Mobilization of Moroccan Women

The Dialectics of Conflict and Empowerment

ABSTRACT This article draws on the experience gained and the lessons learned during and after the Arab Spring protest movements that called for economic, social, and political change. It raises the issue of the role Moroccan women played in these movements. In attempting to address this issue, the article relies essentially on bibliographical information and data derived from studies and writings that dealt with the feminist struggle in Morocco as a whole. It suffers from the lack of openness to a sociological approach or a political viewpoint in Arab and foreign scientific productions concerned with the struggles of women in Arab or Maghreb countries. In parallel, the study uses ethnographic research discerningly, since accurate and sufficient information available on the local protest movements has not received the necessary follow-up and definition. The article first monitors the shift in the dynamics of women’s protests and focuses on the persistent manifestations within them; it also considers the motives that contribute to the growth of this dynamic while stressing the extent of women’s participation in the February 20 Movement and in rural areas. It then identifies the results and extensions of this participation in relation to the requirements of empowerment. Finally, it discusses the problem of development and democracy that prevent women from achieving the desired change in the short term.

KEYWORDS Morocco, Arab Spring, women’s protest, February 20 Movement, women’s empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Sociological inquiry no longer considers the extension of cognitive curiosity to be the formation of feminist consciousness. Rather, it gives greater credibility to Charles Taylor’s definition of democracy being a policy of the recognition of the other (Touraine 2000, 6), which falls into the category of unusual phenomena. Nowadays, researchers of women’s aspirations, in particular those who base their analyses in fieldwork, chants of resistance
and accumulation of social conflicts (Belkziz 2014), will be guided by the fact that their experience in gaining the necessary recognition of competences and status is on the rise! This rapid growth encouraged researchers to study the social and economic status of women independently from that of men, following the constant increase in women’s access to the market in the last few decades, in all industrial and developing societies (Giddens and Birdsall 2005, 361).

In many respects, the social and sociological trend has been linked to the increasing frequency of women’s mobility, of which the women’s movement is one of its most prominent. Though its momentum declined, it was reduced for several considerations mentioned below. It gave way to the emergence of a new generation of women’s protest after the Moroccan movement of 2011, which was characterized by the intensity of social demand in a categorical or sectoral dimension.

In this context, we note that the crisis of underdevelopment and lack of democracy fueled the dynamic ideology and reactions of youths on February 20, 2011, in the context of the Arab Spring.

The “knot” of history mixed with social fragility and the psychological accumulations and generated among the rural population in a particular political context. This led to the estrangement of “masses” in different regions of the Moroccan kingdom (the unemployed, doctors, nurses, official and contracting professors, etc.), and the protests signaled the rise of new generations, with different references, thus motivating women to attend public space (Al-Walid 2017).

This presence was expected and required due to the weakness of the traditional political and trade union organizations, as well as the decline of the intellectual minority and the absence of the women’s movement. This participation is not the result of the moment, but rather their active and distinctive participation (Saif 1992) in the face of various forms of control, corruption, and discrimination in particular.

PROBLEMS OF CONFLICT AND INTERACTION WITHIN THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

Any study of the protests and the feminist movement in Morocco must clash with the various sensitive issues raised by the subject. This is particularly the case in relation to its complex dimensions and interactions that exceed any social struggle within a society that is changing within the logic of continuity.
It has to extend beyond this and cater for a socio-political culture that, in one way or another, conveys various forms of collective intelligence that make camouflage, collusion, and prevarication the most appropriate interpretation of fairness and equal opportunity. Men, in the light of these dominant cultural representations, are also products of a hierarchical political system or social system that is an objective outcome of a history of social, political, and cultural management that expresses aspects of socio-political conflict (Abdel Latif 2018b). This kind of management and its patterns of how to manage the balance of power within society certainly leads to inequality, exclusion, and apparent and latent symbolic violence against women, albeit to varying degrees.

This is explained by what Abdullah al-Arwi pointed out in an interview with Abdullah Saif (Saif 1992):

It is true that society is progressing, but the gap between reality and aspirations remains the same. As society progresses in some sectors, as ambitions increase, some conditions may have improved and some modernization taken place in political practice, but what is needed today is social modernization.

Considering this attestation, going back a quarter of a century makes one wonder if modernization has indeed been reached as we reflect on the inputs and outputs of the Moroccan movement, and examine the difficulties and resistance to the will of reform and change.

