

Oct-2012

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Recommended Citation

Salime, Zakia (2012). A New Feminism? Gender Dynamics in Morocco's February 20th Movement. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 13(5), 101-114.

Available at: <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol13/iss5/11>

A New Feminism? Gender Dynamics in Morocco's February 20th Movement

By Zakia Salime¹

Abstract

The February 20th movement shows new modes of engagement with feminism, despite a striking absence of feminist organizations from the protest movement. Nevertheless, and in sharp contrast with most accounts that posit the irrelevance of feminism for Moroccan youth's identifications and political subjectivities, I argue that feminism has not only penetrated the social imaginary of a new generation of activists, but has also informed their practices. What kind of tension does this appropriation of feminism by the youth of February 20th bring about with traditional feminist circles? Does this high visibility of women in February 20th indicate the rise of a *new feminism*? I will first briefly locate February 20th in a genealogy of feminist activism in Morocco showing places of friction, influence and tensions. Second, I will provide some indications of what I call a new feminism. Third, I will analyze the gender dynamics among the various components of February 20th, notably the secular and Islamist. I will conclude by sketching a new map of protests led by women and not necessarily intelligible under the old cartography of feminism

Key Words: New feminism, Gender, Parity, Subjectivities, Activism, Arab Spring, Social Movements, Islamism.

The Rise of a Movement

The February 20th movement took many by surprise. During the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings several virtual conversations were taking place about bringing the Arab Spring to Morocco. The fall of both regimes triggered demands for protests on February 20th, 2011, the date that became the name of the movement. The calls first appeared on Youtube showing signs of new gender arrangements and cultural politics. This was not simply because of the alternation of colloquial Arabic (darija) and Tamazight (berber) languages. Rather, it was the young men and women's alternating voices and faces that were indicative of new gender dynamics among the February 20th activists.

The clip of the call started with Amina Boughalbi's face and voice. Unknown to the public, Amina is a twenty-year-old journalism student and a founding member of February 20th. In a fashion similar to that of the Egyptian Asmae Mahfouz, Amina, speaking in the first person, initiated the call for protests stating: "I am Moroccan and I will march on February 20th because I want freedom and equality for all Moroccans." She was followed by a young man who stated "I am Moroccan. I am marching on February 20th because I want all Moroccans to be equal."² (Call for protest February, 2011). The faces of young men and women keep alternating, each one speaking in the first person stating her/his reason for marching. On February 20th, several thousand rallied in the streets in more than 60 cities and towns in Morocco.

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²The calls for protests can be accessed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0f6FSB7gxQ>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lli6YpMjGO8&feature=youtu.be>

This gender performance of parity shown in the call for protest is not only virtual, but also the bodily presence of women in the movement is visible at all levels of mobilization and organization. The women too take their share of police brutality, to which the recent kidnapping and trial of Maria Karim, a February 20th activist, bears witness (El-Ayoubi 2012). The women also speak on behalf of the movement in national and international forums. Amina Boughalbi's intervention at the Centre Mosellan des droits de l'homme, in Paris in June 2011³ and the first press conference organized by the movement on February 17, 2011 in Rabat serve as examples. The conference took place at the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH) in Rabat. The AMDH is headed by Khadija Riyadi, a long standing human rights and feminist activist. Riyadi opened the conference by introducing Tahani Madad, a 19 year old science student who spoke on behalf of February 20th. Tahani read the movement's memorandum, introduced the various organizational committees and stressed the peaceful character of the protests. She stipulated that "no sectarian, political or religious slogans are authorized" and defined February 20th as a "youth dynamic" that is "secular, modernist (hadathi), democratic and independent of all foreign agendas or political affiliations". She concluded by sharing the desire to see the "flag of freedom, equality and social justice reign over Morocco, through peaceful means" (Press conference, 2011)⁴.

Since February 20th 2011, the movement has been staging weekly protests throughout the country. The wide scope of demands encompasses political claims such as dissolving the Parliament, the government and the constitution, social demands including access to housing and free education, economic demands such as better wages and access to jobs, and cultural demands, notably the recognition of Tamazight as a national language. In a nutshell, the activists want to see truly representative institutions and a modern political regime in which the King reigns, but does not rule. This marks the first time that the accumulation of political and economic power by the King and his entourage has become subject to wide protests in the streets. The King's religious and temporal authority, protected by articles 19 and 23 of the constitution, is viewed as the main obstacle to the rise of truly democratic institutions and political accountability.

