



Arab Revolutions from the Perspectives of Women

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Abstract

This article examines the Arab Revolutions from the perspectives of women. Thus, it gives a voice to female participants in the Arab Spring by recounting women's participation in these uprisings, their demands, and their assessment of the post-revolutionary era in terms of gains and/or loss of rights for women in particular and for their fellow citizens in general. The conclusion assesses the links that these women make between patriarchy, authoritarianism, neo-liberalism and Islamism.

Introduction

In this article I examine the Arab Revolutions from the perspectives of women. While giving a voice to the female participants in the revolutions that began in December 2010 and that shook the Arab world, I will analyze the role played by women in the uprisings, the demands made by women during this period, and women's assessment of the post-revolutionary era in terms of gains and/or loss of rights for women in particular, and for their fellow citizens in general. But first, I present several theoretical considerations.

Theoretical Approach

If the Arab uprisings surprised the Arab political class as much as the western world, the presence of women in these struggles appears to have surprised the west perhaps even more. In fact, the headlines of western newspapers regularly expressed astonishment at women's active participation in the uprisings: *le Rôle crucial joué par les femmes arabes (The Crucial Role Played by Arab Women)* (Olhagaray, 2011), *Les femmes arabes se révoltent (Arab Women Revolt)* (Ghanem, 2012), or *Silent... no more* (Power, 2011). Beneficiaries of massive media attention, female leaders of the Arab Revolutions were awarded numerous prizes of recognition for their efforts. For instance, the Tunisian Lina Ben Mhenni received the Deutsche Welle International Blog Award and the El Mundo International Journalism Prize (Walker, 2011), Glamour designated the Egyptian Israa Abdel Fettah as a woman of the year in 2011 (Robbins, 2011), the Egyptian Asmaa Mahfouz was one of five activists from the Arab Spring to receive the 2011 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought (Le Monde, 2011), and the Yemeni Tawakul Karman was awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize (BBC – News World, 2011). Certainly, Arab women deserved to be recognized for their work in transforming oppressive mentalities operating in their societies. That said, women's public participation in their country's political history is not new. In fact, such titles—*Les femmes arabes se révoltent (Arab Women Revolt)* and *Silent... no more*—unfortunately demonstrate the general public's limited knowledge regarding the modern history of Arab women and the history of Arab feminism. As we will later see, women participated alongside men in their nation's anti-colonial struggles as early as the late nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, this historical limited knowledge reveals indirectly the Orientalist vision of Arab women and Arab citizens held by the western media. However, in the words of the founding father of Orientalism, Edward Said, Western representations of the East reflect equally an image the West holds of itself (Said, 1980: 13 & 18-19). Thus, while the East is perceived as backwards, the West identifies as the homeland of democracy, as made evident by women's empowered status (Said, 1980: 18-19). While Arab women are represented as victims, western women are described as having miraculously won all of their rights, despite for instance, Tunisian women winning abortion rights in 1973, before French women gained this same right in 1975 (Guidère, 2011: 150); or Egyptian women acquiring the right to vote in 1956, while Swiss women would only obtain the right to do so in 1971. In other words, to adequately understand the struggle of Arab women for their emancipation, it is necessary to situate their plight within the universal struggle of women against global patriarchy. In this regard, numerous historians situate the origins of patriarchy as emerging with the first human civilizations (Lerner, 1986; French, 1987).

Of course, patriarchy in the Arab world contributes to the particularly unfavorable status held by Arab women. The United Nations Arab Human Development report clearly describes the discrimination Arab women face in all spheres of human activity (PNUD, 2005). Similarly, the 2011 "Gender Gap Report" quantitatively illustrates the poor performance of Arab countries in terms of gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2012: 18). That said, reasons for women's unfavorable status can not be located in a specific Arab cultural tradition, but rather in a "culture of power." I mean by the "culture of power" the institutionalization of power relationships between one or several groups of individuals at the expense of subordinated groups. The culture of power can be

exercised between nations, between the governed and their leaders, between elite classes and subordinated classes, and between women and men, among others, and is often plural, that is to say, involving issues related to gender, class and/or ethnicity. Thus the real question remains: Why is a culture of power particularly rampant in the Arab world? The answer is neither cultural nor religious, but rather purely political. For this reason, the results of the uprisings and their consequences for all citizens, both women and men, will be examined in addition to their specific consequences for women. In other words, this article situates the struggles of Arab women within both the universal struggle of women against patriarchy and the struggle of Arab citizens against dictatorial regimes.

Methodology

As is well known, the Arab uprisings shook the Arab world from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula. In an effort to avoid offering a merely superficial account of the events, I chose to limit the focus of this article to three countries: Tunisia, where revolution first emerged, Egypt where revolution quickly spread, and Morocco where protests resulted in constitutional reforms without a regime change, as was the result in Tunisia and Egypt. For each of these countries, I conducted interviews with women from two categories: those who participated in the Revolutions as leaders, and those who participated as members of an organization working in the field of women's rights. For Tunisia, I conducted interviews with the blogger Lina Ben Mhenni, a leader of the Tunisian uprising, and Fatiha Hizem, board member and responsible for external relations for the Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates (ATFD). Most consider Israa Abdel Fatah and Asmaa Mahfouz as leaders of

the Egyptian Revolution. Unable to obtain an interview with either of these women, I studied Asmaa Mahfouz's calls to action for the Egyptian uprising found on her *Facebook* page. Additionally, I conducted an interview with Marlyn Tadros, a member of the Egyptian associational movement and a professor of Interactive Media at the New England Institute of Art in Boston, USA. For Morocco, I conducted interviews with Nidal Salam Hamdache, an activist in the February 20 Movement, a revolutionary movement that emerged out of the Arab Spring, and Anissa Bouanane, a board member for the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) in Casablanca.

