



# Women's Movements in Post-“Arab Spring” North Africa

Edited by Fatima Sadiqi



(Islamic school of jurisprudence) that best fits its political structure.<sup>7</sup> For example, Morocco chose the Maliki madhab because it acknowledges the religious authority of the ruler and hence is suited to a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual country like Morocco. In other words, the ways political and religious authorities function in Muslim-majority countries, as well as the means and degrees of the application of shari'a law in their legal systems, vary. In Morocco, secularists do not in general see their stance as opposing Islam, but they see it as opposing Islamists in an overarching context where monarchy (expected to protect both trends) rules. Indeed, secularists and Islamists in Morocco exhibit both surface commonalities and deep underlying divergences.

### *Commonalities*

Within the overall Moroccan ruling system, where the supreme religious and political authorities are prerogatives of the king, the majority of secular and Islamist forces do not contest this reality. Of course, each trend has its own moderate and extremist versions, but in general both secular and Islamist forces acknowledge the position of the king as a source of stability and the supreme and ultimate arbiter in cases of a clash between parties.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, both secularists and Islamists claim democracy (albeit from different standpoints<sup>9</sup>), focus on women's issues to fuel debates, make extensive use of social media, and compete for international attention in an increasingly globalized world. However, the two forces exhibit significant underlying differences.

### *Underlying Differences*

The initial modernist-conservative polarization hardened into a secularist-Islamist divide with the advent of the twenty-first century and the emergence of Berber identity pursuant to the 2010–2011 revolution in the region (Berber was made an official language in the 2011 constitution). From governance to everyday life, secularism and Islamism continuously bump into each other, and hence they have come to display sharp underlying divergences that separate them despite their surface similarities. These divergences range over the role of religion in political and social life (theocracy), the understanding of

<sup>7</sup>“Introduction,” this volume.

<sup>8</sup>This acknowledges a long tradition in which the monarch has assumed these functions. In modern history, the Moroccan monarchy has survived colonization, decolonization, and the so-called Arab Spring. Its cultural roots and longevity are mainly due to the fact that the monarchy came to Morocco hand-in-hand with Islam.

<sup>9</sup>These different views of democracy are clarified in the following section.

democracy, women's issues (especially their work outside the home), citizenship, violence against women, and international politics.

Of these, theocracy is the central point of contention between the two camps. For secular forces, theocracy represents a huge historical retreat that threatens to plunge Moroccan society into the darkness of the medieval ages, whereas Islamists feel that the secularization of politics threatens their very existence. These stances have repercussions on the social lifestyle of citizens. Hence, secular forces maintain that people should be free to dress as they want and show male–female intimacy in public, for example, claiming these as rights that the government should not interfere with. Islamist forces, however, hold that people's behavior, especially women's behavior, must meet the requirements of the Qur'an and that society must be "purified." Although the current Islamist government does not forcefully impose Islamic law, it encourages common people to guide their lives by Islamic values and women to wear the veil. This trend is enhanced because tradition is deep seated and easily conflated with religion.

Because of the political structure of the country and the reforms that took place in the 1990s, Morocco was spared regime change and a strong version of the upheavals that occurred throughout the region in 2010–11. Nevertheless, the Islamist party, Justice et du Développement (PJD; Justice and Development Party), won a massive victory in the elections of November 25, 2011, partly due to the many modernists and secularists who gave it a pragmatic, not a religious, vote. The party then promised to implement secular legislative, administrative, and judicial principles; respect human rights and freedom of the press; and support women's rights. Because of Morocco's multiparty system, where no single party can have an absolute majority in the parliament, the PJD shares power with other parties but holds the majority of seats (30 %).

