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Original Research Paper

Moroccan Women's Movement Effective Agency in the Aftermaths of the Arab Spring



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Abstract

Before the constitutional reforms of 2011 in Morocco, women's movement in Morocco has - in many cases - stepped over the assumed democratically elected institutions and resorted directly to the king, to instigate reforms and change laws to attain its objectives. This has resulted in the reinforcement of the existing system of government and contributed to trivializing activism in Morocco. The 2011 political atmosphere and constitutional reforms have offered a momentum for women's movement to thrive and reemerge as a powerful actor with more rights and significant roles in the political arena. In this regard, this paper aims to explain how women's movement organization have become very efficient in actions namely after the new progressive provisions of the 2011 constitution. To achieve this, the paper uses a comparative approach to women's movement activism in Morocco before and after 2011 constitutional reforms. It makes use of my doctorate research findings (2012) on women's movement in Morocco, and on following the movement's mobilizations during and after Arab spring on the ground and through media.

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1 INTRODUCTION

For more than thirty years, Moroccan women's movement, as part of Moroccan civil society, has been playing a significant role in the development process of the country. Indeed, the movement has become an active agent in the process of political, economic and social changes. In other words, in addition to its contribution to the vibrancy and development of civil society activism in Morocco, women's movement has managed to trigger changes in a number of ways. First, thanks to its activism, a lot of legislative changes have taken place; Moroccan women gained more rights and equality in the areas of divorce, legal custody, marriage, citizenship, political participation and family relationships. Second, Moroccan women's movement triggered reforms that have turned into a sample worthy of modelling and a source of inspiration to their partners in many other Muslim countries namely in North Africa and Middle East. Last but not least, all the efforts made and gains achieved by women in Morocco have increased their social capital and gained them a new position in their

society. Quiet paradoxically, women's achievements and victories in the name of democracy promotion have been in their content but a solidification or reinforcement of the existing system of government. That said, before the constitutional reforms of 2011 in Morocco, women's movement has – in many cases – stepped over assumed democratically elected institutions and resorted directly to the king to instigate reforms and change laws to attain its objectives (Yachoulti, 2012). This fact has had its repercussions on both civil society activism and on women themselves. Nowadays, women activists within women's movement organizations confirm that the new provisions of the *Moudawana* are not widely implemented and are largely ignored within the judicial system. Added to this, the fact of addressing the king in person opened the door to other components of society to follow the same trajectory when claiming their rights or expressing their grievances. Social media is now full of videos in which ordinary citizens address the king in person, claiming injustice or specific grievances. For them, the king is the only decision-maker that could end up their sufferings.

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With the first sparks of the Arab Spring in Morocco, the women's movement, consciously or unconsciously, decided to change its tactics, forms and strategies of activism to become more efficient in its actions and mobilizations. In this respect, the aim of this paper is to trace and explain this transition. Said differently, this paper looks at how the movement has become very efficient in its actions namely after the new progressive provisions of the 2011 constitution. This is done through comparing women's movement activism in Morocco before and after 2011 constitutional reforms. This comparative approach is based on my doctoral research findings in 2012 and on following the movement's mobilizations during and after Arab Spring on the ground and through media. The focus is mainly on cases or issues in which it has used the provisions of the new constitution to hold the government accountable.

To this effect, this paper is divided into five sections in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. The first section briefly outlines the history of women's movement in Morocco. The aim is to report on the nature and development of the movement in Morocco. The second section gives a bird eye view on the reforms instigated and achieved by the movement in the name of democracy promotion and gender equality. This will help understand the nature of the reforms and their specificity. The third and fourth sections respectively trace the movement's active role in Moroccan spring and the fruits of the strategies of activism adopted. The last section discusses how the movement has used the provisions of the 2011 constitution in order to hold the government accountable for some of the existing gender biased issues or inequalities. This includes cases of promoting women's political representation in the first Islamist-led government, criminalizing violence against women and supporting *Sulaliyyate* women.

2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOROCCAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Moroccan women's movement or feminism is usually depicted as "a set of feminine voluntary organizations, whose ideological discourse to defend women in a general framework of struggle, is to implement the laws that enlarge public liberties and guarantee equality between the sexes" (Chafaai, 1993). Using this definition, it is possible to see that the movement fluctuates between 1) a social movement organized and directed by women and 2) a political movement that struggle for the emancipation of Moroccan women (Yachouli, 2012). This means that Moroccan women's movement specificity lies in its ability to serve different needs of Moroccan women. Also, the precedence of the social characteristic over the political one validates the claim that Moroccan feminism activism emerged out of real social needs of women and not from an alien western concept (Ibid). Indeed, tracing the history of Moroccan feminist movement is a fascinating exercise. It involves different historical periods of formation

punctuated by changes in the socio-economic and political scenes of the country.