Since the rise of February 20th members of leftist political parties, labor unions and human rights organizations have constituted a National Council of Support (NCS) for the youth protest movement. The NCS is composed of a few high profile academics and journalists, most labor unions, 20 human rights organizations and three leftist parties, al-Talia, al-nahj a-dimocrati, and the Unified Socialist Party. International organizations, such as Amnesty International and the Islamists of Justice and Spirituality, al-Adl wa-l-Ihsane, also comprise the Council's membership. The latter withdrew after the November 2011 legislative elections that gave the Islamists of Justice and Development, already represented in Parliament, the majority of seats.

Composed of volunteers, the NCS provides logistical support and legal advice, and it takes part in the movements' various activities and protests. Many women, including Khadija Riyadi Samira Kinani, Halima Morsli, Khadija Abnaou, are involved as legal counselors. From outside of the movement, other women such as Khadija Merwazi, the founder of the NGO, The Mediator for Democracy, play active roles. Merwazi trains many young men and women in the practice of mediation, negotiation and advocacy. However, strikingly missing from these formal and

³ Amina Boughalbi's talk at the Centre Mosellan des Droits de l'Homme (CMDH), Paris June 19, 2011 <http://youtu.be/bw0wqZCx11A>

⁴ The press conference can be accessed in this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-i9mEB_sWnw

informal structures of support are Moroccan feminist organizations. A few organizations, including internationally renowned Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), and the ligue democratique pour les droits des femmes, first supported the movement's goals then withdrew after the King's speech on March 9, 2011.

How can we understand this territorial shift from the traditional spaces identified with feminism in Morocco? Are we witnessing a shift from feminism as a discursive regime that opens channels for collaboration with the state, to feminism as a source of inspiration in a more radical project of political change? How can we understand the tensions between these two projects? Can we speak of a *new feminism*?

In the three main parts of this paper, I will first situate the current gender dynamics of February 20th in the genealogy of the feminist movement in order to identify places of friction, influence and tension. Second, I will provide some indications of what I called a new feminism before analyzing the gender dynamics among the various components of February 20th. I point to the indications of rising feminist subjectivities within February 20th and the tensions they brought to other players in and outside of the movement. This take on feminism goes in fact against previous studies which have either understated feminism for the political subjectivities of youth (Bourqia and all, 2000; Bennani-Chraïbi, 1994; Bennani, 2008) or those claiming the irrelevance of feminism and the generational gap among feminist activists and young men and women in Morocco (Badaoui, 2010; Skalli 2011). Third, I will discuss the tensions amongst Moroccan feminist groups in relation to these groups' positionality in a political regime dominated by the King and controlled by Islamist forces. I want to provide a lens through which we can see how feminism, as a discourse of gender equality, has penetrated the social imaginary of a new generation of activists not necessarily active in feminist organizations.

Methods

This paper is based on in-depth interviews with twenty-five activists from February 20th, half of which were women. I interviewed four members of the NCS and four women active in feminist organizations. I carried out participant observation in two meetings of the movement in Rabat and Casablanca. In addition, I made several visits to al-Wassit, the Mediator for Democracy, and had several conversations with the founder of this organization, Khadija Merwazi. Khadija has a strong background in feminist activism and human rights advocacy as a member of the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights. I also used several Internet sources including the Facebook page of February 20th, individual members' blogs, on-line magazines and Youtube videos. Some of this material will be referenced here. My interviews were conducted with activists from the cities of Casablanca, Rabat and Fes.

Feminism and its Discontents

Moroccan feminism stands out as a leading case in North Africa and the Middle East (see Naciri, 2008; Jbabdi, 2008). For two decades the movement had launched a sustained mobilization to challenge women's secondary status in family law, *mudawwana* (Salime, 2009). Feminism marked the turn of the century by forging one of the most progressive codifications of women's rights in the region. The 2004 Code of the Family institutes gender equality, removes the marital guardian and obedience laws, provides women with the right to initiate divorce and gain custody of children, abolishes repudiation and restricts polygamy. Additionally, in 2002, women won 10% of Parliamentary seats as an outcome of a long struggle to institute a quota system gained many ministerial, diplomatic and legal positions (Skalli, 2011; Sater, 2007).