Several of the interviews began in June 2011 and all were completed in June 2012. I structured the interviews around two major questions: how did women participate in the Arab Revolutions? And, did the Revolutions result in a gain and/or a loss of rights for women in particular, and for citizens in general? The women shall speak for themselves in the following paragraphs.

Women and the Tunisian Revolution

First, I will briefly demonstrate how Tunisian women's participation in the Revolution constitutes a continuation of women's contributions to Tunisian national struggles, particularly the anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Women in Colonial and Post-Colonial Struggles

In 1883, as a result of the Conventions of Masra, Tunisia became a French protectorate, prompting the anti-colonial struggles that followed. Alongside those "great men", such as Sheikh Abdelaziz Taalbi and Habib Bourguiba (Périllier, 1979: 36-40), whom history praises for their roles in confronting colonial powers in Tunisia, other actors, struggled equally for independence, oftentimes jointly as part of a women's movement (Bakalti, 1996: 69-111; Marzouki, 1993: 12-23; Thomas, 2005: 267). Early feminists Manoubia Wertani and Habiba Menchari refused to wear the veil in 1924 and 1929, and made women's emancipation an important pillar in the emancipation of the nation (Marzouki, 1993: 12; Bakalti, 1996: 70-74). Further, many women worked as members of highly structured organized movements (Bakalti, 1996: 91-93). For instance, Majida Boulila (1931 – 1952), born Baktouli, worked for national independence as a member of the Tunisian National Movement while also struggling for the emancipation of Tunisian women.

Ordinary women contributed equally to their country's history alongside the abovementioned women, now symbols of female activism. In doing so, they demanded, among other things, for the right of girls to an education, they mobilized the masses in the *hammams* and the *zawiyas*, and manifested in the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the colonial administration in 1938 (Bakalti, 1996: 91-93).

With the achievement of independence in 1956, and the shift from a modern state to a police state, women continued their struggle, this time for the purpose of promoting democracy. Since documenting Tunisian women's post-colonial activism remains outside of the confines of this article, I will mention only briefly Radhia Nasraoui, a Tunisian lawyer. For the past thirty years, Nasraoui has campaigned for the promotion of human rights, more precisely, for the protection of individuals against torture (Medien, 2011). Needless to say, Tunisian women have for a long time constituted a significant presence in the Tunisian political landscape.

Unfortunately, in Tunisia and elsewhere, women as a group do not enjoy the same visibility in the historical record as men do. To use an example from recent history, despite causing the uprisings that shook the Arab world, the policewoman Fadia Hamdi has failed to figure largely in the historical narrative of the events (Al-Arabiya News, 2011; Snoussi, 2011). Indeed, according to Mohamed Bouazizi's mother, Bouazizi took his own life because he could not live with the humiliation of being slapped publicly by a female police officer (Al-Arabiya News, 2011).

Incidentally, this event reveals much about the culture of power in Tunisia: to maintain power, an authoritarian State must also be a patriarchal State. No Tunisian killed himself after enduring acts of torture perpetrated by—male—agents of the State. The exercise of power by a woman, however, humiliated Bouazazi severely enough to kindle Arab uprisings from Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula. That being said, the rebelling citizens, including female participants in the Arab Spring, perceived the death of Bouazazi to be a result of social and political injustice without necessarily recognizing how beliefs about gender prompted his suicide.

Lina Ben Mhenni (1983 -)

Journalist and English Professor at the University of Tunis, Lina Ben Mhenni began composing her blog *Tunisian Girl* in 2007 (Mhenni, 2007). Already at this time, Ben Mhenni critiqued the dictatorial regime and corrupt government of Zine Abiddine Ben Ali.

Lina Ben Mhenni and the Revolution. When the street vendor Bouazazi set himself on fire in Sidi Bouzid on December 17th, 2010, Ben Mhenni visited the Tunisian city. As the popular protests erupted, she documented the events by photographing the victims of police brutality and by conducting interviews with their families. Ben Mhenni did the same in Kasserine and Regueb when the protests spread to these regions. She subsequently posted the images and the information gathered from the victims' families on her blog and shared them with the foreign media. In fact, during the Tunisian Revolution, Ben Mhenni acted as a volunteer correspondent for the international media, including France 2 and France 24.

Ben Mhenni's blog proved to be an effective tool. Via her blog, she informed protestors about dates and locations of future sit-ins, meetings, and demonstrations. Ben Mhenni expressed her thoughts on civil liberties, human rights, and gender equality. Indeed, if Tunisian women enjoy more rights than other Arab women, they do not enjoy full equality of rights with Tunisian men. For instance, inequality of inheritance rights persists to this day. That said, following the advent of the post-colonial State in 1956, Tunisian women achieved substantial legal rights including the abolition of polygamy, the right to divorce and the abortion right in 1973.

