The War on Terrorism: Appropriation and Subversion by Moroccan Women

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The War on Terrorism: Appropriation and Subversion by Moroccan Women

In May 2003, a series of bombing attacks hit the city of Casablanca, killing forty-five people, including the twelve suicide bombers, and hitting five separate targets. The young men involved in the attack were identified as part of the radical group al-Salafiya al-Jihadiya, which up to that point was unknown to the general public. On-the-spot analysts and activists blamed social and economic deprivation for the bombing, after learning that the bombers were from the shantytown of Sidi Moumen and that the majority had very little education and no stable jobs. Links were assumed between this attack and Osama bin Laden’s broadcast videotape of February 2003 in which he warned Morocco, along with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, against providing any kind of help to the United States in its war in Iraq.

The war as a package and the war at home

The Casablanca attack brought into sharp relief some of the tensions of the monarchy, which had previously failed to openly ally itself with Washington because of the unpopularity of the U.S. narrative of fighting terrorism. After the Casablanca attack, however, the Moroccan parliament rushed to adopt an antiterrorist law, a Moroccan version of the USA PATRIOT Act. In a continuation of the monarchy’s open move to adopt the U.S. agenda for reforming the Middle East, the Moroccan government signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the United States in April 2004. That same year the government also volunteered to host the first round of the Forum for the Future, a revised version of the Greater Middle East Initiative, which was an all-encompassing vision for the democratization and modernization of the Middle East according to the Bush ad-

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1 For details about the attack, see Center for Policing Terrorism (2006).
2 For excerpts from the videotape, see CNN (2003).
3 For details about the FTA, see Arabic News (2004).
ministration’s standards. The Greater Middle East Initiative, presented by the United States to the Group of Eight (G8) members in April of 2004, was adopted by these members during their June summit at Sea Island, Georgia (Wittes 2004).

After the Casablanca attack, the war on terrorism came full circle in Morocco and has become a product for national consumption and control. With the Forum for the Future, the FTA, and the antiterrorist law, the Moroccan state has openly positioned itself against the forces of evil as defined by the Bush administration. As a package the war has been delivered with this prescription: adopt Forum for the Future–style democracy, neoliberal economics, and anti-Islamist moderation. These projects are interconnected. As an economic program neoliberalism needs the war on terrorism because it uses the mass bombing of civilian populations as an excuse for discipline and control through racial profiling and stigma and, as in Iraq, through triggering internal divisions. This mix does not work without tensions, however. While neoliberalism requires a small government and an active civil society, one that can replace the state in the social sectors, the war on terrorism needs a wide-ranging security apparatus and a docile civil society. Yet both the war on terrorism and its underlying neoliberal agenda come packaged in a security narrative that increases the defense apparatus of local governments while reducing the state to its disciplinary dimensions.

As far as Morocco is concerned, the war on terrorism came as a package. The discourse of the war is interwoven with a discourse celebrating neoliberalism and manipulating the themes of modernity and democracy. These themes have been articulated in different versions of the Greater Middle East Initiative and have been presented with a consensual facade in the Forum for the Future.

The Greater Middle East Initiative comprises economic, cultural, and political programs and provides financial aid to help countries implement them. It also requires normalization with the state of Israel through trade exchange and diplomatic relations, which by the same token marginalizes the Palestinian struggle for statehood. All of these projects are couched in a discourse of democratization, modernization, and civil society and are meant to manufacture consent for the controversial U.S. policy in the Middle East and to enhance the poor image of the United States, which has been confirmed by many polls and studies. Morocco is a central piece of this puzzle. The Moroccan government volunteered to host the aforementioned Forum for the Future in December 2004. This meeting was

4 See commentaries about the 2004 Pew Research Center’s opinion polls in the Middle East by Abdessalam Maghraoui (2004).
meant to rally civil society, government agents, businesses, and G8 foreign, economic, and other ministers from the Middle East and North Africa in a democratic show.

Morocco also signed the FTA with the United States despite sit-ins and protests against a negotiation process that was handled with secrecy from the time it was launched in January 2003. The country was congratulated by many representatives of the U.S. government for being a good friend and a strong ally of the United States in its war against terrorism. Morocco is also one of the destinations to which the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency has allegedly moved the interrogation of its detainees since the invasion of Afghanistan.

Women in the United States are not exposed to the agenda and effects of the war on terrorism the way women elsewhere are. Even within the vast geographical area known as the Middle East, North Africa, and South and Central Asia, women are located differently vis-à-vis this war and have a different exposure to it. For example, Afghan, Iraqi, Lebanese, and Palestinian women, who live in countries that fall directly within the framework of the U.S. definition of terrorist because they harbor groups considered by the United States to be terrorist groups, are subjected to military operations that require individual as well as collective strategies of survival. But the story of the war does not end there. It continues as a state-generated narrative that has, so far, justified specific policies and more or less discrete forms of policing, control, and discipline, while having severe effects on women’s ability to act and to resist acts of war.

Thus, understanding the gender dynamics of the war on terrorism requires examining this entire state of affairs. It entails shifting the lens away from the impact of the war on women and gender policies and focusing instead on women’s contributions in reshaping the discourse of the war and using it for political gains. The Moroccan women’s movement, represented by two major groups, namely, liberal feminists and pro-sharia Islamists, provides a good focus for an investigation of the war on terrorism as a culture, an economic rationality, and a technique of government. With Morocco first positioned at the margin of the war on terrorism and then immediately after the Casablanca attack becoming one of its centers, Moroccan women’s groups were compelled to strategically position themselves vis-à-vis the war agenda and to respond through specific organizations, programs, and discourses.

