The Arab Spring and Women's (Cyber)activism: "Fourth Wave Democracy in the Making?" Case Study of Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco

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By Maha Tazi[1]

Abstract

According to Huntington's (1991) theory of "reverse democracy", countries undergoing (or having undergone) a transition to democracy during a wave are always subject to democratic backsliding in the subsequent wave. During the *third wave democratization*, the fall of the Soviet Union and other despotic regimes in Latin America led to the gradual "autocratization" of many of these countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s. More recently, in 2011, the collapse of several authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region underscored important aspects of democratization, a process in which both women and new media technologies played a key role. However, the direct aftermath of the Arab Spring also revealed a significant democratic backsliding with the outbreak of civil and tribal wars in the region, the rise of political Islam to power, and the resulting backlash against women's socio-political and legal rights. Drawing on Huntington's theory of "reverse democracy", I question whether, and to what extent, the Arab Spring could constitute a case of "fourth wave democracy"—especially considering that this most recent wave has been little, if not at all, explored and analysed. To do so, I adopt a feminist perspective that foregrounds the role of gender as the primary focus of my analysis to examine how the Arab Spring exemplified aspects of a "reverse democracy", namely in terms of its impact on women's rights and their resulting social status in the aftermath of the uprisings. I take three countries as case studies: Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Fourth wave democratization, Reverse Democracy, Middle East and North Africa, Authoritarianism, ICTs, Cyberactivism, Cyberfeminism, Arab feminism, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia

Introduction

In *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Huntington (1991) discusses his theory of "third wave democratization", in which he relates the story of democracy's latest recognized wave with the fall of the Soviet Union and several autocratic regimes in Latin America in the early 1990s. His main idea is that countries undergoing or having undergone a transition to democracy during a wave are always subject to democratic backsliding in the period immediately following this wave—a development that he characterizes as "reverse democracy".

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In the context of the third wave, a major backsliding was evident not only in the rise of autocratic regimes in many Eastern European and Latin American countries starting in the mid 1990s', such as in Poland and Honduras, but also in the ensuing "war on terror" following the 9/11 attacks and the 2008 Great Recession. These developments have also significantly impacted women, in terms of their resulting status in the "reverse democracy" phase and undermined their social and political rights. For instance, Lila Abu Lughod (2002) underscores how the United States primarily used a narrative of Muslim women's victimization to justify their 2001 war on terror on Afghanistan. Under the pretext of "saving Muslim women" (p.1) from the shackles of patriarchal Muslim and Arab men, the US intervention sought to liberate local women in Western and imperial terms— that is, without a culturally-sensitive project for women's emancipation. As a result, the intervention only furthered Afghani women's seclusion as a reaction against the US military and cultural invasion.

More recently, the collapse of several authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region in the context of the Arab uprisings of 2011, namely in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, underscored important aspects of democratization; however, the direct aftermath of the Arab Spring has also revealed a significant backlash against both democratic development and women's rights in the region. In fact, a few months after the apparent beginning of the democratic transitions, most of the Arab political openings closed, thereby causing an inevitable pull-back that was mainly noticeable in the rise of Islamist parties to power and the subsequent series of political, social, and humanitarian crises that are currently devastating the region, including the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars, the Libyan tribal war, and the refugee crises that spread to the European continent and beyond. Moreover, Arab women were also deliberately excluded from political participation and decision-making posts in the aftermath of the revolutions despite playing leading roles in the mobilization, documentation, and cultural dissemination phases of the uprisings (Hosni, 2017; Sadiqi, 2016). Whereas such developments could hint at a potential "fourth wave democratization" in the Arab region according to Huntington's (1991) theorization that any democratic development is usually followed by a period of democratic backsliding, this new wave has been little, if at all, explored and analysed.

Therefore, in this article, I adopt a feminist perspective that foregrounds the role of gender as the primary focus of analysis in order to examine whether the Arab Spring and its aftermath could be theorized as the "fourth wave of democracy", namely in terms of its impact on women's rights and their resulting social status in the aftermath of the series of revolutions. To do so, I take three countries as case studies: Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco. In fact, Sadiqi (2016) discusses several patterns and similarities between these three countries in terms of the protestors' intense reliance on digital technologies to rally support and document the revolutions and the (gender) paradox between women's high mobilization in the series of uprisings and their blatant exclusion from state-building efforts in post-revolutionary Arab states.

My argument in this paper is twofold: First, by looking at the interplay between gender and the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), I argue that digital technologies played a key role in empowering women to claim equal access to the public sphere during the initial "democratic transition" phase that led to the collapse (or reform) of various authoritarian regimes across the region between 2010 and 2011. This phase was characterized by a large presence of women during the street protests and an intense reliance on new media technologies to document the progress of the revolutions. However, a significant backlash against women's secured gains during this first period was evident in the direct aftermath of the uprisings, namely between 2011 and 2012, with the rise of various Islamist parties to power that were

299

antagonistic to women's legal and socio-political rights and their continued presence in the public sphere, thereby revealing aspects of a "reverse (feminist) democracy" in the region. Finally, the last part of this article focuses on some of the most recent developments that marked the period from 2013 to 2016, such as the improvement of women's legal rights, political participation and social status and the surge of women's creative subaltern counter publics to contest the ongoing social and gender inequalities in their countries in the period following this initial backlash. Such recent developments underscore the cyclical nature and the continuous "wave" pattern of democratic development that both confirms and limits Huntington's theory.

