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## Moroccan Feminism as Universal Feminism: African Voices from the Feminist Struggle, c.1930-2000

Osire Glacier

### Global Contexts

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss feminism as an African, and particularly Moroccan, experience and ideology. Most people in the West believe that feminism is a strictly Western ideology, and that feminism in non-Western societies is a Western import, or at best only produced by an “indigenous” Westernized elite. The dominant narratives of world history locate the origins of feminism in Europe and United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. These world historians are guided by a dominant set of feminist histories themselves. The dominant histories of feminism have been produced by Euro-American countries approximately up to the beginning of the new millennium.<sup>1</sup> These histories are themselves part of the vast feminist literature that was produced in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West, rather than in the rest of the World.<sup>2</sup> The prevalence of this Western dominance in the feminist literature has led scholars like Miriam Schnier to argue that feminism could only have emerged from the West and not, for example, from Muslim *harems*, including the Moroccan *harem*.<sup>3</sup> Feminist scholars like Schnier thus link feminism to Western modernity, whose manifestations are the industrial revolution, the expansion of capitalism that attracted women to the job market and the enlightenment philosophy that underlies individual rights and social movements.<sup>4</sup> In other words, in their view feminism is intimately bound to Western economic development and democratic progress.

In the last decade, however, this historiography has begun to show interest in non-Western feminisms, as we shall see below. Indeed, women’s resistance --of which feminism is one of many forms of ideas, discourses, ways of life, individual or collective actions and social constructions of inequalities between the sexes --is not solely a feature of Western societies. In fact, such resistance has always existed, and continues to exist in all human societies, although it is often ignored by historians. As the feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty has pointed out, whereas the history of Western feminism has been amply studied, the history of feminism in the rest of the world is still untold.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, this chapter

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1 Miriam Schneir ed., *Feminism, the Essential Historical Writings* (New York: Random House, 1972), xii; Estelle B. Freedman ed., *The Essential Feminist Reader* (New York: The Modern Library, 2007), xv; Eliane Gubin, Catherine Jacques & Florence Rochefort dir., *Le siècle des féminismes* (Paris : les Éditions de l’Atelier, 2004), 15.

2 Schneir, op. cit., xiv.

3 Ibid.

4 Estelle Freedman, op. cit., xii; Gubin, Jacques & Rochefort dir., op.cit., 15.

5 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo & Lourdes Torres eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 3. In the introduction to the book, Mohanty opposes the feminist

begins by narrating the history of Moroccan feminism, while analyzing some key concepts of dominant feminist historiography such as *feminism*, *modernity*, *democracy*, and *Westernization*. Ultimately, such an analysis demonstrates that Moroccan feminism is an integral part of *universal feminism*, which is defined as a series of ideas, discourses and actions conveyed by isolated individuals or collective groups, with the aims of denouncing social constructions of inequalities between the sexes and of remedying the situation by promoting women's rights. Discourse is a series of narratives which are produced in a specific social and historical context, with a particular aim in mind – here the aim is the improvement of women's condition. Thus, discourse supposes strategies that depend on a given social and historical context. In other words, universal feminism is part of the lived experiences and perspectives of women in many places and times, and often appears as a dialogue among women as a group formed around common issues and interests. Another aspect of this chapter gives a voice to some Moroccan feminists, so that the reader can appreciate these feminist discourses.

### **A brief history of Western Feminism**

If one considers the history of feminism as it is normally narrated, the pioneering feminists were European women who contested their conditions as women as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> This is how Christine de Pizan came to be recognized as the first woman to have written to defend women.<sup>7</sup> Other European women came afterwards, such as Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi, Marie le Jars de Gournay and Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>8</sup> However, most histories suggest that modern feminism was born much later, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and United States.<sup>9</sup> These histories argue that the advent of women's collective organization in this period distinguishes modern feminism from the incidents of women's resistance of earlier centuries, which were largely acts of individual resistance. These collective organizations led to a social movement that has as its objective to modify the laws and mentalities that perpetuated inequalities between the sexes. Having identified these nineteenth century collective organizations as the point of origin for modern feminism, these histories then classify modern feminism into three waves of thought and activism.

The first wave of feminist activism began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continued into the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States, Britain, Germany and France. During this period, feminist activists

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historiography of Western countries with that of “developing nations”. In order to avoid confusion due to multiple terminological referents, the concept of “developing nations” has been replaced by that of “the rest of the world.”

<sup>6</sup> Schneir ed., op.cit., xii.

<sup>7</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, trad. & ed. H. M. Parshley, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 105.

<sup>8</sup> Schneir ed., op. cit., xii; Maggie Humm ed., *Modern Feminisms, Political, Literary, Cultural* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Janet S. Chafetz & Anthony Gary Dworkin, *Female Revolt: Women's Movements in World and Historical Perspective* (Totowa: Rowman & Allanheld, 1986), 103.

primarily sought to promote women's suffrage, or right to vote. For this reason, they are often called "suffragettes", however they also denounced other inequalities, such as imbalances within marriage and women's lack of financial autonomy.<sup>10</sup> Emmeline Pankhurst in Britain, Charlotte Perkins and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in United States and Jeanne Deroin in France are among the leaders of this movement.

The first wave of feminism ended when these suffragettes finally attained their goal. This largely occurred through the modification of the American, British, German and French constitutions, all of which granted women the right to vote in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> However, in the following decades women realized that gaining the right to vote did not eradicate discrimination against them. Consequently, in the 1960s and 70s, the second phase of feminism was concerned with all forms of discrimination against women.<sup>12</sup> This period corresponds to the women's liberation movement. Thus, expressions such as "Women's Liberation" were used in the United States in early 1960s, "The British Women's Liberation Movement" was used in Britain in 1968, and "le Mouvement de libération des femmes" appeared in the French press in 1970. These second-wave feminists focused more on personal and social issues rather than political rights. Important topics included reproductive rights and birth control, equal pay and treatment in the workplace, and the division of labor in the home. The slogans "One is not born a woman, but becomes one" and "The personal is political" describe the spirit of the movement.<sup>13</sup> In other words, these feminists argued that the inequality experienced by women in their interactions in the private sphere were indications of unequal power structures in the political sphere. Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone are among the great thinkers of this phase.<sup>14</sup>

The third wave of feminism began in the 1990s. This phase did not contradict previous ones, it did reflect new challenges faced by feminists in this era. On the one hand, feminists were facing a backlash; while on the other, they needed to fill some gaps left behind by feminist activities during the second wave.<sup>15</sup> Thus third wave feminism included many distinct but overlapping critiques of earlier feminist thought. For example, postcolonial feminism emerged in this period to address the omission of non-Western women from first wave and second wave feminist discourse. Postcolonial feminists argued (and continue to argue) that the dominant feminist discourse reduces feminist issues to the experiences

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<sup>10</sup> Schneir ed., op.cit., xiv-xv.

<sup>11</sup> Humm ed., op.cit., 2.

<sup>12</sup> Chafetz & Dworkin, op.cit., 163.

<sup>13</sup> The first slogan, in Simone de Beauvoir, op. cit., the second slogan is Carol Hanisch's, in Theresa Man Ling Lee, «**Rethinking the Personal and the Political: Feminist Activism and Civic Engagement**», *Hypatia* vol 22.4 (2007) : 163.