Furthermore, the Nationality Code was reformed enabling Moroccan women to pass on their nationality to their children. As a result, many other codes have also come under scrutiny, notably the penal code after the 2012 suicide of Amina Filali, a 15-year-old woman who was raped and then married to her rapist.

Feminist groups did not operate in a vacuum, however. Gaining momentum during the 1990s, the Islamist movements were generated at the same time counter-feminist narratives and spaces for women's voices were being made (Oum Yassir, 1992; Yassin, 2003; Lmrabet 2002). The appointment of women to the various 'ulama (theologians)'s constituencies and state-controlled mosques (Eddaouda & Pepiceli, 2010) serves as a case in point. Starting in 2000, these appointments marked the era of competing liberal and "Islamic" feminism (Moghadam, 2003) in Morocco. They culminated in the mass rallies of March 2000, for and against the reform of family law (Salime, 2007).

This brief introduction is helpful in situating the current youth dynamic in the genealogy of the feminist movement. Many thought that the adoption of the new Family Code would diminish the appeal of feminism among a generation unfamiliar with the struggle. While there are no systemic studies about this theoretical impact, a UNICEF-FNUAP study shows that only 7% of the young people surveyed are connected to a feminist organization, despite a growing involvement of Moroccan youth in the third sector (El Azizi, 2005). Rather than indicating a post-feminist era (McRobbie, 2004; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003), most studies have pointed to the irrelevance of feminism in the formation of youth subjectivities and political identifications.

The few studies available on Moroccan "youth" have predicted a continuing impact of political Islam on youth subject formation and the importance of 'traditional' family values due to difficult 'modernization' and impossible economic integration (Bennani-Chraïbi 1994, Bourqia and all, 2000; Cohen, 2005). Nevertheless, February 20th shows several shifts in youths' identifications characteristic of what Bayat calls a "post-Islamist era" (Bayat 2007, 2011; Kepel, 2000; Roy 1999). Rather than anti-Islamic, the post-Islamist era marks the shift from Islam as a political project to Islam as a site for individual identification. One indication of this shift in the February 20th movement is the split with the leadership of the Islamist Party, Justice and Development, which opposed the movement, and their youth continuing to participate in the protests.

The secular foundations of February 20th could have provided the opportunity for liberal feminism to "renew its base" (an expression used by several activists) and take roots in the lower classes targeted by the movement. The political hybridity and pluralism in February 20th could have been the place for generating a new feminist leadership and for making new breakthroughs in the state institutionalization of parity and equality, a desire shared by all of my respondents. Unfortunately, among February 20th activists, there is a real feeling of betrayal by the leadership of feminist organizations. Shall we conclude that feminism, as a struggle to institute gender equality, has not informed February 20th.

As we will see, the framing of this movement's goals in terms of equality and the institutionalization of parity in the movement's structures, indicate the emergence of a 'new feminism'. This is a counter-topography (Katz, 2001) that disturbs first, the NGO-ization of feminist activism and demands, second, the confinement of this activism to women's spaces, and third, its regulation by state institutions.

A New Feminism?

Drawing quick generalizations about an emerging movement that most have predicted was born dead is very risky. Nevertheless, I found it refreshing to take into account the indications coming from my respondents as a way to provide a counter narrative to the gendered traumas of the “Arab Spring” (see Amar 2011, 2011b).

Firstly, my respondents constantly challenged my desire to speak to female activists about gender issues. They kept directing me toward both men and women in the movement. They made me realize that I was still working within old feminist categories of exclusive female spaces and leadership. In February 20th, the leadership alternates between men and women. The issues of concern, including gender, are commonly shared and discussed.

Secondly, to my surprise, this practice of parity is not necessarily based on a prior involvement of these activists with feminist groups. The new feminism seems to be emerging from outside of the traditional spaces of feminist organizations, and seems to be carried out by men and women as partners in the struggle for social and economic justice. The question of gender equality is too narrow to encompass the general goal of social justice that includes men and women. Souad (Interviewed in June 2012), an activist from Casablanca believes that “working together 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”. It will enable a political culture in which women are perceived as equal partners” Khadija claimed (interviewed in June 2012).

