

The Women's Movement and Political Discourse in Morocco

Rabéa Naciri

Occasional Paper 8, March 1998

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
United Nations Development Programme

The **United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)** is an autonomous agency that engages in multi-disciplinary research on the social dimensions of contemporary problems affecting development. Its work is guided by the conviction that, for effective development policies to be formulated, an understanding of the social and political context is crucial. The Institute attempts to provide governments, development agencies, grassroots organizations and scholars with a better understanding of how development policies and processes of economic, social and environmental change affect different social groups. Working through an extensive network of national research centres, UNRISD aims to promote original research and strengthen research capacity in developing countries.

Current research themes include Crisis, Adjustment and Social Change; Socio-Economic and Political Consequences of the International Trade in Illicit Drugs; Environment, Sustainable Development and Social Change; Integrating Gender into Development Policy; Participation and Changes in Property Relations in Communist and Post-Communist Societies; and Political Violence and Social Movements. UNRISD research projects focused on the 1995 World Summit for Social Development include Rethinking Social Development in the 1990s; Economic Restructuring and Social Policy; Ethnic Diversity and Public Policies; and The Challenge of Rebuilding War-torn Societies.

A list of the Institute's free and priced publications can be obtained from the Reference Centre.

**United Nations Research Institute
for Social Development
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland**

**☎ (41.22) 798.84.00/798.58.50
Fax (41.22) 740.07.91**

Note: The pagination of the electronic version of this paper may differ from the printed publication.

ISSN 1020-3354

Copyright © United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD). Short extracts from this publication may be reproduced unaltered without authorization on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to UNRISD, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. UNRISD welcomes such applications.

The designations employed in this publication, which are in conformity with United Nations practice, and the presentation of material herein do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles, studies and other contributions rests solely with their authors, and publication does not constitute an endorsement by UNRISD of the opinions expressed in them.

Preface

In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in September 1995, UNRISD initiated an Occasional Paper Series reflecting work carried out under the UNRISD/UNDP project, **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy**. In view of the intensified efforts in the aftermath of the Conference to integrate gender concerns into policy analysis and formulation, and the progress of the gender programme at UNRISD, the Institute intends to continue this Occasional Paper Series to facilitate dissemination of the findings from its gender-related projects. This paper, based on research undertaken in Morocco as part of the **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives** project, focuses on the role of the women's movement in shifting the boundaries of political discourse on women's issues.

As in many other countries, the claims of the women's movement have been marginalized in conventional political debates in Morocco. Traditional political actors have long used the pretext of religious and cultural sensitivity in an attempt to keep women's issues off the political agenda and to limit women's visibility and their impact on public life. This paper attempts to place the political discourse on women's issues within the context of efforts by political élites to maintain the status quo against processes unleashed by democratization and the containment of political Islam. Despite changes in the relationship between the state and citizens that have allowed the emergence of the women's movement, the resistance of the old political élite remains strong. Rabéa Naciri argues that under these conditions, the women's movement of the mid-1980s onward has rarely identified its activities as "political", adopting instead a range of unconventional strategies to promote its concerns.

The paper traces the development of the contemporary women's movement in Morocco, concentrating in particular on those associations which emerged in the mid-1980s out of the centre-left political parties. Over the past decade women's associations have worked to consolidate their place in civil society. While asserting their independence, a rapprochement with the most progressive institutionalized political bodies has been sought by these associations as a way to establish influence. The movement has highlighted and exploited the contradictions in the politics of maintaining state legitimacy in Morocco, which depends on placating traditional conservative Islamist interests, while at the same time projecting a modernist progressive image. Interestingly, as the author points out, against the backdrop of political Islam, women have also used Islam as a "strategy of resistance" to strengthen their position.

The author concludes that the visibility and energy of the women's movement have turned it into a defining element in the structure of civil society. By representing their independent interests, feminists have helped to redefine gender and political identities simultaneously. The paper argues that despite claims to eschew conventional "politics", the women's movement has nonetheless helped to shift "political" boundaries by

encouraging public discussion and debate on issues traditionally associated with the domestic and private sphere. In so doing, the movement has helped to increase political participation and broaden the political terrain in Morocco.

Rabéa Naciri, of the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines at the University of Rabat, co-ordinates country-level research in Morocco for the **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives** project. At UNRISD, the project is co-ordinated by Shahra Razavi. This paper has been translated from the original French by Erika Drucker, with editing by Carol Miller and Jenifer Freedman.