In the 1940s, three women's organizations were instituted in association with the major political parties of the time. The first one is "Axawatu al- Safae" (Sisters of Purity). It emerged within the *Parti Democratique et Independance* (PDI) (Democratic and Independence Party) or (*Shoura*) as a second political force after *Istiqlal* party. Then came the Union des femmes Marocaines (Moroccan Women's Union) as instituted by the Moroccan Communist Party in 1944. The third organization was created by the *Istiqlal* party in 1946. Drawing from their objectives at the time, the women's movement organizations of the period gave priority to social or charitable works, to the demands of national struggle and women's education.

Also, during the French protectorate 1912-1956, Morocco witnessed a massive participation of women in the fight of the country against the French colonialism. They joined the armed resistance, taking active militant roles and managed to fulfil tasks that facilitated men's fighting. In this regard, Baker (1998) argues that "[m]issions for resistance not only brought them [Morocco women] out of seclusion, but sent them into dangerous situations, travelling long distances, by themselves carrying messages and weapons, even setting bombes all the way using their wits to escape. Indeed, this quotation lays behind it the fact that the struggle Moroccan women led bore a 'twofold' dimension: rebelling simultaneously against colonial occupation and oppression as well as against the restrictive attitudes of traditional society.

Once the independence came in 1956, women's activism began to retreat. Many women militants returned their homes except for the princess Lalla Aicha who continued to head some charitable organizations as a representative of Moroccan women in various occasions (Brand, 1998). The exception of this era of post-immediate independence was the establishment of *Union Progressive des Femmes Marocaines* (UPFM) (Progressive Union of Moroccan Women) in 1961. This Union came out of the pro-government *Union Marocaine de Travail* (UMT) (Moroccan Union of Workers), the only trade union in existence at the time. Brand (1998) states that the UPFM's creation was intended to:

Convince the authorities of the need to overhaul labour and other legislation's treatment of women. In 1961 a number of UPFM sections were constituted across the country. The Union held some twenty regional congresses and created a national bureau as well as regional ones. Thereafter, however, its activity declined the victim of repression by management, the lack of upper level female cadres, and a variety of political battles (Brand, 1998: 47).

Throughout the period of 1964 to 1973, the leadership of women's movement passed out of the hands of the older generation of women namely those who participated in independence movement to a younger generation who was supposed to complete the work. It is at this time that a significant number of young women succeeded in reaching the university as part of those girl groups who had started their education on the eve of independence.

These young women took part in student and Marxist political movements at the university, and when these movements developed into so active political force that the government felt threatened and moved to crush them, women too were caught in the repression. (Baker, 1998: 269)

Also, in the 8 January 1969, King Hassan-II asked for the selection of women well-known for their capability and their honest individual to create a Women's Union. On the 6th of May 1969, a number of 300 women met together in Moroccan capital Rabat for the constitutive conference of *Union National des Femmes Marocaines* (UNFM) (National Union of Moroccan Women). The princess Lalla Aicha was the honouree president and the actual president was Lalla Fatima, the wife of Hassan-II cousin Moulay Ali (Brand, 1998). In his address in 1969, Hassan-II made it clear that it was the moment to move away from the effortless acts of charity to discuss community problems. Unfortunately, as Naciri (1998) argues, the aim behind the establishment of this body was only to control women especially those who played an important role in the struggle for independence.

During the period from 1974 to 1989, Moroccan political parties started for the first time to express new concerns about social issues such as the family, women's issues and Human rights. *Istiqlal* party (Moroccan eldest party) was the first to form a women's section within its formation although its own separate women's organization was not established until 1987. In 1975, the *Union Socialist des Forces Populaires* (USFP) (Union of Socialist and Popular Forces) established a women's committee. Another political party of the left claimed its adoption of women's cause in the mid of 1970s. This was the "Parties Progressive Populaire" (Popular Progressive Party). This party called for equality of wages, facilities for working mothers and a labour status for women who work in domestic sphere (Brand, 1998). However, because of these initiatives came out of political parties and not from women themselves, there were no active work to achieve these objectives and women's concerns remained at the margins. It was until 1985 that women from Popular Progressive Party created their association *Association Democratiques des Femmes Marocaines* (Democratic Association of Moroccan Women), known as ADFM, as independent from the original party.

