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The Moroccan Women's Rights Movement

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The Moroccan Women's Rights Movement

Description

Among various important efforts to address women's issues in Morocco, a particular set of individuals and associations have formed around two specific goals: reforming the Moroccan Family Code and raising awareness of women's rights. Evrard chronicles the history of the women's rights movement, exploring the organizational structure, activities, and motivations with specific attention to questions of legal reform and family law. Employing ethnographic scrutiny, Evrard presents the stories of the individual women behind the movement and the challenges they faced. Given the vast reform of the Moroccan Family Code in 2004, and the emphasis on the role of women across the Middle East and North Africa today, this book makes a timely argument for the analysis of women's rights as both global and local in origin, evolution, and application. [From the publisher]

Keywords

Women, North Africa, Morocco, Women's Rights

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Comments

This is the introduction to Amy Evrard's new book, *The Moroccan Women's Rights Movement*.

INTRODUCTION

THE SITUATION of Moroccan women is dramatic. Statistics and sociological studies attest to this fact. The reasons are many, among them being poverty and its effects on families, both men and women; illiteracy; and the lack of support for socioeconomic problems. The female is the main victim. It is she who suffers the most from the recurrence of this situation because, in the networks which govern the family, she remains subject to the laws and customs that confine her to a level inferior to that of the man. We can authoritatively declare that any solution to these problems will have no effect *without changing the situation of the female at the juridical level*, even if she is integrated in the process of development, because of the family relations that place her under the absolute authority of the male, and give him the authority to control her comings and goings and to grant her what little margin of liberty that she has. (LDDF 2000, 7; emphasis mine)

The best way to begin is with ourselves. Extolling equality signifies simultaneously rights and obligations, liberty and responsibilities. That is to say: grow up, comport yourself like an adult. Don't accept being infantilized, even if it seems better to rely on someone else. Be an example in respecting the dignity of others. Don't replicate the same pattern of domination over less fortunate people, and here I refer in particular to household help. Walk in the street with your head held high. Don't suffer sexual harassment in silence but denounce it, protest, complain, even if you think that you'll never get justice. Don't just give up (*baisser les bras*). Embrace the idea that work is for earning a living but also

for being alive, for becoming independent. That marriage is not an end in itself, a form of life insurance, but a discovery, an engagement, an exchange between two consenting adults. Don't let people get away with the small acts of daily life that reproduce the macho mentality under which we suffer, in whatever form, be it a jest, a joke, a television ad, the manner in which we raise our children, and so on. Provide yourself with the means of dignity, by working harder than others, obtaining diplomas, being in solidarity with others. *Emancipation is something we make for ourselves.* (Sakhri 2003, 4; emphasis mine)

The first passage, a brief excerpt from a report by a major women's rights association in Morocco, shows how a variety of issues affecting women are channeled toward the goal of legal reform. This was written during a period of debate following the announcement in 1999 of the Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development, and it reminds the reader that development without rights is insufficient for addressing women's problems. The second passage, taken from a 2003 editorial by the editor Aïcha Zaïmi Sakhri in the Moroccan women's magazine *Femmes du Maroc*, outlines steps women must take to make the abstract notion of "women's rights" their own. Sakhri wrote this in an issue of the magazine devoted to a 2002 speech by King Mohammed VI, promising a vast reform of the Moroccan Family Code (*mudawwanat al-usra*, hereafter "the Mudawwana"). This code oversees laws of marriage, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and other family matters related to women's rights. As Moroccan women's rights activists expressed their elation over this promised reform, they also expressed concerns about the implementation of these new rights and the need for a vast public internalization of them, especially by women themselves but also by men, families, and communities.

These passages demonstrate the double agenda of the individuals and associations involved in the Moroccan women's rights movement. The agenda involves the process of *convincing* women of the need to address the issues that affect them, first and foremost through legal reform and education of women about their rights. These processes have been developing over the last several decades as women's rights associations have emerged

and gradually coalesced a variety of programs and efforts around the goals of legal reform and education. In counseling sessions, micro-credit cooperative meetings, literacy classes, and job training programs, women's rights associations have convinced individual women that their problems and concerns are collective ones that can best be addressed by legal reform and legal education. This goal has required a second process: that of *translating* transnational ideals of equality and women's human rights such that they are relevant to and resonant within the Moroccan context. In conferences, press events, rallies, protests, lobbying sessions, and public meetings featuring testimonials by women of their experiences with the legal system, women's rights associations have worked to convince the public that legal reform is an urgent need and to make women's rights a prominent topic of discussion in public conversations. Seeing an elderly woman shake her fist and denounce both the husband who abused her daughter and the legal system that victimized her by refusing to grant her a divorce, while television cameras surround her and camera flashes pop brightly around her face, is to experience the power of these two levels of convincing.

This book is about these processes: convincing women to become activists and translating transnational feminist concepts of women's rights so that they are convincing to Moroccan society more broadly. Over the course of a year and a half of fieldwork among associations and individuals in the movement, mostly in 2002–2003, I learned about this movement and the individuals within it. I attempted to understand who was in the movement and how they had come to be there. I questioned why legal change was their starting point and how it informed and inspired other projects. I observed how broad the movement was, bringing in a variety of people at all levels of work, volunteering, and support. I learned about its problems and obstacles, both within the organizations and among Moroccan state and society. I discovered that, throughout their history, associations had tapped into a transnational feminist movement with universalist ideals of women's equality and rights yet had increasingly fostered a determination to find and speak with local voices.

What follows is the product of that research. My main purpose is to present the movement to readers and introduce them to its roles and aspirations during a very exciting moment in the lives of women in Morocco:

a time of legal change, involving efforts to reform and then implement the *Mudawwana*. I also hope to contribute to understandings of women's activism in non-Western settings, especially in the poorly understood Middle East and North Africa region (MENA). Many scholars and commentators dismiss such movements as elite, as puppets for Western agendas, or as wholly universalist in approach; but the reality is, of course, much more complex. Closer examination of the day-to-day work and realities of the Morocco movement shows how activists and groups attempt to weave together the transnational and the local to produce something that is uniquely Moroccan yet resonates with women's concerns in the region and throughout the world.

Why a Women's Rights Movement?

Are so-called universal rights, such as human rights and women's rights, truly universal? Although feminist groups that are international in scope claim that their discourses and plans of action are developed in partnership with activists from around the world, their agendas nevertheless represent a particular configuration of rights that are then presented as universal, or at least universally worthy of application. Ironically, at the heart of arguments both in favor of and against the universal applicability of such rights, there lies the assumption that it is possible to impose a particular set of norms on another society—and, depending on which side of the argument one espouses, such an imposition may be welcome or not. This book rests on the premise that it is, in fact, *impossible* to impose a wholesale system of norms on any group, much less a complex society such as Morocco, much less as diverse a group as Moroccan women. The ways in which “universal human rights” are defined and articulated today—and supported and furthered through funding structures, UN platforms, Amnesty International protests, military campaigns, and so on—issue from a geographical/historical/political/moral configuration that is highly specific to the West and currently hegemonic in the world. These ideologies and legal precepts can, however, be derived from and resonate in local settings if concerted efforts to weave them through local norms and discourses are in place. The Moroccan women's rights movement provides a useful example.

Anthropologists are well situated to study the sites and events where the global and local come together in rights discourses and the associations that promote them. They are also able to examine the local origins and development of universalist notions of rights, as well as how they are addressed, employed, and acted on by local agents. For example, ethnographic work by the legal anthropologist Sally Engle Merry (2006) outlines the process of translating international law into local justice on the issue of gender violence, illustrating that this process takes place at international meetings, in UN offices, in association conference rooms, and in close interaction with local people in local institutions. Merry's extensive, multi-sited fieldwork takes place at UN meetings and conferences, and with NGOs in local communities in Hawaii, Fiji, India, China, and Hong Kong, as well as the United States. It provides an excellent example of research that follows the process of producing and localizing transnational feminist discourse. Yet there is need for more studies of activists in their local settings and in their interactions with colleagues, beneficiaries, governments, and communities. Through such studies we can see how rights discourses are translated and acted on, and sometimes built from the ground up in response to these universalisms.

Anthropologists have not widely focused on social movements. I agree with the anthropologist John Burdick that the participant-observation methodology of anthropology has much to offer social movement theory, as "exploring heterogeneity and contestation is a key step in revealing a social movement's potential for dynamism and change" (1995, 362). Looking at process and everyday practice within associations can add a great deal to our understanding of how and why social movements are formed, maintained, contested, and transformed. And using social movements as field sites can strengthen and add new insights and case studies to anthropological theories of the relationship between structure and agency, one of the great obsessions of the field within the last three decades. One recent direction in social movement theory seeks to take culture seriously by looking at the actions of social movements as cultural performances. The sociologist and social movement theorist Hank Johnston (2009) argues that this can include collective performances, such as protests, marches, and press conferences; it can also include internal discussions and planning

sessions and the smoothing out of conflicts within a group, which feature individuals performing to the group itself (8). He further compares social movements to cultures writ large, containing their own internal processes of reproducing and critiquing cultural norms during and through these performances (9). Who better than anthropologists, through grounded, long-term fieldwork, to study the rules of order, conflicts, and critiques within these social movement cultures, as expressed through a variety of performances and rituals?

Scholars of global feminism have provided a great deal of scholarship on women's social movements in particular. Yet much of this has too greatly emphasized the global and transnational influences on women's rights movements and insufficiently accounted for the national and local. For example, there are numerous accounts of the United Nations and its crucial role in bringing together networks of women from around the world to define such concepts as equality, discrimination, women's human rights, and violence against women, and how these concepts can be applied and enforced at the national level (e.g., Snyder 2006; Pietilä et al. 1990). But we do not have enough information about how these networks of women draw on local experiences and needs in order to develop such definitions and then translate them at the local level when they return home. There is a growing and rich literature on "third-world feminism" that examines the local and regional struggle for women's rights in regions such as the Middle East (e.g., Al-Ali 2000; Chatty and Rabo 1997; Peteet 1991).¹

1. I am uncomfortable with the terms "third-world feminism" and "developing-world feminism." They reify whatever it is that Western feminism is supposed to be, and assume that there is something held in common by so-called feminists across the developing world or global South: namely, that they are not Western. This is an oversimplification that omits considerations of class, urban vs. rural milieu, religion, and economics. It furthermore glosses over the fact that many feminist movements in the global South are led by people educated or living in the West, just as Western feminism has increasingly been informed by the experience and needs of minority women, including those in immigrant communities who are sometimes referred to as "third-world women" in the literature. But there is a reason that such terminology came into being; see anthropologist Uma Narayan's explanation of "giving an account of herself" as a third-world feminist with a special relationship to the West and colonialist and feminist discourses (1997).