<sup>14</sup> De Beauvoir, op. cit.; Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton), 1962; Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case of Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> Susan Faludi, *Backlash, the Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Anchor Book, 1992), ix-xxiii & 454-460. Drucilla Cornell, *At the Heart of Freedom, Feminism, Sex and Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Leslie Heywood & Jennifer Drake eds., *Third Wave Agenda, Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

of middle and upper-middle classes of Euro-American women.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, this feminism highlights the fragmentary representation of non-Western women depicted by the dominant feminist discourse.<sup>17</sup> As Chandra Mohanty suggests, Western feminists' writings about women in the rest of the world were produced through the processes of Western academic production.<sup>18</sup> One of the consequences of this hegemony is that most feminists' writings continue to portray non-western women, including African women, as simply one block of oppressed women.<sup>19</sup> These women are imagined to be ignorant, poor, passive and victimized. In other words, they are seen as the opposite of Western women who are educated, modern, active and combative, according to most feminist writers.<sup>20</sup> The postcolonial feminists did make progress, however, since at the eve of the new millennium, the new dominant feminist historiography now considers feminism to include "multiple feminisms," constituting a diversity of voices within the multiplicity of human societies.<sup>21</sup>

### **Western feminism and women of the world**

This overview of the history of feminism as it is typically narrated raises several issues. First, we need to add the label "Western" to this history since it describes the development of Western feminism, but not that of feminism throughout the world. It therefore contributes to the erroneous belief that feminism is exclusively a Western ideology. Thus, for instance, in an historical and comparative study of women's movements throughout the world, Janet Chafetz and Anthony Dworkin maintain that there is no independent women's movement in North Africa, including Morocco.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see below, this is not correct.

Second, this dominant history clearly links feminism to of the ideas, structures, and social organization associated with Western modernity, including the industrial revolution, urbanization, economic development and democratic individualism.<sup>23</sup> According to this narrative, non-Western feminism emerged only with an encounter with Europe, during the Western colonial expansions, and not out of any local conditions or actions.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Chilla Bulbeck, *Re-orienting Western Feminisms, Women's Diversity in a Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2-10.

<sup>17</sup> Mohanty, «Under Western Eyes, Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse», in Mohanty, Russo & Torres eds., op. cit., 56.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Dubin, Jacques & Rochefort, op. cit., 15.

<sup>22</sup> Chafetz & Dworkin, op. cit., 191.

<sup>23</sup> Freedman, op.cit, xii; Gubin, Jacques, Rochefort, op.cit., 15-16; Alison Baker, *Voices of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1998), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Bulbeck, op. cit., 18.

Linking the emergence of non-Western feminism to the encounter with the West in this way implies that African, Asian, and other societies do not have an endogenous feminism. Yet, non-Western feminism has always existed. It is just more difficult for Western scholars to perceive. In order for this feminism to be seen, and therefore to be narrated, one must first adopt the definition of feminism so as to reflect the society and historical era to be analyzed. This requires a shift in methodology. Numerous societies, including Morocco, favored the oral tradition until only recently. Therefore, one cannot seek evidence of feminist discourses in any piece of writing left by women, but should rather examine their way of life throughout the centuries. It also requires a recognition that feminist expression of a given period depends upon the limits that oppressive bodies impose upon it. In fact, to avoid being silenced, feminist expression most often solely takes the permissible forms that power structures grant to dissident voices. As evidence of the kinds of feminism that careful work in this process can reveal, the next sections narrate the history of Moroccan women's resistance to social constructions of inequalities between the sexes from ancient times to the present.

## African Experiences

This chapter focuses specifically on Moroccan feminism, but it's important to say a few words about the broader African context as well. Scholars who study women in pre-colonial African history have demonstrated a great diversity of lived experiences and perspectives on the roles and status of women across the continent and at different times. Some historians have even suggested that certain African societies did not have a fixed category of "woman" and that those who did often recognized the ability of men and women to cross into each other's realms.<sup>25</sup> This is not to suggest that women did not face particular restrictions or suffer from lower status in some areas and periods in pre-colonial Africa. However, evidence suggests that they often fought to gain or maintain rights and privileges through women's social organizations, contests over control of religious rituals and mystical power, and political action.

This diversity and flexibility decreased rapidly, however, with the advent of colonialism. Nineteenth and twentieth century European colonizers tended to not recognize the rights women held in African societies, partly because of their own cultural predilections and partly because they worked more closely with African men, and particularly powerful male Africans, than with women. As a result, women's rights were rapidly eroded across much of Africa during the colonial period.

Nevertheless, African women managed to contest this erosion even during the colonial period. Many of their activities were individual, but there were also examples of mass, organized defenses of women's

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<sup>25</sup> Ifi Amadiume, *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, (London: Zed Books, 1987). Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

rights such as the Nigerian “Women’s War” of 1929, in which thousands of women rose up against the British colonial administration and their appointed male chiefs to protest taxes on women who owned stalls in markets. Their protests partly took the form of songs and dances outside of chief’s residences. These performances were historically a form of protest employed by women, and they were somewhat effective in this situation in reversing the new tax. Although such action would not fall under the traditional definition of “feminism”, it was certainly an example of action taken by women to redress inequalities and issues that particularly hurt women.

Similarly, despite the patriarchal structures of traditional Moroccan society, women found ways to participate in the public sphere. Patriarchy can be defined as a form of social organization in which the man as father functions as the mediator of authority in the family, and by extension, in society. Inevitably, discrimination against women including their submission to men, a preference for male offspring, and the transmission of the father’s surname to the children, accompanies patriarchy. In precolonial Morocco, women were confined to the private sphere, queens and princess to the *harems*, and Islamic law dictated interactions between women and men. Certainly, the law favoured polygamy and unilateral male divorce. At the same time, Islamic law guaranteed the respectful treatment of women. If individual women succeeded in participating in the public sphere during this period, women began struggling collectively against patriarchal structures with the advent of colonialism. Indeed, when in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century central Morocco became a French protectorate, and Northern and Southern Morocco a Spanish protectorate, women participated in anti-colonial struggles, including armed conflict. While struggling against colonialism, women sought to improve their conditions by founding organizations and schools for girls. However, independence failed to result in the desired social reforms, particularly those desired by women. In other words, even if post-colonial Morocco experienced profound social changes, women continue to face discrimination including unequal access to education, to the labour market, and to structures of power. That being said, from the precolonial era to the present day, women have opposed such discrimination. In fact by broadening the definition of feminism to include a conscious understanding of how social inequalities between women and men come into being, as well as an understanding of the ways of life that oppose these constructions, it can be seen that feminism has been an integral part of the Moroccan social fabric since ancient times.

### **Women in Moroccan political history**

A number of women in Morocco’s history have managed to overcome masculine power structures and to therefore played an important role in Moroccan political history from ancient times to the colonial era. Women were queens and political leaders. Among others, Tin Hinan was the Tuaregs’ queen and ancestress during the 4<sup>th</sup> century;<sup>26</sup> even today, women and men inhabiting the desert proudly claim to be her descendants. Similarly al-Kahina was the Berbers’ queen, and her power extended from Tripoli to Tangiers in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> This latter was the only woman who fought the Arab Umayyad Empire’s

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<sup>26</sup> Count Byron de Prorok, *In Quest of Lost Worlds* (London: Frederick Muller, 1935,) 3-56.

