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Take a Seat: A Critical Analysis of the Evolving Role of Women in Morocco's Parliamentary Parties

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Take a Seat: A Critical Analysis of the Evolving Role of Women in Morocco's Parliamentary
Parties

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ABSTRACT

As is the case in many countries, Morocco's legislative body is largely male-dominated in terms of both representation and political influence. Despite the adoption of gender and youth quotas within Parliament, female politicians are frequently disadvantaged by discriminatory perceptions of the capabilities and roles of women in public life. Political women face obstacles during campaigns, elections, and in office unparalleled by the challenges facing men. Even in the face of adversity, however, many women have achieved and maintained remarkable political success and influence. Today, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, and individuals are becoming increasingly involved in the process of evolving the culture and structure of Morocco's political system so as to incorporate female politicians to a greater extent. This paper, by means of an extensive review of literature accompanied by interviews with politicians, scholars, and representatives from NGOs, aims to describe and analyze the difficulties associated with being a Moroccan woman involved in politics, as well as offer insights into potential solutions to the issue of gender inequality in political parties and in Parliament.

Key words: political science, gender studies

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INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality within governing and legislative bodies, both local and national, is not an issue specific to Morocco. Within the vast majority of countries throughout the world, women are underrepresented in national governments. Of the countries that have achieved gender equality in national governing bodies, most have done so only with the help of gender quotas. It is crucial to attain gender-proportional representation in order for female constituents to have their voices and opinions appropriately understood and addressed. This representation is also important because it allows girls and young women to grow up with female role models in politics, and helps combat the popular notion that the political realm is a strictly male space. Finally, as I discuss in further detail in my analysis, women in politics are often more trusted than their male counterparts, as well as less likely to engage in corrupt practices, and more likely to advance socially just agendas.

The purpose of my research is to answer the question: what challenges are specific to women both within the Moroccan Parliament as a whole, and within the country's various political parties? I look at the ways in which women are systematically excluded from Morocco's political scene, the effectiveness of gender- and age-specific quotas in alleviating this problem, as well as other contemporary efforts to amend the issue of gender inequality in Parliament and in Parliamentary parties. I begin with a review of literature in which I discuss and compare the varying insights of several scholars, journalists, and politicians regarding the important issue of gender in politics. I then move into a critical analysis of the interviews I conducted by first explaining my prior assumptions and the methodology I utilized for ethical, efficient data collection. By looking at the issue from a vast variety of perspectives, both written and oral, I

aim to paint a holistic picture of the challenges facing women in Morocco's complex political, and specifically legislative, context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Morocco's various, multi-faceted women's movements have evolved and progressed over the last half-century, and have made many significant strides towards gender equality. In a 2015 progress report by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) regarding women's political voice in Morocco, authors Clare Castillejo and Helen Tilley identify several legal reforms that have contributed to the advancement of women's rights in the past three decades.¹ Among these are Morocco's 1993 ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, the revision of the 2003 Labour Code, reform of the *Moudawana* Family Code in 2004, the adoption of a new Constitution in 2011 which calls for equal opportunities between men and women, and amendments to national penal codes in 2014.² There is evidence to suggest that these recent developments, in addition to granting women rights and protections in public and private life, have also translated to increased political participation and inclusion for women. For example, Morocco's Parliament adopted a gendered quota system in both the House of Representatives and the House of Counsellors, which reserves 60 nationally elected Parliamentary seats for women.³ Even in light of these positive and significant advancements for Moroccan women, however, many politicians, political scientists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and journalists have additional insights and recommendations regarding the current and future inclusion of women in government.

¹ (p. 13-14)

² (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015, p. 13-14)

³ (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015, p. 12)

Morocco's Legislative Structure

One commonly identified challenge to achieving and preserving female political leadership is the structure of Morocco's political system. Morocco is a constitutional monarchy, and as such the King shares power with the head of government, or Prime Minister.⁴ The government contains a democratic Parliament and adheres to the doctrine of separation of powers. However, within Parliament, no party is permitted to secure a majority of the seats, and thus the country operates under a coalition government at all times. Currently, this coalition is made up of six parties, led by the Party for Justice and Development, or the PJD.⁵ Several sources discuss the idea that the multiplicity of parties in Morocco hinders party loyalty by allowing politicians to more easily cross party lines between elections. As a result, many members of Parliament care little for their party's causes, but care instead about achieving electoral success and gaining political clout.⁶ It is therefore important to consider the true autonomy and capacities of Moroccan political parties before discussing the roles that women play within them in order to gain a better understanding of the significance of gender equality within Parliament.