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5 The secrecy of these negotiations was challenged by sit-ins and demonstrations that were violently suppressed (see Bilaterals.org 2004a, 2004b).
A gender reform

Gender was central to the repositioning of the Moroccan state in this international context. A few months after the Casablanca attack, King Mohamed VI decided to honor two decades of feminist activism by reforming the sharia-based family law, or moudawana. Viewed by the international media as a revolution, this reform was in fact the culmination of more than two decades of activism by women’s groups, which have managed to work out their demands for gender equality within existing state institutions. By activism, I am referring to the actions of a broad and diverse body of women’s groups that have been using the UN conventions about women, notably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the liberal discourse of equality and individual rights to lobby the state for a reform of the sharia-based family law. These groups have been working mostly on gender mainstreaming, law reforms, and granting women access to the decision-making process. During the parliamentary elections of 2002, these groups increased women’s representation in the parliament to 10 percent, managed to open gender units in most ministries and state departments, and saw women represented in the government as ministers and secretaries of state. Some of the women who were appointed to political office were previously active in the feminist movement.

The other part of the story is told by Islamist women who came from within male-dominated Islamist movements and who have attempted to reform women’s status in society by rereading the Koran and the sunna (tradition based on the life of the Prophet). By the end of the 1990s these groups had started their own independent women’s organizations, having opened up multiple spaces for women’s education and interpretations of sharia for more than a decade. More radical in their approach to social change, Islamist women have striven to affect what they call the culture of denigration of women that they found to be widespread in society. They have been engaged in setting up grassroots organizations that have granted them a large and diverse social base of action and support. While feminist groups have been lobbying the state, Islamist women have striven to create a counterdiscourse to the feminist rhetoric of universal rights and gender equality by advancing Islamic alternatives. In contrast to the legalistic approach of law reform as a means to enhance women’s status, Islamist women wanted to respond to the culture of denigration of women through communication, mass education, and self-education.

Both the feminist and the Islamist women’s movements I refer to in this article now have to organize within the framework of the war in order to prevent worse outcomes. In the case of liberal feminists, the worst is
no less than a radicalization of the social body occasioned by the U.S. invasion of Iraq, a marginalization of women’s issues, and demands for a reform of family law. To the Islamists the worst would be the secularization of family law, knowing that this code is the only state law that directly derives from the Islamic sharia as interpreted by the Maleki fiqh (an Islamic school of jurisprudence followed in Morocco). And regardless of their differences, both feminists and Islamist women’s groups have had to articulate their demands in an environment where women’s issues were not a priority.

Nevertheless, as the Moroccan state strove to position itself as an ally of the United States in its war against terror, a new code of the family that recognized the equality of husband and wife before the law started to make sense to the monarchy. It was, in fact, through the reform of family law that the Moroccan monarchy truly recovered its image as a moderate regime, the Casablanca attack notwithstanding. The new family code was presented by the king in a broadcast speech to the parliament in October 2003. In a gesture to appease the Islamists, who had actively opposed the reform for two decades, the king introduced the new family code as a reform that was inspired by Islamic sharia. The new code is, in fact, closely built on liberal feminist proposals of women’s rights and the rhetoric of gender equality. It is worth stating, however, that these reforms in the family code responded to the ways in which feminist and Islamist women’s groups have managed to bring gender back to the center stage of the war on terrorism. In what follows, I propose an analysis of these two major groups’ appropriations of the war on terrorism as a narrative to pursue their competing agendas about women’s rights. This approach will complement feminist studies that have been dominated by cultural and political approaches with a sociological analysis of the way women’s groups have used the phenomenon of the war on terrorism to create more space for women’s intervention and voices. Nevertheless, by appropriating the war as a valid framework for speaking the language of democracy, modernity, and moderation, these groups have reproduced some of the war’s most oppressive aspects. Thus, women are not only resisting the war, they are also contributing to its hegemony while legitimating the policing of the social body and the disciplinary power of local governments.

In order to carry the debate on women’s agency beyond the scope of co-optation and resistance, I will ask a new set of questions: How did these two competing women’s movements participate in shaping the war’s narrative and its agenda? What was the effect of women’s voices on domestic gender policy? What are the spaces opened by women through their appropriation and subversion of the war’s narrative? My intention is
not to imply that the war is good or bad for women. Rather, I would like to shift the gaze from the binary of oppression/resistance to look at the various ways in which women have created new spaces through a selective appropriation of the war’s narrative and its main themes: democracy, modernity, and moderation. Since September 11, 2001, these three themes have been recurrent in the U.S. government’s plans for remodeling the Middle East. They are also powerful frameworks for the justification of local governments’ neoliberal policies and unpopular submission to the might of the U.S. empire.

