

### Moroccan Women's Civil Activism: Towards a New Reform

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**Abstract:** *From the 1980s onwards the rise of Moroccan feminist discourse paralleled the emergence of Moroccan women's civil activism. Moroccan women have established autonomous civil associations in order to render them a legitimate robust scene for political and social performance. Such organizations have mobilized women to create social and political strategies and work in harmonious networks in order to approach all categories of women, be they literate or illiterate, situated in rural or urban areas. The 1980s marked the foundation of two important organizations that championed feminist demands in Morocco and raised women's cause from a radical perspective. The Democratic Association for Moroccan Women (ADFM) founded in 1985, and the Women's Feminine Action (UAF) created in 1987. They both formed a feminist space from which women could disseminate their feminist agenda in an attempt to promote their rights and end patriarchal hegemony. This study has assessed the extent to which Moroccan women civil activism contributed to igniting the debate over reforming the family law and over integrating women into the social development.*

**Keywords:** Civil activism, non-government associations, family law, women's rights, feminist consciousness.

#### Introduction

Moroccan women's civil activism is stirred by their movement into civil collective action and social work. The question of women's condition and role in Moroccan society has become more politicized with the emergence of non-government organizations. Moroccan women have established their autonomous associations and magazines in order to make a fundamental change on both the legal and political domains. Since the late 1980s, Moroccan women have become more visible as they have started to be active agents in civil community and in public sphere. Through bringing the debate of their plight into the public sphere, Moroccan women managed to blur the boundaries between the private and the public and exercise thus their own proper freedom. They are no longer working individually or under the authority of men, rather they manage to embody their freedom in grassroots movements and activities. Such collective organized work has paved the way for Moroccan women to create their own collective consciousness and identity. They come to understand the nature of their position in society and attempt to impose their female agency and subjectivity via establishing autonomous civil associations. The way women are engaged in such associations and the results they achieved are investigated in this paper.

#### 1- The Emergence of Feminist Associations

The emergence of the ADFM (Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc, 1985) and the UAF (Union de L'Action Féminine, 1987) among many others, provide Moroccan women with social and political empowerment. Through these associations, Moroccan women started to perform their roles as active citizens and contribute in constituting a democratic society based on gender equality and social justice. As Moha Ennaji points out,

women's activism has feminized civil society in Morocco due to its greater social involvement in social and political affairs and due to the proliferation of women's associations, and their access to the media. Since the early 1980s, gender roles have

been shaken by women's contributions and participation in the public life motivated by their aspirations for equality and civil rights ( 2011: 87).

These women activists have created new independent spaces from which they could dynamically be united in protest against Moroccan discriminatory laws. The proliferation of women's civil associations have informed the intellectuals as well as the ordinary people about the necessity to integrate women in government political decisions in order to make a change in women's legal and political social status. Within this new social mobilization, Moroccan women confronted the members of their civil community directly without any medium, and transgressed the boundaries between the private and public spaces. Women activists and actors in such non-governmental organizations gathered to destroy the "prison harem" and push women to demonstrate against biased family code and sexual segregation. However, in their push for equality and liberty, Moroccan women activists were divided into two main camps. One was represented by secular leftist women who advocated total radical change in the Sharia-based Law by adopting secular civil codes, while the other camp represented by the Islamic conservative opposed such a change. Though they succeeded in legislating a new modern Family Code in 2004, their division makes the implementation of such a law a difficult task.