<sup>27</sup> David Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History* (London: Heinemann, 1984,) 17-21.

armies. Furthermore, some women were queens *de facto*. As such, they ruled through either their husband or their sons. To name just a few, while serving as the political advisor to her husband, Youssef Ben Tachfine, Zaynab al-Nafzawiyya was the *de facto* queen in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and hence participated in the governance of one of the largest empires in the Maghreb, extending from Senegal to Andalusia and from the Atlantic to Algiers.<sup>28</sup> In a similar fashion, acting as the political advisor to her husband, the sultan Moulay Ismaïl, and later to her son, Khnata Bent Bakkar was the *de facto* ruler of Morocco in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>29</sup> Thanks to her intervention, the country escaped the disintegration of its political and territorial unity. Contrasting with these recognized queens, some women accessed political power through religion. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Lalla Aziza Seksawiya was a Sufi saint who enjoyed wide religious and political powers.<sup>30</sup> As such, she mediated and reconciled different tribal and intertribal groups in the Seksawa Valley. She also led a local resistance against Amir Ben Mohammed al-Hintati, a Merinid general and the governor of Marrakesh. Even today, Lalla Aziza Seksawiya's tomb is a place of pilgrimage and prayers.

Women were governors. Among others, a woman named Zouhra became *Hakimat Fez* (Fez's governor) in 1464, and governed Fez for three years after the fall of Abd al-Haq, the last Merinid king.<sup>31</sup> Similarly the famous "As-sayyida al-hurra," (the sovereign woman) served as *Hakimat Tétouan* (Tetouan's governor) from 1525 to 1542. This latter was the leader of pirates in the adjacent Northwestern Mediterranean Sea.<sup>32</sup> According to Hakimat Tetouan, piracy was indistinguishable from politics. At the time, piracy was not only practiced to have an immediate income, but also practiced as a way to continue the struggle against the Christian enemy. As the organizer of resistance against the Spaniards and the Portuguese's invasions, she built and repaired boats and developed a naval force in the port of Tetouan. In addition, she often ventured out of this port into the high sea, leading piracy in the Mediterranean, and giving orders to her captains to go as far as possible in order to counter the foreign naval expansionist plans. During her reign, Hakimat Tetouan had effectively repelled the invasion projects of the Spaniards and the Portuguese and achieved important financial gains due to piracy, thereby bringing wealth and prosperity to her community.

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<sup>28</sup> H.T. Norris, *The Berbers in Arabic Literature* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1982,) 131-140.

<sup>29</sup> Fatima Sadiqi, Amira Nowaira, Azza el-Kholy & Moha Ennaji eds., *Women Writing Africa, the Northern Region* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2009), 98-100.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn Qunfudh, *Uns al-faqir wa- izz al-haqir* (Rabat : Éditions techniques Nord-Africaines, 1965), 86-87.

<sup>31</sup> Abd al-Hadi Tazi, *al-Mar'ah fi tarikh al-gharb al-islami* (Casablanca : Fennec, 1993), 218-219.

<sup>32</sup> Chantal de la Véronne, *Sida el-Horra, la noble dame* (Paris : Hespéris-Tamuda, 1956) : 222-225.

Women were diplomats. Among others Sahaba er-Rahmania acted as an ambassador in the Ottoman court, one of the most powerful world empires in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> Sahaba er-Rahmainia tactfully asked the Ottoman sultan Salim to military support her son Abd al-Malek in his struggle to regain his throne back. Not only did her intervention enabled her son to regain power, but it ultimately led to making his reign one of the most prosperous eras in Moroccan history. In a similar fashion, princess Fatima played the role of a diplomat in the administration of her husband, Sultan Mohammed III, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> In this role, she corresponded with European princesses, negotiating the liberation of their respective prisoners, as well as securing favorable alliances for the sultan. One example of such correspondence was with Princess Louisa de Asturias.

Women were political advisors. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, a woman named Kenza saved Moroccan political and territorial unity twice. First, she gave birth to a son, Idris II, who succeeded his father when the Idrisid monarchy had just been instituted in Morocco. Second, after Idris II's death, she convinced her grandson, Mohammed Ben Idris, to share governance over the kingdom with his brothers. By decentralizing the government, the Idrisid monarchy temporarily managed to maintain the nation's stability.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, the inhabitants of the Maghreb experienced a period of great prosperity, evidenced by the appearance of great fortunes, such as that of the family al-Fihri.<sup>36</sup> In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, the heir to one such fortune --Fatima al-Fihri --founded the University al-Qaraouiyyine in Fez, a major educational and spiritual center in the Muslim world that contributed to a transfer of knowledge between the Orient and the West—it is today the oldest operating university in the world.<sup>37</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Almohad prince Abd al-Wahid al-Rachid became sultan as a result of the political ingenuity of his mother, Hababa.<sup>38</sup> After Idris al-Ma'mun, al-Rachid's father, died while traveling, Hababa convinced the military chiefs to temporarily hide his death and proclaim her fourteen-year-old son the Moroccan sultan. This was done in order to maintain unity against al-Ma'mun's nephew, Yahya, who had already taken over Marrakesh.

Women were warriors. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the Almoravid princess Fanu, Omar Ben Yintan's daughter, was a female soldier and disguised herself as a man to courageously fight the Almohads during the

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<sup>33</sup> Mohamed Saleh al-Amrani Benkhaldoun, *Sab' Sayiddate Morakouchiyyate bistihqaq* (Morakouch: Manchourate Jaridat al-afaq al-marghebiya, 2009), 99-111.

<sup>34</sup> Tazi, *al-Mar'ah fi tarikh al-gharb al-islami*, op.cit., 248-249.

<sup>35</sup> William Spencer, *A Historical Dictionary of Morocco* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 67.

<sup>36</sup> Mahmud Ismail, *Al-adarisah* (Cairo : Maktabat madbuli, 1991), 63-80.

<sup>37</sup> Hezreen Abdul Rashid, «Fatima al-Fihri, Founder of the Oldest University in the World,» last accessed August 3, 2010,

<http://theurbanmuslimwomen.wordpress.com/2008/08/04/fatima-al-fihri-founder-of-the-oldest-university-in-the-world/>

<sup>38</sup> Gaston Deverdun, op. cit., 18-19 & 292.



takeover of Marrakesh in 1147.<sup>39</sup> In fact, princess Fanu was believed to have fallen only once during the battle in which the Almohads were able to enter the Almoravid palace. Princess Fanu was not the only historically recorded female warrior. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the daughter of the religious and political leader Mehdi ibn Tumart attacked her father on his way back home, and fought him, in order to prove to him that she could be a caliph, the highest political leadership in the Islamic world.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, with the advent of colonialism, women participated in the anti-colonial struggles,<sup>41</sup> some as leaders and others as ordinary women. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a politically engaged poetess named Hadda Zaydia, better known as Kharbucha, encouraged her tribe to rise up against the tyrannical Aïssa Tamri Ben Omar. He was the neighboring tribe's chief and an ally of the French colonizers.<sup>42</sup> In the conflict that followed, Kharbucha was captured, tortured and executed. Her poems are still historically relevant, as they inform historians about peasants' struggles against abusive central power. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Malika al-Fassi was the only woman to have signed the manifesto of independence in 1944,<sup>43</sup> and Farida Hassan spied on the Spanish military camps during the Rif War.<sup>44</sup>

Can we consider these women as pioneers of feminism? For now, the question remains without an answer because –apart from Malika al-Fassi --none of these political leaders left any written reflections about the status of women. However, it is clear that these women did not consider their sex to be an obstacle to governing or participating in the political sphere. Rather, they found ways to transcend the social restrictions imposed upon their sex, often acting behind the scenes or through pathways open to women. For instance, Zaynab al-Nafzawiyya governed through her husband, while Khnata Bent Bakkar governed through her son, thus transcending the masculine power structures. Therefore, one can conclude that in the very least these women should be considered resisters of the restrictions placed on women's roles by their own society.