In the early 1980, the young women who took active part in the student and Marxist political movements at the university remerged again. It is with these women that the "women's movement in Morocco took on a new dimension" (Baker, 1998), namely with founding of 8 Mars newspaper. With this Arabic language monthly newspaper - founded by the Moroccan feminist Latifa Jbabdi¹ together with some other women who identified themselves with the Marxist feminist wave - a new discourse of women emerged. It is through this newspaper that women started to address women's issues and provide themselves with the vision they lacked namely at the political parties level. Also, it is through this channel that women tried to speak for themselves and have their voice heard. Later on 8 Mars group grew into a mere political women's organization called *Union de L'Action Feminine* (UAF) (Union of Moroccan Action), as the first political women organization in Morocco to be founded outside the realm of the political parties directed only by women and taking women's emancipation as its first priority (Baker, 1998).

After its establishment in 1985, ADFM group grew quickly and gained popularity thanks to the skills and experience acquired by its leadership in the political parties as well as to its engagement in social projects such as literacy classes, health care assistance and seminars on everyday life concerns and realities. Soon, it started a feminist magazine entitled *Nissa al Maghreb* (Women of Morocco). ADFM group expanded to establish 8 branches across the country.

Also, the period from 1974 to 1989 marked the establishment of many women's associations of social and cultural dimensions. The most important of which is *Association de la Solidarité Feminine* (Feminine Solidarity Association). This association was founded in 1985 to take care of single mothers and reintegrate them in society, provide them with both psychology and juridical support, help them for benefits from the recruitment of programs of establishing restaurant bakeshops and kiosks and provide them with an internship that would enable them have access to job market. In brief, it is in this period from 1974 to 1989 that women managed to invest their political skills acquired within the political parties to establish their own independent associations and therefore start their struggle for specific gender claims.

Since 1990, a multitude of women's organization appeared on the scene of Moroccan civil society. This proliferation came as a reaction to the status imposed on women in Moroccan society, to the indifference of political party groups towards their claims, to the strong conviction that women should take charge of their own defense and to their determinism to politicize women's cause (Yachoulti, 2012). However, women's mobilization and activism would not have been possible without the positive changes that have affected their health care conditions, their access to job market that allowed them a financial independence and most

importantly their better access to education that equipped them with enough knowledge of their rights as human beings and paved them the bridge to have contact with the outside world (Ibid). Added to this is the cautioned political democratisation that the country has undergone and which led to the flourishing of a human rights movement. Interestingly, the great proliferation of these organization helped, to a great extent, to direct the discussion of women's issues on broader socio-economic and political levels and oppose the public private dichotomy by showing the degree of interdependence between the two and the extent to which social injustice depends upon a mere gender equality within both spheres (Naciri, 1998).

The early years of 1990s witnessed the birth of feminist academic organization with a new vision towards women's issues. In 1992, a "Women's Study Group" was established at Mohammed V university in Rabat to trigger and publish research on women (Brand, 1998). This initiative has been followed by others such as "Shamel" Association of Research on Family and Woman" at Kenitra university, "Center for Studies Tanit Group" at Meknes university and "Center for Studies and Research on Women" established in 1998 at Fez university. These research centres among others aim to promote research on women studies from an academic perspective, open a space of interaction between the university and academic institutions to exchange information and expertise, establish academic links with international universities and academic institutions to exchange information and expertise.

On the other hand, among the feminist groups that emerged in the period is the *Association Marocaine de Droit des Femmes* (AMDF) (Moroccan Association of Women's Rights) in 1992 as an offshoot of *Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme* (AMDH), (Moroccan Association of Human Rights), the "*Ligue Democratique des Droits des Femmes*" (LDDF) (Democratic League of Women's Rights) in 1992, its turn as an offshoot of *Parti Avantgard Democratique Populaire*, *L'Association Marocaine des Femmes Progressive* (AMFP) (Moroccan Association of Progressive Women) in 1992 and 'Jossour Association' which emerged in 1995 as an offshoot of *Union Socialist des Forces Populaire* (USFP) (Union of Socialist and Popular Forces).

Interestingly enough, this period also witnessed the emergence of women organizations with an Islamic ideology and orientation. They emerged as a dissatisfaction with the liberal women's organizations because of their secular orientations (Interview with Basimia Haqqawi cited in Yachoulti, 2012). The best example of these organizations is *Monathamaj tjdjd al waay an-nissai* (Organization for Renewing Women's Awareness). This organization developed out of *Islah wa tajdid* party (Reforming and Renewing Party) in 1995 with the objectives of renewing women's consciousness and ameliorating women's cultural level. Later on, other associations were set up in various sectors such as "*Association 'Amal', Mouvement féministe pour une vie*

meilleure" ('Amal' Association Feminist Movement for a Better Life) in (1997); "*Association Initiative pour protéger les droits des femmes*" (Initiative Association to protect Women's Rights) in 1998, and "*Organisation nationale de la femme démocratique*" (National Organization of Democratic Woman in 1998).