Waves of Democracy: From Huntington's Three First Waves to the Arab Spring
Huntington's Three Waves of Democracy

In order to understand the potentially emerging "fourth wave democracy" in its full complexity and implications, it is necessary to go back to previous waves as described by Huntington in his seminal work *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. First and foremost, the foundation for Huntington (1991)'s meaning of democracy is derived from Dahl (1971)'s classic definition of democracy as a "polyarchy", that is a form of government in which power is invested in many individuals at the same time and where political participation and contestation are essential constitutive elements. Huntington's assessment of democracy is also based on electoral competition and widespread voting participation, as well as on the institutionalization of checks and balances and the limitations on political power (Huntington, 1991, p. 7–13). The main idea of Huntington's (1991) book is that countries undergoing or having undergone a transition to democracy during a wave are always subject to democratic backsliding. In other words, whenever there is a move toward democracy, such a transition is almost systematically followed by a "reverse move".

The first wave of democracy began in the early 19th century in the United States with the so-called Jacksonian democracy, which was a first attempt to limit slavery in the country and grant suffrage to the majority of white males regardless of property ownership and tax payment. At its peak, this first wave witnessed the rise of 29 democracies, mainly in the Western world—that is, in Western Europe and North America. However, first wave democracy started to fade out when Mussolini rose to power in Italy in 1922, followed by Hitler in 1933 in Germany. The decline of the first wave lasted from 1922 until 1942, during which the number of democracies in the world dropped to a mere 12 (Huntington, 1991). The second wave of democracy began in 1946, following the Allied victory in World War II, and lasted for about 20 years, with a steady increase of democracies in the Western (and other parts) of the world before starting to decline in 1962 at the peak of the Cuba missiles crisis, during which the total number of democracies dropped from 36 to 30 worldwide between 1962 and the mid-1970s (Ibid.).

Finally, the third wave began in 1974 with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, also referred to as the 25th of April, a military coup that overthrew the authoritarian regime of the Estado Novo. The number of countries that transitioned towards a democratic system during this wave amounted roughly to 100 democracies, which was a considerable increase in just a few decades. It included, among others, the historic democratic transitions in Latin America during the 1980s, in Asian Pacific countries from 1986 to 1988- including the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan-, in Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in sub-Saharan Africa beginning in 1989. However, some backsliding was evident in the period immediately following the onset of the "war on terror" after the September 11, 2001 attacks; moreover, after the Great

Recession of 2008, a number of other countries slowly backslided from democracy including Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines, Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Honduras, and the Maldives.

Although the notion of "waves of democracy" is widely accepted, their existence is contested by several scholars such as Przeworski et al. (2000) and Doorenspleet (2000b). Their criticism relates to the fact that Huntington's waves classification mostly relies on a measure based on the percentage of states that were democratic at a historical point in time. However, the number of states in the global system itself increased dramatically during Huntington's period of analysis, which was characterized by a series of decolonization processes. The "third wave" was, in this sense, not so much an exceptional case that witnessed the rise of numerous (un)democratic states as it witnessed merely the rise of nation-states in a "post-colonial" global world. Przeworski et al. (2000) also found that transitions between democracies and autocracies in the 1950–1990 period occurred mostly in Latin America, and that the rest of the world was relatively stable during this period, thereby undermining Huntington's theory of "reverse democracy" in the context of the second and third wave democratization. Finally, Huntington's classification can also be critiqued for being overtly Eurocentric and pro-Western. For instance, from a feminist critique standpoint, Switzerland, which is typically included as part of the first wave, did not grant women the right to vote until 1971, in the context of democracy's third wave only.

Fourth Wave Democracy: On the Origins of Women's Activism in the Region and the Core Role of CyberActivism during the Arab Spring

In December 2010, the self-burning of Mohamed Bouazizi in Sidi Bouzid, a Tunisian street vendor who was repeatedly harassed and humiliated by the local authorities in his hometown, arguably marked the start of the Tunisian revolution and the beginning of the events now known as "the Arab Spring." The Arab Spring was characterized by a series of uprisings that sparked across the MENA region to contest and topple several autocratic regimes through both violent and non-violent protests, coups, and demonstrations. The uprisings led to the fall of several dictatorships including former Tunisian president Ben Ali's regime (on January 14th, 2011), ex-Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's system (on February 11th, 2011), and former Libyan ruler Gadhafi's military regime (on October 20th, 2011). In this context, Howard and Husain (2014) argue that new digital technologies played a key role in the rise of both democratic consciousness and organizing.

Democratization movements in the MENA region had existed long before mobile phones and the Internet came to these countries during the long years of struggle against colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century and, subsequently, when a few authoritarian regimes rose to prominence in newly-independent Arab states during the second half of the century. One example includes the struggle of the Moroccan Left and the *Ila-al Amam* movement against late King Hassan II's autocratic regime during the infamous *Years of Lead* that marked Morocco between the 1960s and the 1980s. Similarly, women's activism in the region precedes the digital revolution and the Arab Spring and can be traced back at least to the early twentieth century where Arab women played active roles in their countries' independence movements. For instance, Huda Sharaawi was both a feminist and an anti-colonial activist and icon during the 1919 Egyptian Revolution against British rule (Sadiqi, 2016). The birth of the *Egyptian Feminist Union* at the home Huda Sharaawi in 1923 officially marked the scission between the nationalist movement and the feminist movement in post-independent Egypt in a context where women activists were denied political and social rights in the wake of the revolution. Similarly, Algerian women also played leading roles in the 1954-1962 bloody war of independence against the French through what cooke

