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Impact of Moroccan Female MPs on the Decision Making Process: Challenges and Limitations

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Abstract

The notion of gender has always been a debatable issue especially when it comes to power relations. This article is an attempt to shed light on the major forms and patterns that face these female MPs to impact the decision making process in relation to males. It focuses mainly on the nature and forms these MPs can have as decision makers. To achieve this aim, we look at the effectiveness of these women in decision zones. Female MPs were interviewed especially to evaluate the outcome of a long struggle that attempts to change the pre-constructed images associated with these female effectiveness. Moroccan female members of the parliament's impact on decision making process is mostly governed by a set of cultural and political formations; it is not a question of time or space, but mostly in how these notions have been constructed to meet special aims.

1 INTRODUCTION

Moroccan 2011 constitution stipulates that women are equal citizen to men in all aspects of life. Ironically, in practice, women still face discrimination, namely at the political level. For instance, the higher one moves up in the political hierarchy, the number of women that can be found becomes smaller and smaller. Actually, despite their achievement in recent years - their presence in parliament and ministerial positions - women still have a long way to go. More concisely, since neither law nor the practices are yet egalitarian, the politicians discourse serves only to mask a much more conservative reality. In this regard, the purpose of this article is to look at the different limitations that make this participation invisible. By so doing, we look at the various roles these women perform as decision makers. In this paper, the focus is on the major constraints that face Moroccan female MPs in the political system, and more particularly the decision making process.

The presence of women in any society constitutes its beating heart and the investigation into the various components that shape Moroccan women' impact in the decision making process is what this article is trying to investigate. The interest in studying these elements is meant to elaborate more on the social, cultural and political factors that determine the effectiveness of gender in the decision making process (DMP). Impact of gender on this process is also governed by a well-structured patriarchal system whose main objectives are to limit female effectiveness and shrink their contribution in relation to men presence.

To this effect, this paper is divided into four sections in addition to an introduction and a conclusion. It starts with defining the concept of gender in relation to politics. The purpose is to identify the existing link between the concepts and the way they are used in this article. The second section highlights the roles Moroccan women had been performing throughout the colonial era. These women contributed hand in hand with men not only to bring independence, but also to educate generations satiated with national values. This section is meant to identify the role of Moroccan women throughout the colonial presence in Morocco in

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comparison with the present status of female political leaders. As for the third section, it is devoted for the description of the research methodology of the paper including the research question, its significance and the method used. The fourth section indicates the major results derived from the interviewees with reference to the questions used for the semi-structured interview. Before concluding the article, an analysis is made to elaborate more on the cultural and political components of the notion of gender in Morocco, in relation to the impact they have on the political sphere.

2   GENDER AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN MOROCCO

The notion of gender has always been a debated issue in term of power positions and relations. Gender's impact is mostly governed by a set of cultural and political formations; it is not a question of time or space, but mostly in how these notions are constructed to meet special aims. The concept of gender in politics is a remarkable topic; these relations of power are what stimulate researchers to investigate the major components that constitute gender presence as policy makers. Therefore, it enables them to evaluate the female presence within these places as an indicator or determiner to the country's development. In term with that, most of the stereotypes associated with gender as being unable to transcend certain borders remain relative. They explain how political and societal elites are increasingly confronted with complex environments in which they continuously have to make collective decision (Bursens *et al.*, 2017). As a matter of fact, in order to challenge this notion, a long struggle has been made to strengthen gender' roles, and empower their status as decision-makers. However, the presence of women in such positions may also create a trouble for men; therefore, the patriarchal system opts for the notion of difference to reduce the role of women, and also determine the cultural perception of gender action in the political field.

As far as political theory is concerned, Heywood (2015) examines the theoretical notion of politics stating that "political theory involves the analytical study of idea and concepts that have been central to political thought" (p.166). These young female leaders enter into the traditional image of political scene which does not allow differences. This fact is supported by the idea which indicates that "the organized state must contain two classes, ruler and subject, governor and governed the ideal of self-government can never be so realized as to break down this division, and even if it could, even if ruler and ruled were actually identical, the two aspects would still remain" (Maclver, 2005, p.66). The need to understand how the notion of gender has been used to reveal a set of cultural and social stereotypes related to women' effectiveness in many fields of which the political sphere constitutes a major part. The effective participation in the political field requires the individual to feel free to act far from any obligation or pressure.