The question of modernization, in our view, acting on the perception that Abdul Latif Kamal devised for the desired dimensions of change, accommodates the question of political reform in its comprehensiveness, since it represents one of the appropriate approaches to the democratic project, especially after the emergence of a new consciousness (Abdel Latif 2018a). The latter is originally a natural product of strong historical factors, such as the scientific revolution, the birth of industrial society, and the development of the capitalist mode of production that contributed to the change of many phenomena and structures of society. The overlapping factors have combined new data that have allowed for a more equitable and fairer gender paradigm that can perceive the relative relevance of social products, the relative values that accompany them, the images they don, and the cultural and ethical values in which gaps in the social structure gaps are filled in, for cohesion and preservation (Abdel Latif 2018b). Aware of this change, sociological research has recently been
combined, as noted above, to examine the situation of women in isolation from that of men following the steady increase in women’s entry into the labor market and to try to understand the remarkable rise of the women’s movement.

Catalysts for women’s protest and the transformations feeding it
The impact of the global dimension on women’s issues must be emphasized first and foremost, where the neoliberal economy policy and development discourses can be read from two perspectives: positive—linked to the promotion of the human rights file; and negative—related to countries withholding international financial and economic assistance by setting preconditions to receive them, and later linking their preconditions to what is called “good governance.” Is this not some kind of imperialist pressure, bartering, and domination put upon underdeveloped countries whose path to growth will remain stalled? This, regrettably, is the sad reality. Only serious thinking and consideration on how best to overcome this double bind will limit the damage and constitute the most appropriate way forward. This is the required diligence today to address this issue on how to bypass and execute change without external interference. The Arab countries are mentally, at least, going through a real modernization shift and waiting realistically to see external pressure alleviated, the internal imbalance, and the resulting effects improved through the changes and openness to all possibilities conveyed to them via the Arab movement.

In the case of Morocco, aspects of this social imbalance were identified in the findings of the round-table study prepared by the Royal Institute for Strategic Studies (2016) when measuring the level of social cohesion in Morocco, as follows:

- Demographic transition: while family ties continue to be at the forefront of Morocco’s sense of security and trust, social transformations are occurring within Moroccan society.
- Economic conditions: the dissatisfaction of Moroccan families with their economic conditions according to the High Commission for Planning 2018.
- Value problems: the transition from the extended family to the nuclear family.
- Governance/oppression: the transition from the mode of governance to the mode of oppression (Zinedine 2017, 149).
• Family relationships: weakened relations within families, and thus a weakened social bond and sense of coexistence (Akhbar al-Youm 2015a, 5).

One indicator of the fragility of the social bond is the lack of a civic sense in public spaces, roads, and collective spaces, such as common property, and increasing manifestations of disrespect for the law, public property, and the property of others, and a prejudice for the rights and civil and moral integrity of persons. This shows that Moroccans are experiencing a social and political mediation crisis that has resulted in various profiles of protest (Economic Social and Environmental Council (ESEC) 2011, 68), including the women’s issue. Multiple reasons explain how this situation came about. In 2014, about 3.12 million women reached the minimum working age fifteen years, adding 5.2 million people to the 2000 figure, most of whom live in urban areas (3.60 percent), more than half of whom are illiterate (6.52 percent), and less than one-third (9.32 percent) have a degree (ESEC 2014, 7). Furthermore, women are more vulnerable to unemployment, particularly among those with degrees; and women’s activity remains fragile and concentrated in sectors with poor qualifications and is restricted to a limited number of occupations. In urban areas, more than three-quarters of working women are laborers or employed as domestic assistants (73.60 percent). Despite advances in education and training. Multigenerational cultural imbalances limit the equality of women and men in professional life.

The Moroccan school is an important place to convey the basic principles of human rights, in general, and women’s rights, in particular, but there is a long way to go to reach new paradigms in the area of equity. Educational wastage and the early marriage of minors are still among the causes that have serious consequences for the integration of women in economic life (ESEC 2014, 14). Their number reached 16.5 million (more than half of Morocco’s population at 50.9 percent), and nearly half (48.9 percent) of the population under fifteen years of age was female, rising to 52.9 percent in the age group sixty years plus.

These data enable an understanding of the essential elements, still in force, that have produced a culture of protest in the “feminine” element of society, which is revived and renewed in different forms and subject to the dynamics of societal transformations as well as to the interactions of reality with internal and external political opportunities. It thereby acquires the character of exclusivity and excellence at the level of action. Nonetheless, as many
researchers point out, the reality remains unchanged. It is a mixture of accumulated social and economic disadvantages and political and legal problems that need to be considered together to account for the emergence of any new actor, as is the case for the women’s movement in general.