Thirdly, gender sensibilities are not expressed in the usual feminist rhetoric of “equality” before the law. More pragmatic, my respondents express it in a direct-action-mode in which parity is central. Carving out spaces for women’s representation in the movement is a case in point. Women participate at all levels of organization, mobilization and debate. For instance, the National Council of Support (NCS) is composed of 160 members, representing various constituencies. Each one of these is represented by three members out of which one must be a woman. The other two members could be two men, two women, or one man and one woman. As it is clear from this institutionalization of the quota system, no constituency can be represented solely by men, since at least one member must be a woman. At the same time there is nothing preventing these constituencies from being represented by two or three women since there is no limit on women’s representation. Not only could women form half of the members of the NCS, but they could also form its majority.

Moroccan youth are finding new ways to engage with politics and feminism, which most studies have yet to consider. I spent several days visiting al-Wassit, The Mediator for Democracy, created by Khadija Marwazi in 2007. Merwazi wants to contribute to “the formation of a citizenry that holds state institutions accountable to their constituencies” (interviewed in December 2011). She seeks connecting politics to the everyday practice of “citizenship.” Therefore, several members of February 20th take part in her NGO, some for training, others for meeting and workshops. During the legislative elections of November 2011, several members of February 20th received training as electoral observers. The members respected a quota system according to which more than 50% of the observers deployed in Rabat had to be women. Out of the 50 observers, 30 were women.

Very significantly, this participation shows a deployment of a feminist understanding of political practice in terms of gender parity. This holds true for all of the movement’s structures. The men and the women work together, organize meetings, speak to passers by and distribute leaflets. Most significant for gender representations are the street cleaning campaigns as a

performance of citizenship by women, and the “Freeze for Freedom”⁵ and “Freeze Against Globalization”⁶ events, which normalize women’s appropriation of the public space as spectacle.

The notion of ‘critical citizenship’ could help us understand February 20th’s mode of engagement with the state and citizenship. King Mohamed VI quickly responded to the first waves of protests by dictating a reform of the constitution in a televised address on March 9th, 2011. He announced the formation of a Royal Council for the constitutional amendment and gave recommendations for the institution of equality and gender parity. The new constitution would also allow broader prerogatives to the Prime Minister, hypothetically limiting the sphere of the King’s sovereignty. This address was met with enthusiasm by the political class and by leading feminist groups in Morocco. The main feminist organizations such as the Association Marocaine des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), the ligue democratique des droits des femmes (LDDF), the Union de l’Action Feminine (UAF), the L’association Marocaine pour la defense des droits des femmes, endorsed the constitutional reform and took part in the debate surrounding the institutionalization of parity and gender equality in the new constitution⁷.

Conversely, February 20th called for a boycott of the May 16 Referendum of “gifted” reform. Rather than disengagement from the political process, we are witnessing a new mode of engagement in which the boycott of the referendum does not exclude having a critical gaze on the electoral process. This critical citizenship has been developing through blogs, discussion forums, Facebook pages. It has enabled the constitution of a ‘youth gaze’ on politics that culminated in the rise of the February 20th movement.

My intention is not to draw broad conclusions about gender arrangements in the entire movement, because of its leaderless base, flexible agendas and multiple centers. However, I still find it useful to take the information coming from my respondents as indications of emerging modes of regulating women’s access to “street politics” (Bayat 2007) and a liquidation of old feminist tensions between direct action and mediation through NGOs and state institutions. My intention is not to engage in a conversation about the role of NGOs as governing bodies in the neo-liberal era (Kamat, 2004; Salime, 2010). I want, instead, to point to the displacement of a “feminist talk” from self-defined feminists to self-defined social justice activists, an argument I will illustrate more thoroughly in what follows. What we see is the desire accompanied with an endeavor, to couch all of the movement’s structures into notions of gender equality. This goes against the very gendered, disciplinary, and regulated arenas of feminist organizations.