The ADFM<sup>1</sup>, which was founded in June 1985 in Rabat, is a landmark in the development of modern feminist consciousness in Morocco; it reflects women's independent swing into action and feminist mobilization to gain sexual, political, and socio-economic rights. Its members belong to the Moroccan women intelligentsia bearing the ideology of the left, thus representing the secularist feminist tendency. As Zakia Salime points out, "the ADFM is inevitably the entry point to any study on the women's movement in Morocco and remains, to this date, the cornerstone of secular feminism in the country" (2011: 23). The importance of such pioneer non-governmental association may be traced to the strategies it follows and the objectives it plans to promote feminist consciousness among Moroccan women from all social strata. To implement its plans, the ADFM has created many centers all over Morocco to disseminate its views and raise women's awareness about their (legal) rights. By adopting an international human rights perspective, based on the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), this grassroots organization has attempted to make a radical change in the Moroccan conventional law that perpetuates women's segregation and gender inequality. Its international secular discourse has urged the Moroccan government to execute the content of the International agreement they have approved such as the CEDAW.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the UAF (Union de L'Action Féminine), which was proposed by Latifa Jbabdi in 1987, has had a great impact on raising women's feminist consciousness, manifested in its initiatives and civil actions, especially, to open the national debate on the legal status of women in Morocco. Its members are aware that Moroccan women's current situation cannot be improved or challenged unless the family law that legitimizes and perpetuates such an inferior position is subjected to reform from a feminist perspective. Thus, the UAF activists set as primary aims to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women and to grant them instead their political, socio- economic rights. They attempt also to integrate women in development as active agents and full citizens who can work hand in hand with men. To achieve such goals, the UAF has established many programs such as the programme of literacy and informal education, the programme of fighting violence against women, the programme of integrating women in

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<sup>1</sup> Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (The Democratic Association of Moroccan Women).

<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all Form of Discriminations against Women.

development, and many others that have contributed to accelerate women's mobilization and social empowerment.

Despite their different strategies, these non-governmental associations remain autonomous and share the same feminist ideology and goals. As zakia Salime affirms, "[they] remain independent from political parties and open to all women regardless of their political parties' affiliations and sensibilities" (2011: 24). Their impact lies in the fact that many local centers and small associations are created all over Morocco to lime, apply their feminist agenda and render the question of women's cause a political debate. As Fatima Sadiqi claims, "these two associations were soon followed by a plethora of similar, but smaller women's associations which emerged to combat violence against women, gender-based legal and cultural discrimination, under-representation of women in government and the economic sector, and illiteracy" (2013: 13). In addition to fighting sexual harassment and domestic violence against women, the increase of such feminist organizations has paved the way for women's collective empowerment as they start to question women's political and legal position within a community that is on the way to democratization and modernization. Many former political detainees during the years of Lead—such as Latifa Jbabdi and Fatna El Bouih-- have remained militant feminist within these organizations and began to disseminate their feminist agendas in order to raise feminist political consciousness through increasing women's visibility on the public sphere and asserting their equal participation in the political space hand in hand with men.

Stemming from a leftist ideological paradigm and from a universal human rights approach, these associations advocate a special discourse that seeks to criticize and dismantle the patriarchal convention-based law, and the government's biased politics towards women. To communicate their feminist agenda to the public, these associations have created innovative communicative means, manifested in publishing some feminist magazines such as Nissaa Almaghrib published by the ADFM, 8 Mars launched by the UAF, and Kalima edited by Hind Taarji. These magazines were so important that they broke down the culture of women's silence and complemented women's feminist literary and fictional writings. As Loubna Skalli claims, "such publications contributed to opening up new discursive spaces by and for women to critique oppressive power differentials. Equally important, they have turned women into producers, users, and consumers of information over which they have a more or less greater degree of control" (2007: 124). Through the use of the media, these associations succeeded in shaping feminist consciousness by articulating women's plight in every field and confronting many audiences.

Despite their short time, these 1980s magazines broadened Moroccan women's horizons. Not only did women manage to speak and be heard but to act and perform effective deeds as well. The publication of these periodicals was just one strategy among many others that women activists sought to transmit their message and forge a feminist discourse. For instance, Thamaniya Mars and Kalima made women's submissive position in society wide known in the public sphere and publicized the Moroccan biased law towards women. However, beyond editing the word, such women activists in civil society pursued their feminist movement and carved out a niche via organizational field work and public activism. In this regard, the ADFM and the UAF called on every Moroccan woman to rally in favour of making a radical change in the Moroccan Family Code (the Moudawana).