Mhenni was not the only female participant in the Tunisian spring. In fact, women of all social classes participated at all levels of the Revolution. For instance, female doctors tended to the wounded despite the government imposed prohibition, female lawyers denounced violations of the human rights of protestors and the population, young women, regular participants in the demonstrations, used twitter to forward information about the protests, and housewives cooked food for the protestors.

Absence of feminist claims and demands for women. Contrary to what one may expect, and despite women's active participation in the Revolution, no claims for gender equality were made. In fact, the Revolution's adherents limited their claims to the three following demands: work, dignity, and liberty. This may be because women tend to believe that the law already protects them and that the advent of a lawful state will naturally result in equality between the genders.

Only once the Revolution ended did women begin to make public demands for gender equality. In the streets, women carried signs proclaiming “sawa-sawa”, or “equal-equal”, because the post-revolutionary period and the subsequent rise to power of Rached Ghanouchi, leader of the Islamist party En-Nahda, illustrated to women the fragility of the status of their acquired rights. Indeed, despite identifying as a modernist, Ghanouchi has nonetheless made public statements threatening women’s existing rights, including his intention to reintroduce polygamy and *charia* law (Islamic law) into Tunisian legislation; discrimination against women being one of *charia* law’s main features.

Assessment of the Revolution’s results and its consequences for women. The results of the Revolution, and its impact on women, remain uncertain. The Prime Minister seeks to reassure the populace, but has nonetheless announced his intention to revise the Code of Personal Status. Moreover, pro-Islamist groups openly challenge women’s rights, particularly women’s abortion rights, and have perpetrated violent attacks against women’s rights activists and unveiled women.

However, discrimination against women in Tunisia must be situated within the larger national democratic context. The impact of the Revolution on citizens as a whole remains uncertain. The Revolution resulted in little socio-economic progress and failed to contribute to improvements in civil liberties. Also, as the results of the peaceful demonstration on April 9, 2012 show, there appears to have been a return to police repression and brutality. Lawsuits against journalists have also become prevalent, as was the result for journalist Neji Khachnaoui after he criticized the impunity of individuals who gained their wealth through corruption. If anything, the government

has succeeded only in creating an identity problem in Tunisia and in dividing Tunisians between Islamists and secular Muslims.

Despite these disappointing results, Tunisians are not likely to regret their involvement in the Revolution and the non-tangible impact the uprisings had on the collective: the right to freedom of expression, confidence in the strength of a people, and first-hand experience of the democratic process. Those who voted for the current government will learn to distinguish between extremist groups and democratic groups. Civil society remains a significant presence in Tunisia, and most feel confident that democracy will triumph, as Fatiha Hizem's subsequent testimony reveals.

Fatiha Hizem

Spokesperson for the Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates (ATFD), Fatiha Hizem explains that the ATFD was established in 1989 for the purpose of overcoming patriarchal oppression and achieving women's full citizenship using an alternative discourse and approach (AFFD, 1989). The ATFD campaigns for gender equality, democracy, secularism, and social justice.

The ATFD and the Tunisian Revolution. According to Fatiha Hizem, Tunisian women participated as members of several different organizations including the ATFD, the Association des Femmes Tunisienne pour la Recherche et le Développement, and the Tunisian General Labour Union. The ATFD's struggle against the repressive and ultraliberal politics of Ben Ali's government intensified

after the death of Bouazizi. The organization regularly hosted thousands of protestors at its headquarters in Tunis and organized sit-ins, meetings, and demonstrations. Similar organizations assisted women in Tunis, Sousse, Sfax, and Kairouan to demonstrate en masse in the streets. Needless to say, the advent of democracy and social justice impacts women directly. Poverty acted as a motivating factor in mobilizing crowds in Tunisia. Women, more likely than men to be stricken by this devastating problem, suffered severely as a result of the ultraliberal politics of the deposed regime. The regime's policies, coupled with the patriarchal structure of Tunisian society, resulted in the unfortunate feminization of poverty. Indeed, women tend to have less education and degrees than men do, are paid less than their male counterparts, and often work in the economy's most precarious sectors where there is an absence, or a near absence, of unions.

In addition to organizing sit-ins, meetings, and demonstrations, the ATFD published news releases and performed interviews with the foreign media to inform Tunisians and the international community about the Revolution's progress.

Women's demands following the Revolution. Initially, the ATFD limited its demands to the immediate cessation of violence against the population and to the removal of Ben Ali from office. On January 29, 2011, however, the ATFD organized a women's demonstration at the capital to make demands for gender equality and the right of women to fully enjoy their citizenship. During the demonstration, pro-Islamist groups attacked the protestors. Identifying themselves as representatives of *charia*, the attackers demanded that the women "return to their kitchens,"

“occupy themselves with their children,” and accused the protestors of “taking the place of men at work.”