In the main, Moroccan feminism or women's movement is the instigation of the state, political parties and the inferior position or status imposed on Moroccan women for ages. Therefore, one could conclude that despite the affinities it has with both Middle Eastern feminisms and Western feminisms, Moroccan feminism remains different from both of them because of its historical and socio-cultural backgrounds and contexts. So to speak, unlike Western feminisms, Moroccan feminism did not grow up of a militant feminist movement, and unlike Middle Eastern feminisms, Moroccan feminism did not emerge out of nationalism (Sadiqi, 2003). Regardless of its origins and specificities, Moroccan women's movement has managed to secure a number of rights for Moroccan women through instigating reforms and changes. This will be discussed in the following section

3 GAINS OF MOROCCAN WOMEN BEFORE THE ARAB SPRING

Generally, women's independent activism helped them gain a new presence in society and achieve a number of gender reforms and many victories in the name of democracy and equality. The first important victory of women's movement organizations in the name of gender equality and democracy promotion is the amendment of the basic laws of *Moudawana* (Personal Status Code). For the movement, *Moudawana* constituted the "locus of the legal and civil discrimination against women" (Sadiqi, 2003: 27). In early 1990s, *Union de l'Action Féminine* (UAF) pioneered many attempts to reform the family code, the most famous and important of which is the "one million signatures campaign" that gained a large public support. Actually the petition reached its million signatures goal, gained a large public and was significant in many ways. First, the UAF addressed its demands for reform not directly to the king, but to the parliament and the prime minister to mainly give more power to these representative institutions. Second, the campaign was very significant as it was the first time that the issue of gender was brought up for discussion in the political rather than the religious arena. Third, the campaign was pioneered and directed by women themselves. Unfortunately, despite their attempt to address elected officials and their aspire to push/ go for a democratic parliamentary debate, women's movement organizations demands for reform stirred the opposition of not only the most conservative sectors of society, but also that the political parties which accused the women's movement organizations of creating unwelcome difficulties to the wider process of political opening. In fact, this courage step of the UAF created a fierce opposition and debate among different actors and components of Moroccan society. Therefore, fearing that this step would put the

Moroccan society in a political confrontation, the king Hassan-II intervened to confiscate the debate. The purpose of his interventions was to avoid the possibility of politicizing women's issues and cause and guard his political and religious position as commander of the faithful through ensuring that national sensitive issues are a matter of his remit. For this reason, he created a commission of 'Ulemas' (religious scholars) and judges to bring about changes and suggest recommendations which he announced on May 10, 1993 in the form of a royal decree.

In the late of 1990s, after the failure to implement the 'National Plan for Integrating Women' in Development launched by the government² and the growth of the of the Islamists as key actors in the political arena, especially after their show of force in March 2000, two competing mass demonstrations convinced the leading within the women's movement that to obtain the reforms, they had to bypass the democratically elected institutions and address the king directly, as he is the only person or institution that is able to deliver it. Therefore, while in 1993 the petition was sent to the prime minister and the parliament, in March 2001 the network of women's organizations 'Spring for Equality'³ sent the king a memorandum on its aspirations concerning the reform. The king received the promoters of reforms, made a brief speech and then set up a Royal Commission to discuss the potential reform of the family code. On October 10th 2004, King Mohammed VI, during the opening of the Autumn parliamentary session, announced new reforms creating a modern family law consistent with the tolerant spirit of Islam and lifting the inequity imposed upon women. Worth noting in this regard is the fact that despite its positive changes, the new family code remains a top-down reform. So to speak, the reforms have been conditioned by the pronounced will of the king. Therefore, the king's final arbitration role makes the parties concerned in the reform but a mosaic that enriches the debate.

The same story of addressing the king in person repeated itself in 2007 when the women's movement sought the reform of nationality code, which governs the citizenship. This code which was promulgated in 1958 and is considered as the legal bond which links or unites a person to the Moroccan State has been claimed to be gender-biased. To clarify, the nationality code of 1958 disfavours Moroccan women when being a source of citizenship for both their children and foreign husbands. This fact pushed the Moroccan women's movement organizations to make use of the experience they have accumulated through previous struggles to reform this gender-biased code.

