

ARAB WORLD IN TRANSITION PAPERS

The Women of the Islamist Movements: Towards a Women's Spring?

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
1. THE WOMEN OF THE TUNISIAN ENNAHDA PARTY	4
2. THE TUNISIAN REVOLUTION	4
3. THE ENNAHDA MOVEMENT: EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT	5
4. THE WOMEN OF THE ENNAHDA MOVEMENT: THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE REVOLUTION AND THEIR SITUATION BEFORE IT	6
5. THE WOMEN OF THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (PJD) / MOVEMENT FOR UNITY AND REFORM (MUR)..	14
6. PJD AND MUR	14
7. THE WOMEN OF PJD / MUR: THEIR PARTICIPATION, STATUS, AND DISCOURSE BEFORE AND AFTER THE POPULAR MOVEMENT.....	15
8. THE WOMEN OF THE MOROCCAN AL-ADL WAL IHSAN.....	23
9. AL-ADL WAL IHSAN: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION	23
10. THE RELATION TO THE POPULAR MOVEMENT	24
11. THE WOMEN OF AL-ADL WAL IHSAN: THEIR STATUS IN THE ORGANISATION AND IN SOCIETY, AND HOW IT WAS AFFECTED BY THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE POPULAR MOVEMENT.....	25
12. CONCLUSION	32
13. BIBLIOGRAPHY	33

INTRODUCTION

Most observers agree that Islamists benefited most from the 'Arab Spring.' The ballot boxes brought them to power in a number of countries that witnessed revolutions or popular movements, but how has this transfer of the Islamists, from opposition to governing and running the affairs of their countries, affected the reality of Islamist women? And how has women's participation in popular movements affected their situation within the Islamist groups? This is the main question this study tries to answer. The following Islamist movements serve as examples: the Tunisian Ennahda Movement; the Party of Justice and Development with its preaching wing, the Movement for Unity and Reform (MUR), in Morocco; and the Al-Adl wal Ihsan ('Justice and Spirituality') Group in Morocco.

Studies that have looked into the situation of women within the Islamist movements of those two countries have mostly been limited to newspaper articles. They promote the stereotype of the marginalised Islamist woman, dependent on men, without a voice... This study, aims to overcome such stereotypes with genuine field research in order to answer the following questions:

- To what extent and by which means did women in Islamist movements take part in the Arab revolutions?
- What were the proportions of their political participation before and after the revolutions? How present were they in the movements and in political institutions?
- Which factors influenced the discourse and initiative of women in the Islamist movements before, during and after the revolutions?

Traditional spaces in which Islamist women are active, i.e. the purely religious and preaching spaces such as the mosque and the so-called 'educational family, will not be explored in this paper. Rather, it focuses on the new spaces that have emerged with the entry of Islamist women into the public sphere, especially the spaces and fields of work that opened up in the context of the 'Arab Spring.' The quotation marks around the term 'Arab Spring' denote some reservations that surround this concept. One of them is geographical, since the revolutions and uprisings did not only include Arab countries, but also countries where Amazigh (Berber) and Arab populations are mixed and which should rather be called Maghrebi. Accordingly, the expressions 'Maghrebi Spring' or 'Peoples' Spring' would be appropriate. A second reservation is about the meaning of the term itself, as the events that some countries – like Morocco – have gone through are not considered revolutions by everyone. For these reasons, one must use the expression with reservation.

This research is fundamentally based on a qualitative approach: semi-structured interviews with female officials and members of the concerned institutions.¹ Its conclusions are based on a comparison between the content of these interviews and the ideological output and positions of each movement, in addition to their actual performance on the ground. Where necessary, a comparative approach was used to contrast the views of Islamist women with those who adhere to opposing ideologies in their social environment.

¹ Across the three movements, 64 members and officials were interviewed, most of them women.

1. THE WOMEN OF THE TUNISIAN ENNAHDA PARTY

After the Tunisian revolution, the Islamist political party of the Ennahda movement won 89 out of 217 seats in the National Constituent Assembly election in 2011, thus becoming the prime political force in the country. This happened in the context of an election that was qualified as free and fair. Ennahda's victory in secular Tunisia, where several studies had claimed that women were apprehensive about the impacts an Islamist ascent to power would have on their rights, is an issue that deserves thorough study and analysis. Even more, the presence of Ennahda women during this election calls for our attention in the context of this study. They were widely present in the election campaigns, ran as candidates in numerous districts, and won 43 out of the 48 seats that are held by women in the National Constituent Assembly. Moreover, one of the Ennahda party activists, Mehrezia Labidi, was elected vice chair of the Constituent Assembly. How did the women of Ennahda shift from being part of an underground movement into being members of the National Constituent Assembly, and what were the factors behind this transformation? What is their position within the movement? What kind of discourse have they produced? These are the issues to be discussed to gain a better perspective on the topic. First, however, this paper addresses the circumstances that led to Ennahda's victory in the election, as well as the movement's emergence and development.

2. THE TUNISIAN REVOLUTION

For 23 years, Tunisia lived under Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, whose regime can be described as a dictatorial police state that created a reality of oppression and led to

many social contradictions. These contradictions had stirred occasional revolts in various places before, such as the protests of October 18th, 2005 that called for more civil liberties in Tunisia, or the 2008 uprising of mine workers in Redeyef. In this regard, Béatrice Hibou argues that the Tunisian revolution did not start, as some maintain, with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17th, 2010, which was but the last straw in the Tunisian Revolution. In her analysis, Hibou goes beyond the obvious aspects to describe the causes of the Tunisian revolution; instead she evaluates previous uprisings, like the revolt of the Redeyef miners, in an attempt to uncover a set of developments in the economic and political setting that had accumulated over decades and finally led to revolution.² The researcher speaks about a political economy of subjugation that was historically grounded in the Tunisian society through a number of economic policy choices. These policies served, first and foremost, the interests of the highest echelons of power, by controlling political balances and economic reform alliances in the business sector. This turned the Tunisian economy into an assemblage of political arrangements which imposed, as it were, subjugation treaties for individuals and a large part of society, all within the framework of a state structure based on control and surveillance. In addition to this economic situation, the interviewees believe that the Tunisian people were experiencing an identity crisis, represented by the regime's security policy. This policy was based on criminalising religiousness and fighting its individual and collective manifestations: devotion to prayer, frequenting of mosques,

² Hibou B., 'Tunisie. Economie politique et morale du mouvement social,' *Politique africaine*, no. 121, 2011, pp. 5-22.

the *hijab* (headscarf), growing beards and so on...

The demonstrations that flared up after Bouazizi's self-immolation were a result of the accumulation of all these factors. This enabled the spark to spread from Sidi Bouzid to other cities like Sfax, Kairouan, Sousse and Médenine. The tone of the demands got harsher until they turned from protests about social and economic issues into a call for Ben Ali's departure. And indeed: on January 14, 2011, Ben Ali fled, and new hope was born with the Tunisian people to rebuild a free and democratic country that respects its citizens.

3. THE ENNAHDA MOVEMENT: EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

The origins of the Ennahda movement go back to the late 1960s when it was known as *Al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Group). It was founded by Rached Ghannouchi, the philosophy professor who had studied in Egypt and immersed himself in the ideologies of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Abdelfattah Mourou, a lawyer. In the beginning, the group's activities were limited to educational work in mosques; subsequently, they turned to intellectual and cultural activities by publishing a number of magazines between 1974 and 1981 that were all banned by the authorities. In 1981, the movement changed its name to *Harakat al-Ittihad al-Islami* (Islamic Tendency Movement). The authorities refused to grant legal status and launched campaigns of arrest against it, the first of which took place in the year of its foundation (1981) when 107 people were arrested. They were pardoned in 1984. During this period, the movement worked with pupils and college students, but focussed on the intellectual and political side as well, sometimes taking its activity to the streets. In 1987, Bourguiba's regime accused the movement of being behind acts of

violence in Sousse and Monastir. It launched a wave of arrests against its members and issued harsh verdicts against them, to the point of sentencing some to death by hanging. In the same year, on November 7, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali came to power and started his reign by releasing and pardoning political prisoners, including Ennahda members. In this atmosphere, the movement changed its name to *Harakat al-Nahda* (Ennahda = Awakening Movement) in order to distance itself from the Islamist connotations of the old name. It submitted another request to establish a legally recognised party, which would repeatedly be denied. Despite this continual rejection, the movement ran in the 1989 elections, making use of independent lists, and officially garnered between 10 and 17 per cent of the votes, while Ennahda members put them at 28% despite voter fraud. This result pushed the regime to tighten the grip around the movement once again, compelling Rached Ghannouchi to seek exile first in Algeria, then in London. The movement continued on its path in spite of Ghannouchi's exile. In 1991, it organised demonstrations in support of Iraq, after which the regime launched another wave of arrests in 1991, 1992 and 1994 as part of its campaign to 'dry up the sources' in order to eliminate the Islamist movement.

In 1999, the regime started another round of amnesties that included 600 prisoners from the Ennahda Movement, which re-organised itself afterwards. In 2005, the Movement took part, with the Progressive Democratic Party and the Tunisian Workers' Communist Party, in the protests of October 18 which demanded the implementation of civil liberties in Tunisia. Within this alliance, the movement adopted positions in favour of religious freedom, equality between men and women, and the separation of religion and state, and expressed its rejection of the idea of implementing the *hudud* (legal

punishments) that are usually attributed to Islamic law.³ On November 5, 2008, another 21 Ennahda prisoners were released. In 2009, the Ennahda Movement called for boycotting the presidential and legislative elections in Tunisia.

On February 7, 2011, after the revolution, Ennahda renewed its structures and internally reorganised itself. Sheikh Rached Ghannouchi was chosen as President and Hamadi Jebali as Secretary General, and the movement submitted another request for legal permission which it obtained on March 1, 2011.

4. THE WOMEN OF THE ENNAHDA MOVEMENT: THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE REVOLUTION AND THEIR SITUATION BEFORE IT

When the women of Ennahda speak about how they contributed to the revolution, they maintain that the imprisonment, exile, and suffering they went through were their biggest contribution. They see themselves among the main victims of repression and persecution in Tunisia, since the wave of repression that the Ennahda Movement experienced was not limited to men; women also had their share of it.