## Women in the Moroccan public sphere

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<sup>39</sup> Gaston Deverdun, *Marrakesh des origines à 1912*, vol. 1 (Rabat : Éditions techniques Nord-Africaines, 1959), 160.

<sup>40</sup> Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd Allah, *Mazahir al-hadarah al-maghribiyah* vol. 2 (Dar al-Bayda: Dar al-Sulami lil-ta'lif wa-al-Nashr, 1597-1958), 127.

<sup>41</sup> C.R. Pennell, « Women and Resistance to Colonialism in Morocco: The Rif 1916-1926» *Cambridge University Press* 28.1 (1987) : 107-118.

<sup>42</sup> *Maalamat al-Maghrib/L'encyclopédie du Maroc*, (Salé : Association des auteurs marocains pour la publication, 2005), 3642-3643 & 3685-3686.

<sup>43</sup> Baker, op. cit., 63-78.

<sup>44</sup> *Maalamat al-Maghrib/L'encyclopédie du Maroc*, op.cit., 7068.

Paralleling their political involvement, women from ancient Morocco to the colonial period participated in diverse sectors of the public sphere outside of politics. Indeed, the historical record includes numerous women whose consciousness, actions, stances and way of life can be considered as resistance to at least the reductive social constructions of the roles played by the sexes. In this chapter, we will mention only a few of such women. The 13<sup>th</sup> century Moroccan woman Oum al-Yamane was an explorer.<sup>45</sup> She left Morocco in 1226, accomplished the pilgrimage to Mecca by foot, and spent four years in the Middle East. In 1235, she left again for other pilgrimages and explorations. However, she died on her way back to Morocco.<sup>46</sup> During the Merinid reign (13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> centuries) in Morocco, Aïcha Bent al-Jayyar was a doctor and a pharmacist who practiced in Ceuta.<sup>47</sup> In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Oum Hani Bint Mohamed al-Abdoussi was a theologian who was recognized by her peers as an authoritative *faqih*, or legal expert.<sup>48</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Sayyida Aïcha al-Adawiya was a Sufi religious leader who had numerous disciples.<sup>49</sup> She was also known by the nickname “*Ariyat ra’s*” (the naked head), because she did not wear a veil. Even today, her tomb is an area of pilgrimage and refuge in Meknes. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ftatime Bint Abd Slam was famous for her expertise in making plaster and healing broken arms and legs.<sup>50</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Aïcha Dhaljbel was a *majduba* (a woman shaman) in Tetouan.<sup>51</sup> Lastly, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Touria Chaoui was the first woman pilot in Morocco.<sup>52</sup>

Even though these women did not leave any written reflections on women’s status, their way of life is testimony enough that they did not consider that their sex condemned them to limit their activities to the private sphere. There is also evidence of some women from medieval Morocco --immortalized on account of their writings-- who demonstrated a stance that can be described as feminist. For example the famous 13<sup>th</sup> century Andalusian poetess Hafsa Bint al-Hajj Ar-Rakuniya, who lived during the rule of one of the grand empires of the Maghreb, led a life that negated all the social gender constructions of proper womanly behavior.<sup>53</sup> Hafsa was a free woman who disdained any restriction upon her language and her body. The poetess was renowned for her sharp satires as well as her famous lovers. Moreover, a substantive part of her poetry praises love and sensuality. Similarly, and still under one of the Maghreb grand empires in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the great poetess Nazhun Bint al-Qila’i transgressed all the social restrictions that are imposed on the feminine body and language.<sup>54</sup> Nazhun led such a libertine

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<sup>45</sup> Tazi, *al-Mar’ah fi tarikh al-gharb al-islami*, op.cit., 167

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>49</sup> Mohamed Qadiri, *Nachr al-Mathani*, *Archives marocaines*, vol. XXIV (Paris : Maisn Esnest Leroux, 1917), 202-203.

<sup>50</sup> Mohammed Ibn Azzuz Hakim, *Tatawiniyat fi dhakirat at-tarikh* (Tétouan : Matbaat al-Khalij alArabi, 2001), 37.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>52</sup> Osire Glacier, *Des femmes political au Maroc* (In progress).

<sup>53</sup> Jennifer Heath, *The Scimitar and the Veil, Extraordinary Women of Islam* (New Jersey: Hidden Spring, 2004,) 418-419.

<sup>54</sup> Marlé Hammond, «He said ‘She said’: Narrations of Women’s Verse in Classical Arabic Literature. A Case Study: Nazhun’s Hija’ of Abu Bakr al-Makhzumi,» in *Arabic Middle Eastern Literatures* 6.1 (2003) : 3-18.

life that the famous satirist Abu Bakr al-Makhzumi labeled her a whore. Far from passively enduring the insult, she composed a satire in reply, ridiculing the latter's own sexual practices. At the end of her satire, she concluded:

I replied to a poem by the other,  
so tell me, who is more poetic?  
If the creation made me a woman,  
my poetry is masculine.<sup>55</sup>

Consequently, she proved to her audience that even though she was a woman, and thus a subordinate person in accordance with the social construction of the sexes of her time, her poetry belongs to a superior genre. Because of this statement, some literary critics count Nazhun among the first feminists in the world,<sup>56</sup> thus calling into question the dominant belief that the Venetian Christine de Pizan was the first woman who wrote to defend her sex.

Evidence like Nazhun's writings demonstrates a long history of resistance to gender that set the stage for the birth of modern Moroccan feminism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, as the section below demonstrates, these modern Moroccan feminists also aptly integrated the great ideas of their time into their responses to women's conditions in their society. These ideas included socialist and Marxist orthodoxies, as well as the concepts of democracy and human rights.

### Modern Moroccan feminism

Rabea Naciri,<sup>57</sup> Fatima Saddiqi<sup>58</sup> and Abdelssamad Dialmy,<sup>59</sup> experts in modern Moroccan feminism, locate the genesis of this feminism in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Perhaps its first expression came in 1935, when Malika al-Fassi wrote an article, published by *al-Maghreb* magazine, advocating women's right to education.<sup>60</sup> Al-Fassi thus became the first female journalist in Morocco.<sup>61</sup> A few years later, Rhimou al-Madani published similar articles in the Tetouanian press.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, she has been

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<sup>55</sup> It is our translation, in Abd Muhanna, *Mu'jam al-nisa ah-shairate fi al-jahiliya wa l-islam* (Beyruth : Dar al-kutub al-ilmiya, 1990), 251.

<sup>56</sup> Teresa Garulo, *Diwan de las poetisas de Al-Andalus* (Madrid : Hiperion, 1986), 110-120.

<sup>57</sup> Rabéa Naciri, «The Women's Movement and Political Discourse in Morocco,» *Occasional Paper* 8 (1998) : 1-28.

<sup>58</sup> Fatima Sadiqi, «The Central Role of the Family Law in the Moroccan Feminist Movement,» *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35 (2008) : 325-337.

<sup>59</sup> Abdessamad Dialmy, *Le féminisme au Maroc*, (Casablanca : Éditions Toubkal, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> *Al-Mujahida al-Marhuma Lalla Malika al-Fassiya* (Rabat : Mandoubiyat samiya li-Qudama' al-muqawimine wa aadha' jaysh at-tahrir, 2008), 58-60.

<sup>61</sup> *Al-Mujahida al-Marhuma Lalla Malika al-Fassiya*, op.cit., 56-57.