However, the absence or restriction of this right may contradict the democratic values. Therefore, it becomes difficult to define the state as being developed as Khanka (2014) assets:

> To be free, you must be self-determined, which is to say that you must be able to control your own destiny in your own interests. In case if you are not in control of your own destiny, as you are failing to control a passion that you yourself would rather be rid of and which is preventing you from realizing what you recognize to be your true interests (p.3).

The freedom to act politically is one of the major elements embedded within the notion of equality concerning gender relations. When examining the factors that shape the presence of gender in the political scene, and how they can feel free to have a full engagement in political action, and more particularly in decision making process, all has to be taken from local and global contexts. In the same line of thought, Barnes and Kaase (1979) argue that "if democracy is ruled by the people, as we and any others maintain, then the notion of political participation is at the center of the concept of the democratic state" (p.28).

3   WOMEN AND POLITICS IN MOROCCO: NATIONAL STRUGGLE

In term of Moroccan history, and in relation to the various attempts to achieve independence during protectorate era, Moroccan women had been performing important roles in bringing independence, and participating in shaping a Moroccan national identity in which their presence could not be ignored. Moreover, during this era, woman's role was widely remarkable in preserving national identity; woman's presence was considered and still the brick that youth are inspired by. Moroccan youth at that period were empowered by the role women played in both within and outside house. Women social, cultural and political effectiveness manifested at many different moments; regardless of the conservative discourse which reduced their presence and restricted it into fake boundaries in order to marginalize their contribution and make it unnoticeable. However, the education these women gave to their pupils succeeded in transmitting a set of values that formed Moroccan youth's character during the colonial time.

The history of Morocco has also witness the contribution of women at different levels. Zaynab Nefzaouia has marked its presence throughout Moroccan history especially during Al Moravids ruling period. This female character, unlike the other king's spouses, had been attributed the name of the queen at that time, she had contributed hand in hand with her husband in governing and suggesting rules within their community. Zaynab Nefzaouia had participated implicitly and explicitly in different matters related to the governance as well as international relations that linked the king with other external alliances.

Nevertheless, the limited space of social norms where women' kinetic was oppressed had indeed enabled them to act differently; they brought up young leaders satiated with the sense of responsibility and sacrifice. Outside patriarchal borders, women helped in challenging the protectorate presence, and succeeded in changing the patriarchal discourse which considered women's presence as a kind of challenging to men' norms. The stagnant image of women as being passive members, whose role should not transcend house thresholds had been replaced by a new status of women as decision-makers inside homes, and therefore, was able to produce a strong young generation of leaders. As a matter of fact, Sadiqi (2003) shows that "through continuous, conscious or unconscious gender negotiation, they gain power through the education of their children, they transmit the cultural as well as domestic functions which give them power inside the home" (p.72). This had inverted power relations, and glorified the status of women during the colonial period in Morocco. In term of armed struggle, women ensured a certain kind of braveness and zeal by which they did not only challenge the protectorate presence, but also shacked men' absolute power; therefore, women' revolution against the colonial bodies had manifested through their joining the struggle movement. For instance, women carried weapons, grenades, and messages; organize literacy groups, and participate in streets protests. The heroic presence of woman was strongly remarked in the sense of helping men by giving them weapon and providing them with information related to the colonizer's movements. They had also participated in meetings and demonstrations against the colonizer. Hence, these actions have strengthened their position within society for the sake of having a full engagement in the political action later on. Moroccan women' engagement in the national struggle to achieve independence was a testimony of women' power; they proved themselves as strong householders' decision makers, and as effective nationalist activists during the colonial era (Sadiqi, 2003).