However, after a couple of years in office, the Islamist party went back on its promises, especially in the domain of women's rights (it allowed only one woman cabinet minister and assigned her the women's, children, and handicapped portfolio); openly encouraged moralizing Islamist rhetoric in national debates and among intellectuals and the youth, whether in the press, on TV, or in virtual media; attempted to lower the age of marriage; and so on. The party was heavily criticized by the secular and some of the Islamist electorate and was forced to somehow qualify its statements in the second version of the government, when it added four women as deputy ministers. In its last year in office, the PJD is no longer keeping its ideology out of politics, partly in preparation for the 2016 elections. On June 17, 2014, Abdelilah Benkirane, the party's secretary-general and current prime minister, answered a question in the parliament as to the status of women's rights in the following terms:

Today, there is a problem with women's role in modern society; women don't even find time to get married, to be mothers or to educate their children. Why don't they embrace this sacred status that God gave to them?<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>The translation from Arabic to English is the author's section.

This statement ignited a fierce reaction by women's non-government organizations (NGOs) and secular forces and was attacked on various social platforms, by the press, and in electronic media. Critics highlighted the government's failure to solve the country's economic problems and its recourse to offending women, hence revealing the party's true anti-women's rights agenda. Khadija Rouissi, an opposition member of the parliament, qualified the prime minister's statement as "a threat—an insult to all Moroccan women and all the fights waged for many years."<sup>11</sup>

Overall, secularist and Islamist views on democracy clash: whereas the former view democracy as individual freedom and liberalism and do not make room for Islamists, the latter view democracy as illiberalism. These are deep and far-reaching differences that divide secular and Islamist forces, especially on issues that concern women and their lives, and they pose a substantial problem for the future of Morocco. Women's rights organizations and the feminist camp in general (academe in particular) view the use of Islam in politics as a real danger and a backlash on what women and secular forces have managed to achieve. Hope for the possibility of remedying the situation is facilitated by the Center space that arose from the Moroccan Spring.

### **The Post-revolution Center: A Space for Diversity, Protest, and Hope**

The Moroccan Spring, whose mouthpiece was the February 20 Movement, brought about a new space in the public sphere of authority. This new space is neither secularist per se nor Islamist per se. I term it the "Center," but it is not a center space between the two ideologies; rather, it encompasses and transcends them. It is a space of diversity where various actors enter the scene and create interaction—Berber activists, radical secularists, radical Islamists, and so on—and where networking is enhanced by social media, and where change is relatively quick. The Berber issue fits into the class issue in the sense that rural areas (predominantly Berber) do not exhibit a class system and hence are read as "backward." The Berber issue also relates to the gender issue in the sense that the benefits accompanying the official status of Berber concern urban men and women more than rural men and women. Finally, the Berber issue fits into the clash between conservatives/Islamists and modernists/secularists in the sense that it is instrumentalized by conservatives and Islamists to maintain the status quo so far as the Berber language and culture are concerned.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/world/middleeast/prime-minister-told-parliament-women-better-off-at-home-than-in-workplace.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/world/middleeast/prime-minister-told-parliament-women-better-off-at-home-than-in-workplace.html?_r=0) (accessed July 16, 2014). Broadly speaking, tension between Islamists and secularists has escalated in recent years, and the war of words is sometimes translated into physical violence, as the April 24, 2014 killing of an Islamist student by a left-wing extremist attests to. Indeed clashes between Islamist and leftist students in Moroccan universities are frequent.

Basically a public space, the Center also exhibits “private” aspects because it uses social media, where “location” may be public or private. In this space, women’s rights voices, especially secular ones, seem to be moving from a conciliatory and defensive stance to a confrontational and more aggressive stance. But first, what is the nature of the February 20 Movement that brought about the Center?

Founded in late January 2011, the February 20 Movement appeared for the first time on the Internet in the shape of a Facebook page and a YouTube campaign video encouraging people to protest. The latter spread quickly, and on February 20, thousands of Moroccans rallied in the capital, Rabat. The demonstrations quickly spread to other cities, including Casablanca, Marrakesh, Fez, and Tangiers, as well as towns, like Al Hoceima and Safi, and villages. Initially, the demonstrators were men and women, young and old, urban and rural, educated and non-educated, politicians and academics, intellectuals and laymen, activists and non-activists, secularists and Islamists. They presented a diverse profile with no official leadership and communicated mainly through social media campaigns and virtual networking. The demonstrations were peaceful and the demands diverse, ranging from reducing the powers of the monarchy, improved democracy, a change in government, a new constitution, ending corruption, more economic opportunities, Berber rights, reform of education, and better health services.