One of the projects within this literature is to define the term “feminism” in locally meaningful ways that are historically and politically situated. When can a women’s social movement be labeled as “feminist,” for example? Can a feminism defined within an Islamic Middle Eastern framework be considered comparable with its counterparts elsewhere (Moghadam 2002)? Can the agency of women and women’s groups in the Middle East and North Africa region be evaluated according to the same criteria with which scholars evaluate the agency of women in other settings (Mahmood 2005; Deeb 2006)? All of these are important questions on which to build theory about women’s social movements, but more descriptive, on-the-ground case studies are needed in order to draw valid comparisons and contrasts. This book provides such a case study.

Transnational Frames, Local Concerns

Before continuing, it is necessary to define some terms. First, what is the meaning and relationship between the transnational and local levels of mobilizing women and forming goals to address women’s issues? At its most basic, the term “transnational” refers to actions and discussions taking place among individuals and groups across national boundaries. But this is not as straightforward as it seems: My usage of the term “transnational” instead of “global” is a strategic one intended to emphasize that there is real sharing and exchange among such participants, even though these exchanges are “channeled by global inequalities of resources and power” (Merry 2006, 20). It is also intended to question how scholars explain the flow of action and thought on women’s issues, assuming that these flow from centers of power in the world to less powerful societies that are presumed to accept them without critique. I prefer to think of the set of actions and discourses to be considered throughout this book as circulating multidirectionally. Although the feminist frames I discuss do have a certain historical origin, they have been altered as they have moved through time and place, and they continue to be worked on by Moroccan women’s rights activists. The use of the term “transnational” is indicative of this multidirectionality and multivocality (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). The term “local,” by contrast, refers to the actions and discussions taking place on the ground in a particular setting, in this case among Moroccan

women's rights associations and Moroccan society more broadly.² The local does not represent an isolated place or some site of authentic Moroccan culture, however. It can represent a confluence of ideas, discourses, and circumstances every bit as much as the transnational.

These terms are the topic of numerous works on globalization and transnationalism within and outside of anthropology today, many of which rightly debate how separate these realms actually are in practice (Goodale and Merry 2007). The anthropologist Jonathan Friedman (2002), for example, makes a compelling critique of the overemphasis on the transnational by many anthropologists working from within a post-colonial studies framework and how it erases local meaning. He discusses a moment in the writing of James Clifford (1997) where Clifford discusses an object in Papua New Guinea in the form of a traditional shield but decorated with a beer advertisement. Such a "hybrid" object seems to Clifford significant of the globalized world in which we live, and Friedman links this to writing by other anthropologists who theorize the world as global and transnational, replete with hybrid identities and meanings, and seem to devalue the importance of local and locally derived meanings. Friedman argues, by contrast, that the object has come to have a local meaning and that its "hybrid" nature is only in the eye of the anthropologist who is interested in theorizing globalization. He writes, "In other words, the beer ad was appropriated in a way meaningful within the life sphere of the people concerned. It was integrated or even assimilated to a particular set of life strategies. It was not, then, a foreign design for those concerned, and the fact of its different origins was quite irrelevant" (Friedman 2002, 23). Similarly, although discourses employed by the Moroccan women's rights movement derive from transnational feminism, we must know more about how they are employed and deployed *locally*.

2. For an excellent and succinct review of usage of these terms related to transnational feminism, see the short chapter "Changing the Terms" by feminist scholar Nancy A. Naples (2002). For an equally excellent critique of how these terms are overused and reified in relation to human rights discourse, see Goodale (2006).

Another way of stating this, using a Moroccan example, is through the comparison of beauty shops and concepts of beauty in Casablanca, Cairo, and Paris, as described in the work of the anthropologist Susan Ossman (2002). Cultural flows from Paris to Cairo and Casablanca help determine shared concepts of beauty, and women in Cairo and Casablanca are more likely to seek Parisian styles than vice versa. Yet a woman in a beauty shop in Casablanca feels that she is in Casablanca, wrestling with Moroccan versions of what is beautiful (however they may be based on international standards). She does not feel that she is simultaneously in Paris and Cairo as well, no matter how transnational the notion of beauty may actually be. Similarly, when activists in Morocco are working to apply transnational feminist ideals such as “equality” and “women’s human rights” to Moroccan family law, they are fully situated in the Moroccan context and responding to the specific situations of Moroccan women, even as they are part of a transnational women’s rights movement.

Thus the perspectives most appropriate to this book are those that emphasize the global, transnational, and local not as actual places or experiences but as *processes* occurring under historical, economic, social, and material conditions that exist and are intertwined at both the global and local levels. Transnational feminist efforts have been crucial in bringing together women’s rights activists from around the world and establishing discourses and plans of action that would shape their work. Those transnational feminist efforts have flowed in the direction of the local through various forms of information and resource sharing. In her ethnography on the transnational-to-local flow of gender violence discourse, Merry distinguishes “three forms of global cultural flow that take place across and within global and local spaces” (2006, 19): The first is “transnational consensus building,” or the production of documents, treaties, conventions, and policies that undergo a great deal of debate and move toward consensus by transnational actors before being disseminated and implemented across the world (19). The second is “transnational program transplants,” certain kinds of programs and interventions that are transplanted into one society from another and are largely shaped by an international discourse (19–20). The third is the “localization of transnational

knowledge," in which national and local actors share knowledge gained from their transnational experiences within their national and local settings (20). Merry's work theorizes the importance of all three flows, or processes, and seeks to understand the sites and moments where the three flow together.

More research is needed on this third level: how activists in local settings have translated these efforts to their societies or how such activists have played a role in shaping the direction of the transnational feminist movement. On first glance, it is clear that all three flows are present in the story of the Moroccan women's rights movement. UN documents produced in these transnational events, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), are crucial in Moroccan activists' discourses and actions regarding Mudawwana reform. The structures of funding and accountability of Western NGOs are clearly transplanted into the Moroccan associations, most probably because Western funders require it in the form of budgets, annual reports, and other kinds of accounting, as described in chapter 2. But the third level, this process of localization, is not so straightforward and requires a close and careful study. Merry explains the importance (and limits) of translating rights into a local vernacular in order to accomplish this third form of global cultural flow. I find the concept of "frames," borrowed from social movement theory, helpful by providing concrete conditions within which this vernacularization process is accomplished by women's rights activists in Morocco.

The process of mobilization takes a ready population (women who have come to women's rights associations for a variety of reasons) and steers them toward an effort to reform the Mudawwana. Chapter 2 describes the context of this convincing process in terms of some of the structural conditions for this mobilization: there was a political opportunity to mobilize interest and action in reform, available resources in the form of political support of various kinds, and groups of women already in place—a critical mass on which to build the idea of a collective, rather than a personal, injustice. All of these structural conditions form the macro-level interests of social movement studies, seeking to define what conditions must be in place in order to allow for social movement mobilization and collective

action (Sperling 1999, 44; Diani and Eyerman 1992). In the 1980s, social movement theorists began to seek out micro-level factors that allowed this mobilization, especially the social psychological ones—in other words, those characteristics and experiences that bring individuals into support of a social movement (Kelley and Breinlinger 1996). The notion of convincing, described in chapter 1, helps us understand the process of forming an individual woman into an activist. Yet to make change at the societal and political levels requires something akin to lobbying the public. Framing theory addresses the ways in which social movements can lobby the public and bring the social movement's goals into the personal purview of a wide variety of individuals within society and the political system.

Framing theory posits frames as a tool for being involved in discursive politics, “the effort to reinterpret, reformulate, rethink, and rewrite the norms and practices of society and the state” (Katzenstein 1998, 17; cited in Ferree and Pudrovska 2006, 249)—or, in the words of the Moroccan women's rights movement, the effort to change mentalities (*changer les mentalités*). One of the great triumphs of transnational feminism has been in this realm of transforming the discussion of women's rights, particularly involving human rights, development, empowerment, and gender-based violence (Ferree and Pudrovska 2006, 249). This discursive emphasis is important in linking action to ideology. Two key transnational feminist frames that will be explored in this book, “equality” and “women's human rights,” have helped the women's rights movement turn its quest for Mudawwana reform into a discourse of women's rights as citizens of Morocco and as human beings, with all the moral and societal weight that these ideas carry with them. As we will see in chapter 3, linking specific women's rights issues to larger ideologies of equality and human rights has helped to muster wider support for the goals of the women's rights movement and has normalized those goals, as well as attracted more women who can then be mobilized into active involvement in the movement.

Examining these frames closely allows us to understand and analyze the *process* of developing, maintaining, and evolving the women's right movement. The emphasis on framing in social movement theory arose in the mid-1980s with a focus on “work—the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings” (Benford and

Snow 2000, 613) and attempts to account for the agency of those forming frames and the process of contesting and negotiating them from within. Scholars have been particularly concerned with how frames are developed and used in order to mobilize and motivate social movement members, delineate boundaries around the movement, and accuse other groups or the state of grievances (Snow et al. 1986; Goffman 1974). The social movement theorist Karl-Dieter Opp (2009) argues that framing theory added a useful cognitive element to social movement theory by positing that a frame must be vague enough to allow a wide range of individuals to believe that it resonates with their own personal beliefs.³ The frame “women’s human rights,” for example, is vague but productively so because it engages a wide swathe of Moroccans who have been involved in public conversations and activism about human rights in recent decades but encourages them to think about this familiar issue in a new way, as it regards women in particular.

Yet, although vague and transnationally derived, these frames have been worked into a local context. Chapters 3 and 4 examine how activists in the women’s rights movement have attempted to apply the transnational frames of “equality” and “women’s human rights” in ways that have met with success in certain instances and with less success in others. It was in their application to Mudawwana reform that these frames came to be most useful and compelling. Chapter 5 examines how the women’s rights movement is in the process of developing a third, even more locally relevant frame that seeks to link women’s rights to a more harmonious family life. The frames to be discussed in this book should not be seen as discrete, successive discourses, one replacing another; rather, they are all living frames that developed in response to certain conditions but remain in the movement today and are continually woven, sometimes together, into new projects. With a frame, activists can organize the multiple concerns of women and allow very different manifestations of them—from

3. Opp (2009) also critiques the limits of framing theory and suggests ways of determining how frames are understood, used, and applied by individuals within and outside of social movements.

lack of political representation to inability to obtain a divorce—to be explained and understood as connected to one another. They can also use a frame to direct attention to the existence of a solution championed by the movement—in this case, Mudawwana reform—and how joining the movement can allow one to be part of the mobilization for change. And activists can form new frames that derive from local settings and needs.