The war on terrorism: A view from within

In the United States, support for an endless war needs a condition of sustained fear. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it, the war on terrorism is “zoomed down to a lawsuit [that of Zacarias Moussaoui] and zoomed up to face an abstraction” (2004, 82). François Debrix calls this state of fear and fascination of the American public with the meanings of terror “abjection,” that is, a search for meanings through fascination, acceptance, and rejection (2005, 1158). But if the war on terrorism needs abjection, embracing terror “needs a subtext” (1159). Debrix also explores the work of some U.S. intellectuals in legitimizing the warfare state. “Masters of the abject” or “masters of terror,” as he calls them, these “experts” are defined as men of “statecraft” who serve as “relays between public leadership in the media, government, and the military and the [American] public in general” (1159). These intellectuals have constructed the war within the following three paradigms: political realism (Blanchard 2003; Debrix 2005), the clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996), and orientalism (Said 1978).

Feminist writings about the war on terrorism emerged outside of the U.S. academy as an instantaneous reaction to the way the invasion of Afghanistan was marketed as a civilizing mission (Hawthorne and Winter 2003; Sharma 2003; Nnaemeka 2004). Only recently has U.S.-based feminist scholarship seriously identified the centrality of gender as a site for playing out this mission. Feminist studies of the war have been developed within two major paradigms. The first is concerned with the impact of military operations on gender relations and gender norms in the United States, and the second stresses women’s responses, agency, and transnational solidarities to resist the war.6 Both trends converge to identify the

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values of patriarchal domination and protection, as well as masculine fears and desires, as defining principles of the war on terrorism.

Despite this growing feminist interest in international conflict, U.S. scholarship has so far concentrated on the impact of the war on terrorism on women and gender norms domestically. The focus on domestic policy has, however, rendered invisible those women who are directly exposed to the war as a military intervention and as a discursive regime. The narrative of liberation, oppression, and lack of voice attributed to women in the Islamic context, by both U.S. corporate media and U.S. government agents, contributes to victimize Muslim women and deprive them of any form of agency or control over the war’s agenda and rhetoric. When women’s agency is highlighted, it is considered with regard to direct military intervention, leaving out an important aspect of the war on terrorism, that is, the war as a hegemonic discourse. Studies of women’s agency have also reduced agency to women’s strategies of survival, modalities of resistance, and solidarity movements to protest the war and counter its effects (Moghissi 2004; Zerai and Salime 2006). In all these cases, women’s actual participation in redefining the narrative of the war and shaping its all-encompassing agenda are missing.

The goal of this article is twofold: first, unpacking the war on terrorism by highlighting its economic and geopolitical grounds and, second, identifying the ways women have co-opted these agendas and narratives in order to pursue their long-standing demands for reforming women’s status in law, society, and religion. As a regime of truth and a discourse of power, the war on terrorism is not only disruptive, it is also productive. It has created new subjects, policies, and cultural sites of protest, and it has been an agent of manipulation, control, and legitimation. This article identifies some of these sites.

Engendering the war on terrorism: Cultural analyses

Feminist approaches to the war on terrorism are deeply influenced by the two fields of cultural studies and international relations. Cultural studies of the war have articulated poststructuralist analyses of discourse, postmodern definitions of power, and the postcolonial theory of orientalism. In these three conceptual frameworks, discourse is considered in a dialectical relation to power. Discourse is both constituted by and constitutive of structures of power/knowledge (Foucault 1980), identities (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), modes of governmentality (Lemke 2000), and regimes of truth (Foucault 1978). Power, Michel Foucault argues, is productive (Foucault 1980, 119, 1990); it produces subjects and desires,
institutions and techniques of control, and normalization but also sub-
version (Butler 2003). More important, power does not work through
coercion but rather through consent. Thus, Antonio Gramsci’s (1971)
concept of hegemony, which refers to domination through consent, is
also central to these analyses. Hegemony entails adherence to the dom-
inant narratives and ideology at the level of civil society. As Evelina Dag-
nino (1998) rightly argues, the concept of hegemony brings together
culture, material forces, and politics, which are conceived as interrelated
and embedded into structures of power. Edward Said’s (1978) work on
orientalism articulates these definitions. Rather than defining it as a field
of objective knowledge about the Orient, Said defines orientalism as a
discourse of power in which the Oriental or other is constructed through
texts, images, stereotypes, and representations about his or her incom-
mensurable nature. As a hegemonic field of knowledge, orientalism works
at the intersection of cultural (mis)representations and the political and
economic interests of the West. Hegemony is sought through maintaining
a set of binaries—civilized/barbarians, East/West, and modern/archaic—
to nourish and legitimate the colonial enterprise of the West and the
positional superiority of the white male. When the same binaries are ap-
propriated by the agents of what is widely known as al-Qaida, the use of
these binaries is called the clash of civilizations (Huntington 1996).

As a site for theoretical inquiry, the war on terrorism is relevant to
postcolonial feminist analyses. The war has been advertised through pow-
eful institutions such as the corporate media, privately funded think tanks
(Debrix 2005), and evangelical churches, as well as through more general
sources of cultural production that iterate specific images (Nader 1989)
of Western violence as liberation. This regime of truth has enabled the
renewal of post-9/11 traumatized masculine identities and their articu-
lation of essentialized cultural differences. But the symbols and represent-
tations released by the terror discourse are gendered. Women’s oppression
in Islam is illustrated through selective images of women executed under
the West-sponsored Taliban regime. Similarly, promises to integrate
women into the new Iraqi government and free them from sharia-bound
laws have set the illegal invasion of Iraq in moral terms. The theme of
modernity is also central to these constructions. The main assumption is
that Muslim women will be better off under an invasion represented as
bringing “modernity as a liberation” (Cloud 2004, 285) or, rather, “mo-
dernity as media and market” (294). Images of veiled women are deployed
to confirm the need for the white man’s protection and establish his
superiority on a renewed civilizing mission, fighting the archaic other to
liberate its women. Thus, if liberating Muslim women has been central
to the legitimation of this war, establishing justice has been central to creating tolerance for the most horrible forms of violence perpetrated against Muslim men. The savagery attributed to these men, themselves feminized through a public humiliation of the kind taking place in Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, are examples of the ways Muslim men are brought to their knees in this unwinnable war.