<sup>62</sup> Latifa Akharbach & Narjis Rerhaye, *Femmes et politique* (Casablanca : Le Fennec, 1992), 20.

ignored by contemporary historians. As a result, not much is known about her writings and her activities. Malika al-Fassi, however, emerged as the pioneer of modern Moroccan feminism. Indeed, from 1935 to 1943, al-Fassi wrote a series of articles, all advocating women's progress, with its pillar as education.<sup>63</sup> She also operated in the political sphere. In 1946 al-Fassi founded Akhawwat al-Safaa (Sisters of Purity), a women's movement within the political party al-Istiqlal (Party of Independence), whose main function was the study of the status of women.<sup>64</sup> During the first assembly of the Akhawwat al-Safaa organization on May 23, 1947 in Fez, Habiba Guessouss, another feminist who has sunk regrettably into historical oblivion, gave a speech to celebrate the occasion:

Honorable ladies,

On this happy day, we want to thank all of you, on behalf of the association, for your presence in this General Assembly (...) We are full of hope that we will succeed in the near future. We believe that we will overcome backward traditions with determination, patience, and wisdom. Today, many Moroccans accept the idea of promoting women's rights. This is why we believe that creating a woman's association composed of qualified women would help to fulfill our mission and thus contribute further to women's emancipation.<sup>65</sup>

Soon after, the organization formulated a series of demands, among which were women's right to education and legal reforms, especially advocating the abolition of polygamy.<sup>66</sup>

Not all of the first generation of modern Moroccan feminists were women.<sup>67</sup> Rather, the feminism of this era was produced both by men and women. However, even while male feminists and female feminists pursued the same goal --women's emancipation --the two feminisms differ from one another. When male feminists advocated women's liberation, the targeted goal was not women's progress *per se*, but rather women's progress in the context of achieving national progress and advancement.<sup>68</sup> By contrast, women's feminism advocated women's liberation, with the specific aim of improving women's lives.<sup>69</sup> This difference can be explained by the fact that male feminism was stimulated by the European encounter, whereas female feminism derives its origins from Moroccan social reality. In other words, even though modern Moroccan feminism is born during the colonial period, on the part of women this feminism was not a Western product, and even less a colonial one. Instead, the women were reacting to local social constructions of inequalities between the sexes, as well as participating in the social and

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<sup>63</sup> *Al-Mujahida al-Marhuma Lalla Malika al-Fassiya*, op.cit., 56-70.

<sup>64</sup> Sadiqi, Nowaira, el-Kholy & Ennaji eds., op.cit., 161.

<sup>65</sup> Sadiqi, Nowaira, el-Kholy & Ennaji eds., op.cit., 174.

<sup>66</sup> Sadiqi, op.cit., 325.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

political debates of its time, among which are the issues of power relations among nations, national development and social inequalities.

The next generation of feminists included women who had had true access to education, partly as a result of the actions of the first generation of modern Moroccan feminists. Thus by the 1960s, a decade after achieving independence, Morocco had its first women jurists, doctors, pharmacists and academics.<sup>70</sup> They were the authors of feminist ideas that emerged in newspapers and academic reviews of this period.<sup>71</sup> This generation of feminists, while advocating women's liberation and the development of their human potential, also highlighted women's domestic roles. In this sense, they sought to improve women's lives, although without questioning patriarchal norms and values. Zakia Daoud and Leila Abouzeid were among this feminist generation of journalists.<sup>72</sup>

In the 1970s, Moroccan women like the novelist Khnata Bennouna began to write novels and sociological studies questioning the validity of patriarchal structures.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, along with the development of journalistic, literary and academic writing, partisan feminism also emerged in Morocco in this decade. Various feminist sections were formed within socialist-leaning political parties such as Socialist Union of Popular Forces (SUPF) and the Party of Progress and Socialism (PPS).<sup>74</sup> The paradigm of this feminism was "insufficiency," by which they meant to criticize the insufficiency of rights recognized to women. Thus many of these feminists called for the legal treatment of adult women to be the same as adult men.<sup>75</sup> Among the first demand of this feminism was the abolition of a series of legal discriminations against women, mainly in the private sphere. These included the abolition of the obligation for an adult woman to have a male guardian, the abolition of the requirement for a male to legally support his wife (which resulted in the exclusion of women from the job market and public sphere), the abolition of polygamy and the transformation of the marriage dissolution process into a judicial divorce.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, in 1977, the women of the national congress of SUPF connected the reform of the private sphere to the wider project of socialism. However, the male elites of SUPF did not share this position. According to them, feminism was a bourgeois ideology; therefore, only the abolition of capitalism would bring about women's liberation.<sup>77</sup> As a result, the SUPF's parliamentary group did not retain the women's requests within their party platform.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 125-126.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 126.

After this event, these feminists operating within socialist-leaning parties realized that women's issues transcend class struggles and limitations of socialist and Marxist orthodoxies.<sup>79</sup> From that point on, they expressed the discriminations that women face in terms of relations between genders and power structures among the sexes. In addition, they located these issues within the broader issues of democratization, democracy and human rights. Similarly, they realized that political parties did not adequately represent women. Tired of being marginalized within "male political clubs", they decided to found autonomous associations, the objective of which was the advancement of women's rights. This "associative" feminism began in the 1980s. It included the formation of, various feminist and feminine autonomous associations, only some of which kept a strong link to a specific political party. Some of these associations included the Democratic Association of Moroccan women, founded in 1985, the Union of the Feminine Action, founded in 1987, and the Moroccan Association of Women's rights, founded in 1992. These associations advocated the implementation of rights for women that were already legally recognized, the abolition of legal discriminations against women, the end of women's poverty, the eradication of women's illiteracy and the elimination of all forms of violence against women, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment, among other issues.<sup>80</sup> This generation of the feminist movement produced feminists who became well-respected public figures, such as Latifa Jbabdi, Nouzha Skalli, Amina Lemrini and Latifa Smires Bennani.<sup>81</sup>

It is in the context of this associative feminism that Latifa Jbabdi, founder and president of the Union of Feminine Action, organized the "One Million Signature" campaign in 1992.<sup>82</sup> The campaign aimed at gathering one million signatures, in order to pressure the ruling elites to change the *Mudawana* (the Moroccan family code) to an extent that would eradicate a series of legal discriminations against women. The text of the petition was sent to King Hassan II, to members of the parliament and to the main newspapers in the country. This petition constitutes a major document in the history of Moroccan feminism. For the first time, women mobilized in masses around common demands, and directly express their demands to the concerned authorities, as one can conclude:

We, the undersigned, declare that we strongly believe that only a democratization of relations within the family and society in general can lead to the construction of a real democracy. The Personal Status Law articles are in utter contradiction to the Moroccan Constitution, which explicitly guarantees equality between men and women. The present Personal Status Law is out of date and its articles are unjust toward women, as they cause unnecessary family crises and social tragedies. We, here, demand to change its articles according to the following principles:

Consider the family as a Unit based on equity, equality, and mutual respect

Consider women, in the same way as men, legally recognized as soon as they reach majority age

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Naciri, op. cit., 7-8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Sadiqi, Nowaira, el-Kholy & Ennaji eds., op.cit., 277-278.