## 2- The Debate on the Reform

The dawn of the 1990s marked women's developed self-conscious activities and strategies. Zakia Daoud describes this period as "l' explosion des potentialities" and "une longue maturation" because of the increase in the number of women's feminist associations (Daoud, 1993: 313). In

the same context, Jamila El Moussalli considers the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium as the era that manifested a shift in women's discursive as well as practical strategies (2011, p. 89). In her view, women's organizations transcended raising slogans and general demands to formulate rigorous proposals and projects such as revising the constitution in the way that asserts gender equality, ratifying the 1979 CEDAW treaty, and reforming the Family Code (2011: 90). In the 1990s, Moroccan women's movement gained maturity and enhancement. Political liberalization and Morocco's ratification of many international human rights treaties paved the way for Moroccan women activists to raise women's collective consciousness about the necessity to lead the battle of reforming the personal Status Code. As Latifa Jbabdi points out,

Dés le début de son histoire, le mouvement féministe marocain a fait de la réforme de la Moudawana son principal cheval de bataille. Au tout début, c'était un sujet véritablement tabou dans ce pays. Les résistances étaient énormes, car nous remettions en question l'un de piliers de la société patriarcale Marocaine. Ce qui entraînait inéluctablement la remise en question de tout l'ordre sociale (Jbabdi, 2014).

In 1992, Jbabdi headed the campaign to collect one million signatures to petition the king to reform the Family Code. Such event was of paramount importance in the history of Moroccan women's feminist movement as it enabled the elite women to reach out to the illiterate and the ordinary women living in rural and urban areas. Through such campaign, Jbabdi, Amina lamrini, Nouzha Skalli, Fatima Agnaw to name but a few, circulated their feminist agenda and informed women about the conventional Family Law that rendered them in a subsidiary position. By getting one million signatures, these organizers legitimated their confrontation with a traditional interpretation of Islam within the folds of the Family Code. Their great success manifested deeply in the intervention of King Hassan II, who assigned some religious scholars and different intellectuals to revise the Family Law in accordance with some of women activists' requests (2011: 82), but without conflicting with the Quran and the Sunna. Nonetheless, the Islamists' attack on such a feminist petition was a stumbling block again against achieving the desired codification. Thus, the 1993 reform of the Personal Status Code was limited and didn't live up to all these activists' expectations. Its main reform concerned the question of polygamy which became a little bit constrained, but not outlawed. Women became informed of their repudiation but performing the act of divorce was still very complicated. Male guardianship and inheritance remained irreversible. Yet, in the view of Leila Rhiwi, it was "an enormous step forward because it removed the sacred aura around the code" (quoted in Howe, 2005: 164) render it alterable and opened to feminist readings and interpretations.

Despite its simple amendment, the 1993 Family Code was a turning point in the development of feminist consciousness and "a sign that the Moroccan feminist movement was making significant headways" (Sadiqi, 2011: 39). The nineties generation proved its deep basic understanding of its derogatory position; it transformed feminist ideas and texts into a political debate and action. Such a period marked Moroccan women's mature perceptions of themselves and of the world around them. Feminist consciousness became palpable in their use of a feminist vocabulary and a feminist public discourse. As Sadiqi claims, "this discourse sought to politicize women's collective consciousness of their oppression and denounced the indifference of political parties, which often used women's issues to enforce their political agendas and demarcate themselves from the fundamentalist rhetoric, to the reality of women's lives" (2013: 37). development of feminist discourse and feminist activism strengthened Moroccan women's "bonds of sisterhood" (Green, 1979: 360) and rendered the question of changing the Sharia-