Feminism and Women's Rights

The relationship of the Moroccan women's rights movement to transnational feminism leads to questions about the extent to which this is a feminist movement. Women are the primary agents of the movement, and this fact requires some interrogation and explanation because men also have personal motivations that bring them to the movement, sometimes similar to those of women. One man, for example, became an activist because of his concern for his daughters and their rights. Another, who has devoted four evenings a week for several years to teaching women's literacy classes as a volunteer, does so because he believes it is his duty as a citizen. Men also have close personal and professional relationships with women that bring them into associations, and men accompany and provide emotional support to their female relatives when visiting women's rights associations for legal counseling. Men are certainly important in the political sphere as champions of women's causes, either in their political parties or in important positions within the government and civil society. As one prominent female activist told me, "It's encouraging to see men in the movement, so convinced." However, this movement began and has continued to work by and large as a *mobilization of women*, and thus most of the language of this book concerns women's participation in the movement. Although men participate and can be convinced of the necessity of legal reform and education, one of the most significant aspects of this movement is that it is an attempt to mobilize women for the sake of women's issues, rather than depending on men or on a patriarchal political system to solve women's problems for them.

Generally speaking, a broad, practical view of feminism applies to this movement, such as the notion of de facto feminism espoused by the political scientist Patricia Misciagno, which includes any praxis of working to

change the system of patriarchy (1997). But is this a feminist movement, *ideologically* speaking? The sociologist and prolific theorist of women's social movements Myra Marx Ferree differentiates between the terms "feminism" and "women's movements." Feminism, again defined broadly, is "a goal, a target for social change, a purpose informing activism" (2006, 6)—in other words, an ideology. Women's movements, on the other hand, are gatherings of women *as* women and *for* women for any number of goals, be they feminist or otherwise—in other words, a constituency or interest group (6). It is no coincidence, for Ferree, that women's movements usually end up being feminist as well, since the gendered nature of a particular movement leads to concerns about the multiple ways that women are subordinated to men and the desire to change this subordination. Thus, there is a dynamic relationship between the two, with mobilization leading to feminist goals. We can see this in my informants' descriptions of the emergence of women's associations from women's cells within political parties in the 1980s and 1990s. Once women party members began to meet to discuss issues faced by women in the party, their collective concerns pushed them to form active associations that would address systemic discrimination against women, not only in the party but in the larger society and political system as well.

As scholars, however, it is important to separate ideology and mobilization for at least two reasons. First, men can be feminists despite the fact that they are not the primary constituency being mobilized in a women's movement—in other words, men can be feminists, but they cannot be women. Second, some activists in women's movements throughout the world do not accept or like the label of "feminist," and many feminists use the term as an exclusionary one. But, according to Ferree, distinguishing between feminism and women's movements and narrowly defining the former such that very few women's movements meet the criteria of "feminist" leads to a very real problem: "the groups that are left to study are typically mobilizations of relatively privileged women who are seeking access to the opportunities provided by social, political, and economic institutions to men of their nationality, class, race, ethnicity, and religion" (Ferree 2006, 9). Women's movements with a feminist ideology are thus labeled "elite" because we have defined feminism to include only them.

The Moroccan women's rights movement and others like it in the MENA region and elsewhere continually suffer this kind of labeling. However, a redefinition of the movement and whom it comprises allows us to see that activists are not wholly from an elite class. Another problem with a deep distinction between the terms "women's movements" and "feminism" is that feminism becomes a concept applied at the institutional level but is not accompanied by mobilization in women's movements. While it is crucial to have NGOs, development and aid organizations, the UN, and other institutions deeply aware of and concerned about feminist goals and projects, "there paradoxically might emerge a time in which we have feminism without feminists" (16).

These issues have been debated at length, and feminist scholars have shared, debated, and contested definitions of women's movements, feminism, and collective action, as well as how to determine when and how women's movements arise and whence their goals and directions come (see Molyneux 2001). Practically speaking, such questions demand further exploration, through close, on-the-ground research, of how individuals see themselves within the feminist/women's movement divide. Such exploration can help illuminate Ferree's argument and support the need for broader definitions of both women's movements and feminism. Other scholars have noted that whether or not to call oneself "feminist" is a major issue for women activists in the MENA region (e.g., Al-Ali 2000, 1997), but I did not find this to be the case in Morocco. Although the feminist label can be used pejoratively by critics to conjure an association with Western feminism, the activists I interviewed were not terribly concerned and seemed to use the labels "feminist," "feminine," and "women's" interchangeably to characterize their movement—although, of course, certain labels were used more frequently among certain audiences.⁴ This was made easier by the fact that activists were comfortable referring to international rights regimes, such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and CEDAW, to support their cause. What seemed more vexing

4. See Sadiqi (2003), chapter 1; for a summary of feminist trends in Morocco that argues for the importance of distinguishing these terms.

to some activists was the label “secular,” and they were quick to point out to me that they are practicing Muslims in spite of the fact that they may not desire Islam as the sole reference point in determining what women’s rights should be. Although I did not do extensive research on the meanings of secularism to Moroccan activists, my general sense concurs with the anthropologist Nadjé Al-Ali’s suggestion from her study of Egyptian activists “to conceive of secular and religious positions and attitudes in terms of a continuum” (2000, 147).

Another nagging question for scholars about the definition of the term “feminism” is to what extent larger social justice issues should be considered necessarily feminist. In other words, if one is feminist, is one also supportive of LGBTQ rights, racial equality, labor rights, and a host of other related causes? Snyder (2006) suggests that these larger issues have been of greater, earlier concern for activists from the global South than those from the global North, and one of the great contributions these activists have made to transnational feminism is the emphasis on larger social justice issues. In a 1987 statement, for example, Peggy Antrobus, the Jamaican founder of the transnational organization DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), stated: “Feminism offers the only politics which can transform our world into a more human place and deal with global issues like equality, development, and peace, because it asks the right questions: about power, about the links between the personal and the political; and because it cuts through race and class. Feminism implies consciousness of all the sources of oppression: race, class, gender, homophobia, and it resists them all. Feminism is a call for action” (cited in Moghadam 2005, 88).

At the Second World Conference for Women in Copenhagen in 1970, for example, activists from the MENA region and elsewhere forced a discussion on Zionism and the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and more recently have demanded that those who call themselves feminists speak up for justice for Iraqis—men as well as women. Antiglobalization movements are becoming another feminist domain and may well be the future battlefield of transnational feminist activists who see “antiglobalization as a key factor for feminist theorizing and struggle” (Mohanty 2003, 517). In fact, for many observers, this link to larger social justice issues may well

be what is slowly pushing women's movements from the global South into the ideological leadership of the transnational feminist movement. While women's movements in the North are experiencing "lagging energies and low mobilization" (Snyder 2006, 48), the strength of women's movements in the South continues, as issues of equality and justice for women are firmly interlinked with larger social justice issues concerning poverty, development, and the ravages of economic globalization.

Activists in the Moroccan movement very much consider their version of feminism to be concerned with larger issues of social justice. They organize and participate in marches against international terrorism; for solidarity with Palestinian, Iraqi, and Afghani women; and against globalization and its effects on local economies and women around the world, not only in Morocco. They also vociferously address local social justice issues, such as poverty and development. They join protests held by unemployed university graduates and labor unions. They have been active in protests growing out of the so-called Arab Spring across the MENA region, demanding a new constitution, greater human rights, and more transparent political processes. The movement as a whole has been criticized as being too focused on urban and middle-class concerns, too ready to work within the system rather than overthrow it, too happy to benefit from aid and help from international funding agencies and Western governments, and too reluctant to associate itself with more controversial causes such as LGBTQ rights, HIV/AIDS, and sexuality issues. From these perspectives, the movement is not radically feminist. But activists do demonstrate willingness and desire to effect social change on many interrelated fronts, and I believe this qualifies them for the definition of feminist in this sense as well. After all, as Moghadam (2002, 1159–60) points out, Western feminists, too, have by and large worked within the system and in partnership with the state and existing political and legal institutions.

At the end of the day, I argue that categorizing the individuals and associations I studied as a "women's rights movement" rather than a "feminist movement" is the best way to position them within these debates. For one, all of the above definitions of the term "feminism" can also be applied to those interested in promoting women's rights within an Islamic framework, although this is often and increasingly distinguished as "Islamic

feminism” in Morocco and elsewhere (Salime 2011; Rhouni 2010; Sadiqi 2003). Relatedly, there are women’s groups among Islamists throughout the region that are involved in the larger political effort to reform the state through an Islamic framework, which can be distinguished as “Islamist feminists” (Sadiqi 2003). In fact, many Moroccans argue that Islamist women’s groups are more interested in working outside the system to achieve social justice than are the more establishment-oriented women’s associations that I studied. As I will show in chapter 5, the women’s rights movement distinguishes itself from—or, perhaps more accurately, opposes itself to—such Islamist feminists and even, to some degree, Islamic feminists. The description “women’s rights movement” clearly refers to the group of individuals and associations working on Mudawwana reform and rights education as its major goals, a description that does not fit individuals and associations who fall within the other two camps.

Moreover, the individuals and associations I studied represent a mobilization of women around women’s collective concerns as much as they do a movement espousing ideological and political goals. For this reason, I do not feel comfortable applying the label “feminist” to the movement because it emphasizes the ideological/political pole of motivations as the expense of the personal/social pole of motivations. This gets back to Ferree’s concern about having feminism with no feminists. Not all individuals involved in this movement would feel that the label “feminism” accurately describes their motivations and actions. To be broadly encompassing of the variety of motivations and actions that bring people into the movement and convince them of the importance of Mudawwana reform, I prefer to describe this as a mobilization of (primarily) women into a women’s rights movement. Women come to the movement with a variety of motivations, are mobilized through the process of convincing, to be described in chapter 1, and become speakers and actors on behalf of an agenda centered around women’s rights. Such categorizations keep the boundaries around the movement clearly drawn but permeable, broadly encompassing of people and activities but narrowly focused on the goal of women’s rights. This is not a general women’s movement with multiple goals; describing it as a women’s *rights* movement reminds us that

all activists do come at some point to espouse the goals of Mudawwana reform and education of women about their rights.