During a royal visit to Europe in 2005, the Moroccan king, Mohammed-VI, met a delegation of Moroccan women living abroad and married to non-Moroccan citizens. The delegation claimed the Moroccan citizenship for their children and pointed to the difficulties their children face because of some

articles of Nationality code (1958). The king promised to find a solution to the problem. Indeed, this royal promise of a direct involvement with the issue gave Moroccan women married to foreigners in general and women's movement in particular signs of hope that it will be enacted. Actually, this direct resort to the King and not the government or parliament to solve the issue is attributed two strong convictions: the lesson of reforming the family code has taught them how divided and undecided Morocco's political class can be when it comes to national sensitive issues, and most importantly the common assumption that the king is the only and the ultimate authority that best arbitrates in such issues (Yachoulti, 2007).

On July 30, 2005, in his throne speech, King Mohammed announced that Moroccan women will be able to pass on their nationality to children born to non-Moroccan of fathers and asked the government to submit him the sensible proposals to amend the legislation on citizenship. Following the royal decision, both the cabinet and the parliament adopted the draft bill to reform the country nationality code that was released in the official bulletin on April 2, 2007. The cornerstone of this new code is the amendment to article six which sought to put men and women on equal footing when they are the source of citizenship; it sought to achieve a complete equality regardless of whether it is the mother or the father who is the single Moroccan parent.

4 MOROCCAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE MOMENTUM OF THE ARAB SPRING

The Arab Spring has offered a momentum for Moroccan women to re-organize and reconsider their strategies of activism as a way to maintain their visibility in the public sphere and achieve more rights. To this effect, they relied on new philosophies and strategies of activism that favor both lobbying and networking, a fact which allowed them to achieve both immediate and strategic reforms.

With the first sparks of the Arab Spring, women's movement created the "Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy"⁴ on March 16, 2011 to mobilize both nationally and regionally. All the national level, the colalition targeted the constitutionalisation of equality between men and women with regard to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. To this effect, the coalition prepared a memorandum explaining women's movement organizations vision of the new constitution that Moroccan women aspire to in the twenty-first century (ADFM, 2011). A month later (11 April 2011) and because of this strong and active role, the coalition was invited by the Consultative Commission for the Revision of the Constitution (CCRC) to submit its propositions for the reform. Later, to oblige the consultative commission to take its propositions seriously coalition organised marches in Rabat and Casablanca on May 1, 2011.

At the regional level, the coalition mobilized to unify women of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region against dictatorship, inequality, and marginalization. This initiative was crowned with the creation of coalition of women's movement organizations in the MENA region named "Equality Without Reservation". This regional coalition included 600 Arab women's rights and human rights organizations belonging to several Arab states. Items of its agenda included calls for the removal of all reservations to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the ratification of the Optional Protocol (ADFM, 2011). Following the same path, the coalition invited representatives from civil society, women's rights organizations, the public sector, international organizations including UN Women, and the diplomatic corps from Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia, to meet in Rabat in May 2011 for two days (Ibid). The aims of the meeting were to review regional changes and strategize for the future in the wake of the Arab Spring transitions; look at how to ensure that constitutional reforms clearly protect equality between women and men in both the private and the public spheres; legitimize women's role in politics and public affairs, and include implementation mechanisms to achieve these effects (Women's Learning Partnership and the Leadership Conference, 2011). In the conference, Nouzha Skalli, the then minister of Social development, family and solidarity, surprised all participants when she announced that the Moroccan government was about to officially ratify CEDAW and its optional protocol, a fact which was later implemented on April 18, 2011 (Yachoulti, 2015).

5 THE FRUITS OF ACTIVE LOBBYING OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN THE ARAB SPRING

Indeed, given the thickness of their agenda, the gains of Moroccan women after their active role during and immediately after the Moroccan Arab Spring are a few in numbers. However, they are significant in terms of content. As a response to the uprisings, King Mohammed called upon five women to make up the Consultative Commission to review the constitution and deliver recommendations for democratic reform (The Commission was made of 18 members). Also, on 18 April 2011, Morocco formally withdrew its reservations to CEDAW and its optional protocol. Now, those fighting for women's rights and empowerment have authority under the national constitution to cite all of CEDAW's provisions as leverage to hold the government to its commitment to move toward women's full equality (IWDN, 2011).