based Family Law an independent feminist concern headed by women beyond the patriarchal ideologies of the political parties. Such liberal actions manifest deeply the rise of feminist consciousness as Pearl Green advances, “a major component of the feminist consciousness is autonomy and self-control” (1979: 373). In the late nineties Moroccan women started to control the debate about the Family Law to the extent that they succeeded in pushing the new socialist government to launch the “Plan for Integrating Women in Development” (Sadiqi, 2013: 40). As Zakia Salime confirms, “the dream of feminist reform only materialized in 1999, when the government proposed the National Plan of Action for integrating women into development, promising to remove the conditions of gender inequalities from family law” (2011: xii). In fact, the announcement of such a Plan made the Moroccan feminist movement reach the pinnacle of its achievement. For it proposed radical changes in the premises of the Family Law such as polygamy, inheritance, marriage, divorce, child custody. In what concerns marriage for instance, the *Moudawana* has elevated the age of marriage as it states in article 19, “men and women acquire the capacity of marriage when they are sound mind and gave completed eighteen full Gregorian years of age” (The Reform, 2004: 24).

The suggestions the Plan made did not pass unopposed; rather it triggered the Islamists’ harsh reaction and opposition. Thus, in 2000 more than 300.000 Islamists were holding a demonstration in Casablanca to protest against the proposed plan to reform the Personal Status Code. While the city of Rabat saw another massive demonstration by secularists, activists, feminists and human rights non-government organizations that supported the proposed reform and called for its implementation, but the government intervened and put the project on hold. The outcome of these reactions was in favour of the Islamists who succeeded in nullifying the Plan. Although such fundamentalist groups interrupted again women’s pathway towards feminist development and postponed the reform of the Family Code until 2004, it did accentuate women’s civil activism. In 2001, women activists in non-government associations responded to such Islamists’ attack on the Plan by setting up a coalition named *le Printemps de l’Egalité*, (the Spring of Equality) coordinated by Leila Rhiwi. This coalition empowered the women proponents of the legal Reform and proved to the King and to the public their collective consensus on the proposed change. As Alexandra Pittman points out, “this smaller coalition aimed to establish a network to advocate the reform of the *Moudawana* and more closely monitor the situation and its developments. In 2001, the Spring of Equality Coalition sent King Mohamed VI a memorandum with their propositions and visions for reform in the *Moudawana*” (2007: 8). This coalition succeeded in moving the change forward despite the Islamists’ resistance.

The question of reforming the Family Law unveils the existence of conflicting ideologies and schisms within Moroccan civil society manifested in the clash between the Islamists and the secularists. The rise of the Islamist movement, for instance, considered the project of the reform a foreign attack on the Islamic tenets that constituted the tenets of the Family Law. As one of the female Islamists claims,

our protest in Casablanca was not religious but political. It was a protest against the interventions of the West in our cultural affairs, against the dictate of how to change *Moudawana*. For us it was once again cultural aggression and humiliation. We were never against the reform of the family code. In Fact, sharia is a source for liberation of women, which can go even further than the current family code if the West lets our internal dynamics develop (Quoted in Dmitrovova, 2009: 6).

Such a view refutes the universal human rights laws and treaties presented by CEDAW, and considers any codification that doesn’t stem directly from the Sharia intolerable. For such an Islamist woman, basing the revision of Family Law on Islam is enough to grant women their

legitimate rights beyond Western instructions. In an interview with Marvine Howe, Nadia Yassine,<sup>3</sup> the representative of the feminine branch of Jamaat Alaadl Wallhasan (Justice and charity), reveals also her discontent with the Plan of reforming the personal Status Code. As Yassine explains,

This plan comes in the framework of a strategic global policy. There are undeclared interests behind the plan. It was sponsored by the World Bank in the framework of Beijing. It is part of the efforts to break up the nuclear family, part of the Western concern over demographics in Islamic countries (Quoted in Howe, 2005: 167).

Though the Islamists influenced the public opinion and thrived on attracting many people to their side, they didn't prevent the liberal feminists to continue willy-nilly their struggle for the reform. They presented an approach that derived from the universal human rights movement and Western feminism, but didn't neglect Islamic prescripts. Rather, they suggested a feminist re-reading and an evaluative interpretation of Islam beyond the patriarchal rigid one. As Jbabdi postulates,

cette relecture de l'islam et l'adoption de deux référents, l'un spécifique et l'autre universel, nous ont permis d'ancrer nos revendications dans la réalité de notre société, ce qui a eu bien plus d'impact tant auprès des femmes que des décideurs. Les réformes de la Moudawana que nous avons présentées s'inscrivent dans cette logique (Jbabdi, 2014).