Women, including members of the ATFD, presented claims to the post-revolutionary government for the purpose of securing their established rights. They demanded the constitutionalization of women’s right, as advocated by article 1 of the “Constitution of Equality and Citizenship,” women’s organizations working paper:

The State guarantees full and effective equality between women and men in rights and duties in all public and private areas, particularly both within and outside of the family. There can be no discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, region, political opinion, language, wealth, marital status, and ability, regardless of the origin of the discrimination whether from public authorities, groups, or individuals.

Furthermore, Article 3 of the Constitution outlines the responsibility of the State vis-à-vis women:

The State guarantees the respect of the physical, moral, and sexual integrity of all citizens, and protects women against violence perpetrated against them, whether physical, moral or sexual, regardless of the reasons and origins of the violence, and regardless of the space from which the violence is exercised.

Finally, the ATFD met with the President of the Republic and the President of Constituent Assembly to sensitize them about issues related to gender inequality and to invite them to constitutionalize women's rights. Unfortunately, while the Assembly has been working for several months, the ATFD has yet to be invited to express its demands. Because numerous organizations have attended Assembly meetings for the purpose of presenting their views, the ATFD suspects the Assembly of deliberately excluding them from the process of drafting the Constitution.

Assessment of the Revolution's results and its consequences for women. It may be too early to declare with certainty whether the Revolution in Tunisia resulted in a gain and/or loss of rights for women and other citizens. One may argue that the results are mixed. On the one hand, women and women's rights activists suffer harassment as a result of the religious discourse of pro-Islamists and of the Islamist party currently in power. Attacks against artists, journalists, human rights defenders, and women's rights activists have multiplied. Moreover, the attack perpetrated against young girls in swimsuits at Hamamate beach in summer 2011 has forced women to question whether they can go to a beach and swim without risk. The lax response of the State to these attacks and threats has not been reassuring.

On the other hand, the Revolution represents both tangible and non-tangible gains. First, Tunisians won the right to freedom of expression. Citizens now know that they can mobilize and express themselves in the streets. Second, the electoral law that stipulates that electoral lists must have alternating parity represents a substantial gain for women. Even if today the majority of female members of the Constituent Assembly (60 of 217 members are women) fail to advocate forcefully for

the feminist project, such a law nonetheless assists the ATFD, and women in general, to work towards greater equality in the future.

Women and the Egyptian Revolution

Before giving a voice to Asmaa Mahfouz, one of the instigators of the Egyptian Revolution, and to the activist Marlyn Tadros, it is important to note that Egyptian women's activism has a long-established historical precedent.

Women in Colonial and Post-colonial Struggles

According to historians, women participated extensively in the 1919 Egyptian Revolution that erupted following the exile of the leader of the nationalist movement, Saad Zaghlul, to the island of Malta by British occupiers (Baron, 2005: 1; Ahmed, 1992: 173). Indeed, women of all social classes demonstrated in the streets demanding an end to the occupation and independence for their country. In addition, it is commonly accepted that modern Egyptian feminism emerged following this protest and was reinforced during the following decade (Ahmed, 1992: 174). Indeed, the first feminist analysis emerged with the writings of Malak Hifni Nassef, more known as Bahithat al-Badiya (The Countryside's Researcher) (Ahmed, 1992: 174; Badran & Cooke, 2004: 134-136), as well as the work of the activism of Huda Shaaraoui (Badran, 1986: 118-123). President of the Women's Wafd Central Committee, and later founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union, Shaaraoui made feminism a tenant of nationalism (Badran, 1986: 118-123). During the closing remarks at the first pan-Arab feminist Congress held in Cairo in 1944, she warned her audience of the twin dangers caused by

women's subordination: According to Shaaraoui, women's subordination hindered the development of women and the progress of the nation (Badran & Cooke, 2004: 340). Consequently, that Egyptian women seek to make their voices heard in contemporary Egypt is not surprising.

Asmaa Mahfouz (1985 -)

Even before the uprisings that shook the Arab world in 2011, Asmaa Mahfouz was already an experienced activist. Mahfouz is a founding member of the April 6 Youth Movement, an organization created on *Facebook* to support workers from the industrial village of d'al-Mahalla el-Kubra during the strike of April 6, 2008. She is also a member of the Coalition of the Youth of the Revolution of 2011. On January 18, 2011, Mahfouz posted her now famous video on her *Facebook* page mobilizing Egyptians to participate in a demonstration on January 25, 2011 at Tahrir Square (Mahfouz, 2011). Many consider Mahfouz's video as one of the causes of the Egyptian Revolution.

The following passages have been taken directly from Mahfouz's video:

Four Egyptians have sacrificed themselves because they were tired of living in poverty, misery, and humiliation for the past thirty years. Four Egyptians sacrificed themselves hoping that a Revolution would ignite like in Tunisia, and so the country would finally be a real country, that is to say, a country where there is liberty, justice, honor, and human dignity (...)