The important role of Moroccan young females have performed in bringing independence to their own country had been manifested in different ways. Their contributions along with men indicate that political activism can take different shapes; the zeal and power women had shown during the protectorate period in Morocco had guided demonstrations condemning all protectorate presence. Women' participation in positions that were exclusive to men had challenged different values within the Moroccan society; their presence could not be underestimated. Their power had been able to break the invisible barriers that long reduced women' role to a mere domestic life; being not only experts in deciding about family issues, but also active members in the history of struggle during protectorate era, Moroccan women, at that time, have been able to cross patriarchal borders and be part of political decision making; by having a place in the political parties. However, women's presence in such places was determined by

moments of desire and others of rejection. With the new quota system, the parliamentary seats given for women as political leaders does not exceed 30%, this limited space can be a double faced. In term of democracy, Morocco has been able to join the stream of democracy especially through guarantying a female presence in places that were culturally restricted for men. However, this impact in Moroccan political scene is still soft. Hence, a practical approach to this issue necessitated the interviewing of MPs whose responses contribute in understanding the problematic under investigation. Before revealing the results of this study, the coming section discusses the methodology adopted.

As a form of political participation, Moroccan women within the Socialist Union for Popular Forces (USFP) party have chosen to translate their attitudes towards the various cultural and political forms of oppression women suffer of in Moroccan society. They have chosen the name of 'Federal Women Organization' to their own organization. The name in itself connotes the main principles of the USFP party; these women believe in the importance of forming young female leaders to develop not only their own status, but also to contribute in the progress of their own nation. Thus, the different changes these women are calling for to reconsider the status of women has been inspired by the National Congress in 1975. Women seized the opportunity to highlight the main obstacles, girls face in term of education, financial support and the opportunity to have access to the decision making zones. Still, the perception of women within the party has not been widely recognized in the beginning; especially in term of giving them the freedom to act freely.

Due to all these changes, in the seventh National Congress in 2013, women of this organization tried to make a self-reflective stance so as to reconstruct this organization based on the various forms and practices of the past. Therefore, allow this reflection to be appropriate to the present and contribute in achieving the underlined objectives. By so doing, women of the organization were looking for new methods to develop women's status. By approaching the women's real life, the latter becomes able to act according to the different changes that are affecting their own society. In an attempt to build a democratic modern society where social justice and equality prevail, these female leaders insisted during the Seventh National Congress in engaging women within the political life; therefore, she can impact the process of decision making believing that.

4   METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze the various challenges Moroccan female MPs face to fully impact the process of decision making, semi structured interviews are employed to provide a real opportunity for the research to be conducted on real grounds. The inquirer moves towards a more alive experience where people targeted are the center of interest; their knowledge, experiences and

practices of the phenomenon is what allows the researcher to analyze the process through which the topic under investigation is going on. The interviewees in this study are non-randomly chosen; the young female political leaders belong to two different political parties; one from the majority, and other from the opposition: Justice and Development Party (PJD) and Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM). This diversity is intended to vary the points of view, and also to measure the impact of youth belonging to the majority on the DMP, in comparison with those who represent the opposition. Their own positions within DMP, their experience and more importantly the impact of the various factors that constitute their political identity are the major content of the designed questions. The purpose then is to evaluate the impact of the cultural and political discourses on young female political actors. The employment of this type of interview is used to collect reliable and credible data from what the researcher's 'eyes observe and interpret inspired from interviewees' attitudes and reactions to the questions. In this respect, age and gender indicators were also important to the objectives of the study.

Since we are investigating the extent of impact gender can have on DMP, it was necessary to address young female politicians. The rationale behind this choice is first to respect the underlined objectives of the article which focus on gender as the main interest of inquiry, and also to examine the various factors that determine gender presence within DMP. After having decided about the suitable time, the two interviewees agreed upon the meeting in the parliament on Monday 16th January 2019 during the opening session. This task has taken two days. The interviews were conducted face to face as the meeting was already prearranged. The two interviews were performed in Arabic; hence, the translation of the interviews from Arabic into English has been done by the researcher. The objectives of the interviews are translated through four main questions that seek to understand, test and analyze the impact of these young female political leaders on DMP; the content of the questions try to evaluate the extent to which these leaders are able to influence the work of the government along with the amendments concerning different fields depending on the committee they represent within the parliament. After all, the nature of questions is also meant to test the effectiveness of a process where decisions are being constructed.