So, why a women's rights movement? Because it is an excellent site for illuminating, through ethnographic research, how participants in such a movement in the MENA region are agents in bringing together the universalizing rights discourses of transnational feminism with local ways of conceptualizing women and women's rights. This study allows us to see how rights are worked out on the ground and also how messy women's agency can be as individuals and groups organize within a movement. It also allows us to look at the process of convincing women to join a movement and convincing the public to share its major goals. An ethnographic study of a movement such as the Moroccan women's rights movement can lend much needed insight into the relationship between transnational principles and local activism. This is a valuable project in and of itself, but perhaps it is more valuable than ever today, given events in the larger region around Morocco and the centrality of issues of law, rights, civil society, and democracy.

Why Morocco, Why Now?

The recent protests and revolutions occurring through the MENA region have focused the world's attention on the region and the relationship between state and society; the large population of youth and its dissatisfaction with political, economic, and social systems; and the growing presence of Islamist political parties and movements and their solutions for systemic problems in society. Of particular interest has been the leadership role of women in these revolutions and protests and in the political aftermath of them; many accounts express surprise about this so-called awakening of Middle Eastern or Arab women. A brief quote from a 2011 *Time* magazine article simultaneously questions and reiterates this surprise:

The uprisings sweeping the Arab world have toppled . . . old stereotypes of Arab women as passive, voiceless victims. . . . Arabs were bemused that the Western media was shocked—shocked!—to find women protesting alongside men. “There was this sense of surprise, that ‘Oh, my god, women

are actually participating!” says Egyptian activist Hadil El-Khouly. “But of course women were there in Tahrir Square.” (Power 2011)

Despite its acknowledgement that this Western “shock” is bemusing to Arabs, the editors nevertheless entitled the article “Silent *No More*: The Women of the Arab Revolutions” [emphasis mine]. The belief continues that women in the Arab world have long been silent and are only coming out of this silence *now*, during the popular protests and revolutions occurring in many places. Yet a brief history of organizing around women’s rights in Morocco shows clearly that this is neither an awakening, nor sudden, nor surprising.

Mobilizing Women in Morocco

Until the mid-1980s, according to Zakya Daoud, a French-Moroccan journalist and chronicler of women’s rights associations in North Africa, the political situation of women in Morocco was slowly and quietly evolving (1996, 274). The struggle for independence from France had involved a diverse set of women. The postcolonial era (1950s–1970s) had seen the development of nationalist goals for the education of women, as well as the growth of charitable institutions meant to help poor women, with elite women at the center of efforts in both categories. By 1969, the direst issues facing women (illiteracy, poverty, divorce, abandonment) were severe enough, and the growing power of religious groups worrisome enough, to prompt King Hassan II to appeal to women from leading families to form a women’s movement that would address legal and other issues. This led to the formation of the National Union of Moroccan Women (Union nationale des femmes marocaines, UNFM)⁵ and its corresponding journal *Aïcha*, under the leadership of the king’s close female relatives. The nationalist and postcolonialist purposes behind its organization are clearly noted in one of its objectives: “to constitute an impenetrable rampart against

5. In providing names and acronyms of parties and associations in Morocco, I explain the name in English and French or Arabic and then use the French acronym for the most part. Printed texts in Morocco tend to include the French acronyms, even sometimes in the Arabic-language press.

Westernization" (Daoud 1996, 278). However, the elite nature of this organization did not have wide appeal. Opposition political parties began to form women's cells within the parties, beginning with the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (Union socialiste des forces populaires, USFP), which in 1975 established among its primary concerns reform of the Family Code (including the abolition of polygamy and equal rights in marriage and divorce) (287). Additionally, women were elected to the national councils of their respective political parties, albeit in small numbers (287–88).

Daoud takes a rather grim view of the political response to women's early militancy as well as women's ability to work officially toward political and legal change. However, she acknowledges that this stagnation led eventually to a more active phase: "In effect, during these years of political and feminist maturation, the absence of any action by women's cells within the political parties, a negative 'wait and see' attitude toward the woman question, and its consideration as a secondary issue, brought about the birth of other forms of militancy" (309). These involved the formation of formal and informal groups, which placed emphasis on improving women's educational and work prospects, promoting contraception and family planning, improving women's health, and dealing with labor issues such as salary parity, maternal leave, and sexual harassment. In many ways, women's associations grew to fill the gap left by a government of "phalocrats" (295) that could, but refused to, address women's issues. Leading student and human rights associations organized meetings for debate and discussion of a wide variety of women's issues as well.

By the 1980s, women's cells within political parties followed their lead and began forming discussion groups and even establishing magazines. The pioneering group in this effort was the women of the political party Organization for Democratic and Popular Action (Organisation de l'action démocratique populaire, OADP), forming in 1983 the magazine *8 mars*, named after March 8, the International Day of Women. This group was established in 1987 as the Women's Action Union (Union de l'action féminine, UAF) and provides a useful example of how the women's movement transitioned from a movement using a variety of tools to address women's issues in general to a women's *rights* movement that took on legal reform as its primary emphasis, during a period of the "explosion of potentialities"

from 1985 to 1992 (Daoud 1996, 312). Some of the most influential associations in today's women's rights movement were established in the 1980s, as they moved away from their political party and organizational bases. The Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (Association démocratique des femmes du maroc, ADFM), for example, arose from the Party of Progress and Socialism (Parti du progrès et du socialisme, PPS) in 1985. Female activists grew weary of male colleagues who spoke of equality as a political ideology but refused both to share power within the party with their female peers and address women's rights as a primary issue. The center-right nationalist political party, Independence Party (Parti Istiqlal, PI), also saw its female members become increasingly active in the women's rights movement, but this caused a problem as the women's agenda for legal reform came into conflict with the moderate Salafist (Islamist) flavor of PI party politics.

These fledgling organizations formed networks to support one another's work on particular causes, especially among the left-leaning parties. They also began using UN conferences, conventions, and platforms as a point of reference for demanding women's rights and reaching out to international organizations for financial and other kinds of support (Daoud 1996, 316). Many new organizations laid ostensible claim to agendas other than feminist or legal ones. For example, the Female Solidarity Association (Association-solidarité féminine, ASF) was formed in order to help unwed mothers (*mères célibataires*). Although ASF's programs have remained focused on this demographic and set of issues until today, it is nevertheless firmly located in the women's rights movement, as it works primarily toward the kinds of legal change required to improve the lives of these vulnerable women more generally.

The period 1986–1992 was also one in which organizations and publishing presses published key works on women's issues, many of them written by intellectuals, many of whom were involved in the women's rights movement or associated political parties. Much of this writing also addressed the issue of class and how the suffering of poor Moroccans was heavily intertwined with the problems faced by women. Women's issues came to embrace other political agendas, including protests around the Gulf War in Iraq, constitutional and other kinds of political reform, and

the continued formation of women's associations and networks (320-21). In 1991, ADFM launched the Collectif Maghreb-Egalité 95, intended as a network of activists in the three Maghrebi (North African) countries—Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco—to work together in preparation for the Fourth UN Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995.

Another landmark event in this period, instigated by UAF but carried out in coalition with other associations, was the effort to collect one million signatures on a petition demanding that King Hassan II reform the *Mudawwana*, which was delivered to him in 1992. Although the demands went largely unmet and the 1993 reform was a disappointment for the women's rights movement, activists nevertheless felt the petition and reform process represented a major step forward toward legal reform. The fact that the king responded to the petition and implemented some level of reform was, for them, a recognition that the *Mudawwana* was not a sacred, unchangeable text, but rather a legal text that could be contested and modified through political process (Collectif 95 2005, 13–16; Brand 1998, 77).

In the spring of 1999, the newly ruling socialist government under King Hassan II produced its Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development, signed by Prime Minister Abderrahman El-Youssefi. Its proposals included granting women equality within the household and overhauling laws on marriage and divorce in the *Mudawwana*. The Plan of Action included many reforms that women's rights groups had been demanding in preceding years, such as abolition of polygamy and repudiation (an informal, verbal form of divorce available only to men), expansion of women's rights to divorce, and increase of the minimum age of marriage to eighteen.

The announcement of this Plan of Action spurred two marches of historical significance in March 2000, after Mohammed VI had ascended to the throne. The first was in favor of the Plan of Action, organized by women's associations and left-leaning political parties and held in Rabat as a celebration of the International Day of Women. It drew some fifty thousand to one hundred thousand participants. The second was in protest against the Plan of Action, organized by Islamist groups and held in Casablanca, and drew some five hundred thousand to one million participants—ten times the number of the first (Belghazi and Madani 2001,

27).⁶ The Plan of Action was dropped, and the new king Mohammed VI opted for a more extended public consideration of Mudawwana issues. He appointed the Royal Consultative Commission Charged with Reform of the Mudawwana, comprising a broad spectrum of the political, religious, and intellectual elite—from conservative religious scholars to activists in civil society—and charged them with creating a list of recommendations for reform. After months of disagreement and inability to meet successive deadlines set by the king, in the summer of 2003 the commission presented their report. The king used the occasion of the opening of parliament in October 2003 to address the government and the nation at one time, announcing and explaining his decision using both religious texts and international discourses of human rights. Parliament approved the reform in large part by the end of that year, and the new Mudawwana was put into effect in February 2004.

The actual reform of the Mudawwana came about toward the end of the major portion of my fieldwork in 2002–2003, a period when association members anticipated some level of reform and were planning for how their work might change after reform. Although the preceding brief history of women's activism in Morocco might suggest that legal reform was a minor goal that only came into the movement at the end, nothing could be further from the truth. In my assessment, legal reform has been the primary goal of many women's associations since at least the late 1970s, as women's groups began spinning off of their political parties. This goal has been unified and strengthened through increasing political opportunities and availability of resources, but it was present among women's associations early on.