301

(2016) describes as "stratégie-femme" (p.32) (i.e., women's resistance tactics of smuggling weapons, hiding dissidents in their homes, and delivering important messages). However, despite such overwhelming contributions to the nationalist struggle, Algerian women only constituted they 1% of the national assembly in post-independence Algeria (cooke, 2016). Finally, during the 1912-1956 French Protectorate in Morocco, women were also active on two fronts: in the political struggle for national independence and in societal debates to improve their access to education and schooling in order to put an end to women's seclusion in the private sphere (Yachoulti, 2015). One of the scarce figures of feminist activism back then was Malika Al Fassi, the daughter of the founder of the Independence Party, Abbas Al Fassi, who was also one of the founding figures of the *Akhawat Al Safa* in 1944, the first association to openly advocate a feminist agenda in Morocco through their demands to abolish polygamy and institutionalize women's formal education (Ennaji, 2016).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the advent of new media technologies allowed Arab groups with progressive [democratic and feminist] ideas "to build extensive networks, creat social capital, and organize political action" (Howard & Husain, p.18). In fact, in a region like the Middle East where traditional media are still subject to massive state control and censorship, digital technologies act as alternative media for dissenting and opposing voices, where the free flow of information becomes a source of power that enables "political contests to take place over the aspirations, values, and imaginations of people" (Gheytanchi and Moghadam 2014, p. 4). In the context of the Arab Spring, digital media served as "an 'information equalizer', allowing for both the telling of compelling stories and the management of all the small communications and logistics tasks that must happen in concert if an uprising is to succeed" (Howard & Husain, p.18).

Howard and Husain (2013) identify five phases to the story of digital media and the Arab Spring. First, the preparation phase where the ICTs have enabled social activists to connect with one another years prior to the beginning of the Arab Spring in order to build solidarity around shared grievances and identify collective political goals starting in the early 2000s. Second, the ignition phase where digital technologies allowed activists to capitalize on an isolated incident, such as the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia, a blogger in Egypt or a single mother in Morocco, which was deliberately ignored by the mainstream state-controlled media in order to enrage the public. Third, the street protests phase in which activists were able to organize and coordinate the series of offline demonstrations digitally. Fourth, the international buy-in phase where protesters mobilized international support, including global diasporas, overseas agencies and governments, through the documentation of the uprisings and the sharing of stories of regime abuse on various online platforms. Finally, Arab activists also strongly relied on the ICTs during the climax state phase in order to document the gains secured or the backlash incurred in the aftermath of the uprisings, in a context where their demands were either met by their governments or faced a protracted stalemate as it was evident in subsequent cases of civil wars.

In Tunisia, digital technologies played a key role during the ignition phase of the revolution. In the early days of the Jasmine revolution, the media blackout around the tragic death of Mohamed Bouazizi in mainstream news media and the wide circulation of photos and videos of his plight in the hospital prior to his death on various social media sites sparked the first series of protests in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010 which eventually led to the start of the Tunisian revolution (Ryan, 2011). Similarly, in the context of the Egyptian Spring, a Facebook-led campaign to memorialize a murdered blogger, Khalid Said, who had been beaten to death by the Egyptian police, converted anti-Mubarak sentiment to general civil disobedience and played a crucial role in both the street protests and the international buy-in phases of the Egyptian

revolution. In 2011, images of the young blogger's dead body which were widely shared on social media using mobile phones led to the surge of indignation and popular discontent throughout the country and beyond (Howard & Husain, 2013). Likewise, inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, young Moroccan activists created an online digital campaign consisting of a series of videos to voice their dissatisfaction with the monarchy's top-down approach and called for a national march in all major cities, which was at the origin of the so-called February 20th Movement (20-FMV) of the "Moroccan Spring" (Abadi, 2014). As Daadaoui (2017) pertinently points out: "The movement's undeniable feature was that it was born out of several tech savvy youth activists using the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube". However, while the series of uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia eventually led to the collapse of Mubarak and Ben Ali's regimes in 2011, Moroccan activists did not demand a change of regime but called, instead, for a "genuine" constitutional monarchy and the limitations of the King's political prerogatives, which resulted in the adoption of a reformed constitution in July 2011 (Boutkhil 2016; Abadi, 2014). In this context, digital technologies continued to play an important role in the climax state phase of the Moroccan Spring in order to document the gains (or lack thereof) of the 20-FMV. In fact, many Moroccan activists expressed their discontentment with the outcomes of the local revolutionary movement, through several blogs such as "Mamfakinch" and "Avaaz", which they perceive has been effectively co-opted by the regime given that the newly adopted constitution failed to destabilize the status-quo and meet the protestors' demands on the long run (Daadaoui 2017; Iddins, 2018).

Therefore, during the series of uprisings that characterized the Arab Spring, digital technologies have allowed activists to create a "pressure from below" to destabilize the traditional hierarchies of power (Al Rawi 2014, p. 1149), and paved the way for initial democratic transitions that were evident in either the toppling of authoritarian regimes—such as in Egypt and Tunisia— or in the adoption of constitutional reforms, as it was evident in the case of Morocco. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that although new media technologies played a key role in the democratization movements of the Arab uprisings, several autocratic regimes were also able to instrumentalize new technologies and social media platforms to repress and track down activists' movements. Cases in point, the Egyptian security services used Facebook and Twitter as a major source of information in order to anticipate the movement of activists during the uprisings, and on several occasions in 2011, the Tunisian government attempted to ban Social Networking Sites (SNSs) to stop the Jasmine revolution (Freedom House Report, 2012; Howard & Husain, 2013).