**Process of and challenges for the women’s movement**

There is no denying the fact that over the last two decades the situation of women has witnessed a major development that has covered many areas. This has come about through the openness and liberal orientation launched by Morocco late last century, the momentum of mass political action resulting in the development of a human rights movement, women’s emphatic demand for greater balance, their great ability to mobilize and negotiate, and the international changes that have pushed, and continue to push, in the direction of deepening reforms (Adouni 2013, 62). This progress has meant that women have received several rights that, in the eyes of observers, represent a quantum leap towards actual devotion to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination. However, this institutional and legal development has not been matched by any equivalent development in reality and practice (62). Alain Touraine pointed out that everybody is seeking to be respected and to avoid being humiliated, especially the most oppressed and miserable of us, but most of all to be heard and obeyed (Touraine 2011, 254). Here he links this kind of demand to resistance, which can only be based on a self-awareness of conflict.

Under the dualism of consciousness and resistance, we may include the women’s movement in Morocco and the experiences it gained in the field, including cognitive, methodological, and pragmatic expertise. These are the products of a series of factors. The latter are reduced to the perception of the female elite of the deep contradiction between the progress it has created in the field of education and integration into the production process, and the obstacles that perpetuate and reproduce the realities of injustice against them at various levels. This generated an urgent need for them to create a special space for women to mobilize for the recognition of their rights and to sensitize the public to the legitimacy of their demands, thereby creating pressure on the political actors to achieve gender equality. The Moroccan women’s movement has succeeded in stirring women’s issues and provoking public debate about them placing them at the center of contemporary Moroccan society concerns. It has contributed to the development of a culture based on gender equality, thus influencing society to interact with events,
projects, and ideas from a perspective that serves the strategic interests of women (Benouakrim 2017, 4). This approach takes into account the volatile international situation, the changing community driven by the necessities of development, and coping with the pressures of globalization.

For decades, the women’s movement has realized that the deterioration of the social status of Moroccan women is due to multifaceted factors, the first and foremost being the absence of legislation and laws that guarantee the exercising of their rights in various fields (Nashid 2015, 20). That being the case, for this research major issues were prioritized—ones that required sacrifice and multiple battles, including the family code and the management of disputes arising from marital relations (divorce, early marriage, alimony) (Rachik 2014, 40). The aim was to draw attention to the social problems faced by women such as violence, harassment, rape, and abortion, as well as defending the issue of political rights and demands (electoral quotas, fairness, participation in administrative and political management, etc.). Female protesters have generated a women’s movement and a women’s countermovement in the discourse on how to integrate, or not, women into development (Al-Sulaymi 2011, 123). This conflict over the issue of women and the different views of women themselves over their real demands not only is about the Moroccan case but also is almost universal, to varying degrees, depending on the social, economic, and political conditions within each country. The French philosopher Elisabeth Badinter believes that the feminist movement is still searching for itself when she wrote that it has taken one step forward and two steps back, and that the feminist struggle has evolved a great deal to create the “female victim” (Badinter 2003, cited in Dailami 2015). This is a type of authoritarianism that, in her view, restricts the real battle for equality, which requires at least “unifying women’s discourse under one banner” as a fundamental expression of “true womanhood” (Dailami 2015).

A consensus, in this case, is the main approach to avoid division on the most sensitive issues for a society in which tradition continues to be a key driver of its various transformations (Bennis 2015). Those who say otherwise should remember what happened on the occasion of International Women’s Day in Morocco in 2000 when two separate protests were announced: Progressive in Rabat and Islamic in Casablanca. The first result concerns the nature of the two events in terms of tight organization and the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of people, which typically was calm and peaceful; the second was linked to the subsequent political protests on social issues.
(Al-Karai 2010, 95), which began to emerge gradually, dividing Morocco in half: one side controlled by the Islamists and the other by the secularists (Rachik 2014, 40).