My reasoning may seem tautological here: I define the women's rights movement as those associations and individuals whose primary goal is legal reform and then argue that the major goal of the women's rights

6. The differing levels of participation are not necessarily a clear indication of differing levels of public support. They do, perhaps, indicate better organization: The Islamist political party PJD, for example, bussed in participants from all over Morocco (Buskens 2003, 103–4).

movement is legal reform. The remainder of this book will show that legal reform and education of women about their rights have been the major structuring discourse of women's rights associations in Morocco for the last four decades. For example, many projects of women's associations concern issues of violence, which may seem on the surface to be a general problem for women and not necessarily related to women's rights more specifically. Yet one activist, who works with an association that exclusively addresses violence against women (*violence à l'égard des femmes*), told me in no uncertain terms that their projects concerning violence are mostly the medium for the message; the ultimate goal of the association is to use this work with women as victims of violence in service of reform of the Mudawwana and other laws that leave women vulnerable to violence. The Democratic League for Women's Rights (Ligue démocratique pour les droits des femmes, LDDF) runs an "assistance network" that works closely with "women victims of violence," according to its brochure. The brochure also lists the six goals for the network. Only one of them concerns helping women with their situations of violence; four of the goals, by contrast, mention education and mobilizing women around rights, equality, and/or citizenship (Réseau LDDF-Assistance).

I will argue throughout this book that a variety of associational goals—education, development, improvement of job skills, counseling of women through the process of divorce, micro credit, and many more—are subsumed within the larger goal of legal reform, and it is this shared goal that connects all of these disparate associations into a unified movement. There is an overriding understanding within these associations that the structure under which women live—the legal and, secondarily, political structure—must change for all other goals to be achieved. Undoubtedly the funding and ideological support coming into the movement for legal reform contributes to this structure. One of my informants wryly acknowledged this when she quipped, "Nowadays every association is a women's rights association."

The fact that issues of law and rights are at the center of the work of women's associations is no surprise given the centrality of law to the texts and practices of Islam. As will be explained more fully in chapter 4, the Mudawwana is the last major vestige of Islamic law in Morocco today;

other legal codes are European derived. Also, as the *Mudawwana* includes laws that govern the most intimate level of Moroccan society, the family, any discussions about reform to the *Mudawwana* or new interpretations or applications of it within Moroccan families are necessarily fraught. Law is also central to debates throughout the region today about such topics as the relationship between citizens and the state, the role of religious minorities in Muslim-majority societies, the legitimacy of certain political and legal structures and rulings, and of course the role of women. In a sense, then, the focus on law is more evidence that the women's rights movement is firmly rooted in a local context. A women's movement in Morocco, where some 98 percent of the population are officially counted as Sunni Muslim, cannot ignore law when addressing women's issues within a family context governed by Islamic law.

Nationalism, Modernization, and Women's Rights

Although statistics are never the whole story, the human development statistics on Moroccan women compare poorly with other nations in the MENA region, which generally compare poorly with the rest of the world. Morocco is in the bottom quarter of Arab nations for human development in general, and consistently in the bottom half or quarter on issues related to education and women's health (UNDP 2006). A 2005 Moroccan government report notes that these statistics represent a steady improvement over the last fifty years and will continue to be addressed in the future (CERED 2005). Many or most Moroccans are affected by social and economic problems including illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, and violence. Although the source and accuracy of statistics on Morocco must always be questioned, these statistics can suggest the particular effect such problems have on women.⁷

7. I use figures from two sources: the Moroccan High Commission on Planning's Direction of Statistics from 2002 and the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Report for 2006, unless otherwise noted. I chose these because the former represents the Moroccan government's analysis of these issues during the time of my research and the latter represents information from a possibly more objective, but also more removed, source published shortly after the same time period.

One broad issue involves housing and infrastructure. Remote rural areas have a lack of infrastructure; for example, only 42.9 percent of rural households have access to clean water, 9.5 percent are connected to potable water lines, and 30 percent have electricity. Many families and individuals leave for the cities, where they live in urban shantytowns without clean water and other basic amenities. Such conditions in both locations place a strain on women, who are primarily responsible for housework and cooking that require water and fuel, and who must, in some cases, travel long distances daily to secure these basic requirements.

As elsewhere, disparities between rich and poor have grown with the imposition of structural adjustment programs on Morocco by the World Bank, which have the effect everywhere of growing an elite and middle class while threatening the job security and workers' rights that the poorest of workers enjoyed—and then requiring the government to cut down on public employment and social services (such as bread subsidies) (Desai 2002). The social problems resulting in part from these changes—poverty, out-migration, alcohol and drug abuse, mental illness—have been particularly devastating to women, leaving many divorced or abandoned to raise their children on what they can get begging on the street, or subject to greater violence by the frustrated men in their families, or unable to find steady work to help support the family. This is the “feminization of poverty” that has grown as a worldwide phenomenon in recent years. For the Moroccan population overall, 19 percent live below the poverty line, with 14.3 percent below \$2 a day. These statistics are not broken down according to male and female, but the number of female-headed households in Morocco (one of the primary indicators of the “feminization of poverty” [Moghadam 2005, 39]) is 20.5 percent in urban areas and 15.4 percent in rural.

Morocco has had one of the highest illiteracy rates in the MENA region. As recently as 2006, the rate of illiteracy stood around 62 percent for women against 34 percent for men, and higher in rural than in urban areas, although the Moroccan government is in the process of carrying out an ambitious plan to eradicate illiteracy (see chapter 2) that claims to have included four million Moroccans, or about 12 percent of the population, from 2004 to 2010 (S. Ali 2010a). Despite compulsory education,

many females often do not attend school, or leave early, because of several reasons: early marriage, work in or outside of the household, or the long distance between 'home' and school in rural areas. The disparities between male and female completion of school are narrowing, especially at the level of higher education, where 45 percent of students are female (a percentage that is on the increase). This higher level of participation in formal education has not, however, shown up in the employment records for women. Only 22.5 percent of the "active" urban population are female, and 24.2 percent of these women are unemployed as opposed to 16.6 percent of men. The statistics for rural women are slightly better; 28.5 percent of the active population are female. Of course, all of these statistics should be taken with an especially big grain of salt because it is impossible to specify how many women are active in unofficial and temporary forms of employment. This invisibility in itself says something about the type and quality of women's labor outside the home in Morocco and the region in general (see Nassar 2003). Also, these numbers tell many different stories according to categories of employment and socioeconomic class of the workers. What is clear, however, is that the gap between women's and men's participation is much greater in official employment outside the home than in education.

Given the urgency of the socioeconomic and educational obstacles faced by Moroccan women today, why have women's rights activists and associations chosen to prioritize *rights* over *development*? Some might argue that this is because such movements are led by elite, urban women whose lives are free from many of the above concerns and who are in a position to prioritize legal issues. There is certainly some validity to this argument as a description of the contemporary lives of many of the women *leading* this movement, those at the highest levels of planning and carrying out the goals of their associations and the movement as a whole. They are highly educated and circulate among the political and civil-society leaders of Morocco. They are in a position to make choices about their lives and professions that are not available to many Moroccan women because of poverty, location, lack of education, and a host of other issues. Yet, in chapter 1, I will address more fully the class positioning of these women and argue against dismissing them as disconnected elites. First of all, the lives they live today may be quite different from their backgrounds and

not indicative of the obstacles they have faced in the past. They also work closely with the women who come to their associations as beneficiaries and understand well the kinds of problems that other women face. Where they perceive limits on their understanding of women of diverse backgrounds and experiences, they reach out to smaller, local, more on-the-ground associations as partners. Also, if we expand our understanding of who is involved in a women's rights mobilization, as discussed in the previous section, we can see that women from a variety of backgrounds and experiences play a role in forming and carrying out the goals of an association and therefore the movement as a whole.

Others argue that this "rights over development" approach inheres in the history of the movement outlined above and its rooting in a particular left-leaning political and social agenda. There is certainly some truth in this, as well as in the movement's connection to transnational feminism, to be described in chapters 3 and 4. However, I believe there is another possibility, also rooted in the recent history of Morocco, that has not yet been explored fully. It involves the history of modernization and nationalist discourses and the positioning of women's rights within them, stretching all the way back to the end of the colonial period.

After independence from France in 1956, King Mohammed V—grandfather of the present monarch—fashioned a *Mudawwana* in 1957 that would both appease the nationalists and garner the support of tribal leaders. According to Mounira Charrad (2001), a sociologist whose work compares family law codes in postcolonial North Africa, the preservation of Maliki family law was a natural choice for tribal leaders because of its foundation in a tribal notion of family as patrilineal, clan based, and patrikin (167–68).⁸ Perhaps as part of their effort to dismantle this

8. In Sunni Islamic jurisprudence, there are four major *madhahab* (sing. *madhhab*), or "[bodies] of authoritative legal doctrine" (Hallaq 2005, 163) bringing together jurisprudence, interpretation, and application of the edicts in the Qur'an and Sunna (sayings and acts) of Mohammed, the textual sources of the religion. Numerous such bodies, or "schools," emerged in the eighth century in the major cities of the Islamic empire around great and pious imams, or leaders of the community. These four—the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali—are those that survived over time. Regions of the Muslim world are

form of social organization and the political power it represented, PI (the nationalist party leading the independence movement from France) attempted to establish a new family law for Morocco suitable to its vision of a "modern" family based on a conjugal (nuclear) rather than extended family unit. The desire for reform saw its greatest spokesperson in Allal al-Fassi, the founder and leader of Istiqlal and a well-educated member of the *ulema*, the body of religious scholars. Many of the suggestions he put forth for change have only just been implemented in the 2004 reforms, such as the removal of the provision demanding females have a male guardian oversee their marriage contract, the establishment of a legal age of marriage (to outlaw child marriage), and the suppression of polygamy. During al-Fassi's time, these proposals "had two basic objectives: to reinforce the conjugal family and to eliminate local customary codes" (Charrad 2001, 160). As such, they should not be interpreted as a desire to revolutionize the place of women for their own sake, but rather as a way to strengthen an urban, bourgeois notion of the family and enhance social cohesion for political purposes (Baker 1998).