Seventeen formerly imprisoned women from the Ennahda Movement were interviewed, out of a total of about 90 female prisoners during Bourguiba's and Ben Ali's mandates; they included female students who were, at the time, barely 16 years old. Among the women interviewed, some had been arrested in 1987 toward the end of Bourguiba's rule and had benefited from the amnesty granted by Ben Ali when he took over power. Others

had been arrested in 1991 and 1993 following the demonstrations organised by the movement in solidarity with the Iraqi people. They had been accused of belonging to an illegal organisation, participating in demonstrations, damaging the dignity of the President of the Republic...The prisoners painfully talk about the torture they suffered during their imprisonment. It included physical violence as they were beaten, electrocuted, and had their heads plunged into toilets; they were also subject to sexual harassment, they were insulted, unveiled, abused by other female prisoners who had been incited to do so, denied food, bedding and cover for many days. Some women who had been pregnant miscarried due to the torture. Several respondents described Ben Ali's prison as the 'Guantanamo of Tunisia.' They further explained that their suffering did not end with their release, since they were still subjected to administrative surveillance for numerous years, during which they were exposed to other kinds of torture. Every morning and every evening, they had to appear in person in two different administrative centres, often located far from one another, where they were once again subject to insult and humiliation. Apart from this procedure, their homes were repeatedly raided and searched at night, with terrifying knocks on doors, more abuse and insult. But the biggest torture, according to the women, was their own families' ostracism and rejection out of fear of Ben Ali's collaborators; not to mention the rejection of society. They were prevented from finishing their studies and from finding public or private employment, forcing most of them to work as housemaids or hawkers. Moreover, prison and torture left many of the women with psychological and nervous disorders, in some cases to the point of insanity. It can be sensed from the prisoners' stories a sort of social cohesion between Ennahda's male and

³ Samy Ghorbal, 'Les combats de Néjib Chebbi,' *Jeune Afrique*, October 15, 2007.

female prisoners, as most of the women had married former detainees. They explain this by the heightened sensitivity for each other in these couples, given the similar circumstances of their ordeals: 'Nobody but a male prisoner marries a female prisoner,' one of the women says. Their marriages, in turn, were subject to numerous difficulties that accompanied them all the time and were reflected on their children as well. One of the prisoners put it this way: 'We did not have a normal childhood, nor a normal marriage, nor a normal life.'

A key point in the interviewees' narrative is their continued educational and preaching work inside the prison in the form of Qur'an memorisation sessions and ethics lessons. They motivated some of their fellow prisoners to pray regularly and to start wearing headscarves. This made the prison director isolate the groups from each other, after mixing the Islamists with regular female prisoners had become, as it were, a punishment in their favour. The common denominator in all the women's stories, it should also be noted, is that they did not give away any names of their fellow brothers and sisters in the organisation, despite the torture. One of the former prisoners stated: 'We used to tell them the names of sisters we knew had already been arrested.' The context of imprisonment and torture that the Ennahda women experienced relates to numerous studies which confirm that the repression and persecution the women went through strengthened their personality and their presence both in society and within their movements.⁴ This strength can first be observed in the discourse of the Ennahda women who consider themselves associates

in their movement's achievements. One of the prisoners stated: 'The movement would not have achieved what it has without us,' clearly referring to the role women have played in the movement's history and to their aspiration that the revolution will do them justice and compensate them for the torture and marginalisation they have suffered. They desire, like other women, to find employment and to play a role in the construction of post-revolution Tunisia.

Apart from being imprisoned, women were present inside the movement since its inception; the constituent body that proposed the establishment of *Harakat al-Ittihad al-Islami* in 1981 included four women. In that period, the women's activities included education and preaching through mosques, as well as intellectual work (organising intellectual clubs, workshops...) with students, and advocacy and unionist work via college student activities. However, when the regime started repressing the movement, those women who escaped arrest were forced either into exile or into continuing their work in absolute secrecy. Secret Qur'an memorisation and explanation meetings and lessons in jurisprudence and ethics were held, but they also strove to 'spread Muslim Brotherhood thinking in order to counterbalance the Salafist thinking, which had started expanding.' Some of these meetings were women-only, others mixed; but they all had one thing in common: that only trustworthy individuals attended. Later, these secret meetings expanded to the student sphere, especially after some prisoners were released in 2004. In this period specifically, some women launched individual initiatives to keep the movement in touch with people. One of the interviewees explained this; the interviewee an entrepreneur in the construction sector, which is, as pointed out while introducing herself, 'a purely male domain.' This lady

⁴ This is pointed out by researchers like: Mervat Hatem (1994, p. 673), Oulfa Lamoum (1998), Ikbâl Al Gharbi (2006, p. 66), Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud (2003, p. 75), Laure Adler (1993).

recounts her personal experience during this period of underground work, when she used to organise Qur'an reading sessions in her home that were attended, every week, by about 40 women and five young men. She had studied the Qur'an and the rules of elocution previously, which enabled her to teach them to others in turn. However, the programme was not limited to memorisation or elocution, but included discussions of Ennahda's ideas as well. The practice was not easy; her front door was constantly monitored and 'we used to keep prayer beads next to us, so if the police would search us they would take us for Sufis.' The respondent mentions two helpful things that ensured the endeavour's success: 'I am part of a very secular family, so the police ruled out that one of its members would promote Ennahda's thinking; and the fact that some of the women who frequented my home were not wearing the *hijab*...'

This kind of initiative shows that the educational aspect was well present among the movement's members during the period of underground work, but it also served as an entry point for spreading the movement's ideas among people. Furthermore, this respondent's account of her experience confirms what other women told me as well, namely the glaring ideological differences between members of the same family. Moreover, a significant number of interviewees described their families as 'very secular.' This ideological environment, which had been shaped by different eras, affected the women's personalities and their discourse, as explained below.

The third observation that can be extracted from this woman's testimony, as well as from several Ennahda gatherings the researcher attended, is the mixing of genders. The movement handles this issue very generously; it holds mixed meetings, mixed

lunches or dinners, without any of the embarrassment Islamists usually display in this regard.

Members of the movement who live in Tunis commented about the direct contribution of Ennahda women to the revolution. One of them stated: 'When we first heard about the demonstrations in Sidi Bouzid, we did not take the news seriously – nor did anyone else in Tunis. Uprisings had flared up here and there before, but their flames had always quickly been extinguished. But this time, the events unfolded rapidly and spread from one city to the next, so we realised that things were taking a different turn. When the revolution reached Sfax, we knew for sure that we had to go out too...' She thus explained the hesitation to join the revolution that seemed to grip Tunis in the beginning. The women's presence was not motivated by a particular political affiliation. For many, the slogan was that women should be a part of the revolution and their main motivation was the fight to expand the scope of freedoms, as a young woman from the Ennahda Movement stated: 'When the demonstrations started in Tunis, my brothers went out to join them; they suggested to my mother, my sister and me that we stay at home so nothing bad would happen to us. They were afraid we would be arrested and would suffer like so many Ennahda women had suffered before. But we were convinced that women should take part in this revolution. So we would wait until my brothers had left, then my mother and I would go out to the square... We had high hopes that this revolution would expand our freedoms, but we did not expect that it would lead to the flight of Ben Ali.' These sentences illustrate that women insisted on being present, but were equally careful not to clash with their brothers, which gives the impression of secret scheming: they waited for their brothers to leave the house before

going out themselves, rather than arguing with them and enforcing their decision.

One respondent, a lawyer who has been elected into the National Constituent Assembly, talks about her contribution to getting the revolution going and to protecting its front lines by means of her work as a lawyer: 'I was arrested on December 31st, 2010 for wearing a red badge, which lawyers had agreed upon wearing in solidarity with the events in Sidi Bouzid. I had an argument with the judge while pleading a case: she refused to hear my plea unless I removed the badge. We were carrying it as if it were an explosive device. After this argument, police came and dragged me by force to the security car where they showered me with blows and obscene words. My protesting colleagues in front of the car prevented the police from taking me with them. I took part in demonstrations; after Ben Ali fled, I joined sit-ins against the government of Mohamed Ghannouchi. I also assisted other protesters by bringing them food, cover and bedding.' This last statement reflects what can be sensed from many interviewees: the revolution was, for them, an opportunity to meet people and communicate with them after a long, involuntary seclusion. Thanks to this chance of communication, Ennahda members discovered one another in the square. 'We had not met one another before, but by communicating in the square, we realised that some of the people we talked to were also affiliated to Ennahda.' This experience in the square, although it was not – as I have stated above – carried out under a specific political label, thus helped introducing Ennahda members to one another.

Communication with people under the name of Ennahda took place in the post-revolution phase leading up to the election, in which women, according to respondents, played a

major role. A group of interviewees describe their first experience in the election campaign as follows: 'It was a difficult experience at first. We were knocking on the doors of people we did not know and we were anxious about their reactions. We decided to keep smiling whatever would happen... In some cases, the doors were shut in our faces. Some secularists were determined to distort the movement's image among people: they told them that Ennahda was going to impose the *hijab* and polygamy, and that women would be confined to their homes... When we talked to those same people and explained our ideas to them, they would take one of the following positions: they would either trust us and decide to vote for us, or they would choose not to vote for anyone.'

These campaigns were carried out by groups that were mixed in terms of gender (women and men) and age group (younger and elderly people). One of the interviewees says: 'We would go out in groups that included men and women. When we knocked doors and talked to people about Ennahda, they were surprised, because they had believed that the movement was extinct and done with.' The common denominator between these groups is that it was their first experience of this kind. They had daily assessments where they would exchange their experiences, teaching one another how to endure the criticism they faced from people, especially those who accused them of obscurantism and backwardness. One of the respondents stated: 'As it was our first experience and we had no previous expertise at all, we used to exchange our impressions on a daily basis to benefit from one another. Therefore, each new attempt was easier than the one before.' Communication was particularly difficult in upper-class neighbourhoods as they were 'full with aggressively arguing secularists,' explains

one Ennahda woman who ran for office in one of those neighbourhoods but did not succeed. She adds: 'In this region, the campaign lacked enthusiasm because there are many secularists. Even though I did not win, I learned many things from this experience: I learned to communicate with people whose opinions differ from mine, and I also learned to put up with insults and verbal abuse for wearing the *hijab* or for belonging to Ennahda.' We can recognize the dimension of conflict with the 'secularists' in the Ennahda women's discourse and experience, as will be elaborated below.