Mohamed Daadaoui, in his article "Rituals of Power and Political Parties in Morocco," writes that the parties frequently lack "ideological and political clarity," and are often indistinguishable from one another in terms of agenda and commitment to reform.⁷ He describes how this ambiguity detracts from the democratic legitimacy of parties because it means that lower party members have little to no chance of impacting the platforms or policies of the

⁴ (Castillejo & Tilley, 2015, p. 7)

⁵ (Al Jazeera, 2017)

⁶ (Bojji, 2017)

⁷ (2010, p. 200)

parties.⁸ Because women rarely occupy positions of leadership in parties, and serve only as Parliamentarians if they are included in the party at all, the imprecision of party stances prevents women from being able to hold significant sway over the policies that their parties propose and support.

The abundance of parties also has implications for female voting and election patterns. Rabea Naciri describes the correlation between electoral trends and party fragmentation, using the example of the 1993 general election.⁹ Because female candidates were dispersed randomly among a wide variety of parties in this particular election, female voters fragmented their support and aligned according to petty party loyalties, rather than gathering in support of causes important to women more generally. Women ended up competing with one another rather than allying in support of female politicians. As Naciri concludes, “This scenario is likely to be repeated unless women attach greater importance to gender priorities than to partisan loyalties.”¹⁰ Now, twenty years after Naciri wrote this article, many political scientists and scholars still express concerns about the impacts that Morocco’s vast multiplicity of parties may have on voting behavior and election outcomes. A 2012 report from the National Democratic Institute based on qualitative research gathered in Morocco confirms that the fragmentation and ideological ambiguities which inevitably accompany a legislative structure in which no party can hold a majority lead to constituent apathy and a general lack of political clarity.¹¹ This in turn detracts from the democratic legitimacy of the context in which Moroccan women are striving for equal representation.

⁸ (Daadaoui 2010, p. 201)

⁹ (1998, p. 22)

¹⁰ (1998, p. 22)

¹¹ (2012, p. 17)

Party Structure

In addition to a political system that makes it difficult for women to rise to and retain positions in which they hold real authority, the structure and operations within parties themselves present other barriers for women. Structures which may seem to be democratic from the outside are often less so internally, as several authors explain. For example, the pervasiveness of nepotism represents a major challenge for women attempting to enter politics from outside Parliament's inner circles. The 2015 ODI progress report describes that while some women have genuine political interests and agendas, others are included on party lists only to serve nepotistic interests or as a reward for a favor done for their party.¹²

Beyond the nepotism deeply ingrained in party operations, there is also the issue of parties answering to regional coordinators before other, more central officials. In a Binda Consulting report, Siham Bojji¹³ explains the contradiction of parties' commitment to democratic practices in light of the current structure of most parties, in which even senior-level officials must first consult with these coordinators before making policy or internal decisions. This structure is important to note in the struggle for gender equality within parties because these regional coordinators are responsible for selecting candidates, delegating responsibilities locally, and recruiting new members. However, the coordinators have a reputation for being corrupt, negotiating deals to gain votes and political wealth, and for being difficult to replace even as other leadership positions within the party change hands.¹⁴ Therefore, the coordinators represent a significant hindrance to more centralized efforts to provide greater opportunities to women within political parties.