Further, the approved constitution of 2011 includes many articles that are revolutionary in their content. For instance, Article-19 makes both men and women equal citizens before the law and creates the 'Authority for Equality and the Fight Against all Forms of Discrimination' for the purpose of achieving equality

between men and women. It also says that the state shall work for the realization of parity. Article 21 prohibits sexism. Most importantly, Article 175 states and insists that these rights cannot be retracted in future constitutional revisions.

Finally, in October 2011, following the provisions of the approved constitution, two laws were adopted by the parliament. They contain provisions on the participation of women in political life. This concerns Law N°27 adopted by the chamber of representatives and which establishes a quota of 60 seats reserved for women out of 395 total seats and Law N°29-11 "on political parties" which recommends that 'all political parties work to achieve a proportion of one-third of women in their governing bodies

In a nutshell, Morocco's official ratification of CEDAW and its optional protocol in addition to the articles of new constitutional will open Moroccan women the doors widely for further legitimate action. They would be used as an unprecedented official framework for women's movement to hold the government accountable to the new constitution and its mechanisms such as the new authority for equality in its future mobilizations. Actually this has immediately appeared when the women's movement mobilized to put some 'old-new' gender equality issues in the spotlight.

6 MOROCCAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT EFFECTIVE AGENCY AFTER 2011 CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

Holding the government accountable to the new provisions of the new constitution and its mechanism appeared immediately when the women's movement sought promoting women's political representation in the first Islamist-led government, criminalizing violence against women and supporting *Sulaliyyate* women.

6.1 Promoting Women's Political Representation in the First Islamist-Led Government

Women's effective agency started immediately after the approval of the 2011 constitution. When the Islamists won elections in Morocco (2011), a number of feminists expressed their fear that they (Islamists) will turn back the clock on women's rights. This fear increased namely when the new Cabinet headed by Islamists was nominated. The new cabinet included only one female minister - Bassima Haqaoui- being nominated as Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social affairs. This has been a surprise for all actors in the political arena; a single female cabinet member is a huge step back for Moroccan women as the previous cabinet included seven women ministers. Women's movement groups and activists considered this disproportion as the first tangible infraction of the new constitution, which promotes gender equality and equal representation for women. Other feminist activists even went further to accuse Abdelillah Benkirane, then the head of the government, of being misogynic towards female politicians. Despite Benkirane's attempt after his first

cabinet meeting to defend the accusations in front of the media by claiming that “there was no intention to exclude women from this government” (Morocco World News, 2012), the limited female participation has not eased the angry demonstrations against the new Islamist government. When Benkirane appeared in the parliament as the head of government to announce his government agenda for the five coming years, female MPs stood up with placards reading “women 1, men 30 is this equitable sharing” (Ibid). In the meantime, outside the parliament, there were dozens of women protesting this lack of women representation in the cabinet.

After his election on September 23, 2012, the then new general secretary of *Istiqlal* (independence) party announced his withdrawal from the Justice and Development Party (PJD)-led cabinet because of as he justified, his dissatisfaction with the PJD approach to government and its inability to adequately deal with Morocco’s pressing social and economic problems. This withdrawal pushed the head of the government to look for new alliances and engage in a cabinet reshuffle. In parallel, the status quo gave Moroccan women’s movement a chance to intensify its struggles and pressure for more women’s political representation in the new cabinet. Therefore, the movement went on publishing articles, blogs and organizing seminars asking the prime minister to activate and implement the provisions of the new constitution namely Article-19 which calls for the equality (Sadiqi, 2015).

As a response to Moroccan women’s angry voices, Benkirane- speaking on Tuesday, October 1st, 2013 at a seminar on women’s political participation in Rabat- declared that his new cabinet will be announced officially on Friday before the opening of the autumn session of the Moroccan parliament and pledged to increase women’s representation in the new coalition government. Mr. Benkirane continued his speech by defending himself against all the accusations and assured the participants that his government is “not against the principle of parity and equality between men and women, as a constitutional right,” but insisted that his government has “since its inauguration, appointed 38 women in senior positions at the state level out of 300 positions”. Benkirane’s promise was translated in the government’s mini-reshuffle (2013) when he announced the inclusion of five other women in his cabinet.

6.2 Criminalizing Violence Against Women

The second example in which women’s movement took efficient actions and used the provisions of the new constitution to hold the government accountable is the issue of gender based violence. Indeed, because of the absence of laws that address gender violence including domestic violence and rape in Morocco, women’s movement organizations organized a series of protests and events called the - ‘Spring of dignity’, specifically after the tragic case of Amina Filali. Amina Filali, a 16-years-old rape victim, committed suicide in 2012 after

being forced to marry her rapist. The incident was seized by women activists not only to highlight the lack of laws that protect victims of all forms of violence, but also to remind the decision makers of the ‘fiasco’ of the law to uphold the *Moudawana*.