Fourth Wave Democratization (2010-2011): Cyberfeminism and Women's Empowerment during the Arab Spring Uprisings
On the Core Role of Cyberfeminism during the Arab Spring

As mentioned previously, Middle Eastern women's activism precedes the Arab Spring and the digital revolution and can be traced back to the early years of the twentieth century with the rise of anti-colonial movements in which women played a central role. Recent events have spurred the ideal conditions for the rebirth of Arab women's activism, where their contributions were once again needed, this time to put an end -not to colonial rule but- to authoritarian regimes throughout the region in the context of the "Arab Spring". Arab women played a key role in important stages of the 2010-2011 uprisings, which was particularly empowering for them in so far as their activism resulted in a greater geographic mobility, better access to the public sphere, and improved social status. This suggests that the Arab Spring exemplified, initially, an important democratic development in terms of gender equality. In fact, thanks to the advantages of digital technologies,

including anonymity, privacy, affordance, and (relative) accessibility, women of all social classes were able to contribute significantly to the Arab Spring revolutions (Gheytanchi & Moghadam, 2014). Women activists were particularly active at three important stages of the uprisings, including during the mobilization, the documentation, and the cultural dissemination phases (Hosni, 2017).

During the first phase, Egyptian women bloggers played a leading role in mobilizing mass demonstrations of women and girls during the uprisings, which reflected both their dissatisfaction with their socio-political status in the Egyptian society and their opposition to Mubarak's despotic regime (Naber, 2011). Asmaa Mahfouz, a 25-year-old woman, called for massive participation in the January 25 demonstrations and the abandonment of chauvinist and misogynist attitudes through her viral YouTube video that launched the first series of protests in Egypt; she stated the following:

> "Whoever says women shouldn't go to the protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on Jan 25. I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square and will stand by myself and hold up a banner so that people may have some honor" (Bernard, Bessis & Cherif 2012, p. 16).

In Tunisia, Lina Ben Mhenni's blog ATunisiangirl.blogpost.com also played a key role in the start of the protests. In January 2011, Lina covered the early weeks of the Jasmine Revolution after Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire and documented the news of his tragic death that was absent from mainstream media news outlets, thereby sparking national indignation that led people to come down onto the streets in protest (Ryan, 2011). Finally, in Morocco, women played a particularly important role in the mobilization phase of the protests; 14 activists featured in the 20-FMV's YouTube videos announcing the creation of the movement were young women. In fact, the first campaign opens with a young woman, Amina Boulghabi, a founding member of the 20-FMV, and ends with a much older woman who spoke in Darija, the Moroccan dialect. Telling her personal story with the Moroccan regime's corruption and police violence and incarnating the persona of the Moroccan grandmother who has faced regime abuse her entire life, the older woman called for the right to protest and others to join the movement (Abadi, 2014). In addition, Moroccan women's other various Facebook and Twitter posts also played a role in initiating the demonstrations of the movement and paved the way for the rise of virtual activism (Yachoulti, 2015).

During the second phase of the documentation of the uprisings, while Egyptian women actively protested and demonstrated in masses alongside their male counterparts in Tahrir square (Gheytanchi & Moghadam, 2014), Tunisian women's platforms served as a major source of information to document the series of uprisings and call for national and international support, where the protests were recorded live on cell phone cameras and uploaded onto various social networking sites. For instance, content from Atunisiangirl.blogspot.com was directly used by *Al Jazeera* for international news coverage, in which the woman activist denounced several human rights violations committed against non-violent protesters by official authorities during the uprisings (Hosni, 2017). Moroccan women were also particularly active during the documentation and coordination phase of the protests. They helped create several Facebook group pages that were affiliated with the 20-FMV's page, and they urged their Moroccan counterparts to take part in the protests while keeping them informed about the dates and locations of the movement's meetings and rallies (Yachoulti, 2015). Various websites such as "mamfakinch.com" (we will never give

up) and "lakome.com" (To You) allowed Moroccan women activists to share regular updates and information about the movement's achievements (Iddins 2018). More importantly, Moroccan women served as spokespersons of the 20-FMV's movement during the series of protests; they also took to the front lines and confronted security forces, protecting their male counterparts from police brutality (Yachoulti, 2015). Hasna, another female activist in the movement, reported her experience during the 20-FMV's protests: "We walked side by side with men. Some women were even more courageous than men, they had shown greater audacity and zeal than that shown by men" (Ibid., 904).

Finally, during the cultural dissemination phase, Moroccan, Tunisian, and Egyptian women activists were able to promote a culture of active citizenry and move from critiquing to contributing to social justice and the development of their societies (Hosni, 2017). In Egypt, women activists of the *Women on Walls* graffiti movement have been resorting to creativity as a basic revolutionary tool during the series of protests to paint Cairo's walls and articulate their vision of an ideal society-one that is free of police abuse, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence (cooke, 2016). In Tunisia, Lina Ben Mhenni launched her initiative "Books to Prisons" campaign for political prisoners who would go on hunger strikes to claim their right to read in Tunisian prisons and promote a culture of human rights through her blog (Hosni, 2017). Finally, in Morocco, women's rights organizations seized the momentum created by the 20-FVM to create a new coalition under the name the "Spring of Dignity" in 2013 following the tragic suicide of a teenager who was forced to marry her rapist in order to demand the official criminalization of domestic violence and rape (Sadiqi, 2016; Yachoulti, 2015). Therefore, Arab women have played a significant role in their countries' democratic transitions during the series of uprisings, where women's movements and broader social movements have rather become "intertwined social phenomenon" (Gheytanchi & Moghadam, 2014, p. 2). In fact, women's activism reflected their discontent with both their social status and the governments in place and contributed to press for gender-sensitive reforms and political change, concomitantly.