In order to react to the interviews questions, the interviewees were invited to participate in face-to-face semi-structured interviews. In relation to the topic discussed, age and political belonging of the respondents has a significant presence in testing these demographics elicited by the semi-structured interviews. Interviewee from Justice and Development Party:

- Imane Yaacoubi: A parliamentary member of the Justice and Development party, and a member of Finance and Economic Development Committee

Legislative jurisdiction: 2016/2021 Interviewee from the Authenticity and Modernity Party.

- Sanae Zaheed: A parliamentary member of the Authenticity and Modernity Party. Member of the party's regional coordination in the region of Souss-Massa. Legislative jurisdiction: 2016/2021.

5 RESULTS

5.1 The Role of Elected Youth in the Government

Imane Yaacoubi, a parliamentary deputy from Justice and Development Party associates the impact youth may have vis-à-vis the development of governmental body; referring to the new laws that have been introduced to both the constitution of 2011 along with the internal regulations regarding the House of Representatives. For Imane, she considers the quota system as a new breath in the government where Moroccan youth as well as women are granted 30% out of 395 members as a ratio in the House of Representatives. She does indeed valorize the presence of women especially the intellectual ones. For her, university graduates and youth holding a special degree have a noticeable impact on the work of the government; therefore, their contribution cannot be marginalized, so to speak. For instance, the presence of these young intellectuals within decision making process does indeed reverse the general view about politicians who have a limited academic background. In the same line of thought, when addressing the Authenticity and Modernity party, there should be a gender approach in evaluating the work of political leaders concerning the parliamentary development. Hence, Sanae Zaheed, the PAM deputy and Consultant Advisor in the city of Agadir has enriched the course of research claiming that the role of youth in decision making positions remains relative, and the decisions of most young people are inspired from the social norms within Moroccan society. The youth impact on decisions is unconsciously guided by a cultural system that does not only shape their being decision makers, but also the decisions they implement within such positions. Sanae's ad-hominem argument is inspired from her own experience as a decision maker; she explains that "in general, youth' role as decision makers is mostly impacted by social norms, and their influence remains relative". By so declaring, it is necessary to mention the young political leaders who were able to reach the political scene and impact it to prove their high efficiency, and adapt it to political action in which they constitute only a small percentage.

5.2 Most Prominent Amendments in Relation to Youth Issues

The purpose behind this question is to test the political female leaders' engagement in suggesting laws and implementing them within the financial bill; especially the amendments related to youth issues. In this regard, the PJD interviewee, Imane Yaacoubi refers to the experience of her party in which she declares that within the parliament, the members of each party work in teams; this is why amendments in general cannot be

suggested individually. Every member within the parties that constitute the majority within the parliament suggests a set of propositions related to different issues. After covering most of the parties teams suggestions, the parties that constitute the majority try to include these changes within the financial law project concerning the budget. As a matter of fact, Imane explains this by bringing her own experience as a member of Finance and Economic Development Committee where she is mostly inspired by issues related to human rights, and advocating most of laws defending youth matters. For public policies made mainly at the level of executive branch, youth issues are to be questioned; this priority allows young leaders to express first their knowledge concerning different topic touching the social, economic and political sectors. In relation to these public policies, if we re-consider most of these young members' suggestions concerning youth issues, we will discover that their calls for change are being inspired by the reality that shapes the status of youth in their own social context. As a case in point in her statement, Sanae insists on the important role camps play in forming young leaders; therefore, the PAM's young member tries to re-question the effectiveness of such camps by valorizing their participation, and encouraging the government to create a special budget to support their work.