Moroccan women’s movement organizations including *L’Union de l’Action Féminine* (UAF) (Union of Feminine Action) and *L’Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc* (ADFM) (Democratic Association of Moroccan Women) supported the call for an end to violence against women and for legislation that would protect women who were assaulted and prosecute the men who assaulted them. Women’s movement protests that included organized demonstrations, sit-ins, television, radio and social media campaigns, and press conferences served to educate and raise citizens’ social awareness of gender violence as well as lobby for legal reforms.

The international network ‘Equality Now’⁵ joined the coalition of Spring of Dignity in asking calling the government of Morocco to amend the Penal Code to safeguard women’s rights. On December 8, 2012, they organized a human chain that started at the headquarters of the Ministry of Justice in Rabat and ended at the seat of the House of Representatives. Further, in March 2014, after seeing that the Islamist-led government was doing little to enforce the new legislation or take seriously the 2011 constitution that guarantees Moroccan women equality with Moroccan men, a Civil Coalition for the Application of Article 19 was formed, and it was reported that about 500 organizations joined the coalition. Article 19 of the constitution states that “men and women have equal civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights and freedoms”, and “the state shall work towards the establishment of parity between men and women”. But it hasn’t been fully implemented by the Islamist-led government. On April 13, 2014, about 800 women marched from the center of Rabat to the parliament building to demand the government a “comprehensive review of all discriminatory laws,” “women’s safety in public places,” and “equality as a right, not a privilege” (Morocco Week in Review, 2014). Added to this, the movement published “dozens of articles in newspapers, blogs, forums, and pages such as Webzine, which detailed feminists’ outrage at the government’s silence, the case became international and a Twitter account was opened on 17 March dedicated to Amina’s memory (@RipAmina)” (Sadiqi, 2015). Further, “a petition on the international activism site Avaaz gathered more than 50,000 signatures” (Ibid). As a result, “The government finally acknowledged the rape of Amina and Article 475 was amended to the effect that a rapist can no longer escape punishment by marrying his victim and faces a 30-year term of imprisonment” (Ibid).

6.3 Supporting Soulaliyyate Women

Another efficient action of women’s movement is its unconditional support to *Soulaliyyate* women. The term

Soulaliyyates “refers to “tribal” women, from both Arabic and Tamazight speaking collectivities that are demanding an equal share compared to men, when their land is privatized or divided” (Salime, 2016). In Morocco, the land system is divided into five types or categories. These include *melk* or titled land (they are privately owned by people); *Habous* or religious land endowments (they can be leased but not sold); *Guich* land (they are granted to members of the military by the monarchy); state owned land and *soulaliyate or jema’a* (they are collective tribal land held in trust by the state). This last type which is categorized as *al-aradi al-sulaliyya*, points to a dominant mode of land tenure in which members of an “ethnic” collectivity hold communal rights on the land they inhabit and/or exploit. According to Salime (2016), “[a]lthough communal land could in the past neither be seized nor sold, it could be transferred from fathers to sons over the age of sixteen” (p.35). She argues that “[a]ccording to hegemonic understanding of ‘urf (customary law), women can only benefit through male relatives. Unmarried women, widows, divorcees - and those with no sons - often face expropriation and become destitute. Many end up living in slums surrounding their communal land” (Ibid).

Soulaliyyates’ fight against exclusion, injustice and discrimination, started in the mid-2000s namely when Rkia Bellot - a *Soulaliyate* from Kenitra - was passed over for land use rights. Her eight brothers exempted her from inheritance claiming that women do not inherit land in *urf law* (tribal law). Rkia felt exclusion and injustice and, therefore, started a struggle on her own to change tribal laws and win compensation for *Soulaliyate* women.

The ADFM adopted Bellot’s cause in 2007 and later on included other *Soulaliyyates* from Kenitra. ADFM began its journey of helping these *Soulaliyyates* by training them in civic leadership and public speaking. Also, being aware of the illiteracy and deteriorating conditions of these *Soulaliyyates* and seeking to push and encourage them to participate in sits and demonstrations in front of the parliament, ADFM helped them financially by covering the cost of transportation. Further, as the *Soulaliyate* land problem is a national one and is not restricted to women in Kenitra, ADFM expanded its efforts to include *Soulaliyate* women from all Morocco. It also launched a petition for a nationwide law to guarantee that *Soulaliyate*, women have inheritance rights to communal land. The law would allow *Soulaliyate* women to have equal access to communal property, farm the land or use it for private means, and to receive fair compensation when communal lands are sold. Interestingly, despite its unconditional support to these women, ADFM strategically and intentionally avoided speaking and doing all the work for these women. For this reason, in each village, ADFM has identified one *Soulaliyate* woman to act as a liaison between the ADFM and local *Soulaliyate* women, and left most of the organization to the local leader. To further enhance its advocacy

strategy to support the claims of *Soulaliyate* women, ADFM went organizing campaigns and national seminars in many parts of Morocco to sensitize and make all parts of Moroccan society aware of the problem of *Soulaliyate* women.