¹² (p. 35)

¹³ (2017)

¹⁴ (Bojji, 2017)

Beyond concerns about the structure of the government and political parties, there is also the question of the extent to which political parties wield true power within the state. Daadaoui,¹⁵ among other scholars, explains that the Parliament holds very little political sway when compared to the authority of the monarchy. He presents a grim picture of the Moroccan political landscape, citing disjointed parties, monarchical coercion, corrupt electoral processes, and widespread societal apathy and distrust of government as challenges to attaining democratic legitimacy.¹⁶ Daadaoui wrote this particular article on the corruptions and deceptions of Moroccan power structures in 2010, just prior to the 2011 Constitutional reforms. However, in a 2017 opinion piece for Al Jazeera, he expressed sentiments similar to his 2010 article, suggesting that few strides have since been made toward deconstructing the supreme authority of the royal regime. He laments the continued submission of political parties to the monarch, which “has for decades fostered a patronage system inimical to transparency and accountability.”¹⁷ These many challenges to Parliament’s democratic legitimacy and authority undermine the efforts of women to procure political sway, on both a collective and individual level.

Politics as a Male Space

Women’s movements often have difficulties translating their demands into political policy proposals because of the gendered nature of the political realm, and the stigmatization of leadership positions. As Naciri explained in her 1998 paper, the political realm is often viewed as a strictly masculine space, in which women’s issues are viewed as fringe activity rather than political.¹⁸ This has changed somewhat since the time of her writing, but not nearly as much as

¹⁵ (2010)

¹⁶ (Daadaoui 2010, p. 196)

¹⁷ (Daadaoui 2017)

¹⁸ (p. 22)

women's movements would have hoped. As Nadia Guessous writes in her article on gender and politics in the new Moroccan government, women are frequently and intentionally excluded from government affairs.¹⁹ She cites a statement to the press from Bassima el-Hakkawi, who was the only woman appointed to the new government following the 2011 reforms. El-Hakkawi expresses frustration at the difficulties women face when attempting to rise to positions of leadership. As she explains, "One looks for reasons not to appoint a woman while one does not look for reasons when it comes to men."²⁰ El-Hakkawi received criticism from both within and outside of the government after her appointment as the Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family, and Social Development, as many challenged her fitness for office and her true intentions. Her morality, political positions, and character were closely critiqued and widely questioned.²¹ Many women face similar problems in Moroccan government, finding that they have to prove they are fit for office, whereas men have to prove they are not.

Discriminatory assumptions about women's intentions and fitness for office are often the result of attempts to preserve traditional patriarchal gender roles and stereotypes. "Naturalist" discourses are just one example of a method of excluding women from politics. This argument states that women are naturally too virtuous and gentle, which prevents them from being legitimate candidates in electoral races.²² In addition to harmful and inaccurate conjectures about the biological nature of women, there is also the issue of deeply ingrained perceptions of the woman's "place" within society. Certain roles, jobs, and physical spaces are largely viewed to be appropriate for only one gender. In a 2015 interview with Al Jazeera, Nabila Mounib - who was at the time the secretary general of the Unified Socialist Party and now heads the Federation for

¹⁹ (2012)

²⁰ (Guessous 2012)

²¹ (Guessous 2012)

²² (Naciri 1998, p. 19)

the Democratic Left - discussed the implications of being a political woman in what she refers to as a “patriarchal and sexist society.”²³ As she describes, women in Morocco are expected to be responsible for a large number of tasks within the home and family, which leaves little extra time for being involved politically. In 2003, Mounib played a role in reforming the Moudawana, or the Moroccan family code, which signified a major step towards equality and protections for women in both private and public spaces.²⁴ Triumphs like this one, both large and small, help pave the way for the cultural reform necessary to provide women with equal political opportunities.

Recent and Future Developments

The 2011 Constitutional reform intended to ameliorate some of these worries. However, the changes made to the Constitution primarily addressed the issues of identity politics and monarchical authority.²⁵ The amendments absolved the King of several of his powers, assigning them to the Prime Minister instead. They also granted Parliament additional authority in terms of legislation and investigation of public officials.²⁶ However, even in light of these amendments, Marina Ottaway of *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* considers political structures and parties largely unchanged: “they are top-heavy, internally undemocratic, with little renewal of leadership.”²⁷ Many actors within Parliament are well aware of the constraints on their power as a body and as a political individual, especially within the opposition parties. They recognize the presence of corruption and other sources of illegitimacy in the Moroccan government, but hope to effect changes from within the Parliament. As Daadaoui phrases it,

²³ (Alami 2015)

²⁴ (Alami 2015)

²⁵ (Ottaway 2011)

²⁶ (Al Jazeera 2016)

²⁷ (2011)

opposition forces view continued participation in elections despite their recognition of the incontestable supremacy of the regime as “an opportunity to challenge the state.”²⁸ Several women have been at the forefront of this activism from within the opposition, perhaps most notably Nabila Mounib, who has been particularly outspoken against government corruption and illegitimacy.