<p>A woman who reaches majority should be able to marry without a legal guardian</p> <p>Both husband and wife should have the same rights and duties</p> <p>Divorce should be judicial, and both husband and wife should have an equal right to file for divorce.</p> <p>Polygamy should be abolished</p> <p>Mothers should have parental rights in the same way as fathers</p> <p>Work and education should be considered women's pre-eminent rights; husbands should have no prerogative to deprive their wives of these rights.<sup>83</sup></p>
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Because this initiative, the government somewhat modified the “family code”. Although the legal modifications were minor, they accomplished a major shift in the spirit of the law. As a result of the petition, people came to recognize that *Mudawana* thus was a human product, able to be abrogated, and it lost its status as a supposedly sacred text with immutable provisions. Moreover, the petition stimulated deep social debates that contributed to publicizing discriminations that women face.

Yet even while feminism was penetrating greater aspects of the Moroccan social fabric as it achieved additional gains in terms of rights for women, it also started to face a backlash with the emergence of Islamism as early as the 1980s.<sup>84</sup> Although it utilizes a religious discourse, Islamism is in fact a political movement with an objective to legitimize patriarchal norms and values. As such, its proponents target illiterate women and marginalized social classes, advocating the veil and women's seclusion. To confront this threat, feminists affirmed publically their belonging to Islam as their spirituality, while requesting contextual readings of the Quran to elicit more liberal interpretations of religious texts.<sup>85</sup>

Currently, in the context of the Arab Spring, women's organizations demand that the constitution guarantee a quota of 50% for women in all spheres of activity, including in every level of decision making. Thus, the feminist movement represents one of the main actors promoting democratization in the Moroccan political scene.<sup>86</sup> Feminist associations are more accessible to women than political parties, and they are the ones who mainly represent, express and channel women's demands. This explains why there are currently two types of feminist associations. One type seeks to fill the state's social deficiency towards women and children. These associations provide legal support and material assistance to single mothers, a shelter to homeless children and a refuge to women who are victims of domestic violence. Another type works to bring about the advent of a society that does not discriminate against women. Given the extent and the diversity of their activities, women's associations developing

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<sup>83</sup> Sadiqi, Nowaira, el-Kholy & Ennaji eds., op. cit., 278.

<sup>84</sup> Sadiqi, op. cit., 330.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 332.

today have an extensive network of alliances both with Moroccan civil society and with numerous international governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

This brief history of modern Moroccan feminism deserves some reflection. During its various stages of evolution, Moroccan feminists made use of key concepts such as national development, socialism, Marxism, class struggles, gender, democracy and human rights. However, these were not examples of mere importation of Western concepts. Like other new ideas in human history, all of these concepts travelled far and fast in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet once they reach a new territory, they were redefined according to the geopolitical conjectures of the territory, as well as interacting with other factors. Put more explicitly, every intellectual production becomes sooner or later the inheritance of all humanity. In the case of Moroccan feminists definition women's issues in terms of democracy and human rights, it is a strategic choice—as they situate these issues in the social and political struggles of their time, feminists in fact choose the most favorable concepts for the advancement of women's rights in their society. This explains why Moroccan feminism has successively adapted socialist and Marxist orthodoxies, a democracy and human rights discourse and the recognition of Islam as spirituality. Therefore, when the dominant feminist historiography perceives non-Western feminism as a product of “indigenous” Occidentalized elites, it denies non-Western feminists their ability to rethink and adapt according to their individuality ideas of their time to the needs of their society.

In conclusion, women's resistance to social constructions of inequalities between the sexes has existed in Moroccan society since ancient times, while modern feminism was born in Morocco in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, feminists have been mobilized around a twofold objective: the promotion of women's rights and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Thus, with a plurality of voices, they have claimed rights such as the right to education, the right to vote, access to employment, democratization of the private sphere and criminalization of violence against women, among other objectives. In other words, their demands are similar to those of feminists in the West and elsewhere. Moreover, most of these feminists and women's organizations exchange their experiences and knowledge with western feminists, western women's groups and human rights' NGOs through a tightly woven network of international solidarity. In this sense, Moroccan feminists have been engaged in dialogue with universal feminism, concerning common issues and interests among women. In order to facilitate this dialogue, it is necessary to abolish categories that divide women within cultural, religious and national identities.

## African Experiences in Feminism

In order to better understand this history of modern Moroccan feminism, the next part of this chapter will feature three different feminist voices expressing their views of women's issues: Mririda N'Ayt Atiq, who represents a pre-colonial feminist consciousness, Malika al-Fassi, who represents a conservative feminism and Hakima Chaoui, whose poetry uses both religious and anti-religious themes.



**Mririda N'Ayt Atiq : A pre-colonial feminist consciousness** <sup>87</sup>

Mririda N'Ayt Atiq's work is a perfect example of a home-grown pre-colonial feminist consciousness. The illiterate poetess Mririda was born some time before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Magdaz, in the Tassaut Valley beneath the Atlas Mountains. At that time, Tassaut Valley was so remote that it was completely sheltered from Western influences. Since Moroccan society favored oral tradition, Mririda's work would probably have gone unpublished if she had not meet René Euloge, a French teacher in Morocco and the first Westerner to set foot in Magdaz. Mririda's poems reached us thanks to Euloge who recorded them in 1927, translated them into French and published them in 1959.<sup>88</sup>

Mririda's songs and poems were as much her own, individual creation as they were a part of the Berbers' oral traditions. Their distinguishing feature is that they are clearly the voice of a woman who is bitterly contesting the social inequalities among the sexes in her own society. Read in this sense, Mririda's songs and poems inform us about women's status in Morocco in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as much as they inform us about Mririda's way of life. For example, we learn that Mririda chose to be a prostitute:

The Bad Lover

Leave me, soldier without sense or manners!

I can see that you are full of contempt,

Your hand raised, insults on your lips,

Now that you've had what you want from me.

And you leave, calling me a dog!

Sated with my pleasures,

You'd have me blush for my trade,

But you, were you ashamed

When you pushed gently at my door,

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<sup>87</sup> Mririda N'Aït Attik, trans. Daniel Halpern & Paula Paley, *Songs of Mririda, Courtesan of the High Atlas* (Greensboro: Unicorn Press, 1974).

<sup>88</sup> Mririda n'Aït Attik, *Les chants de Tassaout*, trad. René Euloge (Marrakech : Éditions de la Tighermt, 1959).

Up like a bull?

Were you coming to play cards?

You turned yourself into something humble,

Agreeing right off to my demands,

To losing all your pay in advance.

And the more your eyes undressed me,

The more your rough desire put you in my power.

When you finally took off my clothes

I could have had your soul for the asking!

I could have cursed your mother

And your father, and their ancestors!

Toward what paradise were you flying?

But now that you've calmed down,

You're back on earth,

Arrogant, rough and coarse as your *djellaba*.

Guest of mine for the moment, my slave,

Don't you feel my disgust and hate?

One these days

The memory of tonight will bring you back to me

Conquered and submissive again.

You'll leave your pride at the door

And I'll laugh at your glances and your wishes.

But you'll have to pay three times the price next time!

This will be the cost of your insults and pride.

I'll no more notice your clutching

Than the river notices a drop of rain.<sup>89</sup>

As a prostitute, Mririda considered as hypocritical any social condemnation of prostitutes. She further argued that if this condemnation must exist, then it surely should be extended to the prostitute's customers as well. In so saying, she reminded the client in the poem –and by extension any other man who frequented prostitutes -- that he has no lesson to give her concerning her "sex work," since he was the one who knocked on her door. Some of Mririda's poems also indicate that instead of getting married, she deliberately chose prostitution, a job that enabled her to maintain her autonomy and freedom:

Poor Naïve Man

Poor naïve young man, stop bothering me.