The strong presence of women in the campaign reflects their presence within the movement. Respondents were not able to quote an exact number, but they estimated the proportion of women in the movement at 'about one half.' Women are present in all institutions; however, their presence is at odds with their level of representation, as the Local Offices include at most two to three women, with ratios ranging between 13% and 20%. The movement's Executive Office includes two female members out of 15 total: Mounia Ibrahim, head of the Women and Family Office, and Farida Labidi, head of Legal Affairs. It should be noted that women working in the Offices are not only in charge of tasks usually defined as typically feminine, i.e. social or charity issues,⁵ but they also manage legal affairs, the communication with other parties and organisations, and other tasks.

All these responsibilities are new for the women of Ennahda, but their most exciting

⁵ Achin and Lévêque (2006, p. 57) as well as Fillieule (2009, p. 54) point out that women, even when they work in politics and are highly qualified, are frequently entrusted with tasks known as typically feminine, such as women's issues, social or charity work.

and challenging experience remains that within the National Constituent Assembly. One of the respondents, Latifa Habachi, member of the Assembly, a lawyer who is married with two children, describes this experience as 'a heavy responsibility. There will be elections one year from now and we have to make this a successful experience, especially with the major challenges ahead of us: attracting investments, creating employment opportunities, supporting associations... During our first days in office, we used to work until midnight. This was reflected on my family, as my marital relationship, the upbringing of my children, and their performance in school were disturbed. Nevertheless, I was determined to find the right balance, to carry through the mission entrusted to me by the people, and to fill my position well. Finding the right balance remains utterly difficult and requires a great deal of courage.' She continues: 'If I had not found such an understanding husband, I would not be able to pursue my job. A woman can only succeed if the circumstances are right.' This respondent addresses a problem that gender studies describe as a 'global' one, namely the issue of balancing domestic duties and the ambitions of an active female personality in her environment. These studies argue that the sole devotion of women to household tasks lays the foundation of their marginality and inferiority.⁶

In the National Constituent Assembly, Latifa Habachi carries the title of 'Rapporteur of the Judicial Committee.' She reckons that 'the judiciary was the second weapon – after security – with which Ben Ali oppressed the people.' Emphasising the importance of her

⁶ Guionnet and Neveu (2004, p. 32), Fillieule (2009, p. 51), Marques-Pereira (2007, p. 34), Héritier (2002, p.371).

mission, she adds: 'Committee Heads and Rapporteurs will be in the High Committee for Coordination and Editing that will draft the final version of the constitution.' She also points out that four Ennahda women are Committee Heads: Farida Labidi, Souad Abderrahim, Kalthoum Badreddine and Yamina Zoghlami.

Some Tunisian media outlets consider Ennahda's nomination of such a high number of women a mere tactic that does not express an actual willingness to advance women. But whatever the motives behind this large presence of women in the political sphere, the positive impact it has on their personality is confirmed by a number of studies related to gender sociology, among them a study by Isabelle Giraud⁷ who argues that the mere participation of women in the political sphere signifies a distribution of power and of ideas. Bérengère Marques-Pereira,⁸ for her part, stresses that political participation leads to 'speaking out' or a 'discursive exchange,' which is an indicator of women's empowerment because it means exercising citizenship and public responsibility. On the flip side of this female presence in the National Constituent Assembly, it should be noted that the current government does not include a single Ennahda woman. There are only two women among the 41 ministers:

⁷ Giraud Isabelle. 'Comment opérationnaliser le concept de citoyenneté dans les recherches empiriques sur les politiques de genre.' In Tremblay M., Ballmer-Cao T., Marques-Pereira B., Sineau M. (eds.). *Genre, Citoyenneté et Représentation*. Québec, PUL, 2007, pp. 81-99, p. 98.

⁸ Marques-Pereira Bérengère. 'La citoyenneté politique des femmes dans un jeu de miroir entre l'Europe occidentale et l'Amérique Latine.' In Tremblay M., Ballmer-Cao T., Marques-Pereira B., Sineau M. (eds.). *Genre, Citoyenneté et Représentation*. Québec, PUL, 2007, pp. 23-40, p. 32.

Sihem Badi, Minister of Women and Family Affairs, from the Congress for the Republic Party, and Memia Benna, Minister of the Environment, who is independent. Many respondents expressed their discontent with the absence of female Ennahda Movement Party members from the cabinet, trying to give explanations and interpretations of this matter that will be explored in more detail below.

In conclusion, the former prisoners' demand to be accepted as partners in the transformation process, the fact that Ennahda women won seats in the National Constituent Assembly, and the dissatisfaction of an important part of them over the absence of female party members from government, demonstrates that they have acquired a sense of claiming their rights. They are determined to be present in society and especially in the public sphere, and they are eager to make sure that change will not happen without them. This is an important step forward for women who had been, for a long time, completely absent from the public. Let us explore some factors that led to this breakthrough, namely the following:

1. The conditions of repression in which they grew up. As mentioned earlier, many studies have shown that women who grow up under oppressive circumstances acquire a strong personality and a significant presence within the community and within their movements.
2. The thinking of Professor Rached Ghannouchi, who encourages women's presence in society and believes that society cannot develop if half of it is confined to their homes, to household chores, and to raising children.⁹ Ghannouchi argues: 'How

⁹ Al-Darwish Qusay Salih. *Dialogues with Rached Ghannouchi*. London, 1992, p. 51 (in Arabic).

urgently our society needs female leaders! They would provide the public opinion with an extraordinary chance to compare the Islamic model of liberation with Westernised models. Every man should support intelligent and virtuous women so they can reach leading positions at all levels.¹⁰ The discourse of the Ennahda women refers to Ghannouchi's thinking. When respondents were asked about their position on polygamy or gender mixing, reference was given to Rached Ghannouchi who asserts that 'Islam does not proscribe gatherings of men and women at all; it only prohibits private meetings and encounters in an atmosphere of seduction or physical contact, in order to protect the purity of hearts and the preservation of honour.'¹¹ Considering the issue of polygamy, Ghannouchi points out that 'polygamy, in the Muslim society, is an exceptional solution in order to keep up society's decency and equilibrium and to prevent a breakdown of morals in exceptional situations – such as wars, for example – that usually carry off many young people of marriage age. So polygamy, in the Muslim society, is an exceptional solution to an exceptional emergency situation, and monogamy remains the rule under normal societal conditions, when the number of men and women is about equal.'¹²

3. The rivalry with secularists. In relation to the above, adherents of the Ennahda

¹⁰ Ghannouchi Rached. *Women Between Qur'an and Muslim Reality*. Maghreb Centre for Research and Translation, 3rd Edition, 2000, p. 77 (in Arabic).

¹¹ Ghannouchi Rached. *Women Between Qur'an and Muslim Reality*. Maghreb Centre for Research and Translation, 3rd Edition, 2000, p. 82 (in Arabic).

¹² Ghannouchi Rached. *Women Between Qur'an and Muslim Reality*. Maghreb Centre for Research and Translation, 3rd Edition, 2000, p. 97 (in Arabic).

Movement complain about what they call 'secularists' and 'obstacles that secularists create for the government only because it is a government of Islamists,' by which they mean a series of strikes organised here and there. They also condemn the ongoing control 'secularists' have over parts of the administration and over sensitive institutions such as the media; in this context, pro-government activists struggle for a media liberation. Ennahda members claim that the media still serve the interests of a small group of secularists who categorically reject the Islamists, even if the ballot boxes brought them to power. The same members explain that the media will exploit any statement or behaviour by any Salafist and will attribute it to the Ennahda government, even though the latter is against the Salafists' thinking and does not agree with their idea of society and state. One respondent, regarding the conflict with secularists, adds: 'This is something sad. During the revolution we were all together, no matter what. We all felt like brothers and sisters: leftists, Islamists, non-affiliated people. But after the revolution, the fighting started and the different parties started attacking one another...' This negative side of the conflict with the secularists is counterbalanced by a positive aspect: the diversity which preserves the social balance and acts as a good instrument of social integration; it erases the boundaries between the different communities that make up society.¹³ One of the most important positive aspects of this conflict regarding this paper's topic is the great pressure, reported by some Ennahda women, that secularists exerted in order to impose gender parity in the Constituent Assembly in their belief that the Ennahda Party did not have female activists; or if it

¹³ Simmel Georg. *Le conflit*. Translated from German by Sibylle Muller. Saulxures, Circé, 1992, p. 9, p. 11.

did, it would not let them run in the election, given its Islamist orientation. The surprise created by Ennahda was that it presented a large number of female candidates, who swept the election and managed to win 43 seats in the National Constituent Assembly.

The significance of this secularist pressure becomes clearer when one realises that its absence during the period of picking a government team has resulted in the non-nomination of Ennahda women for the current government. The women of Ennahda express their discontent about this, as mentioned above; some of them explain it by the tough competition between men about the distribution of cabinet posts to which women fell victim. Some others try to justify the absence of Ennahda women from the government by saying that they, whilst not part of the cabinet, are widely present in the different ministries. But some go further and mention authoritarian macho mentalities that do not accept women in power. One of the respondents says that 'intelligent Ennahda women protested about this issue, but unfortunately there are other women who prefer working behind the men.' This quote illustrates that the situation of women within the movement has not yet taken the direction that some hope for, and remains a matter of debate both between women and men and among women. The interviewee mentions two categories of women: 'intelligent' ones and those who 'prefer working behind the men.'

Another observation that can be made about the female Ennahda candidates for the National Constituent Assembly is that some of them do not wear the *hijab*, such as Souad Abderrahim. This indicates, on the one hand, how open-minded the Ennahda Party is, especially since interviewees' statements reveal open-minded views on the *hijab* issue: they regard it as a 'choice' that cannot be

imposed on people. In this respect, one of the respondents says: 'During the campaign, non-covered girls were active with us. They worked with us out of conviction, and joined the Ennahda party afterwards. We cannot dismiss them, because the *hijab* is a matter of obedience towards the Almighty and should be based on conviction; we cannot impose it on people.' This view of the headscarf possibly draws upon Rached Ghannouchi's thinking, as discussed above, but it may also be inspired by the realities the Ennahda women experienced. Whenever restrictions were imposed on the movement in particular and on women wearing the *hijab* in general, whether under Bourguiba or Ben Ali, some women were compelled to discard the head cover for some time in order to finish their studies or to take up work. One respondent recounts that she had to remove her *hijab* in 1995, after she had spent nearly seven years in the Ennahda Movement, to be able to complete her studies and find employment. She says: 'In 1995, I used to wear the *hijab* in the street but had to remove it whenever I entered the campus. I had to give it up completely in order to practise law, and then returned to wearing it in 2005.' The experience of removing the *hijab* for a certain period of time proved to those women that their convictions had not changed in spite of it. Moreover, the fact that they took off the *hijab* in order to study or work suggests that education and integration in society were, for many of them, more important than wearing the headscarf. On the other hand, the party's nomination of non-veiled women may also reflect an attempt to reassure the Tunisian political milieu, particularly women's organisations which feared a regression in women's achievements should the Islamists come to power.

