics, peace, and legal and human rights, among innumerable others.



What are The Main Achievements of the Moroccan Feminist Movements?

- Under the pressure of women's associations and other democratic forces, the government amended the constitution in 2011, following the protests of the Arab Spring
- The constitutional reform increased the number of seats reserved for women from 30 out of 325 in 2007 to 60 out of the 395 seats (15%) in 2011.
- Electoral laws have also undergone significant changes to increase the political participation of women= There are 81 women in Parliament (2016) representing 21%—nearing the world average. They are present in decision-making positions although in insufficient numbers (five in the government).
- Article 19 of the new constitution enhances equality of men and women before the law and underlines the crucial importance of women's sharing of political power and policy-making.



- The new constitution has been cited as an example of Morocco's progress toward becoming a more democratic society to promote women's political participation.

- By communicating across the diverse channels and by forming advocacy networks, women's NGOs have been able to impose changes to criminal laws, including article 475 of the penal code that allowed a rapist to escape punishment if he married his victim. This law has recently been supplanted by a new one which stipulates that "a rapist goes to jail and cannot marry his victim."
- The emergence of a new social-media-savvy feminism from Feb20, challenging the legitimacy of traditional feminists.
 - The traditional feminists' main concern is to achieve gender equality by reforming discriminatory laws and placing women in decision-making positions
 - The new feminists focus not on gender equality alone and not simply on the laws but on social change, believing that only by "working on issues of fair distribution of resources, accountability before the law, equal opportunities, dignity and freedom for all, will create an environment in which women are not isolated in their struggle for gender equality."



These achievements are the outcome of a number of factors:

- International pressure to respect human rights and follow universal laws and norms
- Political leadership and support from the monarchy
- Socio-economic changes that have empowered women (girls' access to education, women's employment, women's health improvement...)
- International funding
- Women's success in building **broad coalitions** and networks and forging links with other political and rights-based actors
- Women's establishment of close **links with ordinary women** and their familiarization with their concerns
- Women's movement's **great flexibility** and agility in responding to changing circumstances and opportunities.

What are the Main Challenges that Stand Against Women's Political Empowerment and Gender Equality Underlying the New Constitution?

Political challenges

- Partial democracy limits women's political voice: the king is still the supreme power in the country
- Tensions between Islamist and secularist interpretations of women's rights
- Failure to implement reforms fully: "the institutional structures for including women's interests in policy-making are largely cosmetic and have little impact beyond ameliorating the most visible aspects of inequality" (Castillejo and Tilley 2015)



Socio cultural challenges:

- **Progress in women's political voice is not experienced equally (e.g. Urban, educated women vs rural, poor and uneducated women)**
- Cultural hurdles and patriarchal traditions = they reinforce discriminatory norms and social practices
- **The choice between modernity and tradition:** In Morocco, which **has opted for democratization**, this choice cannot ignore either Islam or the socio-economic environment (**e.g. polygamy**)
- Illiteracy(60 % of women's illiteracy vs 40% of men's illiteracy), and lack of information prevent women from invoking their rights or reporting crimes against them, such as rape, child abuse, sexual exploitation and domestic violence



Moroccan Women's Participation in Politics and Gender Equality: Is it a Reality or an Illusion?

Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, published in 1859, resonate strangely across time and place:

“It was the best times, it was the worst times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolish-ness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, we had everything be-fore us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way.” (Sadiqi, 2014)



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- Paradoxical situation

1. An exploitation of women's fight for their right and A poor representation of these women in the government:

- There was a spectacular street presence of women of all ages, ideologies, ethnicities and social statuses during the political mobilization phases of the uprisings



- These women were then excluded from decision-making posts after the uprisings.
- The governments elected by the people after the revolutions represented women either poorly or not at all



- In Morocco, women won 67 parliamentary seats (out of 395, that is 17% of the seats), but there was only one woman in the elected government (compared with the previous 2007 government which contained seven women).
- In addition to all this, women were excluded from the transitional governing bodies, constituent assemblies and committees that rewrote the first draft constitutions.

2. Political islamisation vs the gain of Islamic rights

The political Islamization of the region is a fact



What most women's rights advocates (scholars and activists) gained during the decades that preceded the Arab Spring were also 'Islamic' gains. Women's rights advocates in the region fought to improve, and not replace, Sharia (Islamic) laws and they targeted patriarchy not Islam.

Many secular and Islamic feminists (scholars and activists) worked together, showing that Islam had never been a problem so far as women's rights advocates in the region are concerned.

Conclusion

- To conclude, views on the topic differ according to perspectives: from the constitutional perspective yes things advanced, but on the ground moralization and attacks on individual freedoms did not follow suit...

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