The reaction of the king was swift. On March 9, 2011, just a couple of weeks after the massive demonstrations, King Mohammed VI announced in a live televised address comprehensive constitutional reforms that would improve democracy and strengthen the rule of law. He also announced the formation of a special commission with the mission of crafting the constitutional reforms, to be proposed to him not later than the following June, after which a referendum would decide on the contents of the draft constitution. In another live address aired on national TV channels on June 17, the king announced that the referendum was to take place on July 1, 2011. The referendum sanctioned the constitution almost unanimously.<sup>12</sup>

The 2011 constitution brought reforms unprecedented in the history of Morocco, such as more executive power and authority to the prime minister and the parliament, greater independence of the judiciary, the elevation of Berber to official language status, and increased power to some independent

<sup>12</sup> However, the February 20 Movement criticized the commission in charge of preparing the draft of the constitution on the grounds that its members were appointed and not elected. Although invited to participate in the work of the commission, members of the February 20 Movement refused, and they also refused an invitation to participate in the government. Even when King Mohammed VI pardoned and in some cases reduced the sentences of 190 prisoners on April 14, 2011, including Islamists, some protesters viewed the reduced sentences of Islamists as a typically self-serving action by the government, and wanted to keep up the pressure to urge additional reforms. Further, the leaders of the movement rejected the constitutional reforms as insufficient and called for continuing protests and a boycott of the referendum.

commissions. The title “Prime Minister” was changed to “Head of the Government” in the new constitution, and this position was endowed with three powers that had previously been prerogatives of the king: presiding over the government council, appointing members of the government, and dissolving the parliament.<sup>13</sup> As for the parliament, it was vested with the power to pass laws on most issues. Notably, by recognizing centuries-old, marginalized Berber as an official language, the constitution asserted the Arab-Berber bilingual identity of the Moroccan state, a major break from the hitherto monolingual (Arabic only) official identity of the country.<sup>14</sup>

In a sense, these new reforms instigated divisions in the February 20 Movement and revealed the huge gap separating secularists from Islamists. Struggle over leadership and the withdrawal of *Al Adl wa lihsan* (Justice and Benevolence), a banned Islamist association, after the PJD won the election of November 25, 2011, resulted in a sharp decrease in the frequency of the protests.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the gradual decrease in the momentum of the February 20 Movement, the latter created a space in which diverse groups could meet without having to converge, a space with two platforms: physical and virtual. This space is seen by many as a way of bringing a lost vibrancy and dynamic interaction to public debates. Some media platforms that were instrumental in promoting the February 20 Movement on the web created their own social media mouthpieces. An example is the bilingual (Arabic and French) collaborative website “Mamfakinch” (No Concession), which was created by a group of young Moroccans of both sexes who were inspired by the February 20 Movement. Mamfakinch seeks to entrench the democratic values of individual freedoms and human rights in society; calls for radical social, economic, and political reform; and claims diverse political persuasions. Seen by many critics as a “citizen” medium, it promotes free speech and the right to criticize decision makers, especially the government. As such, Mamfakinch is a valuable source of information that the mainstream conventional media does not supply, misinterpret, or simply discard. Mamfakinch has inspired a growing

<sup>13</sup>The king remains the military commander-in-chief and retains his position as chair of the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Security Council, and the primary bodies responsible for security policy. A new constitutional provision also confirms the king’s role as the highest political and religious authority in the country, with the right to preside over the cabinet in serious matters, such as those involving religion, security, or strategic policies.

<sup>14</sup>As stated previously in the chapter, the monolingual identity of Morocco was decided in the 1930s after the Berber Dahir (decree) was promulgated by the French colonizers to divide Morocco along ethnic lines of “Arabs” and “Berbers.” In fact, the decree rallied Moroccans together in the name of Islam, initiated nationalism, and conflated the Moroccan identity into “Arab-Muslim.”

<sup>15</sup>The poor performance of the PJD in the government after 2 years pushed some February 20 Movement members to continue protesting, while others wanted to give the government more time.

number of Facebook groups and blogs that continue the spirit of the February 20 Movement.