But as feminist approaches to international relations have already demonstrated (Enloe 1989, 2004), gender alone does not account for the complexity of national identities in times of war. Rather, it is the interplay of gender, race, nation, and religion that provides a deeper understanding of the issues at stake (Petchesky 2002; Abdo 2003; Akhter 2003). Gender, sexuality, and race contribute to a definition of citizenship and national identities as gendered and racially bound. Similarly, the war on terrorism is gendered, sexualized, and racialized through the ways in which the nations involved are represented. The flag syndrome that contaminated U.S. public space after 9/11 had the double effect of rejecting the notion of a feminized America and its penetration by outside forces and of appealing to the manliest men and women to recover the nation’s status as a masculine superpower. The detention camps at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo work the other way around. They enable those who order the horrors and those who excel in performing them to recover their traumatized masculinities by watching Muslim men on their knees and seeing Muslim men forced into female sexual positions. Though one can resist the thought that Lynndie England, the woman soldier who, with an apparent look of exaltation, posed next to her victims in Abu Ghraib, was animated by the desire to take revenge for millions of oppressed Muslim sisters, as Yasmin Jiwani puts it, as a “discursive regime” (2004, 266), the war on terrorism is founded on “the rescue motif” (271) in which colonization is justified through the motive of saving women. In the United States, the war on terrorism triggers the norms of masculine domination and white male protection, while women are assigned a subordinate position of dependence and obedience (Blanchard 2003, 1294; Young 2003, 2).

In order to understand masculinities at war, Cynthia Enloe (2004, 123) invites us to ask the question, “Are any of the key actors engaging in a violent conflict motivated in part by a desire to appear ‘manly’ in the eyes of their own principal allies or adversaries?” But while Enloe stresses the logics of masculine domination and masculinist power, Eric M. Blanchard (2003) and Iris Marion Young (2003) suggest instead that the logic of masculine protection functions as a strong anchor for the current U.S.
Gender in international relations

The second set of approaches to the war on terror is influenced by feminist scholarship in international relations. Reflecting on the war on terrorism requires opening this field to a gender analysis of this war as a military intervention, a global population policy, and a new site for the repositioning of local actors on the global scene. It also entails exposing the work of gender and power in world politics. Maria Mies (1986) and Enloe (1989) see power as entrenched in the construction of masculinity and femininity and as sustained by the need to maintain women’s subordination through a daily exercise of power at all levels—local, national, and international. A gender lens on world politics necessitates taking into account global processes and the way they engage women and gender (Peterson and Runyan 1999).

This means, in Blanchard’s terms, the “recovery of women’s experiences, the recognition of gender-based exclusion from decision-making roles, and the investigation of women’s invisibility in international theory” (2003, 1290). Blanchard argues that feminist studies have, on the one hand, subverted the supposed “irrelevance of women” in international politics and questioned “the extent to which women are secured by state ‘protection’ in times of war and peace” (1290). On the other hand, feminist international relations studies have contested “discourses wherein women are linked unreflectively with peace” and assumptions that “gendered security practices address only women” (1290). Blanchard also questions the dominance of political realism, considering it “a patriarchal discourse” that is closely tied to a definition of security and politics as the realm of “elite, white, male practitioners” (1292).

But feminist analyses of international conflicts have tended to concentrate on the effects of wars on the militarization of women’s lives and the
shrinking of social programs and public spaces available to them. Few studies have looked at the war on terrorism as a population policy, and feminist inquiry has yet to uncover the war’s effects on increasing internal conflicts and on gender relations in places directly exposed to war and stigmatized by the definition of terrorism, notably, Iraq and Afghanistan or, for a longer period, Palestine. Farida Akhter, referring to Samuel Huntington’s worries about the increase in the Muslim population worldwide, defines this war as essentially “a population policy,” a “war policy” to terminate the people’s considered enemies (Akhter 2003, 328). Put differently, the war on terrorism is based on a Malthusian take on international relations that aims, according to Akhter, to control and dominate the Islamic world. But if one agrees that the war images are predominantly masculine, it is also widely accepted that 90 percent of all war-related casualties are civilians and that the majority of these are women and children (Nordstrom 1995). As a population policy, the U.S. war in Iraq has caused increased losses of civilian lives, destroyed the civilian infrastructure, and triggered internal divisions that have taken the country to the edge of a long-term civil war.

Once defined as a population policy and a biopower, the war on terrorism finds parallels in other fields such as medicine and bioethics. Barbara Ann Strassberg (2004) looks at the social and cultural construction of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and terrorism in the United States. She links these discourses to processes of transformations in “the interpretation of human sexuality, gender identities, and gender roles within [a] culture of violence” (436). Strassberg calls this transformation “a death spasm of the dominant position of the rugged white Christian heterosexual American male” (436). Both HIV/AIDS and terror are defined, Strassberg argues, within the metaphors of extinction and survival and are mentioned by many sources and with increasing frequency, leading to what she calls an “epidemic of signification” (456). This so-called epidemic is grounded in “metaphors of extinction of the Western world” by “unidentified non-Western agents” (456–57). In both HIV/AIDS and terrorism, the values of the white Christian heterosexual man acquire positional superiority.