Therefore, we note that, regardless of the progress made by the Moroccan women’s movement in terms of thought, practice, and political influence, it still faces challenges that limit its strength as a social movement driving the values of equality, democracy, and human rights. These challenges are manifested in overlapping subjective and structural impediments, summarized by a researcher (Benouakrim 2017, 19–20) of the problem of succession. Benouakrim believes that women’s activities reproduce the organizational structures themselves, and the lack of specialization in the work of their components. Furthermore, experience has shown that the women’s associations leading the movement, constrained by the political and demanding nature involved, tend to concentrate their work on issues of equality and the elimination of discrimination based on gender, in general. That being so, they subsequently lack openness to other emerging women’s activities, such as the fact that Morocco now needs Islamists and secularists to promote the rights of women in the country. This reality requires secularists to recognize that the majority of society owes a “debt” to Islam; Islamists must adopt the principle of human rights, diligence must be recognized as a virtue in legal matters; and both must recognize that the solution to social problems related to women is subject to a responsible dialogue between the two currents.

These impediments prevented the women’s movement from having the impact it could have had in the light of its extension and historical development among women, especially in marginal urban neighborhoods and villages where the women’s movement emerged independently of the various traditional organizations, and where women’s faces were visible at the forefront of the advancing protest movements. Regarding the right to a decent living, it is true that the experience of female leaders in association work was evoked; even affiliates and sympathizers with civic associations took advantage of the accumulations in this area. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that the dynamics of the women’s movement did not react sufficiently to the protests in Morocco, especially since many refrained from official support, but waited, at best, for its own outcome, with individual participation, in a way that reinforced the impression that the issue of women, albeit important in civil society, was still largely governed by politics and ideology.

Here lies the sociological dimension of the problem of the political participation of Moroccan women, represented by the contradiction between
their aspiration to improve their social status and their continuing view of their political participation as a subject of politics rather than as a political actor (Belkziz 2014, 116). This is evident from the constitutional and normative reforms that have enabled progress in women’s contributions to development, but their effectiveness remains insufficient in the absence of a clear vision of the realization of equal opportunities at the institutional, economic, social, and cultural levels. One indication of this limitation is that society, including women themselves, parties, unions, and civil society groups do not place their trust in women’s performance, leadership, or ability to receive and manage decision-making positions. This explains why there is little, or a small, symbolic representation of women in parties, territorial groups, associations, as well as parliament, despite the adoption of the quota system in an attempt to overcome the vacuum in the political scene of female figures, and to approach some kind of positive discrimination towards women (Adnani 2015, 43).

Turning to the Moroccan movement, we see that the protests signaled the rise of new generations with different references that no longer accept following the traditional producers of ideas and classical political workers. This has contributed to the motivation of women, as described in the second section, to come onto the street, and to every space available. This seems normal given the functional weakness of the political and trade union organizations, if not structural, then the lack of self-restraint or pragmatic containment (Zinedine 2018, 70–86) of women’s movements, and other parties and bodies that have monopolized the areas of mediation between the state and society (Al-Walid 2017, 4).

WOMEN’S DEMANDS IN PROTEST CONTEXTS

Is democracy a reality, or is it a dream that will never come true as long as man is man? What makes this question even more complicated to answer is that people, including Europeans, often rely on a narrow definition of democracy, as a set of guarantees that leaders will not come to power against the will of the majority. This formulation does not, however, constitute an obstacle to the application of the idea of democracy, formulated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Charles Taylor, and others, as the recognition of the right of all, majority or minority, to citizenship as a social status that guarantees freedom, dignity, and well-being.

Let us return to the slogans raised by women participating in various protest movements, and take the February 20th Movement, the Rural Movement and
“Jarrada” as real cases in an attempt to understand the nature of the world in which Moroccan women aspire to live. Taking into account the logos Moroccan women brandished in their protests brings to light a question of whether or not the debates are obscured on many issues that characterize these movements. For example, the February 20th Movement raised issues of modernity, democracy, equality, and parliamentary ownership. The answer is “not necessarily,” since slogans usually are the official title that defines them, and indicate the nature of their claims (Belkziz 2012, 176).

Logos and their contents

The slogans used in the protests adopt the meanings of abbreviated media propaganda (Ma’arouf 2001, 773), as well as the strong, clear, and exciting expressions of an idea or a set of ideas in French dictionaries. They often carry terms relating to the “self,” with eloquent message statements (Siraj 2014, 45) linked to thought and written and symbolic expressions (Benveniste 1966, 27). Borrowed from the political field, specialists were influenced by these language definitions, in the same manner as Olivier Robol inspired the concept of the political slogan (Choucair 1987, 16), insofar as they are strong, easily echoed, and controversial expressions that aim to incite the masses by their emotional style. This type of slogan is associated with protest movements that act as mentor and instigator for the masses who participate in the protests, regardless of the number of components, in the knowledge that the protest action is no longer characterized solely by its size (Bishara 2013), but by the impact it produces. It is often the case that the impact of the social movement is far more significant than the number of participants. The various pressure movements can be measured and developed regardless of whether or not they meet the conditions of the social movement.