The Arab Spring: Women's Empowerment and Fourth Wave Democratization

Through their continuous reliance and mobilization of new media technologies, Arab women's active participation in the series of uprisings contributed to their temporary empowerment, namely in terms of increased geographic mobility, access to the public sphere and the development of a transnational feminist network of women's solidarity. In Egypt, women's contributions to the uprisings during which they marched alongside men was particularly empowering for them, as they were never involved in a community with equal rights before (Gheytanchi & Moghadam, 2014). In fact, women's invasion of Tahrir Square during the series of uprisings could be seen as a political act and a way of 'doing politics' in itself, given that the public sphere in Egypt is traditionally seen as the sole domain of men, and that women are strongly encouraged to remain in the confines of the private sphere. Therefore, in 2011, the 18 days of protests in Tahrir Square constituted a "time out of time" and a "rupture" from the status quo, where gender segregation is otherwise very much prevalent, and women are relatively invisible in the public sphere (Wahba, 2016, p.67). In this sense, Egyptian women's (cyber)activism has also contributed to bridge the public/private and men/women dichotomy that is used to characterize Arab women in several secularization theories (Hosni, 2017, p.5). Moreover, the Egyptian revolution witnessed the development of new forms of solidarity between women from various religious backgrounds—including Muslims and Christians—and social classes, where upper,

middle and lower class women came together under the common objective of "Defying the Regime, Defying Patriarchy" (Wahba, 2016, p.67).

In Tunisia, the women's empowerment aspect was evident in the leadership positions that women assumed during the Jasmine revolution. For instance, Lina Ben Mhenni became a leading figure in citizen journalism through the role of her trilingual blog in which she documented the progress of the Tunisian revolution at local, regional, and international levels. This was facilitated by her presence on the ground as she filmed and recorded the protests live despite the government's multiple intimidation attempts to block and censor content on her blog (Hosni, 2017). Speaking about the role of the Tunisian revolution in setting a model of transnational solidarity as well as a revolutionary ideal for other insurgent Arab states to follow, Yahyaoui, one of the leading Tunisian activists, reported: "We have this huge responsibility to show to the world, and to the Arab world, that we can succeed. Even if we are focusing on Tunisia, we are doing it for the entire region" (Hosni 2017, p. 15).

Finally, the Moroccan February 20th movement also exemplified an important women's empowerment aspect through the creation of a feminist sub-branch of the movement, the so-called *"Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy"* (Yachoulti, 2015). Founded in March 2011, the aim of the coalition was to integrate a gender-sensitive aspect to the Moroccan Spring, and particularly to the new envisioned constitution. Therefore, one of the earliest achievements of this feminist coalition was the development of a memorandum reflecting women's various demands, their vision of the new constitution, and their role in the Moroccan society. The memorandum particularly emphasized the principles of parity and the constitutionalizing of women's gains and rights in order to promote and guarantee equal political, economic, social, cultural, and civil rights for men and women (Yachoulti, 2015). The 20-FMV also led to the development of a new consciousness of feminist activism among the younger generation of Moroccan women, where women from all walks of life, including social classes, ideologies and political affiliations, came together under the same unifying movement and its feminist sub-branch (Sadiqi, 2016). In this sense, the *"Feminist Spring for Equality and Democracy"* deployed a gender-sensitive approach to push for social change, placing gender equality at the center of a larger discussion of Moroccan citizenry and constitutional reforms. Ultimately, in terms of transnational solidarity, the feminist coalition of the "Moroccan Spring" did not limit itself to acting at the local level but also sought to develop coalitions at the MENA region level in order to "unify women of the region against dictatorship, inequality, and marginalization" (Yachoulti, 2015, p. 905).

As a consequence, Al Rawi (2014) sheds light on the collective identity and character that is forged through Arab women's (online) movements to challenge gender inequality and unite several men and women activists across Arab states. Likewise, Gheytanchi & Moghadam (2014) underscore how this new transnational and electronic communicative sphere has facilitated the emergence of a "new Arab public sphere" and a "distinct community" within the Arab world today. In fact, Arab women's active roles during the series of uprisings have contributed to deconstructing the perception of Arab women as powerless, invisible, voiceless, and victims (Abadi, 2014). Through their strategic use of digital technologies, Egyptian, Moroccan, and Tunisian women were able to contribute concomitantly to the struggle against authoritarianism and gender inequality, which, in turn, was particularly empowering for them in terms of access to the public sphere and improved social status to promote a feminist agenda. Foregrounding gender and the role of new media technologies, the Arab Spring has, in this sense, materialized as a case of fourth wave democracy. However, as cooke (2016) pertinently points out:

> "In revolutions, as in wars, norms and values are suspended 'for the duration' in order to accommodate necessary breaches of what is normally considered appropriate. It also shows that when the crisis is over, the cultural police try to restore traditional gender norms in an attempt to 'squeeze the genie back into the lamp.'" (p.31).