In general, Ennahda's discourse on women and women's issues is aimed at reassuring women and the secular elites. Ennahda's

Islamists have, more than once, announced that they will not undo the achievements of the Code of Personal Status. The Ennahda Movement's party platform equally stresses 'women's rights to equality, education, employment, and participation in public life,'¹⁴ the 'preservation of women's achievements and the enhancement of their role in all areas, so they can contribute to the advancement of society, free from the constraints of inferiority and the dangers of dispossession,'¹⁵ and its determination to 'break with all forms of violence and discrimination against women.'¹⁶ Ennahda officials, furthermore, announced that they would not force women to cover their heads.

5. THE WOMEN OF THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (PJD) / MOVEMENT FOR UNITY AND REFORM (MUR)

Although the Justice and Development Party and its preaching wing did not officially support the popular movement in Morocco, they are among those who benefited most from it. The PJD won the early elections that were held on November 25, 2011 after a constitutional amendment and thus, for the first time in Moroccan history, leads the current government as an Islamist party. What share did its female members have in the party's change of status? How did it affect their position within the party and in the wider political scene? Before answering these questions, the nature of the Justice and Development Party and the Movement for

Unity and Reform, as well as the history of female presence in both organisations should be briefly addressed.

6. PJD AND MUR

The MUR is considered the main human-resource and ideological tributary of the Justice and Development Party. It was established in 1996 following the unification of two Islamist movements, the Movement of Reform and Renewal and the Association of the Islamic Future. The latter, in turn, had combined three Islamist associations that merged in 1994: *Jam'iyyat al-Shuruq* (Sunrise Association), *Jam'iyyat al-Da'wa* (Preaching Association) in Fes, and *Al-Jam'iyya al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Association) in Ksar el-Kebir. *Al-Shuruq* and the Movement of Reform and Renewal descended from *Harakat al-Shabiba al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Youth Movement) which was founded in 1969 and was blamed, in the seventies, for a series of acts of violence, including the murder of socialist Omar Benjelloun. In the wake of these accusations, a large number of its members were imprisoned while others fled the country, headed by the leader of the movement, Abdelkrim Moutii, who was sentenced to death in absentia. In the early 1980s, some *Harakat al-Shabiba* members reviewed their ideas and subsequently renounced violence; the associations mentioned above were founded. They merged in 1996, forming the MUR. Prior to this date, since the early 1990s, some of these associations had attempted to venture into the political arena. The Movement of Reform and Renewal submitted a request to establish the 'National Renewal Party' in 1992, but it was rejected, just like a similar request by the Association of the Islamic Future. After the merger, a delegation from the MUR approached Abdelkrim al-Khatib, who was at the time heading the People's Constitutional

¹⁴ Ennahda Movement Platform, September 2011, p. 3 (in Arabic).

¹⁵ Ennahda Movement Platform, September 2011, p. 8 (in Arabic).

¹⁶ Ennahda Movement Platform, September 2011, p. 45 (in Arabic).

Democratic Movement (MPDC), with the request to join his party and to restore it; the MPDC had become, by then, an empty shell. Al-Khatib agreed to enlist the MUR members in his party on three conditions: respect of Islam, non-violence, and respect of the constitutional monarchy. Thus, a large number of MUR members joined al-Khatib's party, which changed its name to Justice and Development Party in 1998. Saad-Eddine El Othmani was elected head of the party in 2004, which marked the beginning of the phase as an Islamist party. As the regime does not recognise the Islamic character of the party because the law prohibits the establishment of parties with a religious background, the PJD is cautious about using the term 'Islamist.' Its leaders frequently employ the expression 'a national party with an Islamic reference' instead. This caution only increased after the bloody events of May 16, 2003, after which the PJD was accused of spreading ideas that encourage extremism.

The appearance of the February 20th movement in the context of the 'Arab Spring' created some confusion among PJD leaders and activists. While the head of the party, Abdelilah Benkirane, attacked the movement and declared that his party would not take to the streets with it, other officials announced that they would join in. Some of them did go out to the streets on February 20th. This led to disagreements within the party, to the point that three members of its General Secretariat resigned; they revoked their decision later on. It also motivated some of the party's youth to organise themselves in a movement called *Baraka* (Enough), whose participation in the popular movement was equally characterised by confusion. At times, they took to the streets, criticising in their slogans the former head of the Authenticity and Modernity Party and current advisor to the king, Fouad Ali El Himma, and his party; at times, they stayed at home. After the PJD

won the elections on November 25th, 2011, Benkirane declared that he had no problem with the movement, that he considered the young people his children, and that he was ready to engage in a dialogue with them.

This confusion in dealing with the February 20th movement made it difficult to categorise the party among the elements of the popular movement that Morocco has witnessed since February 20, 2011, even though it benefited heavily from the movement's outcomes. It necessitated early legislative elections which the party won with a plurality, enabling it to lead the government.

7. THE WOMEN OF PJD / MUR: THEIR PARTICIPATION, STATUS, AND DISCOURSE BEFORE AND AFTER THE POPULAR MOVEMENT

It should be noted that this study, when referring to the women of this Islamist orientation, analyses all the positions and intellectual productions that come forth from both the MUR and the PJD, as well as the corresponding women's associations and unions that are fed by the same intellectual sources as the party.

According to some respondents¹⁷ who witnessed the beginning of *Harakat al-Shabiba* from the 1970s on, the movement's views on women developed from a conservative Eastern thinking during the seventies and eighties towards a more open understanding in the nineties. It was influenced by the written works of 'Abd al-Halim Abu Shuqqa, Rached Ghannouchi, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Hassan al-Turabi and other intellectuals who belong to the Muslim

¹⁷ In an interview with Aziza Bakkali, member of the Executive Office of the MUR, on May 27, 2010, and Fatima al-Najjar, another member of the Executive Office of the MUR, on Dec. 22, 2009.

Brotherhood school. During the seventies and eighties, the concern not to have mixed-gender meetings prevailed. Thus, women were excluded from decision-making, theorising and programming bodies, even though some of them had witnessed the birth of the various movements that later merged into the MUR. They include the Movement of Reform and Renewal, which was co-founded, in her own view, by Khadija Moufid; and *Jam'iyat al-Shuruq*, whose birth was witnessed by women like Soumaya Ben Khaldoun. These organisations, however, did not focus on women's issues in the beginning. Rather, they were trying to affirm that they had given up the revolutionary approach of *Harakat al-Shabiba al-Islamiyya* and had adopted a new, peaceful and reformist path. The interaction with feminist initiatives provoked, within this Islamist orientation, a growing interest in women's issues, and encouraged its female members to enter into a contest with the feminists. They became more prominent through a number of articles, seminars, lectures, and study days. Among the most important points of interaction were the 'One Million Signatures to amend the Code of Personal Status' campaign led by the Union of Women's Action in 1993; and the National Action Plan for the Integration of Women in Development (PANIFED) announced by Said Saadi, then-Secretary of State for Children and Family Affairs, in 1999. This plan sparked a major debate between the Islamists of PJD / MUR and the feminists. Moreover, the presence of women in the student sector played an important role in promoting women within the movement, and opened up some leadership positions to them. The late 1990s were marked by a transition: from being restricted to preaching, religious education, and charitable activities, women entered the realm of formal social work via associations as well as union and political activities

through the Justice and Development Party. This transition was paralleled by an opening up to the public domain. New spaces were made accessible, different from those that Islamist women used to work in (the home and the mosque). They are now present in the fields of associational work and dialogue (seminars, lectures, study days), as well as official political institutions (parliament, government).

The presence of women in the decision-making and executive bodies of the party and the movement does not exceed 11% in nation-wide institutions like the General Secretariat of the PJD which includes two women: Bassima Hakkaoui and Jamila El Moussali. The same is true for the Executive Office of the MUR with Aziza Bakkali and Fatima al-Najjar; all of them are represented thanks to the quota system. On the regional and prefecture / province level, the representation of women reaches 15% in some regions, while being almost non-existent in others. These ratios seem low if we compare them to the number of men in these currents; but if we compare them to rates of representation in other parties that populate the Moroccan political scene, we find that they do not differ much. This includes parties that are described as progressive, with female representation ranging between 10% and 20% in compliance with the quota. Then again, while gender sociology regards a weak female representation as an indicator of women's subordination and disempowerment, the women of PJD / MUR look at it from a different point of view. They argue, in general, that expertise should be the only criterion of representation regardless of gender. The women who are present in the decision-making circles do not just represent women, but the party as a whole; on this basis, many of them are not troubled by the fact that women are weakly represented.

As to the political presence and participation of women from the PJD, women from the Group entered the field of official politics in 2002 when six of them won a seat in the legislative elections: four via the nationwide list and two via local lists. In 2007 as well, six female PJD members were elected, but this time, they all won through the national list, i.e. thanks to the quota. Aziza Bakkali considers this a step backward compared to the 2002 elections, where two women had come out victorious on mixed-gender lists. In the last round of legislative elections (2011), the women of the PJD were able to triple their parliamentary representation, as they won 18 seats. Compared to the results of so-called progressive parties, the ratios achieved by the PJD women in the above-mentioned elections are higher; this raises major question marks around the link between progressivism and the encouragement of women to seek stronger representation, since the PJD achieves this better than other parties. It may be a matter of mere opportunism and of using the women to reassure the West and local elites; but whatever the reasons for pushing women into politics, their mere presence increases their political empowerment, as pointed out by the studies cited above.

In this context, we can assume that the presence of PJD women in the parliament has expressed, since 2002, a symbolic attendance Islamists have gained in this institution. In addition, they are very active, like all deputies from this party: they submit oral and written interpellations, hold direct meetings with ministers, and are in touch with local authorities.¹⁸

¹⁸ Ben Khaldoun Soumaya. In: Justice and Development Party, Committee on Women and Family Affairs. *Women and Political Participation*. Rabat, Top Press, 2008 (in Arabic).