Opponents of al-Fassi and the reform movement claimed that Islam had already liberated women and that family law, as an important part of Islamic law, must be guarded intact. Immediately after independence, the king made his decision: codify Maliki family law as the *Mudawwana* in such a way that "the spirit of reform [was] greatly reduced" (Daoud 1996, 257). He retained control of all aspects of the process of codification: appointing the commission with al-Fassi as its head (but ultimately preventing him from carrying out his desired reforms), providing it with a mandate, and approving the commission's work. By March 1958 the

governed by different schools, although lawmakers sometimes borrow from other schools in order to suit specific needs. The Maliki school appears to have diffused from its origins in Medina to contemporary North Africa via its adoption by the Umayyad Caliphate in Andalusia (in contemporary Southern Spain) (Hallaq 2005, 174–75). Charrad's point here is that the Maliki school was well suited to the tribe-based society of Morocco at the time of independence, in which the family was organized according to male relations and inheritance of property and identity through males.

codification was complete, although it continued to be supplemented by acts and decisions of the Moroccan Supreme Court and the Ministry of Justice during subsequent years. Although on paper the new *Mudawwana* seemed to install Maliki law at the expense of customary law, in fact the practical difficulties of registering and administering such legal facts as marriage and divorce meant that, in rural areas, customary practices could and did persist with little interference or with the approval of local judges inured to customary ways.

Although women had played an active and important role in the struggle to end French colonialism, they were excluded almost entirely from the process of nation building, including the decision-making process leading to codification of the *Mudawwana*. Alison Baker (1998), an oral historian who recorded the life-histories of around twenty-five women involved in nationalist politics and sixty women involved in the armed resistance, writes that, during the resistance, women were able to operate under the radar of the French and their Moroccan collaborators by taking advantage of traditional beliefs about their feminine identity—namely, that as women they were incapable of participating in political or military action.⁹ They also used the custom of wearing veils and long robes in public, and their right of refusal to search by male soldiers, as a means of secreting weapons, communications, food, and other supplies to men involved in the resistance (Daoud 1996). At the same time, women were able to move beyond traditional gender roles, occupying new roles and new spaces and even noting “a dramatic improvement in their relations with men” (Baker 1998, 9). The influential writer Frantz Fanon, whose body of work described and supported anticolonial national liberation movements, writes that women in such movements had to be even better than men; they had to demonstrate a “moral elevation and a strength of character that were altogether exceptional” (1965, 48).

9. Of these sixty women, thirty were among the three hundred officially registered female veterans of the armed resistance; the other thirty were from the much larger group of women involved in some aspect of the resistance but not officially registered as veterans. See Baker (1998, 285) for notes on her methodology.

Generally, independence brought a shock to these mostly lower-class women who had participated in the armed resistance. Many women were divorced or repudiated, widows who had lost their husbands in the movement were often relegated to marginal social status, and others were forced to return to their traditional roles and expectations of remaining quietly at home, tending the house and children (Baker 1998). Or, as one pamphlet distributed by the Moroccan government in 1992 euphemistically notes, "After Independence, many of them humbly stayed in the background" (*The Moroccan Woman*, 8). More bourgeois women, by contrast, experienced a kind of emancipation, encouraged by their families to further their education and continuing to be active, albeit in a limited capacity, in the nationalist movement.

Thus far, this could be an account of the role of women in resistance and nation building in many postcolonial settings, including those in the greater MENA region. A modern nation was believed necessary for competing with and fully driving out the colonial powers—the most immediate goal of incipient nationalism. Writers during and after the colonial period advocated the nuclear family and education for both males and females so that both could play an important role in the family and nation, arguing in particular that more educated women made for better wives and mothers (see Abu-Lughod 1998). A complementary discourse encouraged political men to take on the "nurturing" roles of caring for weak members of society through charity and welfare programs (Pollard 2005). Why the focus on improving women while extending their nurturing role to the state level led and occupied by men? As historian Ellen Fleischmann explains, "Reformist, Western-oriented men were seeking to modernize *themselves*, albeit through focusing their attention on women . . . and reflexively turned their attention to women, targeting them as the backward, atavistic embodiments of all that was wrong with 'tradition' and traditional culture and religion" (1999, 100). The focus of their concern, however, was not dismantling patriarchal control of the family but improving women's status (especially in terms of educational level) so that women could better serve the family and, by extension, the nation. In the postcolonial years, in many cases, elite nationalists became

state builders, as they moved into positions of power or leadership in government and established political parties that institutionalized such ideologies of modernity.

The Moroccan novelist Leila Abouzeid (1989) draws on the stories of actual women to narrate the life of a fictional character who joins her husband in grassroots resistance activities during the fight for independence, including smuggling communications to and from rebels, only to find herself abandoned by a postindependence husband who wants a “modern” woman:

These days my husband needs a wife who will offer cigarettes to his guests and help pave the road to the top for him by any means necessary.

He once found me sitting in the sun with the servants. He glared with that look that said he would shoot me had he a gun in his hand. I felt at a loss, followed him upstairs, then came down again and sat poised on the edge of the sofa as if I were in someone else’s house. He walked past me, and I followed him into the dining room.

We sat at lunch with the table between us as though I were applying to him for a job. By then we had drifted far apart. A wall had seemed to rise in the intervening space. His face was that of a stranger, unfamiliar to me. The more I looked at him the more distant he became. He ate with a fork and I with my fingers. The sound of his fork hitting the plate stopped and I looked up. Again he was glaring as if he wanted to kill me. I stood up, tipping over my chair, which crashed to the floor.

“You don’t like me eating with my fingers? It doesn’t please you that I sit with the servants? We fought colonialism in their name and now you think like the colonizers!” (54)

The sociologist Marnia Lazreg (1994) writes in a compelling way about how nationalist anticolonial rhetoric in neighboring Algeria, during the same period, was transformed into state-building rhetoric based on gender difference. The socialist Ben Bella government, which came from the FLN (National Liberation Front, the revolutionary body that led the fight for Algeria’s independence from France), wrote the following in the 1964 Charter of Algiers:

For centuries the Algerian woman was maintained in an inferior condition justified by retrograde conceptions and erroneous interpretations of Islam. Colonialism aggravated such a situation by triggering among us a natural reaction of self-defense that isolated women from the rest of society. The war of liberation enabled the Algerian woman to assert herself by carrying out responsibilities side by side with man, and taking part in the struggle. . . . The Algerian woman should be able to participate effectively in politics and the building of socialism. . . . She should be able to put her energy in the service of the country by taking part in its economic life, thereby genuinely promoting herself through work.” (Lazreg 1994, 143–44)

Later, when necessary to the Ben Bella government, this discourse about the role of women morphed into one of service and sacrifice. In 1963, Ben Bella even asked that women donate their gold and silver jewelry, their most significant personal source of wealth and status, to the National Bank (145). Lazreg writes, “Women, as a group, were seen as necessary to the building of the state, but as contributors, not participants. . . . Sacrifice, not duty complemented by right, was the cornerstone of the new state’s view of women” (146). In later decades, as the socialist government lost legitimacy against powerful Islamist discourses, women were expected to sacrifice again—this time giving up their hopes for a family code that would guarantee and support their rights within the family and community in favor of one that would pacify the Islamists (150–57). The aforementioned pamphlet produced by the Moroccan government in 1992 mirrors this language of sacrifice. Claiming to be conceived and realized by leading Moroccan women and a representation of “how the Moroccan woman looks at herself and how she sees her diversity,” the pamphlet states in its introduction that “between the submissive mother and the rebellious daughter, the present generation of young women have suffered more than their share of sacrifices” (*The Moroccan Woman* 1992, 3).

This brief survey of postcolonial history shows how nationalism and modernization became intertwined discourses affecting women’s status and position in the postcolonial state, in Morocco as well as in other settings in the region. Nationalism and modernization require two things

from women, respectively: that they play their role in a modern society as the educated wife and manager of the household, and that they hold the correct cultural and religious values intact through their roles as mother and daughter. The fate of the family, the society, and the nation depend on their ability to perform this dual role, pushing men and Morocco ahead economically while holding Morocco intact culturally. This matched set has changed little over the decades, as seen again in the aforementioned government pamphlet, this time under the heading “As a Mother/A True Keeper of Tradition” written by the sociologist Fatima Hajjarabi: “The woman is the nourishing mother and the educator; as such she occupies a dominating place in society. She perpetuates life, cements identity and keeps traditions. She is valued by social powers, but she is second to the father/husband. Nowadays, this feeling is being counterbalanced by a desire for self-assertion in areas that have up to now been male-dominated. It has also led to claims of equality and demands for sharing the daily chores within the home. This questioning of established norms and powers has resulted in family strains and tragedies” (The Moroccan Woman 1992, 19). Women are clearly still suspended between these two sets of norms and expectations and their competing demands—and easily blamed when they appear to “fail” in either of them.

There are several important ways in which this intertwining of nationalism and modernization affect the women’s rights movement today. In a positive sense, they have made the improvement of women’s status a part of the national agenda, albeit within limits. Immediately after independence, elite women’s groups began to work to promote the education of girls. This has morphed into many of the state-driven development discourses of today, about the importance of education, literacy, and economic opportunities for women. At the same time, it made women the representatives of cultural authenticity and resistance to external intervention. A recent report by several women’s rights associations expresses this relationship well: “This is the paradox of Morocco: while the status of women must be confined to *tradition and culture*, everything else in the political and economic sphere is thrust into modernity” (ADFM 2003, 10). The aspects of women’s status that can be changed in a way that falls in line with modernization goals of the state receive attention: literacy, education,

job training, and some infrastructural development in poor urban and rural areas. The aspects of women's status that ensure their submission to idealized traditional roles within the family have received less attention by the state until recently, including marriage and divorce laws.

I observed that, although associations involved in the women's rights movement do a great deal of development-type programming, they work hard to establish that they are primarily involved in rights, not development. This can be tricky in a country with as many poverty and development issues as Morocco, and in the midst of an international development discourse that so insistently emphasizes the "feminization of poverty" and the importance of development programs aimed at women around the world. But development targeted at women can remain safely within this ambiguous modernization/nationalism paradox: the Moroccan government and development NGOs can teach women to read and can build wells closer to their village while allowing them to continue to fulfill their role as bearers of tradition and religion. A *women's rights* discourse of equality and human rights, however, demands that women be emancipated from this latter role as well (if they so choose). Thus, in order to make fundamental change for women, the Moroccan women's rights movement has had to situate itself firmly in a rights-first discourse. Development issues—and their place in the agenda of modernization/nationalism discourses—must primarily be addressed through the movement's efforts to gain and protect legal rights for women.