Likewise, a parallel can be drawn between Arab women's active contributions to the Arab Spring and their resulting social status in the period directly following the uprisings.

Fourth Wave "Reverse Democracy" (2011-2012): The Backlash against Women's Rights in the Aftermath of the Arab Spring
The Rise of Political Islam and the Legal Backlash against Women's Rights

Whereas women have occupied a center stage in the so-called Arab Spring revolutions, their active contributions have not been effectively translated into egalitarian and progressive legislations that guarantee their rights as equal citizens and encourage their political representation and labor participation in the aftermath of those revolutions (Sadiqi, 2016). The first backlash against women's rights materialized in terms of the rise of Islamist parties to power for the first time in the history of many Arab states, which were very much antagonistic towards women's socio-political and legal rights. In Tunisia, the rise of political Islam to power culminated with the election of Ennahda in the aftermath of the Jasmine revolution in 2011. Because of its conservative agenda, the party constituted a direct threat to women's rights in several respects, especially with regards to the gains made in the 1956 Tunisian Personal Status Code under Bourguiba (Hamza, 2016). Cases in point, in 2012, article 28 of the newly adopted constitution under Ennahda foregrounded complementary—not equal—roles for men and women in the Tunisian society (Arfaoui, 2016).

In Egypt, such a "gender paradox" was also evident in the new constitution that was adopted under Morsi's post-revolutionary Islamist government in 2012, which not only re-emphasized women's family and reproductive roles, but also foregrounded the role of religion and Shari'a in regulating all aspects of their lives (McLarney, 2016). Further, with an overtly Islamist-dominated committee, the new constitution adopted a conservative stance against women's divorce and custody rights and the appointment of women's judges; as a result, an Egyptian female deputy president of the Constitutional Court lost her position following the adoption of the new constitution (Khattab, 2016). Because of its pro-child marriage stance, the 2012 constitution also violated many of CEDAW's fundamental principles--i.e. the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (Khattab, 2016).

In 2011, Morocco also witnessed the rise of its first Islamist democratically elected party since the country's accession to independence in 1956, which quickly revealed its anti-feminist agenda by rejecting the *Government Agenda for Equality 2011–2015* (Boutkhil, 2016). In addition, although article 19 of the newly adopted constitution in July 2011 stipulates several advances for women's rights, it also highlighted an important limitation: that such developments can only take place "with [the] respect for [...] the constants and of the laws of the Kingdom" (Ibid., p. 254), thereby re-emphasizing the primacy of monarchy, tradition, and religion over women's rights in the country. In this context, Boutkhil (2016) speaks about "feminine liminal citizenship" to characterize the status of women in post-Arab Spring Morocco "whereby their full citizenship is

307

not attained or sometimes denied despite its being fully recognized in the new constitution" (p. 251).

Arab Women's Lack of Political Representation in the Aftermath of the Uprisings

In addition, the Arab Spring has also contributed a backlash against women's political rights in terms of their access to decision-making. This was evident in women's lower levels of representation in political offices directly following the uprisings. In Egypt, women only made up 25% of the elected councils and 2% of the newly constituted parliament in 2011, compared to 12% (69 seats in parliament) before the outbreak of the uprisings under Mubarak's regime (Khattab, 2016). Likewise, in Tunisia, women's political representation under the newly formed government of Ennahda was even lower than under Ben Ali's regime; while women made up 27% of parliamentarians in 2009, at a time when the government also had 4 women ministers, in April 2011, Tunisian women were only granted 2 out of 31 ministries and made up less than half of the members of the new transitional body (Hamza, 2016). They also only accounted for 23% of the members of the new parliament, which amounted to a total of 49 seats, out of which 43 were granted to women from the Ennahda Islamist party (Hamza, 2016). In fact, elected Tunisian women were instrumentalized as political tools by Ennahda to display and boast gender parity without them having the necessary gender-sensitive background to advocate for women's rights effectively (Ibid.). In Morocco, the appointment of only one female *Minister of Social and Family Affairs* under the first Islamist-led government in 2011, compared to 6 women before the outbreak of the Feb 20th movement, and its reluctance to implement the gender parity provisions of the new constitution, were but two of the new alarming examples that have severely disappointed Moroccan women in the direct aftermath of the local reformist movement (Yachoulti, 2015; Ennaji, 2016).

The Rise of New Forms of Violence against Women in the Post-Arab Spring Context

Another aspect of the backlash against women's rights in the period directly following the uprisings was the rise of new forms of violence against them. In Egypt, several authors point out that a "counterrevolution" took place in post-revolutionary Egypt where women's continued protests to advocate for a gender-sensitive agenda under the newly formed Islamist government were met with unprecedented levels of government violence and brutality including virginity testing, gang rapes, police beatings, sexual harassment, and systemic violence against women protesters (Wahba, 2016). An emblematic figure of the regime's brutality against women is a police officer dragging a topless woman, with what would become an iconic blue bra, in Egypt (cooke, 2016). Other forms of violence included the restoration of the long-dated practice of Female Genital Multilation (FGM) by Morsi's government in 2012, which was a direct backlash against the anti-FGM movement prior to 2010 and a violation of another of CEDAW's fundamental principles (Khattab, 2016; McLarney, 2016). Likewise, in Tunisia, the newly formed government in 2011 not only denies rights to children born out of wedlock, it also encourages and legitimizes violence against women including sexual harassment and the repression and intimidation of women's initiatives calling for gender justice and equal rights (Hamza, 2016). In 2012, a Tunisian woman was charged with indecency after being raped on the streets (Ennaji 2016). During the same year, activist Lina Ben Mhenni was assaulted and tortured by the police for protesting article 28 of the new constitution which emphasized complementary roles for men and women in Tunisian society (Errazzouki, 2012).