March 1998

Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara
Deputy Director

Contents

	page
Introduction	1
Redefining Politics and Political Participation	2
Democratization and the Emergence of Civil Society	3
The Women's Movement	7
Women's Status as a Political Issue	10
Islam as a Strategy of Exclusion and a Strategy of Resistance	12
The Ambivalence of the State	15
Political Parties, the Women's Movement and the Redefinition of Political Space	18
Conclusion	22
Bibliography	24
Endnotes	27

Introduction

This paper aims to contextualize debates over the status of women in Morocco in relation to the contemporary political history of the country. As in many other countries, the claims of the women's movement have been marginalized in conventional political debates. In Morocco, the status of women is a "taboo" subject, and consequently any discussion of the issue elicits deep-rooted passions, particularly with regard to the country's national identity. At present this tendency is particularly pronounced because Morocco, like other Muslim and Arab countries, has seen the development of Islamic fundamentalist movements. These intensify the national identity crisis, as well as the contradictions inherent in the progressive image of the state and political élites, by focusing attention on the status of women. Indeed, debates over the status of women must be viewed against the backdrop of efforts by the state to contain the forces unleashed by democratization and the threat of political Islam.

The women's movement of the mid-1980s onward, although resembling liberal feminism in terms of demands, has rarely identified its activities as "political". Its energy and skill in using unconventional means of engagement have greatly helped to widen the political field in Morocco by making the status of women a subject for political debate. Ironically, however, its discursive strategies have tended to uphold the attitude that "politics" is exclusively limited to the formal political sphere (political institutions and parties) largely dominated by men. This paradox must be ascribed to Morocco's political and historical context. The strong emphasis on the country's Muslim and Arab identity and its focus on ethnic, linguistic and cultural unity are some of the factors that contribute to the ambivalence of the state and political bodies with regard to women's claims. They also help to explain the varied strategies adopted by women's associations in order to achieve their goals.

Conventional political actors have used the pretext of religious and cultural sensitivity in their attempts to keep women's issues off the political agenda, and to limit women's visibility and their impact on public life. In response, women's associations which have emerged since the mid-1980s have adopted a twofold "strategy"¹ aimed, first, at integration into civil society and, second, at a rapprochement with institutionalized political bodies, particularly the most progressive social and political elements. A further tactic has been to exploit the contradictions between the progressive claims of the state and its need to ensure the loyalties of the old patriarchal structures. The latter were destabilized by the social and economic changes which followed independence, but they have grown in force since the beginning of the 1980s. This study will assess the extent to which the strategies of the women's movement have contributed to and succeeded in redefining social and political gender identities. It will aim to show that, despite its claims to eschew conventional "politics", the women's movement has nonetheless established itself as a partner in political discussions on women's issues and in reformulating the terms of the debate. Indeed, the greatest success of the movement has been the "politization" of women's issues.

Redefining Politics and Political Participation

In Morocco, the question of women's political participation was initially taken up as a claim for political rights by a generation of educated women who were active in the process of national policy development in the post-independence years. In the euphoria of this period, a number of these women, who had ideological and family links with the formal political arena, claimed the right to political representation as a public recognition of their abilities and patriotism at a moment when the country greatly needed national administrators and political leaders. They emphasized the right of women to participate in the management of national matters on the basis of their skills and their socio-economic roles. In other words, their claims were not linked to the need for representation of women in terms of specific gender interests or a female political consciousness ("women's voices"), but upon the provision of political "space" for women on the same terms as men. In this optimistic view, it was sufficient for a woman to have a militant or academic background, or both — which was often the case in this social class — to benefit from the same opportunities as men and to be recognized as political actors.

This view gradually eroded with the emergence, in a context of economic liberalization and democratization, of a new generation of women's associations and with the interest of researchers in these new structures. The appearance of new forms of social organization helped to give direction to analysis and discussion on broader socio-economic and political developments, rather than confining debates to questions of political participation.

According to a narrow definition of "politics", which deems political those activities in which political actors engage with conventional political institutions (political parties, government, parliament, trade unions, etc.), it is possible to conclude that the women's movement in Morocco has remained at the margins and has had a limited impact on the contemporary political agenda. In classical political theory, the questions of women's participation in the political sphere and women's role in democracy are characterized in two ways: first, by the division between the public and the private spheres, which are artificially separated and gender-specific; and second, by a very narrow, male-centric, view of democratic participation, which is essentially restricted to formal political institutions and procedures.

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_21616