(...) Me, I am a girl, and I participated in the demonstrations, I posted information on the

subject, and I waved a banner. Only three young men joined me, while police cars and dozens of officers terrorized us. (Mahfouz, 2011)

Next, Mahfouz explained the purpose of the video:

I made this video to communicate a simple message: If we have any dignity left, I call on everyone to demonstrate on January 25, at Tahrir Square. We want to live in this country with dignity. For this reason, we will demand for our human rights and our right to dignity. (Mahfouz, 2011)

Finally, Mahfouz invited all citizens to join her, particularly men, by reminding them of the code of honor and virility:

Each of you who considers himself a man, come demonstrate with me on January 25. And those who say that girls who protest get humiliated and beaten, have the honor and the virility to protest with me on January 25.

Those who remain at home to follow the events on *Facebook* or in the media, instead of joining in the demonstration, contribute to our humiliation. If you are a man, if you have dignity, if you have virility, come out in the streets, come protect me, and protect all the girls who protest (Mahfouz, 2011).

Mahfouz's call to action raises several remarks to note. First, the young woman displayed unquestionable courage. When Mahfouz released her video without covering her face, the regime of terror still reigned in Egypt. As a result, she was pursued, among other things, for "inciting violence," and for "disturbing public order." However, the charges against Mahfouz were dropped due to the pressure from civil society and the international community.

Second, in her video and on her *Facebook* page, Mahfouz made demands for human dignity, for the fall of the corrupt police state of Hosni Mubarak, and for the victory of popular struggles around the globe. These were not empty words. On October 23, 2011, Mahfouz visited Liberty Plaza in New York to support protestors in the Occupy Wall Street Movement. When questioned about the subject, Mahfouz responded with the following statement: "Numerous American citizens supported the Egyptians during the Revolution. We do the same for the whole world, because we believe that a different world is possible for us all." (Democracy Now, 2011)

Mahfouz has yet to deliver a statement on the rights of women specifically. In fact, the gendered message made in her video suggests that she adheres to an essentialist view of the genders: "I am a girl and I participated in the demonstrations," "if you are a man, if you have virility," "come protect me, and protect all the girls who protest." Perhaps Mahfouz failed to realize that, with the exception of the three young men who joined her in the first demonstration, she exerts more strength, courage, and determination than most men, and in turn, that she was largely capable of protecting herself.

After the Revolution, Mahfouz continued to be involved in Egypt's political scene. On May 25, 2012, Mahfouz expressed her disappointment with the results of the first election on her *Facebook* page: "Too bad for the Revolution; too bad for the blood of the martyrs." Similarly, on June 16, 2012, Mahfouz called on Egyptian citizens to boycott the election. She accused both candidates, Mohamed Mursi and Ahmed Chafik, of seeking to ensure the continuity of the military and dictatorial regime of Mubarak.

The Egyptian Revolution introduced numerous politically -savvy and politically-engaged women like Mahfouz to the world.

Marlyn Tadros

An activist and researcher affiliated with Northeastern University's Middle East Center, in Boston, USA, Marlyn Tadros specializes in human rights issues in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt. Tadros joined the Revolution when the uprisings ignited in Egypt.

Women's participation in the Egyptian Revolution. According to Marlyn Tadros, the Revolution began as a result of videos posted by Asmaa Mahfouz and Israa Abdel Fatah. The activist and blogger Fatah broadcasted calls for the Revolution on the Internet and informed the television network al-Jazeera of the events first-hand (Israa, 2011). Evidently, the major leaders of the Egyptian Revolution were women. Women of all social classes participated in all levels of the Revolution: as protest

leaders, as agents in the decision-making process, as and civil society organizers on the ground and as participants in the daily demonstrations. Women were harassed, beaten, and tortured as men were. Like many others, the 23 year-old singer Sally Zahran passed away from wounds inflicted upon her during a demonstration on January 29, 2011.

The Revolution was a culmination of numerous social struggles and popular protest movements over a long period of time. For instance, previous struggles include the Kifaya (Enough) Movement created by George Ishak in 2004 for the purpose of democratically reforming the Egyptian political system, the April 6 Movement created in 2006, and the Said Khaled Movement created in June 2010 following the death of Khaled after he was tortured by police officers.

Women's demands during the Revolution. Because women tend to believe that the advent of a democratic state will ensure their human rights, female participants in the uprisings that shook Egypt expressed the same demands as their male counterparts—human dignity, social justice, and an end to Mubarak's repressive regime—without making specific claims for women.

A number of incidents during the uprisings, however, indicate clearly how female protestors experienced forms of oppression unique from those experienced by their male counterparts: While the repressive regime oppressed both women and men, Egypt's patriarchal structure resulted in a number of gender-specific forms of subordination that targeted women directly. For example, the activist Samira Ibrahim revealed on March 9, 2011, that army officers systematically inflicted virginity tests upon the female protestors they arrested. Following Ibrahim's testimony, a high

officer admitted to administering the tests because “these girls were not like my daughter or yours ... these girls spent the night outside, in tents, with men.” Further, while it remains unclear as to whether the woman in the blue bra, now known in Egypt by the honorary title Sit al banate (Miss Lady), was deliberately undressed by soldiers, we do know that the soldiers brutally beat her, dragged her, and as a result she was undressed. Also, while women demonstrated on International Women’s Day to protest threats to their acquired rights, religious extremists freely harassed and insulted demonstrators without any intervention from army officers. Finally, at present, none of the ten members of the Constitutional Committee are women. It is probably for this reason that article 75 of the amended Constitution subtly stipulates that the Egyptian President must be male. Indeed, according to article 75, the Egyptian President may not marry a non-Egyptian woman.