I've come to see my parents,

Not to look for a husband. God help me!

And I'll soon return to Azilal, if God wishes it.

One night with me has made you crazy –

Without laughing you ask me to be your wife!

I know how long that would last...

What can you give me for my liberty?

But first of all, don't take this reproachful air

To shame me for my trade,

This trade that's given you pleasure.

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<sup>89</sup> Mririda N'Aït Attik, trans. Daniel Halpern & Paula Paley, *Songs of Mririda, Courtesan of the High Atlas*, op.cit., 15-16.

What other could please me more?  
And you beg me to be yours only!  
Do you have something to give me?  
Tell me, naïve young man. – Days without meat?  
Without sugar and song?  
Sweat and painful work?  
The dung of the stable, stinking clothes  
And the thick air of the smoky kitchen  
While you're off dancing the *adersi*?  
And no doubt you'd want a household of sons.  
Can't you see this isn't for me?  
Let me return to the market of Azilal.  
You are wasting your time and your begging tires me.  
Why would I want to work  
When I'm covered with silver and precious gifts?  
I'm like a flower with an intoxicating perfume  
Which has only the agreeable worry of opening itself  
To receive, at its wish – each night, each day –  
The freshness of the dew, the caress of the sun.<sup>90</sup>

Mririda's rejection of marriage may have stemmed from a belief that, in a society in which men were in charge of the family, marriage disempowered women. For the poetess, it dispossessed women of their personal freedom, while enslaving them in domestic work and childbirth—preferably giving birth to sons. Although Mririda was illiterate, she perceived with clarity the institutions, like marriage, that perpetuated these social patriarchal structures.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 17.

Similarly, there is an instance in which she resorts to an illegal abortion enabled her to maintain control over her body, and correspondingly over her sexuality:

Sister

Sister, don't scold me.

I know I shouldn't have slept in the *azib*.

You know, sister, what can happen in a sheepfold

On a warm night, close to a young man...

Am I the only girl to give in

To the wishes of a young man?

How could I know that this night

Would bring a heavy stomach?

Sister, keep my secret!

Old Tamoucha knows the virtues of plants,

Of plants that will quickly deliver me.

Sister, you know well that afterwards

There won't be a trace.

Tamoucha has the alum and resin ready

To restore my virginity.

She has even promised to mention marriage

(Is it possible?) to our dear cousin...

Tell me, sister, will he make a good husband?<sup>91</sup>

When Mririda speaks about a marriage with a cousin, it is to ridicule the patriarchs who think they are able to control women's bodies and women's sexualities, requiring that women should be virgins and be "given" to their cousins. Mririda wanted to be no one's wife. In fact, given the social constructions of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 19.

inequalities between sexes that are unfavorable to women, what Mririda wanted were some fleeting moments of joy and pleasure:

What do you want?

[...]

You make me laugh, son of the high pasture.

I don't care about money or a scarf,

and even less about marriage.

I expect from you

what you expect from me.

And satisfied, we will leave each other.

What I want, strong son of the high pasture,

what I want is the shelter of this bush

where you will lie on my breasts – which I hold

out to you – and in a moment

happiness sweeter than milk,

while my eyes lose themselves in the sky.<sup>92</sup>

After all, Mririda's way of life is a bitter scream of rebellion against the social constructions of inequalities between the sexes. Refusing the institution of marriage, prostitution and recourse to illegal abortion appear as means enabling the poetess to somewhat maintain her autonomy.

### **Malika al-Fassi : A conservative feminism**<sup>93</sup>

Like Mririda, Malika al-Fassi was conscious of the ways in which the society in which she lived created inequalities between the sexes, and the resulting unfavorable impact on women's lives. However, al-Fassi's feminism differed significantly from the rebellious poetess' feminist consciousness. While Mririda's feminist consciousness was expressed through an individual rebellious way of life, al-Fassi's

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>93</sup> *Al-Mujahida al-Marhuma Lalla Malika al-Fassiya*, op.cit.

joined with other feminist voices to create the shared movement of modern Moroccan feminism. These different pathways may have resulted in part from the fact that whereas Mririda was poor and illiterate, al-Fassi benefitted from great socio-economic privileges. In fact, al-Fassi was born in 1919 into one of the wealthiest and most erudite families in Morocco. She benefitted from the beliefs of her father, al-Cadi al-Fassi, who considered education as a civic obligation and thus ensured she received a proper education.

Even as a child, Malika al-Fassi did not understand why her teachers came to her house, while her brothers and male cousins went school. At a certain age, she realized that there was no school for girls in Morocco at that time. Al-Fassi had grasped that women were excluded from national education. Therefore, at only age fifteen, she wrote an article advocating women's right to education. The article was published by *al-Maghreb* magazine in 1935, and was signed "al-Fatate" (the young girl). The first feminine voice to have made her way to the national press, she asserted:

When I consider the situation of women in Morocco, I find an abundance of ignorance and backward-looking traditions, which have nothing to do with Islam. Islam refutes these traditions. I devote this article to women because they live in decadence and inertia. I call upon you to rescue and free women from the chains of ignorance and illiteracy and provide them with a proper education.

Let us ignore the talk of egoists who underestimate women and undervalue their purpose, and let us consider the problems of this task, hoping that we will reach a solution. Whoever has studied the past or present of civilized nations, and has witnessed the culture and advantages that women enjoy, will realize that women are essential in all human societies, that women form the cornerstones of rebuilding a nation. They are the first teachers of children and bear responsibility for the future generation. Therefore, we must first ask how this generation should grow and what objectives it should attain. Should our children acquire cowardice, a mean spirit, and useless traditions, which will prove harmful to any nation? Or should they acquire virtue and self-reliance? The answer is self-evident. The education of young girls should then be compulsory, and only dull minds would resist this on the grounds that girls' education is an outrage. Women are considered by many to be ignorant and feeble-minded, higher in status only than animals. Yet, one cannot deny that many women are strong, well educated, and tactful, albeit in a few limited circles.

That is why I feel sad about the present state of Moroccan women. And therefore, I have thought of a solution: I call on all Moroccans to open the doors to girls' education so that they may acquire religious and literary knowledge in the Arabic language, so as to develop noble skills and wisdom.<sup>94</sup>

Malika al-Fassi's feminism was rooted directly in the real repercussions of the inequalities between sexes in Moroccan society: women's illiteracy and their exclusion from the educational system. In denouncing this situation at age 15, al-Fassi set herself on a feminist pathway in which she remained consistent over the years. Her first article was followed by a series of articles from 1935 to 1943, all

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<sup>94</sup> Sadiqi, Nowaira, el-Kholy & Ennaji eds., op.cit., 145.

advocating women's right to education. These articles may not have yielded significant results in terms of women's right to education during this period, but they did initiate deep social debates about women's status in society. Some of al-Fassi's readers opposed women's rights on the pretence that these rights were Western imports threatening national culture and religion. They reacted by writing their own articles, but Al-Fassi proved willing to enter into dialogue with her dissenters, writing this in 1935:

I was sad to read an article in *al-Maghrib* magazine with faulty ideas which called women's progress "Western", and claimed that it would only lead women to separate from their religion and to lose their values... I didn't think that such ideas could be published [anymore], ideas that set back girls' progress, and postpone their education... I was afraid of the influence that such an article might have; I, who cling to our language and religion and to those of our traditions that do not harm Islam or Moroccan civilization. I wanted to answer that article, but for various reasons I restrained myself. But now I think that I must write a word on the subject.