State Feminism

February 20th activists consider the King’s address to be a turning point in the feminist movement’s decision to totally withdraw its initial, and very shy, support. Feminist groups applauded the reform and took an active part in the debates about instituting parity and gender equality in the new draft of the constitution. The implication of feminist leaders in a political process still dominated by the King created a gap between the leaders and those who were mobilizing on the ground. for a more radical change. Activists from February 20th see an obvious sign of elitism and co-optation by the state in the feminist position. To several of them, one cannot speak of women’s rights in the context of a constitution that puts religion and the King’s authority above international law. One active member in February 20th explained to me that the feminists have been “sitting in air- conditioned offices, writing reports to their foreign sponsors,

⁵ The event can be viewed in this link : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxR7dkocjec>

⁶ The event can be viewed in this link <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4DCt8OF6ck&feature=related>

⁷ See this link: <http://www.lesoir-echos.com/les-islamistes-font-peur-aux-feministes/presse-maroc/22532/>

and making deals with those in power.” For these reasons, he believed, the feminists “can no longer walk in sneakers”.

Another activist denounced the “feminists’ inability to see February 20th as an extension of the struggle for gender equality to issues of social justice”. More accurately, many activists highlighted the feminists’ “old fears to see the Woman’s Question subsumed under broader demands of political change that may or may not occur”. To these activists, the feminists’ emphasis on the specificity of “women’s issues” isolated their movement and channeled their efforts to state bureaucrats, foreign funds, and, not to mention, consultancy and expertise. There is a shared belief that gender equality could only be reached if “men and women are together in the struggle” and “are represented by institutions accountable to them”. Gender equality “should not be isolated from the general struggle for democracy and justice for all”.

It is worth noting here, that there is a strong conviction among these activists that the state shifted to a more muscular approach only when the feminists withdrew their initial support. There is a sense of betrayal --expressed by most activists-- by a feminist movement that champions equality and yet cannot extend it to social justice. In my opinion, however, feminist groups’ relationship with February 20th and the state is much more complicated.

As many studies have shown (Daoud 1993; al Ahnaf 1994), feminist groups built their activism around a legalistic framework that necessitated the involvement of state agents and the King, as “arbitrator”. The reform of family law, for example, owes a great deal to the complicated negotiations among political parties, feminist groups, Islamist players, and King Mohamed VI. Since the 1990s, feminist groups have positioned themselves within this power arrangement as ‘allies,’ rather than opponents, of the Moroccan state (Naciri, 2008). To endorse the goals of February 20th is to upset these alliances obtained through public advocacy, networking and lobbying.

Despite feminist groups’ ambivalence about February 20th, I want to argue that feminism was the first movement to open multiple spaces for debating issues of democracy and citizenship rights as they pertain to women (Brand 1997). The feminist magazine, *Thamania Mars* (March 8), launched in 1984, serves as an excellent example (*Thamania Mars Collectif*, 1993). *Thamania Mars* articulated the United Nations’ regime of rights and a class-based understanding of gender equality. Restating the leftist sensibilities of its editorial board, *Thamania Mars* spoke of labor rights, unionization alongside domestic violence, political representation of class struggle, linking local demands to global conventions for women.

Reflecting the aspirations of an emerging class of urban, educated and professional women, *Thamania Mars* advocated the spatial and social mobility of women and denounced its restriction by a codification that subjects women to male relatives’ supervision and permissions. For a decade, the magazine engaged in debates about gender equality and women’s rights, preparing the first generation of feminist activists who now form the backbone of feminist organizations in Morocco. It is also through *Thamania Mars* that the Union de l’Action Feminine (UAF) mobilized the public for the One Million Signature Campaign against the mudawwana in 1992 (Freeman, 2004; Brand 2008; Sadiqi and Naji 2006). The feminist movement was also the first force that took the issue of gender equality to the streets during the rallies of March 2000. It is clear that the issue of women’s rights did not stay in air-conditioned offices but extended to the media, the schooling system, the judiciary and, more recently, cyber space.

The so much applauded new family code owes a great deal to the King’s prerogatives as Commander of the Faithful and mediator. These entitlements provide feminist groups with leverage to counter the power of the Islamists who could authoritatively speak in name of God

against painfully gained rights. This is why questioning the King's authority is very risky for feminist groups, especially for the most urgent items on their agenda: full parity and the reform of the penal code.

In contrast, February 20th members define their movement as a "dynamic of protest" (Souad, interviewed on December 17, 2011). The movement opposes "an economic regime in which the country's resources have been concentrated in the hands of a few" and wants "to hold accountable a political class" (Amin interviewed on January 14, 2012) that benefited from privatization of previously owned state institutions, European cooperation and post-9-11 policies of securitization. Some feminist groups are certainly among those "beneficiaries" considering the changing positionality of feminist leaders from agents of dissent in the 1970s and early 1980s, to knowledge producers packaging expertise on gender for foreign donors and state institutions at the turn of the century.