In a culture of masculine power, the notion of a woman running for President appears to belong to purely theoretical discussions and debates. That said, the television host and human rights activist, Buthaina Kamel, did in fact declare her candidacy for the 2011 presidential elections. However, as Tadros regrettably explains, while Kamel emerged as the “Candidate of the Revolution” at this time, she failed to garner the required number of votes. Kamel nonetheless remains the first woman to run for President in Egypt’s contemporary history.

Assessment of the Revolution’s results and its consequences for women. It may be too early to determine specifically whether the Revolution resulted in a gain and/or a loss of rights for women and other citizens. In the post-revolutionary era, however, and largely as a result of the uprising, women have recognized the fragility of their acquired rights. For instance, on May 14, 2012, the

Islamist Parliamentarian Nasser al-Shaker proposed a bill aimed at reintroducing the practice of excision, despite the abolishment of the practice in 2007 following the death of a young girl. Women must mobilize once again, not with the intention of gaining further rights, but rather, for the purpose of maintaining their previously acquired rights. Also, women and their fellow citizens shall learn to be more vigilant, and to recognize the religious extremism often hidden within social justice rhetoric. Finally, Egyptians, both women and men, are increasingly aware and knowledgeable of the political game, their rights, and their ability to express themselves successfully in the streets. In this sense, democracy has finally taken root.

Women and the Moroccan Uprisings

While Morocco may not have experienced a change in regime, as did Tunisia and Egypt, the country nonetheless experienced waves of popular protests. Moreover, like in Tunisia and Egypt, women constituted a major presence in the uprisings that began on February 20, 2011.

Women in Colonial and Post-Colonial Struggles

Women, have for a long period of time, participated in Moroccan politics. Since the late nineteenth century, women have been recognized for their leadership and militancy against European domination and the threat posed to national sovereignty by colonial powers. For example, the singer and poet Kharboucha led her tribe of Oulad Zayd in campaigns against the *makhzen* (the central

government) and its western allies (Khudari, 2008; Maalamat, 2005: 3642-3643 & 3685-3686).

Similarly, in the first half of the twentieth century, chroniclers noted the massive presence of women in anti-colonial struggles (Pennell, 1987: 107-118; Forbes, 1924: 281-282; Baker, 1998). While colonial agents systematically searched men for weapons, women like Fatna Mansar and Rabia Taibi trafficked arms into the country and supplied combatants (Baker, 1998: 169-181 & 243-266).

Modern Moroccan feminism emerged in the 1940s. Throughout this period, a number of nationalist women, including Amina Leuh, used the education of women as a weapon against colonialism (Baker, 1998: 140-149). In 1946, the nationalist Malika al-Fassi founded Akhawat al-Safaa (Sisters of Purity), one of the first women's organizations to address the status of women and to promote their progress (Sadiqi et al., 2009: 161).

After independence was achieved, women continued to be involved in the social struggles that shook their society. However, women failed to garner the level of media attention afforded to men. For instance, only after the death of the revolutionary socialist Saïda Menebhi in the late 1970s did Moroccans acknowledge the existence of feminist activism in their country (Menebhi, 2000).

Menebhi died after using a hunger strike to protest the deplorable prison conditions suffered by political prisoners. While the details of this form of activism remain outside of the confines of this article, it is important to note that the engagement of women in present-day popular uprisings finds root in Morocco's century-long history of female activism.

Nidal Salam Hamdache (1985 -)

Nidal Salam Hamdache is a founding member of the February 20 Movement that emerged out of the Arab Revolutions. Inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, a group of young people, including Hamdache, began a discussion forum on *Facebook* addressing the political and socio-economic conditions of contemporary Morocco. Participants in the discussions expressed their dissatisfaction with the corruption of State elites, the patronage of officials, the violations of human rights and individual liberties they witnessed regularly, and the unequal access to education, healthcare, and employment in Morocco. The February 20 Movement began with the circulation of a video through social media networking sites calling on citizens to protest in the cities of the Kingdom on February 20, 2011.

Women and the February 20 Movement. Because of her position as coordinator for the Moroccan Association of Human Rights Youth Commission (AMDH), Hamdache played an important role in the mobilization of young people. Over 50% of the demonstrators were women. For this reason, during the protests, demonstrators addressed women and men equally: “You, the daughters of the people,” they chanted, “you, the sons of the people...” The victims of violence and intimidation, women paid heavily for their right to protest. Hamdache experienced her first confrontation with officers of the Direction de la surveillance du territoire (DST) on May 10, 2011. Hamdache was responsible for tracing the itinerary of the next protest march to enable the demonstrators to circle Temara’s secret detention centre. Hamdache failed to complete her task after being arrested for three hours. Similarly, on June 30, 2011 an assault on Hamdache prevented her from participating in that day’s demonstration. Hamdache’s attackers followed her to the hospital and assaulted her for a second time in the Emergency Room.