On another level, the women of PJD / MUR are present in the work of associations via two national entities: The Organisation for the Renewal of Women's Awareness (ORCF) and Forum Azzahrae for the Moroccan Woman (FAFM). Both shape the positions and choices adopted by the women of PJD / MUR on women's issues. In this regard, studies have indicated the importance of associational work in strengthening women's personalities, as it gives them a chance to leave the private sphere, acquire skills, and achieve self-fulfilment.¹⁹ It should be noted that these two associations emerged out of the conflict with women's organisations. ORCF was founded in 1992 but became active only in 1995, in response to the 1993 debates mentioned above; FAFM was established in 2002 following the discussions about the PANIFED plan. Although the initiative to establish both entities came from male party members,²⁰ the engagement of women in them, especially after the conflicts about PANIFED, contributed to a shift from closed to open work on women's issues. In general, female PJD / MUR members criticise those who focus on women's issues without addressing family problems – which is what feminists do, according to the respondents. Hence, the women of PJD / MUR defend an approach where family rights and issues come first. As a result:

- They insist on family cohesion. Two basic cornerstones of family stability should be borne in mind: motherhood, and the balance between a woman's domestic and public responsibilities.

¹⁹ Fillieule Olivier. 'Travail militant, action collective et rapports de genre.' In Fillieule O., Roux P. *Le sexe du militantisme*. Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2009, pp. 23-74, p. 65, p. 72.

²⁰ Yafout (2012, p. 315); Radi (2005, p. 72).

- They ascribe a great value to the role of women as mothers and consider them the main actors responsible for the emotional and educational supervision of children. The focus lies on the aspect of sacrifice and selflessness that distinguishes mothers.
- Giving importance to the family does not contradict the advancement of women, in the view of female PJD / MUR members. A woman can be active in the public sphere without neglecting her family obligations. The interviewees see themselves as the best examples, as they manage to find a balance between their political, activist, and familial responsibilities.
- They link women's issues to moral questions, arguing that moral decay harms women and poses a threat to family and society. In this regard, they accuse the media of serving the interests of Western policies that seek to destroy the family using morals as a gateway. Thus, a large portion of the women's initiatives that were started by the movement or the associations were aimed at restoring morality and calling for virtuousness with things like 'prevention campaigns against the trend of unsteadiness.' These campaigns advocate wearing the *hijab*, the fight against drugs and smoking, children's education and call for an improved image of women in the media. While focusing on morality is an approach followed by the entire movement, observers expected this focus to fade away after the PJD's rise to power. Indeed, a sort of diminution of this aspect could be observed in the first statements of Abdelilah Benkirane, the current Prime Minister, about his position on wine and on festivals, which had been important topics in the party's platform and even in its parliamentary interpellations.
- The main factor that threatens the stability of families and the status of

women, according to the respondents, is the West which affirms colonial policies through the gateway of culture. Therefore, the women of PJD / MUR criticise a number of Western concepts, first and foremost the idea of equality which, according to them, does not take into account the right to be different. They see it as a 'mechanical equality' that aims at bringing about a resemblance between genders, but ignores the things that naturally distinguish men from women. In this regard, they embrace two concepts which they see as guaranteeing the rights of individuals while respecting, at the same time, their right to difference. They are:

1. The concept of evenness (*'adl*), which they consider 'more comprehensive than equality' as it guarantees all the rights without levelling all the differences.
2. The concept of complementarity (*takamul*), which means to the interviewees that the main role of a married woman is her role as a mother and housewife. Subsequently, she can take on other roles in society, including political ones, provided that this engagement does not contravene her main duties.
3. The PJD / MUR women also embrace the concept of *tadafu'*, a concept from the Qur'an with a meaning somewhere between interaction and confrontation. Interviewed respondents believe that society moves forward thanks to this interaction-confrontation between women and men and between women's and Islamist organisations.

In accordance with their family-based approach, the women of PJD / MUR criticise the state's lack of social policies that would aim at alleviating women's family commitments and encouraging them to become active in politics. In this respect, they have suggested the establishment of

nurseries in their places of work or political activity to avoid wasting time when a woman goes to breastfeed her child. They invoke the experience of the Scandinavian countries which they regard as pioneers in this area. This approach and orientation has long been defended by the PJD / MUR women while they were in the opposition. It invites us to keep an eye on the future achievements of Bassima Hakkaoui, a high-ranking party official and the only female minister in the current government, in this regard, after her appointment as Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family, and Social Development.

Regarding the popular movement, we cannot talk about an obvious participation of the PJD / MUR women if we take into account the confusion mentioned earlier. However, we should acknowledge the role played by some women leaders in key moments of the party's development during that period: most importantly, the conflict that opposed the party to the February 20th movement in its early days, which led to the resignation of three of its members. Secondly, the internal disagreement that a party activist has called an 'internal rivalry.' It became public when one of the party's leaders, Abdelaziz Rabbah, wrote an article on March 22, 2011, entitled 'A Peaceful Conversation: I Want to Understand.' In this essay, he wonders: 'I also want to understand how leaders and parliamentarians can support marches and slogans that call for bringing down the parliament which they are a part of and which their party is represented in. For such a long time, we have struggled for this right. Some leaders and deputies are even heading parliamentary committees and are members of the Office of the House of Representatives like Mustafa Ramid and Saad-Eddine El Othmani who almost became Speaker of the House of Representatives. Is it conceivable that those people meet with members of Democratic Way and Al-Adl wal Ihsan, who

not only denigrate these institutions but reject them? I just want to understand.' Other party leaders responded with more articles, either supporting or opposing Rabbah's arguments. At this point, one of the female leaders, namely Soumaya Ben Khaldoun, tried to play a conciliatory role by publishing, in turn, a piece titled 'A Contribution to the Peaceful Conversation: So that we Might Understand' on March 25, 2011. This role becomes visible in her attempt to comprehend both groups' point of view. She writes: 'One group wants reform but is afraid that the main demand will be to overthrow the regime, as it was in Egypt and Tunisia before. This is the position of a portion of our party's leadership who have not condemned the movement, but have decided not to participate in the February 20 events until things will become clearer. Another group supports this movement's justified demands, but confines itself to calls for constitutional reform and combating corruption. This position has been adopted by another portion of our party's (central and local) leadership who have decided to take part. They have announced this in a declaration which set the framework for their participation, allowing them to dissociate themselves from any slogan they disagree with that may be raised.'

Some analysts have explained the confusion that befell the Justice and Development Party with the existence of a deal between the Moroccan regime and the party: the latter would be obliged to calm down the situation and refrain from supporting the popular movement; in return, it would be allowed to lead the government in the upcoming legislative period. In preparation for this period, the party took a number of steps concerning its internal structure, among them the establishment of the PJD women's section, the 'Organisation of the Women of Justice and Development.' The PJD and its preaching wing, the MUR, had not possessed

women's sections before. According to most of the women interviewed between 2008 and 2010, the mainstream was then in favour of so-called participatory work, which supposes that men and women should follow the same programmes and trainings, thus making a women's section unnecessary. Participatory work is overseen – on all levels, from the local to the nationwide – by integrated bodies: the same committees and offices direct, schedule, and follow up on men's and women's work at the same time. However, such an approach requires a significant representation of women in the executive structures, which is not the case in practice; women's representation in decision-making bodies remains weak, as mentioned earlier. In this context, some PJD women, including Bassima Hakkaoui in a 2010 interview, expressed their conviction that the party needed a women's section in order to form a female elite. However, this view was not predominant at the time. A number of female and male party members alike did not think that establishing a female section was necessary. It seems that the political prospects opened up by the popular movement convinced the party of the need for such an institution. The constitutive meeting of the Organisation of the Women of Justice and Development took place in October 2011.

Aside from the establishment of a women's section, the multiplication of their representation in parliament, and the individual initiatives mentioned above, the popular movement in Morocco has not delivered much to the women of PJD / MUR, who have remained out of touch with the events. After the government was formed, the major observation noted by many commentators was the nomination of one woman as a minister, namely Bassima Hakkaoui, an official of the Organisation of the Women of Justice and Development. On

January 3, 2011, a cabinet of 31 ministers was announced, including 12 from the PJD; however, there was only one woman among them. Some considered this a 'significant setback' from the achievements Moroccan women had made during the previous government which had, at times, included seven women. This topic provoked a considerable clamour in the media. However, in order to discuss the matter from multiple angles, the following observations should be made:

1. The sole woman in this cabinet belongs to an Islamist party, although the government includes a progressive party (Party of Progress and Socialism)²¹ as well as one of the so-called historical parties (*Istiqlal* or Independence Party);²² neither of them, however, nominated a woman for a ministerial position. This echoes the debate about the standards of progressivism and its correlation with the representation ratio of women. Nevertheless, a number of feminist organisations see Abdelilah Benkirane as the main responsible. As Prime Minister, he is in charge, according to the constitution, of the appointment of ministers; he should have set up a mechanism forcing the other parties to nominate female candidates.²³ Furthermore, feminist movements regarded this forming of a government as

²¹ A political party with a socialist ideology that was legally recognised in 1974. It is regarded as the descendant of the Moroccan Communist Party which was established in 1943 and banned in 1959. The party is currently part of the government led by the PJD since January 3, 2012.

²² *Istiqlal* is one of the oldest Moroccan parties. It was founded in 1943 by Ahmed Balafrej to fight for Morocco's independence.

²³ See, for instance, the statements of Fouzia Assouli, president of the Democratic League for Women's Rights, and Khadija Rebbah, coordinator in the National Movement for Egalitarian Democracy.

violating the requirements of the constitution, which stipulate equality between women and men. The justifications that were given in this context, both by the parties and by Benkirane, were related to the difficult economic, social, and political conditions. Therefore, priority had to be given to competence instead of other criteria, as the focus at the time was to make the government experience a successful one. There was also talk of time pressure, especially during the last round of negotiations; and a basic difficulty was brought up, regarding the Prime Minister: to make citizens interested in politics and to create a political consciousness among them. This would encourage dozens of women and men to enter the political arena.