5.3 The Issue of Gender

In order to evaluate the presence of gender within DMP, the conducted interview with Imane Yaacoubi has enlightened the course of research especially in revealing facts related to the female participation as decision-makers. The young parliament member takes us to the political scene where she states that gender presence within DMP is to be almost absent, and limited in term of number. For her, the parliamentary seat the quota has provided for both young men and women has indeed weakened the female's involvement in places where decision are mostly man made. To put it in her own words, Imane adds that "the cultural, social and political constituents of Moroccan society impact gender effectiveness within DMP". She maintains that the image of Moroccan woman is always associated with home matters; the traditional role of woman is viewed in relation to marriage and the production of children. Therefore, it is difficult to valorize women's participation in the process of decision; to attentively to women's ability to think, suggest and implement decisions concerning different issues. Accordingly, Still, Imane considers the presence of gender by 24% in the parliament is almost near to that of some developed countries, but she suggests that women ought to be granted more space in the parliamentary institution. In the same line of thought, Sanae Zaheed, the PAM's interviewee considers the female presence as decision makers to be invisible if not absent; the blurred conditions where women find themselves within DMP makes of their contribution a secondary one. Based on Sanae's experience, "most decisions are being made by

men, and women are supposed to defend them". In general, Sanae declares that political parties in Morocco do not valorize women's presence within DMP. Thus far, this situation goes further to reach the long process of decision where women are used only to promote certain agendas related to their parties; yet, their knowledge, experience and capacities are not to be part of this masculine system.

5.4 Contribution in Public Policies

The participation of youth in DMP can be achieved only through a strong connection between all the constituents that shape the social presence of youth, and the policies that encourage youth to fully participate in the political life. The purpose behind this question is not only to approach the various policies the state has decided to implement concerning youth; the reason is to observe and analyze how these young parliament have contributed in designing these policies, and more particularly the extent to which they are aware of the real constraints Moroccan youth may face to develop their own sense of belonging. In order to approach the young parliaments' attitudes towards this question, Imane Yaacoubi, in her statements, takes the initiative to put us in a holistic picture concerning this issue. Imane believes that both the government as well as civil society should collaborate to make of youth issues their center of interest; she clarifies this point by referring to a set of integrating devises such as: social norms, cultural stereotypes, political parties and also civil society. All these factors play an important role in first, preparing youth to become political leaders, and then making of their participation a valuable one. Yet, Imane stresses on the idea that the suggested policies to develop the status of Moroccan youth ought to be inspired from real life; including all specificities that characterize these youth. Sanae Zaheed seems to share the same view as Imane where she claims that the role of political parties to evolve the presence of youth. For Sanae, the historical process of developing the young segment has always been political parties role; since independence, these Moroccan parties have been performing heroic roles in attracting pupils and adolescents to join camps, teaching them different values, and more particularly making these youth aware of the political action, and how to act wisely. Nevertheless, these roles have declined; thus, which has an impact on youth participation as political leaders.

6   DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

Based on the two female interviewees' reactions, we can deduce the interference of various discourses that shape gender presence within DMP, from the perception youth have towards power holders to the important role the 'National List' has played in asserting certain roles for these young female actors within decisions where their presence was almost unnoticeable at different moments. In this regard, gender roles as decision-makers can vary from one context to another, but they are almost meant to serve a particular agenda in which decisions are to be

men suggested, implemented and pursued. In relation to gender's roles in advocating different amendments that touch youth problems, they constitute an added value to their presence as decision makers. In term of what has been stated by the young female parliament members, and with reference to the previous study conducted about the role of political parties in forming young leaders is being reflected through the speeches hold by these young politicians. Their call for a re-consideration to the importance these camps play in pupils and adolescent's life are demonstrated through the long training they have been through to become political leaders responsible of their own choices. In fact, the participation of Moroccan women in different fields throughout the course of this study has widely been manifested through their inner need of not only asserting the self, but also leaving a remarkable impression within domains that were restricted to men. By so doing, gender presence within DMP has been able to reverse relations of power and call for a re-consideration to the cultural and political discourses associated with women's own capabilities and cognitional capacities. In fact, a honest and objective approach to this issue proves that the cultural, social and political components within Moroccan society do not only affect the effectiveness of women within decision making positions, but also determine women's perception of themselves as active members within the political action. Actually, the cultural practices that frame the presence of women within house issues builds fake boundaries that women find difficulty to transcend; women start feeling that their voice cannot affect the process of decision making and invade a place that is characterized by men's dominance. The participation of gender in DMP can be achieved only through a strong connection between all the constituents that shape the social presence of youth, and the policies that encourage youth to fully participate in the political life. The purpose behind this questionnaire is not only to approach the various policies the state has decided to implement concerning youth; the reason is to observe and analyze how these young female MPs have contributed in designing these policies, and more particularly the extent to which they are aware of the real constraints Moroccan female leaders may face to develop their own sense of belonging.