Absence of feminist claims and demands for women. Women participated in the February 20 Movement in leadership roles and therefore contributed to developing the Movement's specific demands. Along with their male counterparts, women demanded for the dissolution of the government, the separation of judicial, executive, and legislative powers, constitutional changes aimed at securing the rights and liberties of citizens, the release of political prisoners, the closure of secret detention centers, the prosecution of individuals responsible for acts of torture and the prosecution of government elites who acquired wealth through corruption and by squandering the economic and financial resources of the country. In other words, women made no feminist claims or demands specific to women. According to Hamdache, women believe that the advent of democracy will secure the maintenance of women's human rights.

Constitutional reforms and their impact on women. As a result of the Movement, King Mohammed VI announced several constitutional reforms on June 17, 2011. Hamdache argues that the reforms fail to represent real gains in rights for women and for citizens in general. First, the members of the Commission for the Revision of the Constitution were selected by the King rather than democratically elected by the people. Second, the new Islamist government of Abdelillah Ben Kirane has failed to produce any gains in economic and social rights. Third, women in government have experienced major setbacks: only one woman, Bassima Hakkaoui, Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, holds a governmental position at this time. When asked about the decline of women in government, Ben Kirane blamed women's perceived incompetence. Such backwards discourse, coupled with an increasingly present religious discourse, leads Hamdache to regrettably foresee major setbacks in women's rights in the near future.

Nonetheless, the February 20 Movement resulted in important changes in the Moroccan political landscape. The Movement united Moroccans of all ages and from all towns and villages for a common purpose. The Movement also spread a culture of protest in the streets. Moroccans realized that democracy could be successfully exercised in the streets rather than in Parliament or through elections. In the end, so-called democratic institutions proved to be nothing more than empty shells. True democracy is still to come as the people realize that rights are not given, but must be forcibly taken.

Anissa Bouanane

Anissa Bouanane is a board member for the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) in Casablanca. The ADFM is a feminist organization created in 1985 to promote the rights and strategic interests of women. The ADFM's members believe that women, regardless of all other forms of identification, share a common condition as a result of the social differentiation of the genders (ADFM, 1985).

Women's demands during the constitutional revisions. After the King announced his intention to reform the Constitution on March 9, 2011, the "Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality Coalition," a coalition composed of thousands of organizations, including the ADFM, seeking improvements in human rights and women's rights, presented a list of demands to the Advisory Commission for the Revision of the Constitution. They demanded that the Constitution acknowledge

the responsibility of the State in eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, and asked for gender parity—a 50% quota for women—in all areas including the decision-making process. The Coalition demanded further that the Constitution recognize the indivisibility of rights so women may fully enjoy their civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Finally, the Coalition asked that the Constitution enshrine the primacy of international law over national law.

The impact of the constitutional reforms on women. The constitutional reforms of June 2011 resulted in significant gains for women. First, the Constitution recognizes the citizenship of women. Second, article 19 of the Constitution stipulates that “men and women enjoy equally their civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights and liberties.” In other words, women and men hold the same rights. The provision announces further the creation of “la Haute Instance sur la Parité et l’Égalité”, or the “Authority for parity and for the struggle against all forms of discrimination”, whose missions are to make observations and recommendations, and to assure the implementation of these recommendations. The Authority has yet to become functional.

Despite certain legal gains, setbacks in social and political practices have become apparent. For instance, during the 2011 legislative elections, only 69 of 389 elected parliamentarians were women. While only 30 women were elected in the previous election, the ADFM had hoped that at least one third of the seats would be awarded to women this time around. For several years now, the ADFM has worked as part of the “Mouvement pour le 1/3 des sieges élus ...vers la parité,” a movement consisting of a thousand organizations seeking to award 1/3 of the decision-making power to women, with the objective of achieving parity in the future. Disappointed with the results of the

election, the ADFM, along with other women's groups, organized a sit-in in front of Parliament during its opening session.

At the governmental level, a net decline has ensued: the past government boasted seven women while the present government has only one. Further, this latter represents the Islamist Party of Justice and Development and therefore fails to represent the rights and strategic interests of women. When Amina Filali committed suicide after being forced to marry her rapist, the Minister remained silent while civil society, including the ADFM, demanded the repeal of article 475 of the penal code stipulating that a rapist may choose to avoid prosecution by marrying his victim.

Finally, in the present-day, there has yet to be any socio-economic improvements for women in particular, and for citizens in general. However, the government has already proceeded with the closure of shisha bars and cafés. Organizational movements, including the ADFM, continue to follow vigilantly the unfolding of events.

Conclusion

The women of the Arab Spring were ordinary women, but they were also heroes like Lina Ben Mhenni and Asmaa Mahfouz, ultra-politicized women like Nidal Salam Hamdache, Fatiha Hizem, Marlyn Tadros and Anissa Bouanane, as well as victims, like those who chose to remain silent about the virginity tests and other forms of sexual aggression they suffered.