2. There was no visible protest from within the PJD against the nomination of just one woman. Its female members reiterated the arguments they cite whenever their weak representation is brought up: firstly, the idea of competence as a criterion for nomination, so the most competent person will be chosen; and secondly, the question of democracy. Hakkaoui states in an interview with a news website: 'In our party, the names were chosen in a democratic way approved and adopted by us, by means of forming an internal assembly. We voted on the proposed ministerial candidates in secret.'²⁴ Thirdly, the women of the PJD invoke an Islamist principle which says that an individual should not demand responsibilities for him- or herself. Hakkaoui asserts: 'We do not propose ourselves as candidates for whatever position. The party as an institution, with its rules and specialised apparatuses, is in charge of this matter. For us, responsibility

²⁴ Interviews with Deutsche Welle website on Jan. 8, 2012, and Almassae newspaper on Jan. 1, 2012.

is not something we demand; however, an assignment is binding. So if we do get charged with a task, we will accept the responsibility, and if we get discharged, this decision is up to the specialised apparatuses.'²⁵ These justifications put forward by the PJD women lead to two observations. The first, is related to the use of a religious principle to explain a political act: while politics is based on the competition between individuals who strive for political posts and prominence,²⁶ Hakkaoui talks about the religious principle not to demand responsibilities. The second observation concerns the invocation of the criterion of competence, which is at odds with theories that defend the quota mechanism. They consider quotas the best instrument to counteract male resistance against women becoming active in decision-making institutions.²⁷ Accordingly, competence should not be the only criterion.

3. We should not overlook those who think that the talk about female or male representation in the government is idle as long as the institutions, from their point of view, are sham institutions without any power. This makes participation in them fictitious as well, so there is no point in making such a noise about women's participation in the first place.

Despite the weak representation of PJD women in the government, they have certainly made headway within MUR and PJD. This concerns their presence in decision-making bodies, on the political scene, and in

²⁵ Hakkaoui in an interview with Asharq al-Awsat newspaper, issue 12090, Jan. 4, 2012.

²⁶ Guionnet C., Neveu E., *Féminins/Masculins, sociologie du genre*. Paris, Armand Collin, 2004, p. 203.

²⁷ Tremblay M., Ballmer-Cao T., Marques-Pereira B., Sineau M. (eds.), *Genre, Citoyenneté et Représentation*. Québec, PUL, 2007, p. 15.

the associational field, regardless of what the Arab Spring has brought them. This progress can be attributed to the following factors:

- The thinking that frames the approach to women's issues has evolved. From an Eastern, conservative approach during the seventies and eighties, it has opened up during the nineties, as outlined above, under the influence of the writings of 'Abd al-Halim Abu Shuqqa, Rached Ghannouchi, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Hassan al-Turabi, and others. Moreover, since the early nineties, essays on the female cause by intellectuals associated with the movement have appeared. They include Saad-Eddine El Othmani's book 'The Women's Cause and the Psychology of Despotism' (1998), Ahmed Labiedh's 'The Philosophy of the Islamic Dress' (1991) and 'An Islamic Approach To the Dispossession of Women' (1991), and Farid al-Ansari's 'Women's Countenance in Islam' (2003). However, the following remarks about these writings are in order:
 1. They contradict one another. This is to say that, while Saad-Eddine El Othmani's book displays a certain openness in imagining women's role in society and calls for involving rather than marginalising them, Labiedh and al-Ansari focus on women's dress and outward appearance. They present a rigid perspective, to the point of linking a woman's existence to the headscarf: 'You wear the *hijab*, therefore you exist.'²⁸
 2. It is difficult to determine whether these writings express solely the views of their authors or those of the movement as a whole, given the lack of intellectual

homogeneity of this current's leaders which numerous analysts have affirmed.²⁹

3. There are no books written by women, except for a few articles that were published in the eighties and nineties in *Al-Furqan* magazine, that focussed, for the most part, on women's outward appearance and their domestic role. However, in the late nineties and the early second millennium, texts by female authors with a more open-minded approach on women's issues appeared, including articles by Bassima Hakkaoui, Khadija Moufid, Jamila El Moussali, Soumaya Ben Khaldoun, and others.
 - The intellectual and ideological rivalry with feminist currents of a leftist conviction led to a more profound thinking about women's issues and the gradual involvement of women in this thinking. This contributed to the prominence of women's associations and female leaders. Here, earlier statements made about the positive aspects of conflict are more defined.
 - Entering into politics through the PJD required a high commitment from numerous women in the party's national and regional structures; and the venture of elections and national lists necessitated a search for women's powers which had to be integrated in the political work according to the criterion of competence, as most of the respondents point out. Some of them, however, doubt that this criterion was applied in sincerity, arguing that women with a strong personality are not wanted in political parties. This is suggested by Khadija Moufid, one of the first members of the MUR and one of the first women to be active in the PJD since its creation; however, she quit the party in 2007 after differences about the order of

²⁸ Al-Ansari Farid. *Women's Countenance in Islam*. Rabat, Top Press, 2003 (in Arabic).

²⁹ Cf. Darif (2010), Zeghal (2005), Hami Eddine (2003).

female PJD candidates on the national electoral list of women running for parliament.

Ultimately, in regard to the party's discourse since it came to power, i.e. after the wave of the popular movement, a certain restraint on several topics can be noted. These include the moral issues mentioned above, as well as Benkirane's statements about not imposing the *hijab* on women and about the sacredness of personal freedoms that should not be violated. All these statements are meant to reassure the international community and the local elites concerning the anticipated restriction of freedoms with the Islamists' rise to power. However, these statements could not remove the fears of women's associations and some civil society actors about the possibility that the party might revoke some of the achievements women had made. The fact that Bassima Hakkaoui heads the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family, and Social Development reinforces these concerns in the view of some feminists. Hakkaoui has announced her opposition to Morocco's lifting of its reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Recently, she has stated that she does not oppose the marriage of minors, under the condition of parental consent; moreover, she regards abortion as an act of murder. Hakkaoui supposes that the whole debate is artificial and out of place, and that the Moroccans have other concerns related to their daily bread and to democracy.³⁰ In addition, some of the party's female leaders regard polygamy as a right of the second

³⁰ Hakkaoui has announced these positions on numerous occasions, among them the 'Mubasharatan ma'akum' TV programme on Channel 2 on March 7, 2012.

wife,³¹ and some PJD ministers have two wives.³² All these opinions illustrate the previously mentioned contest between PJD / MUR on the one hand, and feminists and civil society actors on the other.

8. THE WOMEN OF THE MOROCCAN AL-ADL WAL IHSAN

The status of the Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group on the Moroccan political scene can be described as 'special.' It is not a political party, but constitutes a major opposition force against the current regime and is clearly present on the ground, both through its social and associational work, and through demonstrations and marches. It was one of the biggest supporters of February 20th Movement during the first ten months of the movement.

First this paper reviews the research performed on the Al-Adl wal Ihsan group, and its contribution to the popular movement, before discussing the status of its female members in the organisation and in society as well as the impact their contribution to the movement has had on their situation.

9. AL-ADL WAL IHSAN: ORIGINS AND EVOLUTION

The history of the Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group is closely related to its leader Abdessalam Yassine, the education functionary whose religious path started in the Budshishiyya

³¹ In a June 11, 2008 interview with Aziza Bakkali who considers polygamy a Qur'anic rule which cannot be forbidden. Khadija Moufid has also stated, in the 'Li-l-nisa' faqat' TV programme on Aljazeera channel (Oct. 28, 2002), that polygamy is the second wife's right.

³² Mustafa Ramid and Abdellah Baha (cf. Hasan Tawil, *Civilised Dialogue*, issue no. 3637, Feb. 13, 2012, in Arabic).

Sufi brotherhood in the late sixties and early seventies before he left the brotherhood due to his increasing interest in the events happening around him. Yassine devoted himself to studying the history of the Muslim community and came to two conclusions: firstly, a Muslim should not restrict his role to worship and invocation, but should care about people's issues and the political, economic, and social injustice they are subject to. Secondly, Yassine rejected hereditary monarchies because they negate the principle of popular sovereignty. Based on this conception, he wrote a letter of advice to King Hassan II in 1974, calling on him to repent and to distribute the wealth evenly. He was first confined to a hospital for chest diseases and then later for mental illnesses, before being transferred to prison. In 1978, he started his intellectual work by publishing a magazine called *Al-Jama'a* (The Group), which would be banned later on. Afterwards, Yassine decided to formalise his work and founded *Usrat al-Jama'a* (Family of the Group) in 1981; he was rearrested two years later for publishing the *Al-Subh* (The Morning) and *Al-Khitab* (The Speech) newspapers. Subsequently, he decided to establish the charitable *Al-Jama'a* association which raised the slogan of *al-'adl wa-l-ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality) in 1987 and adopted three founding principles: 'no to violence,' 'no to secrecy,' 'no to foreign funding.' The slogan of the Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group turned into a societal project that focused, on the one hand, on an intensive educational programme imbued with Sufism, which emphasised religious education as a process of continual ascension on the path of faith. On the other hand, it focused on the notion of justice as a rejection of oppression, justice in the distribution of wealth, and social and political justice. The group considered it a duty to stand by the oppressed and to help the weak; accordingly, it was interested in politics. It

opposed the king's title of 'Commander of the Believers' – a byname that grants him religious and political legitimacy – as well as his extensive political powers, and therefore advocated a radical change in the nature of the regime, all the while insisting on the peaceful character of that change. The group's interest in politics expressed itself in practice with the establishment of the Political Circle in 1998, which looks after the members' political instruction and encourages them to be in touch with other actors on the Moroccan political scene.

10. THE RELATION TO THE POPULAR MOVEMENT

The Group supported the February 20th movement from the outset: its youth officially announced on February 16th, 2011, that they were determined to actively support the popular movement. This step was expected, given the Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group's views and the points it had in common with the demands of the February 20th movement. These included:

1. Dissatisfaction with the nature of the regime, as well as a number of political, economic, and social problems.
2. The use of the street as a means of expressing this dissatisfaction. This instrument had been well-established within Al-Adl wal Ihsan since the 1990s, as it had repeatedly expressed its opinions through demonstrations in the street.

The Group's positions became more similar to those of the popular movement when it declared its rejection of the constitutional amendments proposed in the royal speech of March 9, 2011. It argued that they would preserve the spirit of a decreed constitution, as the king would appoint a royal committee to amend the constitution, and would himself define the general lines that the amendment

should follow. Al-Adl wal Ihsan also called for a boycott of the referendum on the constitution that was carried out on July 1st, 2011, and a boycott of the legislative elections held on November 25th, 2011.

The Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group was equally active in most sector-specific protests: unemployed doctors, teachers, physicians, preachers, unemployed graduates, the telecommunications sector, and others.