Whether the focus is on international relations or global gender issues, feminist studies converge to show that the values of masculine superiority and domination are underlying rationales of both state and nonstate violent conflicts and wars. Enloe paraphrases the U.S. military expansion and “militarized US culture” (2004, 146) in terms of “masculinity as a
foreign policy issue” (122) and “macho” policies (126). She argues that the U.S. government has, since the Cold War, strengthened the privileged positions of men in decision making, both in the United States and in the international arena (127). One main idea to retain here is Enloe’s claim that the events of 9/11 may be militarizing non-U.S. women’s lives, since it was only after 9/11 that the violation of Afghan women’s human rights took center stage (147). Jiwani (2004) highlights another dimension of gender in international relations. She claims that the gendering of terror is apparent in the targeting of women as victims of retaliation by means of rape, for example, in the West and the East. She adds that “while patriarchal powers compete for social, cultural, and economic resources, it is women and children who suffer the ensuing of terror” (288).

The challenge for feminist analyses of the war on terrorism relates to its reduction to cultural struggles. The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan have relied on cultural manipulations, yet they have been motivated at least in part by the urgency to control the natural resources of Central Asia and the Middle East. Both were on the agenda prior to 9/11. The war on terrorism is a technique of power to ensure the hegemony of neoliberal globalization as a promising model for global disparity. James Ferguson (2006) has rightly argued that it is in the shadow zones, in the zones of crises, that the real story of globalization is told. It is in the zones of chaos that capital flourishes, through black market arms trades, part-time jobs, and reconstruction efforts. As I stated earlier, the war on terrorism came as a package. Thus, to look at the war through multiple lenses enables us to enlarge the sphere of feminist inquiry and analysis to the political economy of the war and its geopolitical strategy, notably the marginalization of the Palestinian cause and the supremacy of Israel as the sole military power in the region.

Furthermore, considering how women are articulating these phenomena in their discourses and organizations enables us to tackle differently the question of women’s agency in the obviously male-dominated realms of international relations and of political and religious representation in the Middle East. This requires locating the analysis at the interplay among domestic gender struggles, the hegemonic neoliberal agenda, and U.S. imperialist ambition in the region. It also entails deconstructing the binaries assumed between the feminine local and the masculine global (Freeman 2001) by showing how local women are in fact shaping these global processes and discourses. Furthermore, by locating this approach at the interplay of feminism, Islam, and the war on terrorism as a package, my purpose is to show that the local and the global are mutually constitutive.
Restating feminism and the “clash of civilizations”

It was interesting to me to hear Moroccans espousing local versions of Huntington’s concept of the clash of civilizations when I talked to leaders of liberal feminist organizations in Morocco. To most of my respondents, the Casablanca attack of May 2003 was the expression of two clashing worldviews, a modernist one represented by liberal feminists and an archaic one promoted by the Islamists. There is, then, a similarity in the way feminist groups perceive the Islamists as a bloc of evil and the way Islamists are represented in the government’s discourse, notably through its socialist press. These forces converged to discredit their major political opponents, the Islamists of the party al-Adala w-al-Tanmia (justice and development), who were held responsible for blocking the progress of Morocco through opposing the reform of family law, *moudawana*, and found guilty of disseminating a discourse of hatred of the other. Empowered by the Casablanca attack, liberal feminists started urging the state to adopt with no further delays their project of reform of the *moudawana*. Not only did some leaders of these groups become more assertive about their feminism, but they also managed to define feminism as the fence against religious extremism and the best warrant, if espoused by the state, for blocking the progress of extremist discourse in the mosque and the parliament. Thus, it made sense for these groups to push for a more interventionist state that would protect civil liberties and secular institutions. The Casablanca attack enabled feminist groups to articulate feminism as a new project for transforming Moroccan society along more secular lines. To them, modernity entails the birth of a feminist, anti-Islamist state. As a term, *feminism* is then openly adopted and redefined beyond the scope of a family law reform. The sociologist and president of the Moroccan Association for Women’s Rights (Association Marocaine pour les Droits des Femmes; AMDF), Najat Razi, is now open about her feminism. She said, “I used to have a lot of problems with the term feminism and always shied away from calling myself a feminist. I am no longer concerned with the controversy. Yes, I am a feminist, and as a feminist I oppose the injustices based on sexual differences of men and women. To me feminism is an identity and a world vision that enables a progressive political program. Feminism is a modernist, progressive movement that carries a great potential for a true democratic change.”

After the Casablanca attack, their opposition to the war on Iraq not-
withstanding, feminist groups adopted the rhetoric of the war on terrorism but only to redefine its terms and conditions. Najia Zirari, a founder of the network Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc; ADFM), claimed that “espousing the values of ‘democracy’ and ‘modernity’ is the only path for any country to prevent an American military intervention and preserve its territorial sovereignty.” More naively, Zirari maintained that “eliminating the motives for an American military intervention definitely depends on the state’s handling of ‘religious extremism’ on the one hand, and its enhancement of women’s rights on the other.” In a co-optation of the state’s discourse of the urgency of democratic reforms, my respondents contended that the state’s encouragement of the feminists as democratic players would undermine the advances of religious extremism. Feminism is then both endowed with a normative value and marketed as the strongest ally of the state. The irony is that by defining feminism as an ally of the state, these groups risk becoming feminists of the state. There are also unresolved tensions among feminist activism, discourses of democracy and individual rights, and these activists’ call for the eradication of the Islamist component from the political spectrum. And there are tensions between their claim for more political freedoms and their desire to see a more interventionist state that cracks down on those perceived as fundamentalists.