It is necessary to distinguish between two types of impact: a real-time impact and a future effect. If the immediate effect relates primarily to the direct demands of such a movement, the future impact is linked to the awareness, will, and willingness of that movement in future generations to emulate its driving action (Manar 2017, 10), in defending the right to live in dignity, whenever conditions exist. This willingness is observed through the intense participation of Moroccan women in the various protest movements, particularly in the context of the Arab world, where it cannot be ignored that the growing role of women in this context has made them, like men, vulnerable to socio-political mobilization from multiple state and non-state actors and different ideologies. Moreover, various national and international
reports record that women have been at the forefront of the protests, particularly as spokespersons for the protesters, and even when the police suppressed the rallies, marches and demonstrations, they, like men, were also physically injured and arrested by the security forces. Space constraints here do not allow further detail into the cases of Khadija al-Riyadi, Sara Badi, Sara Sogar, Fatima Al-Afriqi, Nawal Bin-issa, “Celia,” and many others, despite their differences in terms of age, educational level, and employment. They constitute good examples of protest effectiveness, illustrating that the protests of February 20, the countryside, and Jarrada are proof of their profound awareness of the imbalances between citizens and true democracy.

It may well be that the researcher studying these cases will realize the extent of the common denominators between the protesters’ claims—right across the diverse geographical spectrum—especially in the February 20 protests. These include creating, improving, and providing social services (if they exist), with the accompanying reminder of the urgent need to provide the basic necessities of living, such as healthcare, employment, education, transport, adequate housing, water and electricity at affordable prices, and political issues of a moral dimension, particularly transcending the inferior view of women, their right to live in dignity, equality before the law, and achieving justice.

The women’s movement in Morocco aims at developing public awareness of the values and rights of the status of women and their role in building society. While many observers and researchers believe that the mass protest that began on February 20 was the result of the efforts of young people of both sexes, the role of feminists in driving the movement forward simply cannot be ignored.

Local and foreign media (audiovisual and electronic) carried scenes of many women of different ages and orientations who cheered the speakers, flaunting the images of the Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara, and wearing the Palestinian keffiyeh (traditional scarf) around their necks, attending media seminars and releasing press statements (Dunia El Watan, 2011), brandishing slogans with strong connotations in space and time, including: “For complete equality without reservations”; “Women are a tool (not a tool)”; “The voice of women is a revolution (Mashi Awrah/not Awrah)”; “Women are human”; “No gender discrimination”; “Multiple forms of violence and the same issue”; “Families Jaya (women coming),” etc.

These slogans, and the strong presence of women in the movement, are attributed to Hassan Kronfol, thanks to the growing educational and
political awareness of this group, which facilitated their easy interaction with the events of the February 20 Youth Movement, as well as the role of technological media in the emergence of this. The trend of women within this movement, the fact that most of the participants are students, and have the key to access social media and the skills to post on the internet and Facebook was an important advantage in bringing about the awakening and subsequent mobilization (Dunia El Watan, 2011).

**Cases of women’s participation in protests**

To understand the rationale and manifestations of women’s presence, only a few of the many examples are taken here. Nonetheless, it needs to be stated that many women have not been fortunate enough to have been recognized for their efforts, and positive participation in the transfer of claims from the margin to the center or to the parties involved, including in large, medium, and small towns, and in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas.

Beginning with Khadija Al-Riyadi, a prominent human rights lawyer, and winner of the 2013 United Nations Human Rights Award, she asserts that women in the February 20 Movement were not only participants but also leaders and officials. She states that what attracted her attention was “the strong presence of young women on occasions when the movement was strongly suppressed, and the courage that characterized women at those moments” (Akhbar al-Youm n.d.). A daughter of Tangier, Sarah Badi is one of those women who have stood up to symbolic and physical violence. She recalls this painful experience: “After the police report was released, I was not released immediately, but was subjected to a verbal attack concerning my body.” “I felt a lot of discrimination when Al Adl Wa Al Ihssane [Justice and Spirituality, an Islamist group in Morocco] members asked women not to mix with men” (Akhbar al-Youm n.d.), adding that the feminist struggle was trying to break that discrimination.