Similarly, many Moroccan women activists during the Feb 20th movement reported that they received threats and were met with strong opposition because of their activism; some confessed receiving threatening messages via Facebook and phone calls. Kamilia Raouyane, an intern at the *Moroccan Association of Human Rights*, said that she received calls at 3 a.m.—someone calling her a whore and threatening sexual violence—at the very start of the movement. Other activists reported being strongly discouraged by their families to partake in the protests for risking being jailed and tortured by the police (Yachoulti, 2015).

Therefore, by foregrounding gender equality as the focus of my analysis, the aftermath of the Arab Spring was a clear case of "reverse democracy" in terms of the legal, political, and social backlashes against women's rights where their active contributions to the series of uprisings were met with unprecedented levels of violence, repression, exclusion, and marginalization in the post-revolutionary contexts between 2011 and 2012. However, more recent developments in the MENA region, beginning in 2013 onwards, strongly signal the integration of a more gender-sensitive approach and a pro-women's rights agenda.

Fourth Wave "Democratization in the Making" (2013-2016): Capitalizing on Women's Gains in the Post-Revolutionary Contexts
"Pro-Gender Equality" Politico-Legal Developments: The Reform of the Constitutions

In this context, one of the major developments concerned the revision of the constitutions that were adopted in the period directly following the revolutions in order to guarantee better rights for women. In 2014, a new constitution in Egypt adopted a rather liberal stance under Al-Sissi's "secular" regime, following the overthrow of Morsi's Islamist rule, and emphasized the role of the state in guaranteeing gender equality in all aspects of social life, including in high-level management positions, in political offices, in the judiciary, and in parliament; it also widely condemned the widespread social plague of domestic violence (Mclarney, 2016). Echoing these reforms, 89 women were elected following the 2014 parliamentary elections, compared to less than 2 percent during the Islamist-led parliament of 2012 (Ibid.). However, the notion of complementary roles between men and women in the family, which implies a sexual contract, was not completely abandoned in the reformed constitution, and the Sharia—or Islamic family law—was still defined as the primary source of legislation under Al-Sissi's new military dictatorship (Khattab, 2016).

Likewise, in January 2014, a new constitution that strongly protects women's rights was voted in Tunisia. Article 46 particularly insists on the provision of equal opportunities for men and women to have access to all levels of responsibility and in all domains. It also emphasizes gender parity in elected assemblies, the eradication of gender-based violence, and the ratification of the CEDAW without any reservations (Hamza, 2016). As a consequence of the implementation of the parity law, the 2014 elections witnessed a stark increase in female heads of legislative lists compared to 2011, in addition to the increase in both women's voting and nominations in political constituencies and as presidential candidates, which signals Tunisian women's growing political participation and representation (Arfaoui, 2016).

Similarly, in 2013, the Moroccan government adopted the *National Charter to Reform the Justice System*, which centers women as their target priority, as well as the *National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women* that criminalizes sexual harassment (Elattir, El Allame & Tihm, 2016). On January 23, 2014, thanks to the concerted efforts of women's rights organizations within the framework of the "Spring of Dignity", the revision of Article 475 of the Penal Code led to the

abolition of the archaic law that allows rapists to escape prosecution by marrying their victims, following the tragic suicide of Amina Filali, a 16-year-old girl who swallowed rat poison after being forced to marry her rapist (Boutkhil, 2016; Iddins, 2018). Finally, the adoption of the *Government Plan for Equality 'ICRAM' 2012-2016* aimed to further institutionalize parity and achieve a set of reforms touching upon women's social status and access to the public sphere in Morocco including in the Family Code, the Criminal Code, the Labor Code, the Nationality Code, the Election Code, and the Collective Charter (Yachoulti, 2015). These changes were adopted thanks to the continued (transnational) efforts of individual women activists and women's NGOs in the post-revolutionary context to promote gender equality and social justice concomitantly, such as the Moroccan feminist coalition of the "Spring of Dignity" and others that will be discussed in the following section. These women's organizations put increasing pressure on the newly elected government to institutionalize gender equality in post-Arab Spring states to both guarantee their legitimacy and acknowledge women's active contributions to the series of uprisings.

The Surge of Women's NGOs and the Rise of Subaltern Counter-publics to Advocate for Social Justice

In fact, another important development which signals recent major advances in Arab women's rights following the backlash against their rights in the period following the uprisings is the surge of women-led (individual and collective) initiatives that advocate for social justice. In post-revolutionary Egypt, women artist-activists are currently resorting to creative disobedience (i.e. art activism) as a basic revolutionary tool to protest ongoing gender and social inequalities in their country (Badran, 2016). In this context, Wahba (2016) discusses the rise of "subaltern counter-publics" to characterize the new spheres that are currently created by Egyptian women who are excluded from the public sphere. Along with the development of several street theater initiatives led by women—such as *El-Batt El-Eswed* (The Odd Ducks), a theatre collective founded in 2013 to promote feminist storytelling—graffiti art continues to rise to prominence from the time of the uprisings to share Egyptian women's painful stories and give them greater visibility in the public sphere (cook, 2016; El Nossery, 2016). For instance, the famous "Don't touch or castration awaits you" graffiti denounces the widespread sexual assaults, virginity testing, and sexual harassment of women in post-revolutionary Egypt. In this case, graffiti symbolizes a form of resistance and activism, as well as a form of talking back to and subversion of dominant power (Wahba, 2016). Such developments can, in fact, be paralleled with Marwan Kraidy's (2016) concept of revolutionary creative labor during the Arab Spring which he characterizes as "artful dissent".