To these activists there is no such a thing as two women’s movements in Morocco, one Islamist and one feminist. Zirari, the secretary general of the ADFM in Casablanca, defined the women’s movement as “one that prioritizes the cause of women, fights for equality, and recognizes the international norms and conventions about women.” She continued that the feminist movement “carries the hopes and aspirations of women for a better world, for fair access to resources, and for equality before the law.” Leila Rhiwi, the president of the ADFM section in Rabat, described the feminist movement as “modernist in its approach, democratic in its goals.” Another activist, Fatema Maghnawi, a founding member of the Union for Women’s Action (Union de l’Action Feminine; UAF), argued that “Islamist women cannot be and are not part of the women’s movement.” Khadija Rougani from the FAMA Center for the Advocacy of Women’s Rights explained to me why Islamist women cannot be considered part of the women’s movement. She claimed that “their project is different; because they do not work for the cause of women [qadiat al-mar’a] but for the cause of the Islamic state, and women are secondary in this project.” In the best-case scenario, the differences between the

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10 Personal interview with Zirari, Casablanca, June 2003.
Islamists and the feminists are expressed by Razi, a self-declared secular feminist from AMDF: “We are a civic force; the Islamists are a political force.”

To demarcate themselves as a civic force, feminist groups strove to respond to the Casablanca attack through new structures emphasizing their distinguished societal project. The Modernity/Democracy Network is a large concentration of activists and intellectuals united in their struggle against the antidemocratic practices of the Moroccan state as well as against the Islamists’ societal project. Feminist groups played a leading role in this network. My own participation in some of the meetings of this large group, in summer 2003, was critical to my understanding of the tensions brought to light by the Casablanca attack. The two-page mission statement published in the network’s memorandum captures some of these tensions. The introduction states: “We, the persons signing this memorandum, state our adherence to the values of the enlightenment and modernity. We believe that democracy should be founded on respect of individual freedoms, the right to difference, and the values of solidarity, equality, and tolerance. We believe that this will grant Morocco’s full membership in the contemporary human civilization. We are convinced that these universals are a common heritage to humankind. We are also confident that multiple sources of inspiration from our culture have a lot to contribute toward the advancement of these universals.”

The Modernity/Democracy Network was formed after many attempts by feminist groups to attract the state’s attention to the violations of human rights that were taking place in marginal suburbs, as well as in the streets of big cities, in the name of religion. As women’s rights advocates, the feminists were particularly subject to defamation during religious sermons and through audiotapes sold in the streets by unemployed young men. In response, feminist groups have created specific structures to document these violations. For instance, the Observatory for Women’s Rights was created by the Ligue Democratique pour les Droits des Femmes (Democratic League for Women’s Rights) after the huge Islamist march of 2000 opposing the feminist project for reform of family law. This center has been holding an Islamist Watch in order to document hate speech.

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11 Quotations in this paragraph are taken from the following personal interviews: Zirari, Casablanca, June 2003; Rhiwi, Rabat, June and July 2003; Maghnaoui, Rabat, July 2003; Rougani, Casablanca, July 2003; Razi, Casablanca, July 2003.

12 This is a two-page statement that was circulated during the June 2003 meeting of the Modernity/Democracy Network in the offices of the ADFM in Rabat. The network called this statement the Memorandum. This document is available at the ADFM office in Rabat.
and acts of violence committed against persons found guilty of nonob-
servance of Islamic morals, as defined by some Islamist radicals. It also
provides legal assistance to women, helping them bring their cases before
the law. It hosts a library and compiles data on violations of individual
freedoms of both men and women.

As Bouchra Abdou, an activist in this center, confirmed, various cases
of violence were reported by young women assaulted on the street for
nonobservance of the hijab (wearing of the head scarf). These assaults
were more common in poor suburbs where some radical groups were, in
the absence of any effective presence of the state, in charge of setting the
rules, taxes, and modes of punishments that these radicals dubbed Islamic.
In this context, many working-class women were compelled to wear the
hijab in order to become invisible. That the feminists saw the need for a
more interventionist state makes a lot of sense in this context. But it was
the Casablanca attack that brought the feminists’ frustrations with the state
to the fore. It also provided them with the opportunity to rearticulate their
demands for a reform of family law that would impede the progress of
Islamic radicalism by granting full citizenship and equal rights to women.