This feminist vision became very recognizable, especially when the new king ascended to throne after the death of Hassan II in 1999. Mohamed VI allowed women to reach ministerial position and started to identify with the Moroccan feminist movement and its demand to enhance women's position in Moroccan society. As he claims in one of his royal speeches, "How can we hope to achieve progress and prosperity when women, who constitute half of the society, are deprived of their rights, without taking into consideration that our holy religion considers them equal to men?" (Quoted in Howe, 2005: 164) Significantly, the King appointed three women to contribute to the reform of the Family law: Zhor Lhor (a jurist), Nezha Guessous (a doctor), and Rahma Bourkia (a sociologist). For the first time His majesty allowed women to participate in Ijtihad beside men. This event was in itself a great achievement for the Moroccan feminist movement, for it granted women the right to construct a law from their own perspectives. The commission adopted Ijtihad and consulted with Muslim jurists who accepted the reform articles.

Bassima Hakkaoui<sup>4</sup>, a leader of an Islamic association at that time, was among the opponents of the Reform. As she argued, "the current debate over the Moudawana represents a conflict between those who respect the Sharia and those ideological groups who prefer international convention even when they contradict Islamic sources" (Quoted in Howe, 2005: 169). Like Yassine, Hakkaoui considered the reform of the Family Law an importation from the West that aimed at debunking Islam. For her, polygamy doesn't humiliate women or degrade their position within the family; rather it increases men's responsibility. As she explains, "this system [polygamy] enables the first wife to keep the family together, while it assures the dignity of the second wife and the responsibility of the husband toward both wives and children" (Quoted in Howe, 2005). To what extent Hakkaoui convinced the feminine public with such a claim remained a rhetorical question (however, the PJD did). Mernissi reflects on the issue by elucidating that the Islamists' resistance to change is discriminate as it concerns only women's

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<sup>3</sup> Nadia Yassine is the daughter of Sheikh Abedsalam Yassine, the founder of the same organization.

<sup>4</sup> Bassima Hakkaoui is actually the minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development in Abdillah Benkirane's cabinet. She is representative of the PJD party (Party of Justice and Development).

liberation and socio-cultural development whereas in other fields change is welcomed. As she maintains,

[Muslim] societies do not reject and resist changes indiscriminately. Muslim societies integrated and digested quite well technological innovations: the engine, electricity, the telephone . . . all this without much resistance. But the social fabric seems to have trouble absorbing anything having to do with changing authority thresholds. . . . Whenever an innovation has to do with free choice of the partners involved, the social fabric seems to suffer some terrible tear (Mernissi, 1987: XVII).

In Muslim societies, both social and family relations are structured by patriarchal hierarchy, thus any coming change is seen as a threat to this structure that is based mainly on male power. In this respect, Mernissi justifies this resistance to change as such, "everyone is afraid of change, but Muslims are more so, because what is at stake is their fantasies of power" (1987: X). Nonetheless, in the Moroccan Muslim context, this hierarchical power was shaken and the feminists' demand for gender equality snowballed for the first time into a modern liberal Family Law. The changes occurred in the 2004 Family Law reconciled the feminist paradigm with an Islamic moderate view as it was adopted an "Islamic State Feminism" (Eddouada, 2008) -- in the sense that it reveals men and women's equality within both the domestic and the public spheres. In the light of the new Family Law, the Moroccan family is no longer based on male tyranny and violence, but on equal rights and duties between the husband and wife. As Jbaldi confirms, "the law is a victory not only for women but also for the family, the society and the generation to come, and that investigation in women's empowerment is an investment in Morocco's future" (Quoted in Nelson, 2012: 113).