Another example of the development of those subaltern counter-publics in post-revolutionary Arab states is the organization by the Moroccan Feb 20th movement of a performative act in front of the Rabat parliament until the title of "*Freeze for Democracy*" in response to the government's allegations that the movement has promoted sheer violence and disunity in the country since its outbreak. Young female and male activists used their bodies to 'perform' their message with utter silence and peace, thereby providing a counter-narrative to the government's false accusations of brutality and chaos (Abadi, 2014, p.18). Their main message was that democracy, like their bodies, was frozen both in time and in space. In addition, Sadiqi (2016) talks about the emergence of an ideological center following the events of February 20th in Morocco that caters to women's voices and defies the classical dichotomy between secularists and Islamists, mainly through the activist role of several women's NGOs in the country. She posits

310

that this movement highlights the possibility of remedying the longstanding dichotomy between the modernists and the traditionalists that was inherited from colonial time in Morocco (i.e.1940s).

Similarly, a notable development in post-revolutionary Tunisia is the emergence of women's poetry in the Tunisian Arabic dialect that tells women's stories of the revolution and the backlash against their rights (Labidi, 2016). The objective of such initiatives is to deplore the prevailing chauvinist social and cultural norms in the region and alter the social perceptions of women. Another development also includes the rise of prominent women cartoonists through the *Union of Cartoon and Comic Strip Artists* who mix public humor with critique of authority in order to parallel Ben Ali's tyrannical rule with that of the newly elected Ennahda (Labidi, 2016). Ultimately, the surge of women's NGOs and grassroots organizations in Tunisia contributes significantly to such democracy-building efforts. Over the past few years, there has been an increasingly important role of civil society in post-revolutionary Tunisia through NGOs such as *l'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates* and the *Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développemen*t, as well as an increasing number of female candidates in National Constituent Assembly elections which promote a more gender-sensitive approach in Tunisian politics and policy-making (Hamza, 2016).

Conclusion

Drawing on Huntington's concept of "waves of democratization" and adopting essentially a feminist perspective, this article aimed to explore and assess the extent to which Huntington's model applied to the case of the Arab Spring. My objective was to examine whether the Arab Spring could be theorized as a case of "fourth wave democracy" by paying close attention to women's roles during the series of uprisings and their resulting social statuses in each of Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia. The research has revealed that the Arab uprisings did, in fact, exemplify important features of a "wave of democratization" as theorized by Huntington (1991) in so far as they resulted in an initial democratic transition during the first phase. During the series of uprisings (2010-2011), Moroccan, Tunisian, and Egyptian women activists have been able to contribute effectively to the struggle against authoritarianism and gender inequality thanks to their tactical use of digital technologies, which, in turn, resulted in their direct empowerment in terms of increased geographic mobility, access to the public sphere, and improved social status.

On the other hand, as Huntington's theory suggests that whenever there is a move toward democracy, the transition is usually followed by a reverse move, the Arab Spring also validates the assumption with regards to women's rights and, in this sense, can be characterized as a case of "reverse democracy". In fact, whereas women actively contributed to the series of uprisings through the creation of a transnational movement that resulted in their "temporary" empowerment, the period directly following the uprisings (2011-2012) witnessed a severe deterioration of women's social status, in light of the rise of political Islam to power, the limitations on women's political participation, the backlash against their legal rights and fundamental CEDAW principles, and, finally, the rise of extreme forms of violence against them.

However, in light of more recent developments beginning in 2013 onwards, including the revision of the newly adopted constitutions to integrate gender parity and a gender-sensitive agenda, the surge of women's NGOs in the region and the rise of women's (creative) subaltern counter-publics, Arab women have been able to significantly advance their rights during the last few years (2013-2016) and capitalize on their gains in the post-revolutionary contexts. This last development could signal a limitation to Huntington's theory, in the sense that the "reverse wave"

is not the last or ultimate move, and that more progressive developments can, in turn, (re)emerge from backlash, therefore drawing the picture of a cycle rather than a wave. It is, however, somehow also a validation of his hypothesis that democratic developments are constantly shifting and fluctuating. In this sense, a wave of democracy or democratic transition would not consist of a single "wave" per se, but many.

Finally, it is worthwhile mentioning that the French Republique, a model of democracy today, was not directly born out of the 1789 French Revolution. It did witness a major backlash against human rights in the period directly following the "people's revolution" which was commonly known as "the years of terror". The system then slowly transitioned towards the democratic model as we know it today. In this sense, as recent developments in the Arab region seem to suggest, the Arab Spring could not so much be a case of reverse democracy as a possible "fourth wave democracy" in the making. Future research could examine the ensuing period that this paper did not cover (2017-2020) to assess the situation in light of more recent developments in the fields of women's rights and democratic governance in the MENA region.

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313

16

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