Sara Sogar, a member of the Young Women for Democracy group, sees her main struggle as women’s. However, she clings to the need to link the women’s struggle with the democratic struggle, but believes that isolating the issue of women from public issues does not serve them, but contributes to distort the general struggle of society (Al-Buhsini 2017). The demand for dignity, freedom, and social justice is the responsibility of every Moroccan citizen who carries the burden of change, man or woman. In response to a national newspaper’s question about harassment in the movement as a woman, she replied:
Personally, I have been respected and appreciated by all militants, and the atmosphere within the movement was beautiful and characterized by equality and non-discrimination between males and females, despite the view of society, which has not yet lived up to women as an independent citizen with the same rights as men and the same duties.  

(Akhbar al-Youm n.d.)

Perhaps this view made it easier for author, media and opinion writer Fatima Al-Afriki to expose the structural view of women in politics. In bitter disclosure, politics remains a purely male issue (Al-Afriki 2013). While she dislikes the idea of assessing mobility from a gender perspective, she finds that the number of women in the February 20 Movement was smaller than that of men, but for her, women were more influential, powerful, effective, and symbolically present. The rest of the citizens are hesitant or afraid to stand up to all forms of social and cultural tyranny practiced against them. With women in the front lines of the movement, they can express their opinions and speak out for their deep-rooted demands for democracy. To be sure, this female presence in the February 20 Movement, in her view, alone will not change the inferior view of women, nor will improve her situation, but has, at least, managed to break the silence and fear.

The same idea is found in the thinking of Latifa al-Buhsini, a militant and researcher specializing in women’s history. Although she recognizes that part of society still views women as a subject of sexual desire, she confirms that the status of women has evolved, because Moroccans, from her point of view, have overcome the problem of the presence of women in the public space, “by virtue of women going out to work and their struggle to enter the work of association.” “Women are everywhere today: in parties and associations. . . .” There are many young women whose faces were prominent in the movement, and who did not retreat. There are, in contrast, those who retreated like men (Al-Buhsini 2014).

Although the movement has fallen substantially since 2012, or may even no longer have a clear impact from the moment of the vote on the constitution, it can be emphasized that, more than seven-and-a-half years after its first appearance, its dynamism is still present in the public space, in new formulas, capitalizing on the accumulations and experiences of protest practice in Morocco. Multiple occasions have revealed the unprecedented return of “heat” to Moroccan street protests (Akhbar al-Youm 2015b), and the most prominent was what happened in the countryside. There was an expression of an explicit rejection of the dualism of corruption and marginalization in
a geographical area in which the weakness of development is mixed with the legacy of a scarred memory with its own local capital in contemporary Moroccan history, despite the state’s concrete efforts to alleviate issues.

Unlike the February 20 Movement, mobility in this geographical area is characterized by nervousness, where the complexity of family and tribal affiliation and the inhabitants of the diaspora make it a difficult hotbed of issues.

The sympathy of the Amazigh regions differs in terms of its historical roots (Oureid 2017), as well as the intensity of the social demand and its context, and is largely linked to the psychological interaction associated with the killing of Mohsen Fikri and the revelations of internal paradoxes.¹ In addition, Fikri’s death gave the movement a spatial and identity specificity, and the possibility of extending and sustaining the momentum for over ten months before the start of the series of trials and arrests which compounded the difficulties of predicting his course and fate. Amid the crowd of demonstrators who take almost daily to the streets of Al Hoceima, the profiles of female activists who managed to steal the spotlight from the men emerged, thanks to their call for a civil protest and not to engage with the security forces (Al-Arabi Al-Jadeed 2017).

“Freedom, dignity, and social justice,” “Death over humiliation,” and “Peaceful not violent” are some of the slogans the women chanted in the streets of Al Hoceima, either as an expression of the competence recorded in the current situation, as a call for urgent thinking in the construction of the next steps, or as solidarity and interaction with the new events on the ground. Within the circle of active involvement and full awareness of the specificities of the field and the requirements of citizenship, the names of activists belonging to the countryside were known through protest platforms. Among them is Nawal Bin-issa, whose notable appearance, along with other women’s faces as she takes on social media protests, is a new shift in the Moroccan protest landscape, given that Rif is one of the most conservative regions in the kingdom. According to several media outlets, when asked by the police if she was the leader of the movement, her response was: “I went out for legitimate economic and social rights only.” As for the participation of women in the movement, she explains: “Claiming these rights is a matter for all of us men, women and children . . .”; and that “Many women did not go out from the start, but after the arrest of all these peaceful activists and protesters” (Achtou 2017).