Physically, the Center is characterized by spectacular networking between diverse forces. For example, with the recognition of the Berber language, Berber NGOs, including some feminist ones, have entered the public field and woven relations with various other networks and NGOs, especially human rights and women's rights associations. This culture of networking, which has always constituted a powerful strategy of the feminist movement, asserts the role and significance of feminists in the Center.<sup>16</sup>

In sum, the February 20 Movement created a space where both secularists and Islamists can meet. This new value of co-existence with divergence is not easily applied, but it is there to stay. The new space is characterized by protest<sup>17</sup> as a means to achieve goals.<sup>18</sup> In order to understand the protest-laden, post-revolution Center, a conceptualization of the notion of protest is needed.

### *Conceptualization of the Notion of Protest*

The emerging Center is a middle ground between the secularist and Islamist trends in Morocco and a new space of protest. Although the non-homogeneity of their protestors and their demands is a threat to something like the Center, the space, once created, is irreversible and will have permanent effects even if tensions break it apart. From the 1970s onward, substantial theory and research have been produced on social movements and the link between resource mobilization and political process. This theory and research were crafted from various disciplines, including sociology, political science, and social psychology.<sup>19</sup> Classical theories of protest (e.g., Berkowitz 1972; Gurr 1970, and Lind and Tyler 1988) attribute people's participation in protest to a desire to express grievances resulting from deprivation, frustration, or perceived injustice. However, scholars of social movements, such as Klandermans (1984), McAdam (1982), and McCarthy and Zald (1977), suggest that protest is generally instigated by efficacy, resources, and opportunities. Yet other scholars such as Reicher (1984), Simon et al. (1998), and Klandermans and De Weerd (2000) shift the focus to collective identity as the main instigator of protest. Further, Van Zomeren et al. (2008) highlight the role of emotion in protest. According to all of these authors, the more politics is discussed within networks, the more efficacy

<sup>16</sup>More on this in the last section. See the section on the conceptualization of the notion of protest below).

<sup>17</sup>There is a difference between the notions of "protest" and "contestation" in the context of social revolution: whereas the latter demands a regime change, the former does not.

<sup>18</sup>It is important to note that prior to the February 20 Movement, negotiation was the main means to achieve goals in Moroccan civil society at large and by women's groups specifically (see Ennaji 2013).

<sup>19</sup>Klandermans and Roggeband (2007).

is enhanced and the more individual grievances are transformed into shared grievances and group-based anger, which in turn translate into protest participation. According to Jacquelin van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans (2010),<sup>20</sup> protest is “a form of collective action and of social movement participation at the same time.”

Taken together, these theoretical aspects of the notion of protest are useful in the preliminary understanding of the concept of protest. However, concepts are bound to be constrained by the overall socio-cultural and political paradigms of specific contexts. In Moroccan culture, protest and contest are not new; the pre-colonial, colonial, modern, and post-modern eras witnessed various protests and contests against oppression and colonialism. The Moroccan nationalist movement emerged out of street protests directed at a controversial 1930 Dahir seeking to establish separate Arabic and Berber legal systems. Ritualized protest, like the Latif prayer and commemorations of invented national anniversaries, including the May 16 Berber Dahir and Throne Day, abound in the history of Morocco. Today, protest, sometimes referred to as “politics by other means,” is recognized as an essential component of the now acknowledged meeting between institutional and extra-institutional politics in the country.