The 2004 Family Law is then the fruit of the development of Moroccan women's feminist consciousness, materialized in the creation of their own liberal feminist discourse that was transformed into civil activism in the public sphere. As Gerda Lerner affirms, "Liberating thought is always connected with liberal action in the public arena; thought and action represent two aspects of the same process by which social change is generated" (1993: 221). Their feminist consciousness is raised as they "are starting to wonder about the law" (1987: XIII). Within this framework, Moroccan women generated social as well as legal change in their status quo and rendered the question of their liberation a political issue discussed in the main political arenas such as the parliament. As Fatima Harrak points out, "for the first time in Moroccan history, gender issues were brought up for discussion in the political rather than in the religious arena" (2009: 8). Women have become more visible in the political arena and liberated from the prison of the private sphere. "As they transformed their consciousness, they went from the private to the public realm and acted in it, that is, they made their lives political" (Lerner, 1993). For instance, 2007 marked a turning point in Moroccan women's participation in political decision-making. Seven ministerial positions in the in 2007 government were offered to women in comparison to just two in the previous government (2002). Yasmina Baddou led the State Secretariat for Family and Children, Nawal Moutwakil, (the first Muslim woman Olympic champion in Africa in 1984) was named the minister of Youth and Sport, Nouzha Skalli headed the ministry of Social Development, Touria Jabran (the famous theatrical actress) was offered the Ministry of Culture, Amina Benkhadra was appointed as the minister of Energy and Mines, the State Secretariat for National Education was headed by Latifa Laabida, and Latifa Akharbach presided the State Secretariat of the ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation. Moreover, thanks to the quota system, women's parliamentary representation increased from two in 1997 to 34 after the 2007 elections (Sadiqi, 2010: 393). Holding such political positions reflects the extent to which Moroccan women's civil activism was fruitful as they enabled many women to

make “their lives political” by invading the political space and foregrounding a political feminist discourse.

By politicizing their feminist movement, Moroccan women, through working in civil non-government associations, pursued their campaign to assess the extent to which the Reform of the Family Law is implemented in all Moroccan rural and urban areas. They knew that the announcement of such a Law was not an end in itself but just the beginning of the real struggle. They got involved in many activities to define the handicaps that hindered the implementation of the Family Code and informed literate as well as illiterate women about its premises. Leila Rhiwi asserts that women’s struggle after the adoption of the Reform should concern “the change of mentalities.” (2004). Thus, they created links, coalitions and networks all over Morocco to watch out for the new Law. For instance, they established many small sections and “Listening Centers” such as Anaruz. Anaruz is the National Network of Counseling Centers for Women Victims of Violence (Reseau National des Centre d’ Ecoutes des Femmes Victimes de Violence) that brought Moroccan women together from all Moroccan regions. It was founded in April 2004 by approximately twenty associations in order to promote the mechanisms and the institutional procedures to protect women victims of violence. It aimed also at reinforcing women’s communicative strategies in many regions in the country. Anaruz provided many annual reports that paved the way for women’s rights advocates to recognize that despite the new Reform, gender inequality still permeated Moroccan society. Such centers, also, contributed to the amendment of many other laws that degraded women. For instance, in 2007, they succeeded in enforcing gender equality through acquiring the right of citizenship. As Sadiqi explains,

thanks in part to the efforts of women’s groups, particularly the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, a new nationality code was passed in January 2007, thereby improving gender equality with respect to citizenship rights. Article 7 of the new law, which came into force in April 2008, enables women, married to noncitizens men to pass their nationality to their children (2010: 326).