Having said this, it is no exaggeration to claim that Moroccan feminism has been a force of change of not only state laws, but also state institutions. Perhaps this is why young activists from February 20th were hoping to see this political force join. However, the feminists' contentions with February 20th are not purely generational (Skalli 2011). There is certainly a difference between the liberal feminist understanding of change through state institutions and the February 20th's desire to overthrow those same institutions.

Equally important in feminist contentions with February 20th is the movement's more inclusive approach to political partners. The ability of February 20th to work with the Islamists of Justice and Spirituality posed a true challenge to feminist organizations. Justice and Spirituality had previously championed mass protests against the 1997 governmental project to reform the sharia based family law (See Salime 2007). The feminists' struggles with the Islamists are inscribed on an even longer path starting in 1992, when feminist groups organized their first mass petition campaign against family law. More recently, it was the mass protest of March 2000 by Islamist groups that truly placed these two forces on opposite ends of the political spectrum. Interestingly for February 20th, it was certainly the Islamist participation that pushed the activists to re-consider gender and the question of parity in their weekly deliberations. Parity could no longer be taken for granted.

Nothing should be taken for granted

Justice and Spirituality was represented in the National Council of Support for February 20th. This Islamist organization is, without doubt, the largest movement of opposition to the monarchy in Morocco (Tozi, 1999; Darif 1999; Salime, 2011). Its decision to join February 20th was important since it would provide the movement with thousands of bodies in the street protests. These are the bodies of men *and* women who are regulated by a pyramidal structure of control, a Sufi tradition of self-discipline, a long practice of civil disobedience, and a Gramscian understanding of change as intervention in civil society (Darif 1999). In fact, Nadia Yassin, one of the most outspoken women against both the monarchy and liberal feminism, is the daughter of the Supreme Guide of Justice and Spirituality. She was also the first woman to go on trial after her 2004 interview in which she declared that Morocco needs a republic (Bladi Net, 2005)⁸.

The February 20th founding members decided to discuss Justice and Spirituality's admission into the NCS only after the first demonstrations. The "secular" and "civil" identity of the movement needed to be preserved. The Islamists could only join after the movement was

⁸ The controversy can be found at this link: <http://www.bladi.net/forum/45810-fille-cheikh-grand-satan/>

identified as February 20th, an independent youth movement that was “secular, modernist, democratic, and aiming to establish civil institutions and a civil state” as Fatima, an activist from Fes, stated. Only after that could the Islamists join.

The integration of the Islamists into February 20th bears witness to the ability of this movement to embrace all components of the political field while still following the movement’s agenda and goals (see Piccinin 2011). Amina Boughalbi and others claimed that the Islamist participation “enriched the movement by providing opportunities for discussions and networking among secular, leftists, Islamists and women.” As far as gender is concerned, the presence of the Islamists also led to the first debates about gender equality within the movement. Equality could no longer be taken for granted. It had to be renegotiated between them (who?) and their Islamist partners.

Equal division of labor also had to be re-negotiated. Debates about gender equality, and its meaning and importance for the movement, became part of broader deliberations about the political and societal projects to which the movement aspired. Controversies raged over the slogan, “men and women have equal rights,” which was rejected by the Islamists. Compelled to keep equality within the slogan, the Islamists of Justice and Spirituality, subverted the slogan and chanted, “men and women are equal in the struggle.” The Islamists’ subversion of equality compelled February 20th activists to adopt even a bolder understanding of equality extending them to the risky domain of “equal inheritance rights” (interview with Fouad, a member of the NCS).

Interested to learn more about the effects of Islamist participation, I interviewed several women about their experiences. I spoke to a militant in the leftist party al-Talia who is also a feminist activist in the Ligue Democratique des Droits des Femmes (LDDF). She is active in a poor neighborhood in the city of Casablanca. This militant outlined all of the “positive changes” she witnessed in the “attitude” of the Islamist members who were part of her neighborhood committee. In this committee of 26 members, half were women, and, in this activist’s words, the “Islamists got over their initial attitude toward working, meeting or listening to secular women”. She celebrates the fact that the Islamists’ perception of “secular leftist women has totally changed”. “We wanted to make sure they accept parity,” she said. “They had to partner with us. We walked and worked together and this slowly became no issue for them.”