The above discursive formations of gender, in turn, help in formulating a clear image about Moroccan women's impact as decision-makers; in term of asserting gender equality in the political field, Childs sheds light on this attempt especially by bringing into the surface the paradigm of 'gender sensitive public theory. For her, women's presence as effective members should not be underestimated with regard to their own capacities. However, the patriarchal nature that contends women's presence in these places imposes certain rules for women to be accepted to act as men; their presence in such positions forces women not to leave the narrow space men have allowed for (Hook and Childs, 2010).

Being almost the same as men can at least reduce the probably existed challenge women may provoke as decision-makers. However, to allow females participation to step up to the appropriate human rights standards, Hook and Childs (2010) argue that "policy makers at both the national and international levels have now largely moved to the third stage known as gender mainstreaming" (p.12). The purpose then, is to valorize women' presence in DMP, and glorify their contribution to impact the various stages through which political decisions are being designed. In this sense, other countries would like to adopt the same model in order to preserve their image as democratic states, and Morocco is of no exception. Gender participation in the process of decision making is being desired by the state to project its own image as democratic and respectful to gender equality. Women's full impact on decision making constitutes a challenge to the patriarchal absolute power. This challenge is embedded within the traditions that limit women' impact on this field; therefore, they are to be rejected when it comes to impacting decision making process. At a deeper level, "Moroccan women's ambiguous status at the levels of authority, social attitudes, public discourse, and law, is a clash between traditions and modernity" (Sadiqi, 2003, p.77).

These factors prevent women of having a free political identity; they are torn between different streams that mostly put their participation into brackets. The gender's impact on decision making can be manifested through various aspects; more particularly the official mode of political participation in all its steps through which decisions are being suggested, designed and implemented. As a matter of fact, "women who were active in the independence movement have political views that are more or less the same as those of the men in their social milieu" (Baker, 1998, p.11). The societal formations that characterize Moroccan society explain the space provided for women as decision-makers. Political action for women is a question of being more that acting; it is how they are perceived by their own cultural surrounding. The following section is brief review of women's political participation in Morocco.

By adopting the notion of difference, and being troubled by the presence of gender, men feel superior over women; they justify this fact as the latter's presence may seem to be lacking experience and rational way of thinking especially in dealing with decisive political matters. Indeed, there are other factors that may create hierarchies in term of gender presence within DMP; therefore, when approaching the topic of women as decision-makers, we should consider this fact from both a descriptive as well as substantive perspectives. In this case, the presence of women in policy-making zones are a reflection of the cultural images and assumptions associated with this notion as a descriptive notion, and a questionable topic for investigation for the later. In this regard, further attempt to empower this presence requires 'incorporating gender perspective in all stages of the policy-making process

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with the goal of recognizing where policies might have a deferential impact on women and men, and adjusting the policy in question such that it promotes gender equality' (Hook and Childs, 2010).

7   CONCLUSION

The role of political parties in this case is mainly manifested through building a strong bridge that women can cross to be able to affect the process of decision making; far from being used as only an interface to polish the political scene. In fact, society distributes roles and assesses them according to the effectiveness performed by men and women. It is only a cultural practice more than a logical evaluation to the role of women in producing roles and defending them. Throughout the term of this research, the reference to the role of women as political leaders has been associated to men character; in this stage, we can allow the words to justify this expression by proving that, in order to be accepted in men space, and impact DMP, women have to practice politics from men's position, knowledge and experience. The presence of women within political zones can only be a continuity of the social roles society has already distributed for them.

ABBREVIATIONS

DMP: Decision Making Process; **MPs**: Members of Parliament; **PAM**: Authenticity and Modernity Party; **PJD**: Justice and Development Party; **UNFP**: National Union of Popular Forces.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I declare that there is no conflict of interest by any term.

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