### *Characteristics of the Emerging Center*

As a concept, the Center is about the public sphere and the public discourses it generates. It may be seen as an example of what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 111) call a space that does not restrict the “political field” to “political professionals” involved in the production of “political ideas, programs, and concepts”; the Center is thus not about political discourse per se. The allusion to political parties in the previous sections does not mean that there is a center in these parties. In the post-revolution Moroccan context, the Center exhibits the following characteristics: it does not have a clear leadership, it transcends the boundaries of the secularist-Islamist dichotomy, it uses conventional and social media (virtual space), and it is porous (i.e., with open boundaries that are not clearly delimited). Hence, seemingly incompatible standpoints (secularist and Islamist) may co-exist and converse without converging. Subsequently, the Center is bound to be complex and multifaceted because it addresses different important facets of a complex and quickly changing reality. In practical terms, the Center expands beyond the reform movements of the 1990s and 2000s and, as such, does not easily fall within Anglo-American or Western European frameworks of what constitutes a “political center” because the base of social reform is expanded and the relations with politics is not direct.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/research/researchareasofstaff/isppsummeracademy/instructors/Social%20Psychology%20of%20Protest,%20Van%20Stekelenburg%20%26%20Klandermans.pdf> (accessed July 12, 2014).

The Center is an answer to the stalemate of the secularist-Islamist dichotomy in Morocco and beyond. It somehow conciliates the illiberalism and non-inclusivity of the Islamists with the absence of a niche for the Islamists in the secularist camp. It does so by addressing real questions in a pragmatic way and demanding quick and efficient answers; these questions relate to the heavy weight of patriarchy; lack of clarity on the nature of “a secular state”; the importance of secularism as a value for the state; the need of a secular space as an important pre-condition for the advancement of human rights, including cultural and language rights; and so on.

It is important to note that within the Center, secularism is not seen as the absence of religion, but rather as a state structure that defends both freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief within a state religion where law is not derived from God and where religious actors cannot impose their will on public policy. A secular state does not simply limit religion; it also maintains the essential right of religious freedom as a duty, not a favor. This means that it defends the freedom to worship and the right to maintain places of worship like mosques, churches, and temples while also defending minorities from attack.

Religious freedom also includes the right to challenge dominant religious interpretations of the Qur'an, to change one's religion, and to leave it altogether. These rights are crucial not only for women but also for religious minorities, and they require a secular state to implement and reinforce them. In fact, only a secular state can allow religious fundamentalists to have a voice and limit the inevitable harm they may cause. In sum, the divide is not inherently between the categories of “religious” and “secular,” but between the categories of “anti-secular” and “promoters of secular values.”

The Center is also a way of protecting democracy by obliging both the secularists and the Islamists to respect democratic rules. Given the complexities involved, it would perhaps be more meaningful to speak of a plurality of Centers in the field between secularists and Islamists—or perhaps middle grounds (in the plural). This makes sense because of the numerous “types” of secularists and Islamists in the Center. Within this context, “inbetweenness” could be a recognizable experience for many Moroccans, North Africans, and Middle Easterners (male or female).<sup>21</sup>

## Women's Issues in the Center

Although the February 20 Movement did not specifically target women's issues, it is thanks to decades of women's struggle for their rights that issues like education and health care are at the top of the movement's agenda. Further, it was the protest culture that secular women's activists instilled in the

<sup>21</sup> Hanne Petersen (personal communication).

public sphere that opened the door to large-scale demonstrations both in support of or against women's rights, as in the 2000 Rabat and Casablanca marches, respectively. Indeed, more generally, the physical/virtual networking between civil society associations (including the feminine and feminist ones) have greatly facilitated the recent protests in Morocco and beyond.

A number of women-related issues are now raised in the Center: Islamist rhetoric that aims at rolling back women's achievements in terms of rights; the escalation of gender-based violence pursuant to the escalation of Jihadism in the region; domestic violence;<sup>22</sup> rape, ignited by the case of Amina Filali, a 16-year-old victim who committed suicide after being forced to marry her rapist; sexual harassment; and so on. In addressing these issues, secular feminist forces are trying to gain initiative. Thanks to their endeavors, Article 475 of the penal code was modified so that the rapist faces heavy charges even if he marries his victim, and sexual harassment was criminalized. In addition, women's rights are at the heart of the new political settlements in Morocco. These rights are increasingly included in “mutual accountability frameworks” between donors and aid recipients in governmental institutions with the aim of regulating political dialogue, aid, trade, gender aspects, and wider economic relations. It seems that, theoretically, in the long run the Center will allow a broadening of the support base for women's rights movements through engagement of new youth activists and women in rural areas and urban slum areas. Initiatives to transform development programs to embed gender equality, women's participation, and youth empowerment are on the agenda (Ennaji 2013). However, there is a growing feeling that the chief obstacle to these goals is the rise of fundamentalist movements in the region and the failure of political Islam to manage politics and be inclusive.