11. THE WOMEN OF AL-ADL WAL IHSAN: THEIR STATUS IN THE ORGANISATION AND IN SOCIETY, AND HOW IT WAS AFFECTED BY THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE POPULAR MOVEMENT

Before the Al-Adl wal Ihsan youth announced their participation in the February 20 movement, the first indicator of this intention was a declaration given by Nadia Yassine to the Spanish *El País* newspaper on February 14, 2011, where she emphasised that 'every peaceful initiative can count on our movement's support.' This standpoint gives a hint about women's power to affect decision-making inside the group. Nadia Yassine is seen as the most important woman within the Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group, is one of its most famous leaders, and has founded its women's section. She is also considered the group's unofficial spokesperson through her statements and opinions in press and media. Many observers attribute her special status to her being the group leader's daughter; Al-Adl wal Ihsan leaders reject this analysis and argue that she has earned her position thanks to her personal efforts as well as her intellectual and communicative skills. Nadia Yassine herself sees the matter from a different point of view: being the daughter of Al-Adl wal Ihsan's leader can be a supportive factor in counteracting the masculine

mentalities that may obstruct the advancement of women within the group.

The women' section of Al-Adl wal Ihsan has gone through various stages. During the late seventies and up to the mid-eighties, its activities were not organised; female experience came about spontaneously and creatively in contexts of spiritual instruction. But as soon as the transition to organised women's work occurred in the mid-eighties, under the supervision of men, gender separation in meetings became a main concern. Thus, women were excluded from decision-making, theorising and programming bodies. The women's educational, spiritual, and training programmes became exact copies of the men's programmes and curbed any female initiative. Some areas such as the student sector formed an exception, as female students played a prominent role from the early nineties onward. Members increasingly brought up issues like gender mixing, giving women a voice, female contributions to the decision-making process, and others. In the mid-nineties, the publication of the 'Guide for Believing Women' by Abdessalam Yassine, the group's leader, gave a strong thrust to women's work. In this Guide, Yassine discusses the women's cause, relating the decline of their role, historically, to the degradation of the community; and he calls for a new awakening of the community, with women present at the heart of the change, leading – together with men – rather than following. He writes: 'Believing women must fight to overcome the impediments of tradition, the barriers of the mind which should yield only to the truth, and the obstacles of habits, selfish behaviour and backward mentalities. The believing women's cause will only be solved in a comprehensive framework in which they take part as leaders

together with men, not as followers.³³ He adds, encouraging women to become involved in *ijtihad* (independent judgement in Islamic law): 'It is a double fight: you have to wrest your rights, which are guaranteed by Islamic law, from men's arbitrary abuse; and you have to keep educating yourself so they will not monopolise *ijtihad* and abuse their "degrees."' ³⁴

These ideas gave a strong impetus to women's work and prompted them to elaborate their own thoughts on the advancement of women. They criticised the injustice and marginalisation forced on women in the name of religion. At the same time, this line of thought defends the idea that Islam is an emancipatory religion that came to liberate women from the bonds of marginalisation and disdain they were suffering in pre-Islamic times. It also maintains that women have been wronged by a blindly emulating, rigid jurisprudence that emerged in the epoch of decline and nurtured both the patriarchal attitude and the political oppression that the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan view as one of the reasons behind the marginalisation of women. This jurisprudence was followed throughout the ages until it came to be seen as part of the religion's essence. Moreover, we are dealing with a feminist, religious, and political awareness combined in the frame of a militant approach which argues that women's top enemy is the patriarchal and despotic mentality; for the more political injustice there is in a society, the more it is women who are its victims.

³³ Yassine Abdessalam, *Guide for Believing Women* (two volumes). Casablanca, Al-Ufuq, 1996, p. 80, volume 1 (in Arabic).

³⁴ Yassine Abdessalam, *Guide for Believing Women* (two volumes). Casablanca, Al-Ufuq, 1996, p. 212, volume 1 (in Arabic).

Based on this imagination, the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan sought to achieve a certain independence in their work, in spite of the strong resistance this project met with. Unlike those theories which suggest that women's sections of parties are nothing but spaces that men create in order to seclude women among themselves and to divert their attention from the decision-making circles,³⁵ the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan regard their independence in elaborating their own vision of women's advancement – along with the independence of their programmes, choices, initiatives, and decisions – as indispensable in the liberation of the women's will and in building their self-confidence. This kind of independence is also required, in the eyes of the Al-Adl wal Ihsan women, the particular situation of the Muslim woman. She experienced an emancipatory dynamic during the era of the prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs, but it was not sustained through the following periods for a number of historical, political, and social reasons which led to the woman's gradual decline. In the end, she felt inferior on every level and had become, compared to man, a second-class citizen. This special situation of the woman requires, therefore, special training, a special education, and special programmes. The principle of independence, however, does not imply the establishment of a women's section apart from the Group, as one of the respondents explains; on the contrary, they encourage women to become involved in all the bodies of the movement. In addition to the women's section, women are represented in most governing bodies of the Group, among them the General Secretariat which features three women and the *Shura* (Consultative) Council, the highest decision-making body, which includes about 30%

³⁵ Achin Catherine, Lévêque Sandrine, *Femmes en Politique*. Paris, La Découverte, 2006, p. 50.

female members. However, the *Irshad* (Guidance) Council, the Group's highest executive body in educational matters, does not include a woman. This raises several questions for anyone interested in the Group's affairs.

The most significant change to be registered in the women's discourse, from this period on, is perhaps their talk about the believing, strong, independent female personality who marks her presence in her environment. Moreover, they now condemn macho mentalities which, they argue, have no basis in Islam. This phase is also characterised by the extension of women's activities from the spheres of preaching, religious education, and charity into those of social work in general, unionist, political, and intellectual work, in addition to a new presence in the decision-making circles of the Group, as will be discussed below. This transition was accompanied by a wider opening up to the public sphere and to new spaces different from those that Islamist women used to be concerned with (the home and the mosque). They are now present in the spaces of associations and dialogue (seminars, lectures, study days) and in the street as a space of protest (demonstrations, pickets).

On the practical level, the strategy of the Al-Adl wal Ihsan women is leaving the phase of merely teaching women about their religious duties and giving them jurisprudential lessons, to enter a phase where they criticise the overly rigid jurisprudence and construct a 'liberation project for women.' Hence, they have adopted a project to reread the religious texts from a woman's point of view and to reopen the door of *ijtihad*. The most important aspects of this project can be summed up as follows:

1. The project's theoretical foundation is the concept of renewal which the Group

promotes through the thinking of its supreme guide, Abdessalam Yassine.

2. This thinking does not reject traditional jurisprudence in its entirety; rather, this jurisprudence is critically examined, and those items that do not oppose the emancipatory spirit of Islam are applied.
3. It is a collective women's *ijtihad* project.
4. This project has sparked practical initiatives such as the Fifty Female Scholars ('*alimat*) project that incites women to attend higher studies in various fields, especially religious studies, in order to master the techniques of *ijtihad*, reread the texts from a female perspective, and elaborate a vision that aims at constructing a strong female personality. Women are to be integrated in all areas of change, and their rights are to be guaranteed on the basis of Qur'an and prophetic *hadith*. This view is passed on via more than 24 so-called 'Councils of Sisters for Eternity' (*Majalis Akhawat al-Akhira*), intellectual gatherings that are held monthly in numerous Moroccan cities. They thoroughly study the lives of the prophet and his companions from a 'women's point of view' which tries to extract events and quotations that highlight the role women played in building the Muslim society; their contributions to social, economic and political life, not just inside the family; and the fact that they are dignified, free, independent beings not subordinate to men. In this way, they seek to refute the theses of Wahhabi thinking, which insists on confining women to a secondary role in society, as beings inferior to men. These councils also re-examine a number of Qur'anic concepts that have long been used by classical jurisprudence to justify the subordination of women to men, such as *qiwama* (a husband's responsibilities), *hafiziyya* (a wife's responsibilities), *daraja* (the precedency of the husband), and others. The women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan have made *hafiziyya* a basic principle of their work,

interpreting it as 'the preservation of everything that eludes men,' whereas classical jurisprudence understands it as the obligation for women to be committed to her home. According to the meaning they attach to this concept, interview partners argue that women have to equip themselves with a piercing female gaze which pays attention to everything that eludes men's minds, be it in political, social, or other issues. Moreover, they discuss a range of controversial jurisprudential issues, such as gender mixing and polygamy. They see this latter as an exception rather than the rule, as it was used as a particular solution in a historical context linked to the battle of Uhud where the Muslims were defeated and a large number of men were killed, leaving many women widowed and orphaned. In this time, polygamy was a solution in the context of social responsibility, but it can in no way be considered a rule. It is, as the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan underline, an exceptional solution for exceptional situations. From these councils, the women have concluded that women can acquire self-confidence, strong personalities, presence and participation in society without moving away from their religion, which has prompted Zakia Salime to describe these meetings as 'councils for collective empowerment.'³⁶

This is the theory; in practice, the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan link the female cause to the cause of the community. Consequently, it can only be solved in the frame of comprehensive change where areas of construction are opened on many fronts. This includes the fight against poverty, whose major victims are women; putting an end to corruption and the embezzlement of public funds, whose

perpetrators have to be held accountable; and the launching of real development projects that benefit everyone. It also covers the fight against illiteracy – which chiefly concerns women – through the adoption of serious educational policies and the rehabilitation of public schools. And it encompasses reform of the judiciary by combating bribery and corruption, of which women are the main victims once again, as well as other construction areas that depend on political will and on concerted official and civil-society efforts. 'In the meantime,' one of the respondents says, 'we do not stand by with tied hands, but we work in the field so we can accompany the women and educate them about the emancipatory principles of our religion.' The women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan operate in the field through a network of associations that are active in the neighbourhoods and look after women through programmes for the eradication of illiteracy, vocational training, legal, and health education. They also carry out development work through associations and cooperatives, with the purpose of achieving women's material independence which the respondents deem essential for their advancement and for involving them in the process of change. The women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan believe that their work in the field combines conventional association's programmes with the awakening of consciences and with a spiritual education. Conscience awakening, it should be noted, refers to the indirect political role possibly played by associations who are related to a specific political institution; spiritual education, on the other hand, points to the importance of education in the Al-Adl wal Ihsan project. Its programmes essentially focus on liturgy (*adhkar*), nightly prayers (*qiyam al-layl*), spiritual retreats (*ribatat*), Qur'an memorisation, and other programmes

³⁶ Salime Zakia, *Between Islam and Feminism: New Political Transformations and Movements in Morocco*. PhD Thesis, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2005, p. 153.

infused with the Sufi spirit that the Group adheres to in its educational activities.