¹. See Mohammed VI’s speech on the eighteenth anniversary of the throne.
In addition to Nawal Bin-issa, the name of Salima Zayani, nicknamed “Celia,” comes to mind. She is said to have constantly challenged the male community to enter the field of singing and practice of theatrical representation. In one interview with a news website, she stressed that women’s access to many fields was delayed because of restrictions imposed by society in the name of tradition and custom, or sometimes religion. Women in rural areas were expected to confine their dreams to finding a husband. “But this is not a human life, the conditions of real life are not eating, drinking and breathing. Creativity is what makes man and creates civilization,” she said (Achtou 2017).

In this sense, Bin-Issa’s concept is closer to Baruch Espinoza’s concept of freedom. In his *Political Treatise* (Espinoza 2005), Spinoza states explicitly that “human power chiefly consists in strength of mind and intellect”; it consists, in fact, of all the human capacities and aptitudes, especially the highest of them. Conceived correctly, Spinoza’s whole philosophy leaves ample scope for ideal motives in the life of the individual and of the community. Based on this interpretation, the state should instead liberate people from fear and injustice to promote their involvement in society and the development of their creations, so that they can use their minds freely without fearing the weapons of hatred or anger (Espinoza 2005, 437).

**THE NEED FOR MULTILEVEL EMPOWERMENT: RESISTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

Pursuing this dialectic approach would not be correct, if the past is not linked to the present, when seeking answers to the questions: Why is achievement not integrated? Are reforms moving in the direction of empowerment? Is responsibility and poor accountability absent or lacking? The stakes are clear, as Karl Popper stated (Popper 1994, 265): “We must feel our way well before we step”; and “The worst thing is that we don’t learn from the past.”

In Morocco, there is great ambition for the overall empowerment of women, and the adoption of practices, standards, and pioneering initiatives in this area, insofar as there is a prevailing impression that exclusion or discrimination against women is not acceptable overall. In practice, does this mean that lessons have been learned from the past in relation to the nature of the feminist movement and that its basic demands are now shifting from empty words to real empowerment of women?
The answers to this question are numerous and fluctuate between negation and positive. First, this article will discuss the concept of empowerment. It is derived from the Latin word “potere,” which refers to ability; hence, it is usually associated with self-realization or presence, the enhancement of capacities for participation and free choice, or the abbreviation of the concept of “capacity enhancement” (Baloul 2009, 650). In relation to women, empowerment goes beyond the welfare of women by making them the owners of the psychological, social, economic, and political strengths that enable them to rely on their own resources to improve their different situations continuously and influence the decisions that concern them (Lakrini 2014, 11). On the basis of these idiomatic connotations, it can be said that Morocco has for decades accumulated a rich experience with the progressive adoption of a series of measures and procedures that allow women to develop their competencies in a way that makes them aware of, and confident in, their abilities and potential, which has led to their integration into society, to some extent. However, the problem remains over the extent to which obstacles to such integration and their equality with men have been overcome (11).

An inventory of the various efforts undertaken by the state to support women includes:

- The creation of a support fund for the promotion of women’s representation.
- The Ministry of Interior’s issuing of two ministerial patrols for Shalal women.
- Moroccan ratification of the International Convention against all Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- The creation of the National Observatory of Women in Media Women for Justice Plan 2018.

These initiatives show the extent to which Morocco is keeping pace with international developments, and also the extent of its permanent and intelligent interaction with local dynamics, notably, women’s participation in the February 20 Movement and the ensuing local protests in several regions when the suffering of its youth and women from unemployment and monopoly was expressed in their readiness to risk their lives in death boats and desert crossings in search of a living. This is all because the current development model can no longer respond to the urgent demands and needs of citizens,
reduce disparities between groups and spatial inequalities, and achieve social justice.²

This developmental weakness draws attention to the fact that women’s empowerment and the promotion of their integration, and the public debate about their political participation, were not primarily about the legal text. It was also not about the situation of women who all agree about their suffering, but about the cultural and identity frameworks that must be included in the texts regulating their status (Zeghal 2005, 250). Consider the Family Code as an example of awareness and understanding of these frameworks. The reading of the code, which came into effect a decade-and-a-half ago, suggested a resolution with the patriarchal family model, but this did not happen because the issue certainly did not go beyond the legal rules. Through what women faced in courts, we have come to realize that what must be changed are entrenched male mentalities and the representations they produce about women and the family (Belkziz 2014, 140). Anyone who says otherwise should think carefully about Princess Mariam’s sister’s answer to the problems of implementing the code:

The problem is that large segments of women, especially in rural and remote areas, are not yet aware of the existence of the Code and what it has to offer them. Of protection and rights, . . . while the general rule is that no one is excused for ignorance of the law, the rights of many women are being lost, either because of their ignorance or because of the lack of legal and material means to guarantee them. Despite the adoption of the Code, the establishment of family courts, and the existence of advanced programs and legal texts, much remains to be done to publicize women’s rights.³

This intersects with the conclusions of a researcher regarding static representations of the family and labor codes, so that if the adjustments are progressive,⁴ the multilateral family ideology continues to resist this reform as the key values of the previous model persist (Al-Mansouri 2008, 27).

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². Extract from Mohammed VI’s speech made during the opening of the first session of the second legislative year of the tenth legislative mandate.

³. Excerpts from the speech of Princess Mariam, President of the National Union of Moroccan Women, Center for Seminars Mohamed VI, Marrakech, on the occasion of her presidency of the celebration of International Women’s Day, March 8, 2018.

⁴. Among the notable developments in the Family Code are: the prevention of polygamy, with some justified exceptions before the judiciary, and restricting it to the consent of the first wife; divorce being put in the hands of the judiciary, instead of justice; and allocating alimony and custody for women over men.
Certainly, the continuation of this reluctance requires a further cultural, symbolic, and value struggle to consolidate the various gains achieved by the women’s movement, and the effective enjoyment by women of the efforts made in this regard, especially as their participation in public and political life in particular continues to face a range of challenges in order to extract their right to participate politically, and to assume decision-making positions, even within the political, trade union, and civic organizations, of the women to which they belong, leading to their management of certain official sectors, and influence the laws. This is due not only to the persistence of discrimination at the legal level, the persistence of social restrictions, and the dominance of the male personality within Moroccan society (Promoting Equality between Men and Women in the Euro-Mediterranean Region (2008–2011) 2010, 33) but also the Moroccan experience proves that the resolution of society’s issues, including those relating to women’s rights, appears in the political field, and it is the balance of power that determines the direction to be followed. This is an evident question that should be recalled at a time when some think, or have reason to believe, that besiegement comes mainly from religion and that there is no possibility of progress without removing it (Al-Buhsini 2012).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing, it seems clear that the path of Moroccan women’s mobility was not static, but continued to interact constantly with historical and political opportunities. As such, the issues and goals it sought to achieve, and the expressions it took, varied from generation to generation.

This movement, in all its expressions, levels, and effectiveness, represented a struggle for advocating and defending the socioeconomic and political rights of women in a society in transition. It has strengthened women’s presence in prominent positions in management, responsibility, and decision-making in the public and private spheres.

Within the general dynamic of the country’s cumulative movement, the feminine components became increasingly aware of the gradual transition from the battle of constitutional and legal demands to the necessity of political, social, and economic empowerment, which in turn, over the last twenty years, gained ground. This was despite the constraints of extracting more rights to fortify the gains, through the relative lifting of the pace of government reforms with the legal and developmental instrument—the
Reformed Family Code—in addressing negative stereotypes towards women, adopting a gender approach in legislative, regional, and local elections, and granting women the right to establish civil society associations concerned with development and human rights.

Given that the issue of women is at the heart of societal concerns today, it should be noted that the success of the cultural, symbolic, and values struggle that has been driven by improper conditions of living, and the problem of promoting the rule of law, is linked, in large part, to the realization of the unity of women’s discourse. The latter advocated gender equality in the political sphere, particularly running for office and assuming political responsibilities, while defending women against whom violence and flawed discrimination were tolerable. More importantly, the Moroccan women’s movement needs to unify women’s demands under one demand that views the women’s issue as an integral whole if true modernity is the true objective. In this regard, thought and behavior have already been achieved. This, as we have seen, does not contradict the emphasis that it is the consolidation of the unity of women’s discourse. The latter advocated gender equality in the political sphere, particularly running for office and assuming political responsibilities.

It is desirable to start with visions and contracts that carry the elements of resilience, so as to avoid questioning its path and its potential refrain. It is necessary to begin with visions and contracts that carry the elements of resilience, so as to avoid questioning its path and its potential with hesitation and suspicion!

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