This indicates Moroccan women’s triumph to rectify the law. Likewise, in 2012, women’s non-government associations became more visible in the social and political arenas and gained new momentum as feminist legal movements, especially after the tragedy of Amina Filali. The latter, whose tragic story attracted national and international attention, motivated national and local feminist associations to protest against Article 475 of the Moroccan Penal Code and call for its abrogation. As Simone Allison says, “women’s rights campaigners in Morocco, --people with lots of work to do-- were horrified by Amina’s situation and organized large protests in the capital Rabat and a publicity campaign to draw attention to Clause 475” (Allison, 2012). Filali, a fifteen years-old girl living in suburban Laarach, was raped and then forced to marry her rapist as away to hide the dishonor act. Such a practice is common among families of girls victims of rape in Morocco. As Amina’s mother puts it, “I had to marry her to him, because I couldn’t allow my daughter to have no future and stay unmarried, we would be the laughingstock of our neighbours” (Allison, 2012). Such a view reveals that norms and traditional values are still entrenched in women’s minds in Moroccan society. It seems that what certainly looks good on paper (Moudawana, 2004), still fails to confront the harsh social and cultural realities of Morocco. Filali’s reaction to such unjust customs was her committing suicide by consuming a rat poison. Neither the law nor the family did save her from the violent rapist/husband. In this case, Article 475 in the Moroccan Penal Code acquits the rapist of all charges against him on the condition that he will marry his own victim. Indeed, such engagement for Filali and the like was psychologically and physically terrible and meaningless. More importantly, this event has awakened Moroccan

women's consciousness about the inherent misogynist gaps in the Moroccan Penal Law. As Latifa Jbabdi comments,

Amina Filali's suicide brought to the foreground this question that exists and was known. For a long time, we called on the feminist movement to bring an end to it but nobody was listening to us. Today, this tragedy contributed to the awakening of the conscience and alerted both public opinions and citizens. Today, everyone is talking about this issue and everyone is asking for article 475 to be abolished from the penal law (Quoted in Allison, 2012).

As a result of their feminist actions and civil activism, Moroccan women reaped the benefit of their mobilization when the government abrogated law and started to respond more positively to women's demands, especially as such demands had coincided with the emergence of February 20 Movement, inspired by the Arab Spring.

Moroccan feminist consciousness has also benefited from the Arab Spring, manifested in the 20thFebruary the movement. Stemming from the Arab spring, which emerged in the Maghreb and the Middle East in early 2011, this movement rallied women as well as men from almost all Moroccan regions to call for a political reform. In a series of protests and demonstrations, the 20thFebruary Movement succeeded in forcing the monarch to announce the reform of the constitution. In this context, Moroccan non-government associations exploited this event and made their call for gender equality a part of this movement's democratic project. For instance, the ADFM participated in this uprising under the name "the Feminist Spring". The Feminist Spring for Democracy and Equality Coalition united many feminist associations to draw up a memorandum that reflects the feminist perspective of the new constitution. As Jbabdi notes, "when the new constitution was being considered, the commission invited civil society to submit proposals regarding the changes they want in the new constitution. In fact, all of the women's groups gathered to create "the Feminist Spring Memorandum" (quoted in Mari, 2014: 175). Thus, of the umpteen feminist legal reforms, the new constitution is a turning point in establishing Moroccan women's equality to men in civil society and in all social, political and economic domains. For the first time in Moroccan history, the new constitution brought some crucial issues from the margin to the center. As Sadiqi comments,

with these vast reforms, various groups who were previously overlooked or altogether ignored are now finding their issues at the forefront of the country's politics. Take for example two once-marginalized groups: women and the Berber population (the indigenous peoples of North Africa). Their issues are now at the heart of the new Moroccan constitution (2014).

In addition to institutionalizing women's rights, the new constitution makes the Berber language official alongside with Arabic and Hassaniya.<sup>5</sup> This action increased Berber women's awareness of their central place in Moroccan society. This language has begun circulating in mass media and educational programs, thus enabling Berber women to understand their conditions. Recognizing the Berber language meant the recognition of Berber women's identity and subjectivity in the Moroccan multicultural setting.

However, although the new constitution has illuminated women's pathways towards emancipation and equality, its implementation has been hindered by many obstacles. Beside illiteracy and patriarchy, the Party of Justice and Development's victory of 2011 election turned out to be a huge disappointment to many feminists. Unlike the precedent governments, the PJD government has made women's political participation invisible as it allowed only one woman,

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<sup>5</sup>Hassaniya is the language of the Moroccan Sarhrawi people.