With all of the complexities and hindrances that accompany both the Moroccan Parliament and the role of women within Parliamentary parties, it is important to also consider the potential solutions and recommendations that scholars and social scientists put forth. Loubna Skalli, in her report on generational politics as it relates to the Moroccan women’s movement, believes the education and incorporation of youth in women’s rights discussions could be a key to preserving and expanding the movement’s momentum and progress.²⁹ Many young people have become disillusioned and apathetic with respect to political engagement, but Skalli puts forth the hypothesis that reenergizing the youth and bridging the gaps between generations are crucial steps toward responding to the evolving demands of gender-based activism.³⁰ Young people have the potential to effect real change in the realm of gender equality, which can translate to widespread reform of political structures in order to incorporate more women and youth.

In addition to journalists and academics who offer insights into the issue of gender inequality in Moroccan government, many NGOs - based both domestically and internationally - have also put forth suggestions and solutions. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has held several conferences in recent years with the goal of incorporating women and youth into their own framework of political action. The organization aims to take into account the opinions and

²⁸ (2010, p. 197)

²⁹ (2011, p. 331)

³⁰ (2011, p. 343)

ideas of Moroccan women in order to formulate more contextually applicable and workable resolutions. At the 2016 “Women @ the Forefront” conference that the NDI co-hosted with USAID and the embassies of Spain and France, 120 women from eight political parties discussed ways in which women can advocate for and fill leadership positions within their parties.³¹ Some of the women’s key recommendations for their parties included implementing more fair candidate selection criteria, offering more funding to women candidates, and “adopting voluntary party quotas to increase opportunities for women at all levels of the internal party structures and committees.”³² As the NDI’s conference report emphasized, the next step after the conclusion of the conference was to engage the women’s parties in an effort to enact some of the recommendations they put forth. The purpose of this conference was to come up with ways to rally support for female candidates leading up to the 2016 general election, but the women’s suggestions are of a more general significance outside of the context of a specific election. They bring up the important point that much of the burden ultimately falls on the political parties themselves to bring light to the issue of gender inequality, and to address this problem proactively and swiftly.

The scholarly and current event articles I read described some of the greatest barriers to women’s engagement in Morocco’s political realm, and sometimes offered explanations for these phenomena. In an effort to better understand the realities of gender dynamics and discrimination in Morocco’s legislative branch, as well as the functions and limitations of Parliament and its actors, I chose to interview various individuals in relevant fields about their personal experiences and insights. In my analysis, I compare and contrast the data collected in

³¹ (NDI 2016)

³² (NDI 2016)

my review of literature to data I gathered during interviews with various individuals in fields relevant to the topic of gender in Parliament and political parties.

ASSUMPTIONS

Over the course of my literature review, I recognized the need to reformulate my question to more accurately account for the nature of Morocco's legislative branch. I began my research with the intention of understanding the differences between specific Parliamentary parties with respect to gender. However, given Morocco's wide multiplicity of parties and the ambiguity and fluidity of party lines, I came to realize that this challenge would prove too large given time and accessibility constraints. This was a concept later reinforced by my interviewees, who offered widely contradictory insights into the differences between the roles that women play within specific parties. I came to understand that this knowledge was not public, and not even known by members of Parliament (MPs) themselves. I therefore decided that an assessment of the more general issues surrounding gender inequality in Morocco's Parliament and political parties would be a much more rewarding and practical endeavor. I chose to focus on parties and legislators at the national level in order to gain a better sense of the effectiveness of the gender and youth quotas as well as the role of NGOs and nonprofits, which allowed me to narrow my topic to a more realistic depth.