However, while the visibility of women in historical narratives appears to be improving, the story nonetheless continues to reduce women's experiences. Unlike the forgotten female nationalists of the past, buried in oblivion in the colonial military archives and/or nationalist narratives, the female activists of the Arab Spring benefitted from massive media attention. In the words of Michaël Béchir Ayari and Vicent Geisser:

The European media 'elected' their revolutionary heroines: these young cyber-dissidents, barely out of adolescence, and often physically attractive, by themselves symbolized the struggle of Arab women against dictatorships and patriarchy. (2011: 89)

Given these "Mariannes of the twenty-first century" (Ayari & Geisser, 2011: 89), the authors engaged in a so-called corrective re-reading of the events. The women of the Arab Spring were neither heroes nor victims (Ayari & Geisser, 2011: 90), but rather ordinary women forming their revolution daily by acting on everyday social practices:

In fact, the politicization of women in the Arab world and their gradual access into spaces of engagement (elective office, union activism, leadership positions in political parties, participation in street demonstrations, etc.) is rarely expressed through the voice of the heroine, but favors rather more ordinary methods for inclusion perhaps more effective at overcoming the machismo and patriarchy of Arab societies. (Ayari & Geisser, 2011: 90)

Said more explicitly, the women of the Arab Revolutions experienced a downwards leveling. In doing so, they are not heroes but ordinary women. Yet, to give one example, two young women, Asmaa Mahfouz and Israa Abdel Fettah, were in fact the instigators, and therefore the heroes, of the Egyptian Revolution.

Parallel to this limiting narrative, additional discourses reduce the experiences of women of the Arab Revolutions to those experienced by a minority of privileged and highly educated women—that is to say, highly westernized women (Frenkel, 2011; Steyn, 2012). In this sense, these women fail to represent true Arab culture and authentic Islam. That said, such a discourse confuses what are clearly symptoms resulting from a culture of power, mainly patriarchy, authoritarianism, and neo-liberalism, with so-called authentic Arab and/or Islamic culture. Indeed, in societies around the globe, as in Arab societies, the number of individuals who distinguish themselves by their leadership and activism, in this case feminist activism, represent a minority of the population. It could be argued that the activist minority of Arab societies would be significantly larger if activists no longer feared for their physical safety.

The women of the Arab Revolutions were, in fact, educated. That these women were educated, however, does not necessarily mean that they failed to represent their culture and/or religion. “Education” should not be confused with “westernization”: The arts, culture and the sciences are the heritage of all mankind, and despite western hegemony, all of humanity contributes to the production of this heritage, its reinterpretation, and its integration into specific social localities.

Finally, while education may not be a cultural phenomenon, it is in turn a socio-economic condition capable of dissimulating serious political issues. All of the women interviewed for this article believed that the elections that led to the victory of the Islamists in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco, were both democratic and non-democratic: On the one hand, the elections were not falsified; on the other hand, the cultures of power supported by the past regimes endured. To this day, the neoliberal regime persists in Tunisia; the army, or rather the henchmen of the Mubarak regime, clings to power in Egypt; and the monarchy continues to hold a considerable amount of power in Morocco—an observation also advanced by the great Egyptian economist Samir Amin (2011). Desires for democracy expressed during the Arab Spring have been largely thwarted, or better: The Arab Revolutions and the popular uprising were quickly appropriated.

The goal of this article is not to study how the Revolutions and the uprisings of the Arab Spring were co-opted. It may be noted though that Islamism remains the most effective tool for appropriating popular demands for democracy. In this sense, Islamism continues to be the political product it has been since its emergence (Lamchichi, 1994a: 32; Lamchichi, 2001b: 8; Burgat & Dowell, 1993: 63-65). Indeed, Islamism experts agree that these same dictatorial regimes contributed largely to the emergence of Islamism in the 1970s for the precise goal of countering desires for democracy expressed by Arab societies (Guidère, 2011: 72 & 152). Profiting from the dire conditions caused by the coupling of authoritarianism with neo-liberalism, Islamist charitable associations infiltrated the social fabric. Islamist groups addressed the shortcomings of the neo-liberal and repressive State by offering to the poor and illiterate fringes of Arab populations health care, social security, religious education, and.... Islamist indoctrination. These poor communities, excluded from mainstream educational networks, form the essential electoral base for the Islamists. One of the indirect impacts

of the repressive and neo-liberal State's shortcomings is the reinforcement of patriarchal values supported by Islamist discourse.

With the absence of true democracy, the Islamist governments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco have extended the same repressive and neo-liberal culture of power reinforcing patriarchal values. On July 6, 2012, Ben Mhenni described how she was handcuffed, arrested, and detained by the morality police because she wore an evening dress deemed indecent (Ben Mhenni, 2007). On July 3, 2012, Tadros was outraged by some Islamist discourses in Egypt seeking to legalize marriage based on "Milk al-yamin", where rather than agreeing to give her hand in marriage, the bride-to-be grants her future husband "ownership of herself" (Tadros, 2012). Tadros believes that the Revolution became a "Vagina Revolution" because the popular uprisings resulted in a desire to control women, their bodies, and their sexuality. According to Hizem, demands made for cultural authenticity, for a return to pure Islam, or for the application of *charia* law, are never made in an attempt to challenge authoritarian regimes, or neo-liberalism, but rather with the intention of restricting women's rights. Can we argue then, that the first lesson to emerge out of this experience in democracy brought forth by the Arab Spring is that democratization will not succeed if the demands made during the popular uprisings fail to include demands for gender equality?

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