Bassima Hakkaoui, to head the ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family, and Social Development. In an interview, Jbabdi reflects on this event as follows,

under the PJD there will be a regression of women's rights and that past equality and parity measures that have been gained for women will be lost. In the past, the PJD had reduced the women to family, home, and children. . . . If democracy is to bring about change, women and human rights must be at the heart of any reforms. The absence of women from the political scene can only have a negative impact on their rights. (2014: 177).

Likewise, Sadiqi also claims that "the new government has already shown that it cannot work within the constitution with the appointment of only one woman. The new government has already demonstrated that women's issues will fall to the back of their agenda" (Mackanders, 2014: 183). Accordingly, Moroccan women's pathway towards the rise of full feminist consciousness is frustrated again by the growth of the Islamic trend. As they relatively hindered the reform of 2004 Mudawana, this time, the Islamists made the implementation of the new constitution difficult. Yet, Moroccan women's civil activism, either through political parties or non-government associations, continued their civil work in order to push for their feminist agenda into practice. On the other hand, and in opposition to the Islamic government that suppressed women's visibility in the political sphere, the left-wing Unified Socialist Party surprised civil society and the political sphere by electing Nabila Mounib as its Secretary General on January 2012. She, then, became the first woman Secretary General of a political party in Morocco. Mounib is an emblematic figure of Moroccan women who have developed a critical feminist political consciousness par excellence. In almost all of her speeches— she is well known of her rants or "coups de gueule"--, Mounib reveals her identity and political awareness as she criticizes the government and absolute monarchic power while advocating women's rights. Reaching such a political status is hailed as a triumph for all Moroccan women as Mounib points out: "my election is a victory for all women struggling for equality and dignity". (Quoted in Belamri, 2012). Stemming from her leftist socialist party, Mounib associates herself with every single woman in Morocco regardless of class, race or cultural belonging. Thus she is still struggling, along with many Moroccan women activists, to meet the demands of her fervent commitment to the cause of feminism and democracy.

In the light of these new vicissitudes, Moroccan women's feminist consciousness has received a powerful stimulus. A Feminist press and civil activism have had a great impact on promoting gender equality at the level of the social, political, and legal institutions. Not only have these women activists foregrounded a feminist political discourse, but they have generated legal and political changes as well. It is clear that from the 1980s onwards, Moroccan women have managed to create their own solidarity via autonomous organizations that have enabled them to play social and political roles beside men. Furthermore, the new millennium has signaled a new phase for women's legal triumph. As Sadiqi points out, "It is at the level of the law that women's rights have achieved the most significant gains." (2010: 314). The 2004 Reform of the Family Code and the new constitution have emerged from a long historical struggle and from the work of many generations. In fact, these reforms are the fruit of women's own action and feminist activism though their full implementation remains unsatisfactory and insufficient. But thanks to them, they have achieved the main universal goal of feminism: parity in almost all domains. As Jurgen Habermas states, "the classical feminism stemming from the nineteenth century understood the equality of women primarily as equal access to existing educational institutions and occupational systems, to public offices, parliaments, and so forth" ( Habermas, 1996: 777). Moroccan women have enjoyed some parity with men as they have become visible in the public

sphere and esteemed in the domestic one. They have entered the workforce, held political positions, and enjoyed their legitimate rights inside the family. In addition, these reforms have enabled women to think and act as an organized group despite their cultural or social differences. While the Moudawana consolidates the opinions of the Islamists with the secularists' and presents a moderate tolerate ( feminist) version of Islam, the new constitution creates a solid bond between all women of Morocco be they Amazigh, Sahraoui, or Arabs. Souaad Eddouada contends that such changes "are moves in the direction of an Islamic state feminism" (Eddouada, 2008: 1). From this perspective, the development of Moroccan feminist consciousness towards embracing the Amazigh and the Islamic revivalism requires special attention.

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