Islamism redefined
Islamist women, however, had to carefully articulate their identity politics
in a very hostile environment. Leading activists in the movements of Uni-
fication and Reform (al-Islah w-al-Tawhid) and Justice and Spirituality
(al-Adl w-al-Ihsane), such as Nadia Yassin, Khadija Mufid, and Bassima
al-Haqavi, expressed their concern about the disastrous effects of the
Casablanca attack on the Islamist movement during our private meeting.
In fact, the immediate reaction of the Islamists was to adopt a low profile.
Noteworthy also was the way in which women’s voices almost disappeared
from the Islamist press. The waves of arrests, intimidation of Islamist
groups, and systematic calls to close down their organizations from the
socialist majority in the government were partly responsible for the fading
of Islamist women’s voices from the press. There was also a paternalist
and protectionist reaction on the part of male Islamist leaders during
periods of crisis that is very familiar to the female membership of the
Islamist groups. In fact, one can speak of a web of families constituting
the Islamist organizations: husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, and
the younger generation of children. Thus, the patriarchy, or rather neo-
patriarchy (Sharabi 1988), characteristic of these groups is always at work
and is more pronounced during periods of crisis. With the exception of
a few women such as Yassin from al-Adl w-al-Ihsane, who gave several
interviews to the press, or Fouzia Hajbi from the party al-Adala w-al-Tanmia, who maintained her column in the weekly newspaper *al-Asr*, Islamist women did not comment on the attack in the press. The views about the attack that I will outline in the following text are based on personal interviews with the leadership of these two movements.¹³

Both feminist and Islamist women articulated their response to the Casablanca attack by targeting the state and activating a feminist agenda. Both attempted to position themselves as the appropriate agents in this crisis. While feminist groups appropriated the discourse of modernity and democracy to lobby the state and push for a reform of family law, Islamist women directed their efforts to articulate a more radical demand. They wanted to be admitted to positions of religious leadership and to be recognized for their ability to lecture in state-controlled mosques. This also entailed redefining political Islam as it pertains to women and their role as mothers. For example, my respondents defined motherhood according to the Koranic concept of the *wassat*. This term characterizes Muslims as the people of the middle way, which means that they occupy both a median location and a moderate position. The term *wassat* enables Islamist women to steer clear of the politics of radicalism and articulate new identities around an imagined motherhood, this time linked to women’s roles as mediators. By claiming the *wassat* as a location, Islamist women appropriated one major discursive theme of the war on terrorism, that of moderation that gave them more space to maneuver.

The narrative of moderation is used by the U.S. government to describe the friendly regimes of the Middle East, such as the Jordanian and the Moroccan monarchies, as moderate states. This term is equally central to the Bush administration’s plans for integrating moderate Islamist groups into the political field in the Middle East. After the Casablanca attack, the term *moderation* was manipulated by the Moroccan government to justify reforming the religious field and controlling the discourse of the mosque. Hence, Islamist women’s appropriation of this term provided them with negotiating power, first, within their male-dominated movements and, second, in their dealings with the Moroccan state. The discourse of moderation became their entry point to initiate this process of reform, which acquired urgency for the United States after 9/11 and for the Moroccan government after the Casablanca attack. It was then, through defining

¹³ These interviews took place in the cities of Casablanca, Rabat, Fez, Meknes, and Tangiers in two consecutive summers. I first met with these activists in the months of June, July, and August of 2003 and conducted additional interviews with some of them, including Mufid and Suad al-Amari, in June of 2004.
motherhood and womanhood as the embodiment of moderation and as sites for enacting a politics of mediation, that Islamist women positioned themselves within the war rhetoric.

Womanhood is defined by this leadership as a set of natural qualities and psychological dispositions that are specific to women, preparing them for their roles as mothers. If womanhood is viewed in essentialized terms, motherhood is defined by Suad al-Amari, an active member in the Unification and Reform movement, as a social location, an “intersecting site,” a waswat. According to this activist, motherhood is “the point where the social and the individual meet and overlap.” As she explained to me during our meeting in June 2003 in Casablanca, motherhood enables women to develop skills and qualities that promote better understanding of interpersonal relations and social connections. “Women carry life, give and maintain life”; this is why they are “predisposed to protect life,” contended Ghislane al-Bahrani, the president of the women’s section of al-Adl w-al-Ihsane. Thus women are conflict managers, peacemakers, and moderators. In a more radical stand, Yassin, the spokesperson for al-Adl w-al-Ihsane, claimed that “motherhood does not have to be connected to maternity and procreation.” She defined motherhood as “the factor of humanization of the social.” It is obvious that these narratives are meant not only to state these activists’ distance from Islamist radicalism but also to mark the specific location of women within political Islam and to show the privileged position of women as mediators in times of heightened social crises.

These meanings attributed to motherhood and womanhood are not constructed with reference to a certain feminist theory, at least not consciously, but are rather the outcome of women’s interpretations and readings of the Islamic sources of the Koran and sunna as well as the history of Islam. It makes sense then, that Islamist women’s call for more space to maneuver would find a large echo in an environment in which the state is looking for these moderate voices to articulate a different message from within Islam. As moderate voices, women and mothers can educate the masses in the true spirit of Islam. Thus, without shying away from their Islamic identities, Islamist women activated their long-standing demand to obtain official recognition from the state as full players on the religious and political scene. It is access to the religious leadership and the podium of da’wa (public preaching) to which these activists sought claim. Previously this demand was directed inward, to the male-dominated Islamist movement; it was now directed to the state. Islamist women’s discourse of moderation as connected to motherhood is creating its own hegemonic space within the Islamist male-dominated organizations and movements. The Casablanca attack did not change the grounding of this discourse in
this emerging culture of gratification of womanhood and celebration of political motherhood. Rather, it provided Islamist women with the opportunity to find an echo to their long-standing demands for access to the mosque and for official recognition of their roles as dai'yat (preachers).