Faced with women’s movement persistent and growing mobilization, the ministry of interior issued a third circular in March 2012 (the first was in 2009 and the second was in 2010) ordering local administrations and tribal leaders to recognize the right if *Soulaliyyates* have their share of money when communal land is sold. This decision is the culmination of many steps and actions with relevant officials; it also repairs the sense of injustice felt by thousands of women who have tirelessly condemned the archaic law that deprived them of their lands. Salime (2016) argues that although “these circulars are not to be taken for laws, they still gave the *Soulaliyyates* enough leverage for their demands”. Like Amina Filali’s case, *Soulaliyyate* women gained international support and recognition. On a recent visit to Morocco, Michelle Bachelet, the Executive Director of the UN Women’s Program, delivered a special address to the *Soulaliyate* women. She said “You, the *Soulaliyyates*, succeeded in mobilizing the media and public opinion against the violation of your rights. I congratulate you for obtaining official recognition of women’s rights” (Global Post, 2012).

7 CONCLUSIONS

Moroccan women’s movement changing modes of action in relation to the state in the post Arab Spring in Morocco shows a development towards more maturity and efficiency in its activism and mobilizations to ask for specific rights. However, the question now is what has really facilitated this efficiency and maturity? First, is it the nature of the reforms that are not very costly in their political implications and dimensions? (All the above discussed reforms have neither short nor long term genuine implications for the state’s political system and culture). Second, is it the specificity of the political context in Morocco after 2011? The very first and short answer to these two questions is that the debate sparked by the women’s movement on inheritance laws and mainly on inheritance practices, such as *ta’asib* (residues) and the directions it will take, will either confirm or reject the claim of women’s movement shift and development towards more maturity and efficiency in its struggle to ask for specific rights. *Ta’asib* gives the rights to the men closest to the family of the deceased or distant relatives, even never known to having any links with the family, to share the inheritance with female orphans who do not have a brother. Seeing it as a form of social injustice and women’s oppression and a way of stripping women of their financial independence, women’s movement has launched a lobbying campaign to end the *ta’asib* practice and seek broader gender equality in inheritance.

NOTES

1. She is a Moroccan feminist known in particular for her action to change the *Moudawana*. She was also elected as an MP in 2007.
2. On March 19, 1999, the socialist government launched a proposal to improve the situation of Moroccan women. The latter was known as the *National Plan of Action to Integrate Women in Development* or (project plan d'action national pour l'intégration de la femme au développement). The aim was to integrate women more fully in society, and to make them contribute to, as well as share in, development.
3. It is a network created by a group of women's movement organizations in the early 2000s to express their wish to be more involved and be informed about what was going on concerning the reforms the Moroccan personal status law.
4. The coalition was created on Wednesday, March 16, 2011 in Rabat by more than twenty-eight women's organizations. However, it was animated mainly by the most active women's movement organizations like the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), Union de l'Action Féminine (UAF), Association Marocaine pour la Défense des Droits des Femmes (AMDF) and Fédération de la Ligue et Démocratique pour les Droits des Femmes (FLDDF).
5. Equality now is an international human rights organization founded in 1992. It works to protect and promote the rights of women and girls around the world in the areas of Discrimination in Law, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Sexual Violence and Trafficking, with a cross-cutting focus on adolescent girls. It encompasses groups and individuals in almost every country in the world. For more information see <http://annualreport2013.equalitynow.org/year-in-review/approach/>

ABBREVIATIONS

ADFM: Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc; **AMDF:** Association Marocaine de Droit des Femmes; **LDDF:** La Ligue Démocratique pour les Droits de la Femme; **MENA:** Middle East and North Africa; **UAF:** Union Action Féminine; **UMT:** Union Marocaine du Travail; **UNFM:** Union Progressive des Femmes Marocaines; **UPFM:** Union National des Femmes Marocaines; **USFP:** Union Socialiste des Forces Populaire.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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