Morocco has come a long way since its independence in matters of women's rights. The women's movement has never ceased to grow, changing its strategies according to new elements in the public arena, networking with other forces (especially secular ones), keeping a link with new generations, and embracing the new social media. The continuity of the Moroccan feminist movement is not without a cost and not without hurdles, but it is persistent.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the post-revolution Center space presented in this chapter may be extended to the rest of North Africa and the Middle East because women's issues—and reconstituted gender relations—in this region are increasingly

<sup>22</sup>Progressive as it is, the Mudawwana (the Moroccan family law) does not address gender violence in a clear way.

situated in the middle grounds between varying degrees of secularism and Islamism. These issues are also increasingly influenced by other strong belief systems (which may be “scientific,” such as the economy and economists in the West) and hegemonic globalization.

Whatever the constraints, the use of gender as a lens through which emerging politicized identification processes within the public field are analyzed is a promising area of inquiry that brings together various feminist voices in the region and across the globe. From the perspective of this chapter, this approach brings to light a plurality of identity configurations at play in post-revolution Morocco and the region—ethno-linguistic and non-ethno-linguistic, Islamist and secular—that were marginalized or elided in the process of decolonization. This in turn allows a contextualization of the dominant post-revolution narratives in Morocco and the region, including the public role of Islam, women's roles, and recent reforms regarding women's legal status. The chapter also depicts the central importance of gender politics in forging these narratives, and hence it exemplifies how the three axes of identity—religion, ethnicity, and gender—were activated during the revolutionary moment and are being nourished in the aftermath of the revolution.

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## *Chapter Three*

# *Women and the Arab Spring: A Transnational, Feminist Revolution*

miriam cooke

**Abstract** Spanning the Middle East and North Africa region and using real cases, this chapter traces the trajectory of euphoria, backlash, and persistence that has marked women’s participation in the Arab Spring transnational revolution. The chapter reveals how in revolutions, as in wars, norms and values are suspended “for the duration” in order to accommodate necessary breaches of what is normally considered appropriate. It also shows that when the crisis is over, the cultural police try to restore traditional gender norms in an attempt to “squeeze the genie back into the lamp.” The chapter highlights how women in the Middle East and North Africa are learning various lessons from the different revolutions, starting with the Algerian revolution, going through the Palestinian revolution, and moving on to the Arab Spring.

## **Introduction**

There is a pattern in women’s political participation during times of national crisis: they’re in when they’re needed; they’re out when they’re not. The Algerian revolution provides the template. In 1954, women rose with the men to oust the French, who had colonized their country for 124 years. So effective were the women that Frantz Fanon immortalized their ways of fighting in his famous phrase “stratégie-femme.” Shortly after the French were expelled in 1962, a new government was formed, and ironically, less than 1 % of the national assembly members were women. Some agreed to the conditions for staying at home; others left the country with the hope that they could continue to function as Algerian activists in exile. This denial of political recognition to women who had fought for national independence is what has come to be called the Algerian Lesson. Palestinian women applied its rules to their

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experiences during the intifadas of the late 1980s when the men tried to suppress them. This lesson is once again being learned.

In this chapter I will trace the trajectory of euphoria, backlash, and persistence that has marked women's participation in the transnational Arab Spring revolution. Despite widespread academic and journalistic criticism of the label, I refer to these events as a revolution because many participants prefer the term. Naming matters; in revolutions, as in wars, norms and values are suspended “for the duration” in order to accommodate necessary breaches of what is normally considered appropriate. When the crisis is over, the cultural police try to restore traditional gender norms. In other words, they try to squeeze the genie back into the lamp. To declare a revolution over sanctions that process. To describe a revolution as ongoing makes room for the abnormal and the unexpected; it opens up new possibilities.