Beyond gender dynamics, a semiotic of colors was also at stake. It points to the ways in which religious affiliations and sexual identities were negotiated during the Islamist participation. The debates that raged over the slogans extended to the colors of the signs. Both the secular and Islamists components of February 20th decided to avoid colors that might point to religious, sexual or political affiliations and subjectivities, which explains the exclusive use of white and black in the signs.

The Islamists’ withdrawal after the November 25th elections is perceived as liberation from this binary of black and white that does not reflect the diversity of the movement and the wide scope of rights, including sexual, for which some of its members stand. As one of my respondents stated, “We were stuck in logic of black and white, now we are colorful.” What is most fascinating about this process of decision-making is its consensual mode. This requires several hours of discussions among members to reach a consensus while at the same time enabling most members to freely express their opinion. Amina Boughalbi and others explained to me how these meetings became an “educational space”. Their male friends, in the struggle, have come to terms with interrupting women during meetings or speaking in authoritative voices to them. The women make sure that their opinion is heard, that they take turns with the men in

directing workshops, using megaphones, moderating the general assemblies and leading demonstrations. The educational spaces that emerged from February 20th seem to be structured around the young women's new subjectivities as political actors and equal partners.

Conclusion

It is too early to draw conclusions about the *work* that these spaces will do to gender relations. I have no evidence to prove that the gender dynamics taking place in those spaces extend beyond them. My point is to show that there is something worth documenting. These spaces are not regulated by funds or membership or bureaucratic authorizations in the way feminist organizations are. Their radicalism stems from their openness, inclusiveness, pluralism, and diversity. Yet overstating the impact of this counter-geography of feminism will downplay the tremendous difficulties that February 20th has in taking roots among its poor and middle class constituencies, not to mention the intellectual class, which is totally dismissive of the movement.

Meanwhile, feminist groups are suffering from major setbacks, notably after the November 25th elections that gave a majority of seats in the Parliament and the government to the Islamists of Justice and Development. In sharp contrast with the parity instituted by the new constitution, the women's presence in the Parliament did not reach 30%. There are now 60 women representatives and 345 men. Additionally, there was a sharp reduction of the women members of the government from seven to one. Bassima al-Haqqawi is the only female Minister. In the current government and heads the Ministry of Social Development, Family and Solidarity. She is one of the most visible, highly respected female members of Justice and Development, and had served for two terms in the Parliament. To most feminist activists, El Haqqawi is another virulent anti-feminist voice in her party. Her appointment raises several questions about how she would lead a Ministry with a long tradition of liberal feminism (see Guessous 2011) and how she would handle the rising issues of abortion rights, early age marriages, and above all, Morocco's reservations on the ratified CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination Against Women

Despite of all these challenges, I would like to argue that we are witnessing an unprecedented horizontal extension and a deepening of the question of social justice now espoused by various communities of women fighting for very specific needs. To make myself clear, the fructification of the feminist quest for equality in the youth movement's demand for social justice have led to the visibility of scattered and much more localized, movements of protests led by women in many poor urban neighborhoods and rural areas.

We have no particular name for these uprisings here and there, but the name of the women who started them. For instance, when we mention the "women of Ben Semime", we mean the protest movement that the women of this rural community have started against the privatization of a local source of water by a French company. When we speak about the "women of Bhalil" we are pointing to the protests staged by the women of this region against their social and economic marginalization. The "women of Ait Abdi" started their movement of protest to break their isolation and claim access to public transportation, roads and hospitals after seeing several women from their communities and surrounding neighborhoods giving birth on the roads. Youtube is crowded with pictures and voices from these systematic and spontaneous protests by women facing situations that push them to act together. According to Khadija Abnaou, a feminist and human rights activist, February 20th has led to the emergence of a new generation of women's leadership, while taking grassroots women, not the elites, to the streets. This is why Amina Bougahlbi considers February 20th as "an educational space." According to

her, not only are the men and the women learning “how to work together, listen to one another and respect each other’s opinion,” but also the movement has helped young women to put the questions of equality and parity into practice in the movement.

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