In effect, the contemporary women's rights movement attempts to break this modernization/nationalism paradox. The bourgeois women of the early postcolonial era worked to promote women's status through charity work and support of education and literacy, in order to modernize Morocco, while continuing to promote women's role in preserving Moroccan cultural and religious values. Today's movement leaders begin with a discourse of rights in hopes of forming women into autonomous agents who can make decisions for themselves that will then affect their status as subjects of development. This rights discourse runs through all of their development-related programming. Although individual women and men within the movement may feel that women should continue to represent

authentic Moroccan cultural and religious values, this is not *discursively* present in the movement:

In short, I argue that this movement has attached itself to the modernization discourse while purposefully detaching its work from the nationalist characterizations of women, echoing the plea of feminist scholars Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan for “the need to free feminism from nationalist discourses” that interfere with the ability of women’s movements to play an oppositional role in relationship to the state and society (1994, 22). And it has done so because of its access to other kinds of partnerships and ideologies that will be described in chapter 2.

So, why Morocco and why now? The women’s rights movement has a clear and unified set of goals centered on legal reform and awareness and is in a dynamic period of seeing these realized in some form. Members are furthermore working to improve the implementation and acceptance by the public of recently gained legal reforms. Given the world’s focus on the relationship between citizens and their governments in the MENA region, and the questions about where women’s rights will come into play as governments fall and constitutions are rewritten, this close study of the Moroccan women’s rights movement can lend insight into what is happening and what may happen in the region. This is an ideal time and place to explore organized agency on the part of women as well as the meshing of transnational feminist notions of women’s rights with local needs and constraints.

Methodology and Process

I traveled to Morocco for language study and exploratory research in the summers of 2000 and 2001, then lived in Morocco from September 2002 to December 2003 to continue my work. I returned to Morocco in December 2006–January 2007 and again in the summer of 2008 in order to see whether and how the 2004 Mudawwana reform had been implemented. I spent most of my research time in association offices, using the participant-observation method of attempting to participate as a women’s rights activist while simultaneously observing and making analytical notes. I also formally and informally interviewed people who worked for,

volunteered with, or visited the associations. At first I attempted to fill an official role within associations—as a volunteer or intern, with specific duties to carry out—but eventually sensed that people were more comfortable with my playing the role of researcher and observer.

Because the women's rights movement exists within a larger political and social context that includes other kinds of actors, I also interviewed individuals involved in other women's and human rights associations, international NGOs, and the press, which are not directly part of the movement but are in partnership or alliance with it. I attended conferences, rallies, and press events in order to see how associations use these forums to address the public. Overall I conducted semi-formal interviews of varying length, from one hour to several hours and spread out over days or months; with over seventy individuals, and numerous additional brief and informal interviews.

Though the narratives and descriptions featured throughout the book are presented in a straightforward way, the process of collecting them was hardly straightforward. I spent days in association offices awkwardly stationed on a chair in the waiting room or within an office, observing very busy people while they went about their day, as often as possible participating in their activities and conversations. Many of these narratives were collected over time, in bits and pieces. I tried to schedule times for interviews, but these were often postponed or interrupted. As people told their narratives, or interrupted someone else's interview to explain their own version of that interviewee's story, I began to notice the formulaic quality of the narratives. These personal experiences and observations had been told over and over again, packaged into a testimonial form that an association could use in its efforts to convince others of the importance of their work. The value of participant-observation research is that I had access to other versions of these stories, or other ways of interpreting them, on a daily basis. I could also record body language and facial expressions that suggested another side to what was being related in a formulaic way. I also learned that, if I waited until the end of the day, when individuals were tired and willing to let their guard down, there was more "noise" in the narratives as the individuals allowed themselves to express some of their

more negative experiences that did not survive the process of forming the testimonial. I intend this book as an honest rendering of these narratives, including both the formulas and the “noise.”

I also learned a great deal about the women’s rights movement and women’s issues simply by living in Morocco, given that numerous books, newspaper and magazine articles, and television programs are devoted to these subjects. They are the topic of casual conversation as well, perhaps especially between a visitor like myself and Moroccans with whom I came into contact on the street, in shops, during train or bus rides, or through the friendships that I made with males and females of all ages. I spent many enjoyable hours crammed into train compartments with seven other people, hashing through women’s rights issues after I inevitably was asked to tell them why I was traveling in Morocco. I listened as they debated and watched as they gesticulated passionately while making their arguments, and I laughed with them as they poked fun at each other about opinions on which they could not agree.

I entered the field with a great deal of naïve optimism, thinking that I could work with associations in all regions of Morocco and take a broad look at everyone involved in the movement. Of course, Morocco is too big, and there are too many women’s associations—well into the thousands—for that to be possible. I also underestimated the amount of time I would need and want to spend with individual associations in order to meet and talk with enough people and attend a sufficient number of events. I began in Rabat, the capital city, with associations that are the most politically involved and among headquarters for large associations that have local chapters throughout Morocco. My method quickly became a snowball method, as activists set up appointments for me to meet their friends and colleagues in other offices, or as I met activists from elsewhere in Morocco at conferences and events in Rabat and Casablanca.

My first stop in Rabat was Global Rights, an American NGO that promotes women’s rights in numerous countries; their office in Rabat is co-directed by two lawyers, one Moroccan and one American. They partner with several Moroccan associations for educational projects on human rights generally and women’s rights specifically. Their excellent library and

advice led me to my initial contacts among associations. One of these is the Women's Action Union (Union de l'action féminine, UAF), described in the previous section as an early women's rights association that published the *8 mars* journal and led the effort to obtain one million signatures. It is a large, national-level, multiproject group headquartered in Rabat but with chapters throughout Morocco. It runs projects providing literacy and vocational training, housing for women in desperate situations, and legal, medical, and psychological counseling. Members are heavily involved in lobbying efforts and drawing public attention to women's issues through various publications, conferences, and press events.

Another major association headquartered in Rabat is the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (l'Association démocratique des femmes du maroc, ADFM), where I made use of a vast library, attended conferences, and interviewed volunteers and activists in several different offices. This is another association mentioned in the previous section as playing a key role in the history of women's rights in Morocco. It founded the Collectif Maghreb-Egalité 95 network and now focuses its attention on the national and international levels, including an active research and publication effort on women's rights and equality issues in the region and world.

In Rabat I also made contact with Zakoura, a large micro-credit association founded by Moroccans that works closely with the Moroccan government and Moroccan and international funders, such as the World Bank. As a micro-credit association, it works with women and families and provides women's rights training as a required part of the process of receiving funds and other kinds of support. It was interesting to see how an organization not directly involved in pressing for legal reform nevertheless incorporated legal reform and women's rights education among its major programming goals.

My early location in Rabat provided easy access to Casablanca, an hour away by train, the economic capital of Morocco and therefore another important site for major associations and headquarters offices. There I worked with another large, national-level association, the Democratic League for Women's Rights (Ligue démocratique pour les droits de

la femme, LDDF).¹⁰ Led by an elected, twelve-member General Secretariat, members and volunteers run a full spectrum of projects, including literacy and other training programs, legal counseling, rights training, and an annual “women’s rights caravan” to underdeveloped areas of Morocco (and once to Moroccan neighborhoods in Paris). They also undertake a great deal of lobbying at the political level and hold conferences and press events. In addition to fieldwork in three of their offices and several project sites, I also visited other women’s associations with them, as they are firmly embedded in a close network of ties to other Casablanca groups.

One such association, which became another primary research site, is Female Solidarity Association (Association solidarité féminine, ASF), formed in 1985 in order to help abandoned women and unwed mothers (*mères célibataires*).¹¹ Today, the association helps these women by providing literacy and vocational training, housing, jobs, and childcare for a limited period of time in order to help them get on their feet. At the time of my research, the association operated a restaurant, a patisserie, two snack kiosks, a café, and a health and beauty spa, where mothers accepted into their program worked and received on-the-job training in these fields. The association has the coveted public utility status, a legal designation that allows it to do certain kinds of direct fundraising that other associations cannot and remain exempt from certain forms of oversight and taxation.

10. The association is now the Federation of the Democratic League for Women’s Rights (Fédération de la ligue démocratique des droits de la femme, FLDDF), encompassing several projects and centers operating under various names.

11. This is an awkward translation because the term “unwed mothers” is rather outdated in many contexts. Yet this outdated sense works well in the Moroccan context, where it refers as much to a moral category as a demographic one. It has social and legal meaning in Morocco, as sex outside of marriage is criminalized and a child is the “evidence” that a “crime” took place and can be used against women more readily than men. There is no other term (or translation) that conveys the particular legal and social position of these women and set of problems that they face. The anthropologist Jamila Bargach has studied the issues of child abandonment extensively and performed research at the ASF. In one article (2005), she uses the terms “unwed mothers,” “unmarried mothers,” and “mothers” to describe the beneficiaries of this association.

The front door boasts a plaque with the names of funding agencies, including many European and North American governments and NGOs. I spent most of my time at project sites so I could experience the training programs through the eyes of both the young women in the program and the trainers who were assigned to oversee them.

Contacts I made through LDDF led me to another association in Casablanca, the Moroccan Association for Women's Rights (Association marocaine pour les droits des femmes, AMDF) and their Fama counseling center (*centre d'écoute*). I only spent a few hours and undertook three interviews there, but they helped develop my awareness of how small associations focused on a particular topic are networked into the larger, national-level ones through individual contacts and shared programming or political affiliations.

A friend who was active with the USFP political party introduced me to the leaders of the Chouala Association for Education and Culture (Association Chouala pour l'éducation et la culture, "Chouala"), the party's very politically active youth association. The association is led by an elected board, with chapters in almost every city and town in Morocco; works closely with government officials; and has a great deal of funding, as its political party is one of the largest and most powerful in Morocco. Most of its leadership were involved in the organization as youths. I was fortunate to be invited to numerous conferences and their National Congress, a major organizational meeting held once every four years for the purposes of electing leaders and planning objectives; this gave me an opportunity to see how the national leadership operates and interacts with its local chapters, as well as to interview numerous members and make plans to visit some of them in their own locales. This was where I began to learn that the women's rights movement was broader than a handful of associations that explicitly refer to themselves as women's associations. Chouala had recently come to focus on women's rights education among youth as a major objective and was actively promoting the participation and leadership of young women among its own ranks.