It is no secret that the Moroccan woman's life is stillness and languor. Why not, since she only leaves her mother to go to the handicraft mistress' house. And when she finishes there with skill in some craft, she becomes a prisoner in the house. All she knows of the secrets of life is what her grandmother and some old women tell her, such as stories about *djinn* [wicked spirits, imps] and the *baraka* [blessing, holiness] of saints: Sidi so-and-so, he who swears by him becomes blind; Sidi so-and-so, he who spends time in his shrine will be healthy, rich and vigorous... and so forth and so forth.

Is it fair that the young Moroccan girl remains the way she has always been, in an era of science and knowledge? Is it good for her to stay the way she was, when her sisters in the Middle East have already gained a significant amount of knowledge? Is it good for her to stay the way she was, when a number of the most talented Moroccan youth have scattered to Eastern and Western countries to get knowledge and high culture; when the Qaraouiyyine University is wide open and training students every year; when schools are full of boys; when the Middle East is sending us torrents of books, and papers and magazines, written by the region's best scholars; when knowledge is rapidly spreading throughout Morocco? Yet the young Moroccan girl knows nothing of all this, and gains nothing from it. How can educated youth accept as a wife and be comfortable with her, and give her the reins in socializing their children, when the youth have dealt with knowledge and formulated ideas, and gained enough learning to make them despise an ignorant woman?

This situation may lead to disaster: either marrying a foreign woman –and we have seen the signs of that, and the Middle Easterners have known its calamities and write about it- or it may lead to celibacy, which is a second calamity that destroys even civilized nations, let alone underdeveloped countries. It is possible to avoid these two calamities, since there is a way out: Giving girls a good education that will raise their level of culture and lead to the happiness of both man and wife.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Baker, op.cit., 64.



In 1946, Malika al-Fassi decided to act so that the call for women's access to education would be widely heard. In that year, she founded Akhawat al-Safaa (Sisters of Purity), a women's association within the political party Istiqlal (The Independence). Akhawat al-Saffa's objective was the promotion of women's rights. The first issue that al-Fassi promoted within this organization was the necessity to establish secondary schools for girls. Eventually, this association led to the creation of sections for girls in schools and was also a factor in the birth of the modern feminist movement in Morocco.

Malika al-Fassi campaigned for women's access to education until her death in 2007; however, al-Fassi only advocated education for women through the secondary school level:

But will this education be primary, or secondary, or superior? I think that what is appropriate for girls is secondary education, because the primary level alone will be incomplete... As for superior education, it is usually used to obtain a career, and careers are men's duty because of the life responsibilities that are imposed on them... We know the social harm caused by women's work from Westerners' experience and from Middle Easterners who have imitated them. For when a woman works outside the house, she who is responsible for the housework and the socialization and welfare of the children, it does nothing but take men's work and tear apart the family bonds because of the clashes that it causes.<sup>96</sup>

It should be noted, however, Malika al-Fassi's feminist thought situated women's progress in the context of the broader issue of national development. Put differently, al-Fassi's feminism did not significantly differ from the feminism of many of her male colleagues. Both were fostered by the nationalist reformist current during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this sense, al-Fassi's feminism has its roots in exchanges with Europe. Nonetheless, she still sought to dissociate herself from the West and to reject some aspects of feminism in the West:

The word equality, which is thundering now in the West and the Middle East, is nothing but a fraud. I don't understand woman's imitation of man, by working and taking on rights that are not hers, thus neglecting her home responsibility and all the burdens related to it. Is earning money man's only virtue? Are there not other social virtues equally or more important than earning money? Isn't the socialization of children and the managing of the house a great and gracious accomplishment? ... Men and women were created to cooperate, to confront the difficulties of life together. Man works hard outside the home, and woman inside, and it is through this association and cooperation that they reach equality, not in doing the same work.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Malika al-Fassi's feminism did not question the basic social patriarchal structures of Moroccan society at the time. In fact, al-Fassi rejected the principle of equality between the sexes, preferring instead to emphasize the complimentary nature of the sexes. In the name of this latter principle, al-Fassi considered that women's primary role would be to remain as mothers and wives. It was for this reason that she advocated a limited level of education for women. According to her, women did not

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

need a PhD in order to be good mothers and good wives. One can conclude on these accounts that al-Fassi's feminism is a conservative feminism.

### **Hakima Chaoui : A religious and anti-religious feminism**

Unlike Malika al-Fassi's feminism, the feminist writing and thought of Hakima Chaoui's feminism completely rejected the patriarchal structures of Moroccan society, including the religious beliefs that legitimated them. The context of this poetess' feminism, was the increasing delegitimizing of Moroccan feminism by Islamists in the 1980s. Indeed, these Islamists exploited religion in order to promote women's subordination, using Islam as a justification for their call for veiling, women's exclusion from the work place, women's seclusion and the glorification solely of women's roles as mothers and wives. Writing in response, Chaoui utilized a religious discourse, precisely in order to bring into question the degrading images of women they produced as well as the patriarchal norms and values that the religious fundamentalists convey. Such a process resulted in a feminist message that was paradoxically both religious and anti-religious:

You (in the feminine form)

Bright you are my lady

Like a sun

And the sun rises every day

From your eyes

Majestic you are

Like a palm tree

And under your feet the moon

Crawls

And the stars multiply

In your hands

Enflamed you are my lady

As the flames of revolution

And many revolutions

Learnt from you

[...]

Cursed is he my lady  
Who said  
You were created from a crooked rib  
Cursed is he my lady  
Who named you  
The sign of assent is silence  
Cursed from the origins of creation  
He who said  
You were a pudenda  
From your voice to your toes  
Cursed  
He who speaks poorly of you  
[...]  
Dignified, you are my lady  
And this present is igniting  
To burn yesterday's books  
And to write your forgotten history  
Cursed is he who betrays your sex  
When you are the progeny of mankind  
Of the moon  
Of the sun.»<sup>98</sup>

As a result of her attempts to restore women's dignity through her poetry, the poetess was victim of harassment and death threats. In March 8, 2001, Chaoui read the poem transcribed above on the radio

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<sup>98</sup> Hakima Chaoui, *Ishraqat al-jorh wa al-ishq* (Rabat : Imperial, 2001), 47-49. (It is our translation.)

for the occasion of International Women's Day. The Islamists' reaction was immediate. Accused of blaspheming against the Prophet, the poetess was excommunicated by the fundamentalist newspaper *Attajdid*.<sup>99</sup> While this episode was undoubtedly stressful for Chaoui, it nevertheless contributed to greater publicity for her poems. Inescapably, this episode raises one question: How many women were silenced over the centuries, and how many more are still silent, because of fear of reprisals?

## Questions

- 1- According to most mainstream histories of feminism, where and when did feminism emerge? Based on the information in this chapter, do you agree or disagree? Why?
- 2- Consider the popular conceptions of African women described in the Global Contexts section. How does Moroccan feminists' activism compare with these conceptions?
- 3- What does Mririda's poem "Sister" suggest about precolonial women's control of their reproductive lives?
- 4- Malika al-Fassi opposed the principle of equality between the sexes, favoring instead that of complementarity between the sexes. Can women attain equality of rights, while claiming difference?
- 5- Compare Hakima Chaoui's poems to the images conveyed by Western medias about the veil and Muslim women.
- 6- Compare Mririda, al-Fassi and Chaoui's feminisms.
- 7- French philosopher Michel Foucault asserts that power and knowledge are often intertwined. Can such statement be applied to our knowledge about the history of feminism?

## Further Readings

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