I call the revolution transnational because it involved not just one people exceptionally up in arms against its colonizers or unjust rulers; several societies simultaneously rose up against cruel men. Even if not all those dictators are gone, the people now realize that they too have power. They are listening to each other's music, admiring each other's art, reading each other's stories, and building their own activism out of those resonances.

## Euphoria

Between late 2010 and mid-2011, revolutions broke out in seven Arab countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria. In each case, women were highly visible. The fact that they were there with the men was not surprising. In Hamid Dabashi's words: “They are the voices and visages cultivated in the public domain for decades and centuries. It has taken relentless work to enable these girls and women to show the courage, the imagination and, above all, the audacity to come out on the streets to demand their rights” (189). What was surprising were their large numbers and high visibility. Women's presence in the places of protest was registered not only in the media but also on city walls.

In Egypt, women figured in graffiti—a formerly forbidden art—most notably in Muhammad Mahmud Street off Tahrir Square. Alaa Awad renders the mass of women activists in his exquisite image of an army of ancient Egyptian Amazons that he titled *Pharaonic Women in Battle*. In an interview he said that his motivation was respect: “We wanted to recognize the key role of the women whom we respect very much.”<sup>1</sup>

Drawing inspiration from Ancient Egypt, Awad's painting represents women mourning 70 soccer fans the government killed in Port Said in January 2012. Awad chose a mural from the 10,000-year-old tomb of Ramose to depict twenty-first-century women marching like slaves as they accompany their pharaoh on his journey to the next world. But these women are no

<sup>1</sup> <http://artforum.com/words/id=30394> (accessed July 19, 2014).

slaves. Defiantly, they approach the sarcophagus containing the souls of the soccer martyrs. These powerful women are the spiritual guardians of the government's victims, whose souls the human-headed bird Ba will deliver to heaven.<sup>2</sup>

It is not only the number and visibility of women in the revolutions of all the Arab Spring countries that surprises, but also their ongoing resistance and insistence on remaining in the public sphere, often at great personal cost. Unlike Algerian women in the 1960s, they are not returning home. They are staying where their bodies can be seen and their protests heard.

In Tunisia, long considered the most progressive of all Arab countries with respect to women's rights, women were prominent actors in the January 2011 revolution. Sihem Ben Sedrine, human rights campaigner and spokesperson for the National Council for Liberties, was at the forefront of the demonstrations demanding reform of the constitution as well as the ouster of President Benali. They succeeded: Benali was replaced and the third constitution, passed in January 2014, gave women equal rights and duties.

During the early days of the Egyptian revolution, the women in Tahrir protected each other, manned access to demonstrations, and made sure that no one entered the square armed. All the while they mixed freely with the men, even living with them in the tent city that Tahrir became. As in Tunisia, their demand for the removal of their dictator, Husni Mubarak, was met.

On February 20, 2011, Moroccan women joined students and workers to demand reform of the *Mudawwana*, or family code. Within a few days, the king announced his intention to reform the constitution to enshrine women's civic and social equality.

On October 24, 2011—nine months into their revolution and a few days after 32-year-old journalist and politician Tawakkul Karman returned from Oslo with the Nobel Peace Prize in her hand—Yemeni women filled Sanaa's Change Square and the streets of Taiz and Aden. They carried signs with messages like "Ali Salih (president at the time) the butcher is killing women and is proud of it." They spread out colorful arrays of veils and burned them in a spectacular signal to men that they were no longer needed and to the tribes that they were without honor when they did not protect women from government thugs.

"We will not stay quiet. We will defend ourselves if our men can't defend us. Tribes who ignore our calls are cowards without dignity," said one of the demonstrators.<sup>3</sup> The women of Yemen, too, were instrumental in toppling their dictator.

Not only in Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, and Yemen were women out in the streets and squares, but also in Bahrain, Libya, and especially Syria, where

<sup>2</sup>Thanks to Basma Hamdy for explaining the origin of the mural and for sharing an email from 'Awad about the source and meaning of the *Na'ihat* (mourners) (Durham, NC, March 29, 2014).

<sup>3</sup><http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/26/world/meast/yemen-protests/> (accessed July 19, 2014).