I also worked closely with Chouala's local chapter in the small and historically significant city of El Jadida. The head of this chapter also

worked with the Fellah Association for the Development of Rural Women (Association Fellah pour le développement des femmes rurales, "Fellah"), a small, new, local association in a rural Dukkala region. The association worked primarily to help women farmers establish farm cooperatives. A newer, secondary project involved furnishing boarding houses near schools for rural schoolgirls. Although Fellah did not yet have an established office, I spent time with individual members in their homes, attended board meetings and conferences, and visited project sites. The connection between Chouala and Fellah exemplifies how associations can be networked through a set of individuals and their contacts in civil society and the government.

Connections with Global Rights and LDDF also led me to the Marrakesh area, located just north of the High Atlas Mountains and serving as something of a regional capital for the southern part of Morocco, which is rich in Amazigh (Berber) and Sahel African culture. This period of research allowed me to see a regional perspective on the women's rights movement and also to explore the connections between urban associations and their rural partner associations and projects. A young woman employed as a human rights trainer with a large NGO introduced me to two associations that she had helped to establish. The first, the Amane Association ("Amane"), is a small, new, local association in a once politically marginalized neighborhood of Marrakesh that conducts women's human rights education programs with "girls at risk." It was formed by a group of eight young people from the neighborhood, many of them college students (including two males), and carries out training sessions in vocational centers, schools, and orphanages that teach girls and women about their human rights and legal rights as citizens of Morocco. The association's goal is to boost young women's self-esteem and ability to stand up for their rights within the family and workplace. This is an interesting example of many associations in the movement—small, highly localized, and run without an office or a budget by some concerned citizens with time on their hands and a desire to address social problems. An individual or specific project can bring them temporarily into connection with a larger association that provides them with training materials and ideas

for projects; otherwise, they are self-sustaining and depend greatly on the drive and participation of their small group of members.

This informant also introduced me to a sewing cooperative that she had helped her mother establish with funding from a local women's association closely linked to the PI. I spent some time with this cooperative at their meetings and with members in their homes. I also had a brief involvement with the Ennakhil Association for Women and Children (Association Ennakhil pour la femme et l'enfant, "Ennakhil"), a large, multiproject women's rights association headquartered in Marrakesh; it is much like the large national associations I studied in Rabat and Casablanca but with a regional presence and focus. This, as well as work with the Marrakesh chapter of the LDDF and another youth association affiliated with LDDF, gave me access to the women's rights association scene in Marrakesh during the three months that I spent there.

What impressed me again and again during the process of meeting and working with these associations (and several others whose leaders and members I met and sometimes interviewed) was the breadth of the women's rights movement—its projects, its concerns, the motivations that brought women to them, and the earnest desire of activists to be relevant to a broad swathe of the Moroccan population, both men and women. Yet there was also a sameness to all of these associations in that I heard again and again about Mudawwana reform and the importance of legal reform and the education of women about their rights. I heard long trajectories of an association's involvement in the fight for Mudawwana reform and its plans for the future, after reform.

Clearly, this project took on a very urban focus, but this is appropriate to the women's rights movement, as rights discourses are largely urban concerns in Morocco and the region. The movement as a whole is rural only insofar as it partners with rural women's associations or establishes programming that involves rural women and communities. In my work outside of Rabat and Casablanca, I was able to undertake some research with rural partners, although this was unfortunately limited. A necessary follow-up to this research project is a closer look at rural women's associations and how they connect to efforts of the women's rights movement, including the process of legal reform, at the national and regional levels.

Another limit to my research involves language. Most of my interviews were conducted in French because my interviewees were equally fluent in Arabic and French and knew that I would be more comfortable in that language (despite years of studying Arabic). I held some interviews and numerous casual conversations in the Moroccan dialect of Arabic, *Darija*, and relied on friends, a research assistant, or bystanders to check my translations when I was unsure. I also attended events such as conferences that were held in Modern Standard Arabic, *Fusha*, again relying on others to make sure I understood correctly. I feel I have done the best job possible to ensure clear communication with all informants and correct translations. Stronger Arabic skills would have allowed me to speak more with less-educated or rural participants in the movement; thus, this book may well privilege the perspectives of informants with higher education levels and those who are more comfortable with and willing to talk with outsiders such as myself (in French).

It will become clear throughout the manuscript that I admire the participants of this movement greatly, and this manuscript is my attempt to describe the movement itself, on its own terms. This is not because I personally value a certain version of women's rights that is subject to all kinds of labels, often pejoratively intended: "Western," "liberal," "secularist," "universalist," and so on. It is not because I hope to impose a certain kind of political agenda on Morocco that derives from my position as an American. It is also not because I have come to identify with my informants so closely that I cannot now critique them. Rather, I believe in a classical style of cultural anthropology, dating back to Franz Boas: that an ethnographer owes it to her or his informants to tell their story, to translate the meanings and actions of their world—their "self-interpretations"—in ways that will make sense to the reader, to use the categories of analysis that seem to be important to them, and to try to comprehend these meanings and actions from within (Keane 2003). I leave the work of deconstruction and heavy critique of women's associations and movements, which are also an important part of our analysis of women's movements, to the many scholars who have devoted themselves to it. Because my focus is on "self-interpretations" of the world of the women's rights movement, rather than on the individuals themselves, I use pseudonyms throughout the book.

Studies of the Moroccan women's rights movement often focus on particular individuals within it, but I want the attention of readers of this book to be on the movement as a whole.

I also try to avoid judging the efforts of the Moroccan women's rights movement on results. While early media characterizations of the 2004 Mudawwana reform were of triumph and lauded a vast overhaul of rights for women, the language describing the reform has morphed into Manichean binaries of good or bad: the reform was either revolutionary or a step backward, the work of the women's rights movement was either a success or a failure, the new laws are either a triumph of modernity or an attack on Islam, and so on. It is surely much more accurate and interesting to look at the complexity of the *process* of reform and examine the efforts of the movement as a work in progress rather than as a definitive result. While chapter 4 will look at loose ends and loopholes left in the law with the 2004 reform, it will also look at the rich and deep public conversation about the Mudawwana, which is one clear outcome of the work of the women's rights movement over the last few decades. As the editor of *Femmes du Maroc*, a magazine that is greatly supportive of the women's rights movement and Mudawwana reform (Skalli 2006), writes, "It is thanks to the actions of [women's] associations that the woman question has become a public debate that gives stir up strong emotions (*qui déchaîne les passions*)" (Sakhri 2003, 4).

Outline of the Book

Chapter 1 begins by examining individual members of the women's rights movement and how they have come to be there. Who is involved? How does one become part of the movement and convinced of the necessity of Mudawwana reform as the first step toward improving the status of women? What are the relationships between individuals within associations and networks? These are some of the questions that I began with in this research project, and their answers speak to the difficulty of capturing the messiness of a social movement and accounting for it in neat categorical terms. This messiness is also the strength of a movement such as the Moroccan women's rights movement, however, because it allows for a rich

variety of discourses, actions, and goals within the major objectives that guide the work of the movement.

Ethnographies often begin with the “history chapter”—an attempt by the anthropologist to contextualize the subject at hand and also to assuage historians and other critics who state that it is insufficient to describe the little slice of life that anthropologists try to understand without providing the historical, political, and social factors that have produced the situation as we see it. It often has the feel of an afterthought that seems out of step with the style and message of the remainder of the book. I hope, on the other hand, to suffuse this entire book with history, as the Moroccan women’s rights movement does not stand alone in time but can only be understood through its own evolution as part of the transnational women’s movement and the history of Morocco itself. If there is a “history chapter” in the book, however, it is chapter 2, which examines the social and political fields surrounding the movement and the obstacles and opportunities they present.

Chapter 3 examines the relationship of the Moroccan women’s rights movement to transnational feminism. As feminists have met and worked together around landmark UN-sponsored documents and plans, they have developed two important ways of framing women’s issues. The first frame is “equality,” a usefully vague term intended to unite into one mobilized constituency women who endure various kinds of discrimination in their respective societies. The second is “women’s human rights,” in which transnational feminist activists have sought to make violence against women and other human rights issues a *state* problem that can be addressed legally and politically rather than a personal, private problem addressed within families. The Moroccan women’s rights movement has employed these frames in thoughtful and intentional ways in order to capitalize on political and social events and issues occurring within Morocco. Yet each has its limits and has pushed the movement to evolve its own local means of attracting individuals and addressing public concerns.

Although this book is not specifically about the Mudawwana or law in general, reform of the Mudawwana and education of women about their rights are the defining goals of associations in the women’s rights

movement. Thus chapter 4 includes a thorough examination of the most significant provisions of the Mudawwana—before and since the 2004 reform—and how the movement has formed goals and programs around the reform of these provisions. The chapter closely examines the difficulty of winning and implementing Mudawwana reform and shows how the movement has contributed to and even pushed the conversation toward “equality” and “women’s human rights.” Although this chapter reveals the ambivalence of the Moroccan public toward the reform, and the great challenges remaining in implementing the reform, it is nevertheless a victory for the movement because “equality” and “women’s human rights” are now prevalent discourses in the public conversation about the Mudawwana. Ambivalence is a *result* of the efforts of the movement rather than merely an obstacle to it.

There is still a great deal of work to be done in order to legitimize reforms and educate the public about them. Chapter 5 explores a new frame coming into usage, which I have termed the “harmonious family” frame. As women’s rights activists face the reality of the difficulty of implementing the 2004 reforms and “changing mentalities” in order to encourage women to take advantage of the reforms in their own lives, a new frame is required, one that addresses the realities of family life for many Moroccan women. Activists are learning from their close interactions with women all over Morocco through various grassroots-level projects, coming to realize that many women wish to pursue legal reform and their own rights in order to help their families and improve their status within the family. Thus, the movement has begun to shift its discourses and many of its programs in order to promote a harmonious *family* life for women in addition to and alongside equality and women’s human rights. This chapter represents the culmination of my argument that this movement has worked to localize transnational feminist discourses and make them relevant to the lives of women in Morocco.

The success of the 2004 reform has begun a new era for the Moroccan women’s rights movement, with its own obstacles and opportunities. Chapter 5 looks at these in terms of new and continuing challenges for the movement and how it is adapting to them. The prominent legal anthropologist, Sally Falk Moore, treats fieldwork as “current history” (1987,

727). By this she means that past history is germane to an understanding of the present, and the following question must be answered: "How has the present been produced?" (727). Equally important yet too often overlooked is a corollary set of questions: "What is the present producing? What part of the activity being observed will be durable, and what will disappear?" (727). The book ends in an attempt to suggest answers to these important questions.