The fragmentation and hybridization of the religious field that resulted from the emergence of the Islamist movements through independent preaching and private mosques opened tremendous opportunities for women’s entrance into the field. During the 1990s women started opening spaces for discussion and learning in neighborhood mosques, but they were faced with many restrictions because of the state surveillance and co-optation of Islamist discourse and groups. Some of these leaders, such as Naima Benyaich, started taking concrete steps by writing to the Ministry of Islamic Affairs expressing the need for time and space devoted to women’s lectures in mosques. In fact, Benyaich, who was one of the first women to pass an exam in Islamic sharia from outside the field of Islamic studies, paved the way for a movement by Islamist women “to take the mosques back,” to borrow Yassin’s phrasing. In November 2003 Rajaa Naji Mekkaoui, a university professor of law, became the first woman to deliver a religious sermon in the presence of Moroccan royalty. Her sermon opened a series of conferences organized by the palace to commemorate the holy month of Ramadan. Yet Mekkaoui’s religious sermon was only the first step toward recognizing women’s expertise in religion. A second and more important step was reached when, in an unprecedented move, the king appointed thirty women to the councils of ulema (religious scholars) in May 2004. Among them was Fatouma Kabbaj, who was appointed to the state-controlled supreme council of ulema.

Launched by pioneers like Yassin and Benyaich, this movement by Islamist women to take back Islam found its perfect raison d’être after the Casablanca attack. Not only was this large group of women who were self-educated in the Islamic sciences assigned space and time to preach in mosques but also, in a sign of recognition of women’s political impact, the state opened schools to train new groups for the sake of the spiritual security of the Moroccan people. The state also coined the term of morshidate, spiritual guides, to define the task of this young generation of women who would carry the burden of moderating the tone of political Islam. A first cohort of fifty women received their degrees in May 2006. As religious leaders, women are now in charge of changing the masculine culture of the mosque and providing a feminine alternative to the radical tone of some imams. Whether we consider this intervention by the state to be a co-optation of women’s politics or a smart move in the right
direction, the gains made by women were not given by the state but are rather the culmination of two decades of women’s readings of the Islamic sources and activism to revise the Islamic sharia and reform the Islamist movements.

The war on terrorism and the gender field

The women’s movement has been a major factor in the identification of the centrality of gender in processes of state formation and transformation. Valentine Moghadam (2000) argues that women may become the sign or marker of political goals and of cultural identity not only during processes of revolution and state building but also when power is being contested or reproduced. She states that “representations about women assume political significance, and certain images of women define and demarcate political groups, cultural projects, or ethnic communities” (44). Expanding Moghadam’s argument, I see gender as a marker of political shifts at the level of the state and as a site for the positioning of local actors within the context of the war on terrorism. For instance, the reform of family law, resisted by the state for two decades, was implemented only a few months after the Casablanca attack to mark the country’s open engagement in this global war and to paint the monarchy as moderate and democratic. Consequently, there was no need to implement radical changes to the structure of political and economic power in which the king remains the central player. Defined within the binaries of modernity/archaism and progress/stagnation, the agenda of the war has also buttressed the Moroccan state’s ability to use gender to position itself as a modern player on the international scene.

Feminist studies stress the fact that some political transformations may increase the political space available to women’s organizations while still actively repressing other sectors of civil society (Alvarez 1990, 262; Jelin 1998). Thus, the case of Moroccan women’s groups is not merely a success story of how women have subverted the discourse and agenda of the war on terrorism, it is also the story of how they have made this agenda hegemonic. It is true that women’s manipulation of the war’s narrative has enabled them to carve out new spaces of empowerment and access points (Noonan 1997) to the state. This entailed new definitions of feminism and Islamism as well as a repositioning of women vis-à-vis the neoliberal state agenda for reforms. As I have shown earlier, women on both the feminist and Islamist sides have used the war to support their own politics and affect the opportunities available to their opponents.

Despite their different approaches to social change—a legal reform for
liberal feminists and hegemony in civil society for the Islamists—both have responded by adopting the war policy of the state as a valid framework for action. Both have positioned themselves as the appropriate agents for the era of fighting terrorism. Yet, as I argue above, by accepting the framework of the war and speaking its language, both groups, with notable differences, have contributed to making the war hegemonic.

In addition, the state manipulation of the liberal rhetoric of gender equality has decreased the spaces for independent organizing by feminist and Islamist women’s groups alike. In addition to co-opting both movements, the state is now able to monitor the discourse and activism of these groups while acting as a neutral mediator. The neoliberal state intervention to facilitate women’s access to religious representation and grant them more rights in the family has also enabled the monarchy to regain negotiating power and create local allies among both forms of the women’s movement. But since the war is constructed on modernist binaries, the state’s intervention to reform family law has definitely increased rather than decreased internal divisions and tensions between the Islamist and feminist movements in Morocco.

Thus, feminists are right to argue for the importance of using a gendered lens when looking at international relations. As far as North Africa and the Middle East are concerned, a promising area of inquiry is yet to emerge in analyses of the war on terrorism, particularly with respect to the state’s appropriation of a gendered rhetoric as a means to speak the language of the war, an appropriation that inadvertently triggered local dissent. A feminist analysis of these dynamics will complete the cultural studies of the war on terrorism with a reflection that takes into account gender as a site for the enactment of change.

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