Apart from the work through associations, the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan are eager to organise activities that enable them to stay in touch with the different actors on the political scene and in the women's sector, in order to elaborate a shared vision for the advancement of women. However, the response to such initiatives remains dependent on the nature of political positions and alliances, which often preclude the achievement of this goal, as one of the interviewees explains. Therefore, the women of the Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group focus primarily on keeping in touch with actors who are completely independent from any political affiliation. Furthermore, they direct their communication to the international sphere by attending seminars, lectures, and international or Arab forums to introduce their section and their view of the women's cause.

What is more, the Al-Adl wal Ihsan women organise training activities for the members of the group, e.g. family gatherings where male and female group members meet and through which women try to establish their approach to the family. They defend the need for men to be present in the home and to contribute to household tasks and the upbringing of children; they also encourage family planning, mutual respect between partners, and try to change mentalities. At the end of the day, they argue, families cannot move in the right direction without those things, nor can a woman be empowered if she carries the family burden alone, even if she is, in their view, the essential factor in this institution. With this approach, they try to break with the values that patriarchy is built on, promoting a greater presence for women in the public sphere, and a balanced complementarity between woman and man

in the private sphere. Then again, they believe that the woman's role as a housewife and mother needs to earn the recognition it deserves from society, since they regard motherhood as a power God only gave to women, charging them with the task of ensuring the continuity of mankind on earth. The concept of motherhood, according to a number of respondents, is not confined to its obvious, external meaning, i.e. giving birth; rather, it includes an inner meaning that pertains to the woman's capacity to spread love and affection and her ability to listen to others and their worries. This authority cannot be owned by anyone.

The atmosphere of openness brought about by the February 20th movement has allowed the work of these women to flourish. Their strong presence in the marches and pickets of the February 20th movement was noted; Aman Jar'ud, head of the women's section in Casablanca, estimates it at more than 50% compared to male attendance. She empathises that the high rate of female presence remained constant, even during the critical phases when the movement was heavily repressed and protesters, including women, suffered beating, humiliation and insult. The interviewee also mentions the strong female presence during the events of March 13th, 2011, which were heavily repressed, as well as the events of May 22th and 29th, 2011, where repression escalated to the degree of one demonstrator being killed in the town of Safi.³⁷ One of the most remarkable points during this period was that Islamists overcame the question of gender mixing in the marches: the lines of

³⁷ This refers to the young man Kamal Amari, who died from injuries inflicted upon him on June 2, 2011, when he was violently beaten by security elements, according to the declarations by the February 20 movement and the Al-Adl wal Ihsan Group.

protesters were mixed, rather than distinguishing between women's and men's lines as they used to do in earlier marches. In this regard, respondent Fatima Kassid indicates: 'We have never had a problem with gender mixing, as long as it stays within the bounds of good manners and mutual respect between everyone. Even when we used to organise marches with separate rows for men and women, our concern was purely organisational and had nothing to do with *shari'a* considerations. The fact that we went out to the public sphere itself expresses that we accept gender mixing, with the specifications I just mentioned.' So-called moderate Islamists, in terms of their jurisprudential viewpoints, do not generally reject gender mixing in itself, but they presuppose respect. One of the respondents underscored that 'mixing does not imply unsteadiness or immorality. We defend a positive gender mixing that respects morals and religion.'

In addition to this presence, the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan have organised purely female demonstrations, both in terms of themes and content as well as in terms of organisation, arrangement, and participation. They include female pickets against the social conditions that drove Fadwa Laroui, an impoverished citizen from the region of Beni Mellal, to burn herself,³⁸ and solidarity pickets with the Libyan, Syrian, or Palestinian peoples, especially in Casablanca and Tangier. In these two cities, the popular movement had a considerable momentum. The demonstrations were accompanied by women's statements to several media outlets

³⁸ 20-year old Fadwa Laroui, who lived in a slum area in Souk Sebt, immolated herself on February 21, 2011, and died the next day. She burnt herself in protest against the denial of her natural right to housing, and against the misery and destitution she experienced.

like Aljazeera. This kind of on-the-ground activities, i.e. organising demonstrations, were not possible in this intensity before, as the entire Al-Adl wal Ihsan movement was under strict blockade, banned from public places and from all forms of protest, which was usually dispersed by force. The regime's justification for the ban and the use of force used to be the illegality of the Group, while the latter regarded its status as lawful and claimed that a number of court decisions had recognised this. Some of these pickets have surprised observers, especially those supporting Fadwa Laroui who was a single mother; common stereotypes about Islamist women suggest that a single mother would not earn their support. One of the respondents explains this stance: "Laroui and similar women are the victims of a society that mistreats, impoverishes, marginalises them and makes them sell their bodies. In such cases, we have to side with the victim, not the perpetrator. There is nothing astonishing in this." This period was also characterised by a number of statements issued by the women's section that condemned, expressed solidarity, or interacted with current events, as well as several analytical and responsive essays.

The dynamism displayed by the members of the women's section provoked attacks on their honour, a serious issue in conservative societies. Videos and images were fabricated which offended the honour of the section's leaders. Respondents accused the website that led the campaign against the Al-Adl wal Ihsan women of being affiliated to the *makhzan* (the Moroccan government), since its owner was invited as a guest on the second state television channel (2M) where he and his website were advertised right after the start of his campaign.

In sum, the discourse of the Al-Adl wal Ihsan women adheres to values defended by most

Islamists: it pays attention to the significance and priority of the family, the value of motherhood, the precedence of collective over individual interests, and more. At the same time, however, it defends values of modern individualism: women's financial independence, freedom of choice and non-coercion, especially regarding the topics of *hijab* and choosing a husband, the tendency towards the model of the core family...

To conclude, the factors that affect the presence of Al-Adl wal Ihsan's female members, both in society and in their movement, as follows:

- The thinking of Abdessalam Yassine, influenced by traditional Sufism, which looks at women in a positive way. Likewise, his interpretation of history which links women's weak status to the decline of Muslims and calls for women's advancement, inviting them to stand up for their rights and take part in society. It also encourages them to reread the texts from a feminine point of view, liberated from the bonds of rigid classical jurisprudence. This thinking has inspired the women of the Group to go forward with the projects mentioned above, and to create a female imagination based on Yassine's ideas. Their vision, however, has not won consensus inside the Group. It exposes them, from time to time, to what

they call resistances or mentalities that obstruct the way in which they work and the conclusions they reach. This raises questions, for some observers, about the sustainability of this female dynamism in the era after Yassine.

- The circumstances of repression the Group's women have experienced during many episodes of this movement's history; most recently, a series of detentions that has affected two thousand women since 2006. They are arrested in the middle of their meetings, brought to the police station where official reports are filed, and afterwards sent home late at night. There was also the defamation campaign against them that was launched with the beginning of the February 20th movement, which they believe was initiated by the *makhzan*. It should be reiterated that the oppression these women go through plays an important role in strengthening their personalities, making them more robust and more insistent on standing up for their demands.
- The women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan argue that the independent work of the women's section has pushed this work forward and has enabled them to elaborate their own programmes and visions for the advancement of women.

12. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the ways in which Islamist women have benefited from the atmosphere of the 'Arab Spring' vary between countries and groups. In the Ennahda Movement, women have tremendously benefited: from fear, secrecy, and hiding, they have moved to political and associational participation and have achieved a wide presence in the public sphere (demonstrations, seminars, the National Constituent Assembly, associations, forums). The situation in Morocco is different. Regarding the Party of Justice and Development – and apart from the presence of one woman from this party in the government and the multiplication of its number of female deputies in parliament – there is hardly a big difference between their current situation and that of before the popular movement. They had been present in institutions like the parliament and in associations before. As for the women of Al-Adl wal Ihsan, they benefited in a different way: by appearing more prominently in the street, in demonstrations, seminars, debates, and in the emancipation of associational activities, compared to the situation of blockade they were experiencing before.

Aside from the impact of the Arab Spring, the situation of Islamist women – the topic of this study – has taken quantum leaps since they started their work in the late 1970s. These leaps are visible on four levels:

1. On the level of activities: they expanded from exclusively preaching, religious education, and charitable work into the wider sphere of social, unionist, political and intellectual work, in addition to women's representation in the decision-making circles of their own movements.
2. On the level of spaces of activity: they are opening up to the public sphere and to new spaces different from those that Islamist women used to be concerned with (the home and the mosque). They are now present in the spaces of associations and dialogue (seminars, lectures, study days), sometimes in official political institutions (parliament), and in the street as a space of protest (demonstrations, pickets).
3. On the level of the social status of women leaders in these movements: it has shifted from the level of pupils, students, or housewives during the seventies and eighties up to the early nineties, to the level of high cadres with a distinguished social and economic standing (doctors, engineers, university professors).
4. On the level of their discourse: from being limited to religious admonition and women's family obligations, it has opened up to women's issues, affirming their rights and claiming their place in all areas of society. This discourse, generally, falls into the context of the renewal of Islamic thinking and tries to benefit from the mechanism of *ijtihad* in order to achieve advanced positions for women.

There is, undeniably, a strong dynamism with regard to women's work in Islamist movements. However, despite the fact that the movement's founding thought generally encourages the advancement of women and the promotion of their status, and although a number of respondents did not want to speak about internal conflicts, their statements indicate that traditional macho mentalities do exist among functionaries of the Islamist movements – including women. In some instances, as can be observed the presence of gender conflicts in all these movements; questions the sustainability of said dynamism. In this context, four possible scenarios could be outlined

1. This dynamism continues and the above-mentioned gender conflicts contribute to imposing female strategies and overcoming traditional thinking. This would push the movements to

become more open and more democratic internally. In this case, Islamist women would be a factor that drives their movements towards more democracy and modernity.

2. Internal divisions arise due to these conflicts. The women would establish independent women's organisations, similar to what happened in the mid-eighties in some leftist organisations; this resulted in the establishment of the Union of Women's Action (1987) and the Democratic Association of Women in Morocco (1985).
3. The traditional macho mentality prevails and all past achievements are undone.
4. The scenarios of undoing and independence occur simultaneously. Given the existence of macho mentalities with a large number of women, those who embrace an emancipated view of the female cause would start their own, independent structures. Women with traditional mentalities would stay in the organisation and this undoing of achievements would come about.

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