Because I began this research project knowing very little about political structures and attitudes in Morocco, I attempted to enter the interview process with an open mind and minimal assumptions. Even after reading and reviewing literature from a wide variety of sources, I did not feel equipped to make assumptions about the opinions that Parliamentarians and non-governmental organizations might hold regarding the role of women in Parliament. This is

largely because I recognize the complexities of party loyalties and alliances, and I understand that political attitudes - both personal and national - are often fluid and subject to change. I therefore asked open-ended questions in my interviews, and listened intently to answers in order to summarize and quote interviewees accurately in my analysis.

While I kept an open mind about the specific responses I would be given throughout the interview process, I did hold several hypotheses about the nature of gender discrepancies in Morocco's political structures. I held these preconceptions based on what I have learned about and observed in America's political structures and operations. In American elections, women generally face more significant obstacles than men when running for office or attempting to build name recognition. Because the nation has predominantly been governed by men since its founding, the sexism intrinsic in American history is women's primary hindrance in the political realm. Patriarchal and misogynistic ideals are still deeply ingrained in the minds of many Americans, and thus women frequently have to take additional measures - beyond those of men - to prove their fitness for office to their constituents. Once elected, American women sometimes continue to be subjected to discriminatory comments or treatment. I used this knowledge, accompanied by our lectures from activist and author Stephanie Bordat, as the basis for my assumption that Moroccan women face similar challenges when seeking and holding office. However, a primary aim of my research was to gain a better understanding of the accuracy of this assumption and to understand what specific factors influence gender inequalities in Morocco's Parliament and within Parliamentary parties.

METHODOLOGY

I chose to conduct my review of literature before my interviews in order to first gain a more complete understanding of the issues at hand. I read literature sent to me by my advisors, as well as current event pieces and scholarly articles I found on my own. Some of these articles were purely factual - including statistics and election data, and histories of Morocco's political parties - while others were opinion pieces on generational differences, political movements, or recommendations for the future of women in politics. As I compiled these various and sometimes contradictory perspectives, I formulated questions for my interviewees based on what I read.

I chose to interview a variety of individuals from different fields within the general political realm, from legislators themselves, to scholars in relevant topics, to spokespeople from several organizations. For those public figures whom I was not able to interview due to time and travel constraints, I was often able to find video interviews and transcripts of interviews published online for public viewing. I primarily spoke with individuals whose contact information was given to me by my advisors and teachers. My attempts to reach out to politicians and non-governmental organizations outside of this network were largely fruitless. I was able to interview two representatives from two different NGOs, one current Parliamentarian, and one former Parliamentarian. I planned to also interview a political science professor based in Rabat, but because I was sick the day of our scheduled meeting, my classmate with whom I intended to conduct the interview sent me her interview notes and transcription.

I prepared extensively for each interview in order to ask targeted questions, and to avoid wasting time covering basic or irrelevant questions. I researched the organizations and parties in which I knew the interviewees to be involved, and developed questions based on both their roles

within their organizations and my specific research topic. This base-level understanding of their responsibilities and their organizations' ideologies helped conversation flow more smoothly, and also shortened my meetings in order to take up as little of my interviewees' time as possible.

My first interview was with Slobodan Milic, the Director of Morocco's branch of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), an international nonprofit organization whose role varies from country to country, but which aims to promote democratic institutions and practices. From information and articles posted on their official website, I learned that this organization has made significant contributions to gender equality both internationally and domestically by educating women and children about Moroccan politics, and also by offering training workshops to women hoping to run for office. After reading about these activities, a classmate and I arranged an interview with Mr. Milic to learn more about the organization's missions and official opinions on the issues of gender equality and female representation in Moroccan Parliament.

Hoping to hear a variety of perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of NGOs' role in the Moroccan political context, I also visited the office of the *Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc* (ADFM) in Casablanca. There, I spoke with Yasmine Zaki, the Vice President of ADFM's Casablanca branch. Having learned about the ADFM's mission in our thematic seminar, I wanted to visit the office itself and hear from a representative of the organization in order to gain a better understanding of their work on a day-to-day basis.

In addition to speaking with representatives from relevant non-governmental organizations, I also arranged interviews with several Parliamentarians. I spoke with Omar Balafrej of the *Federation de le Gauche Democratique* (FGD), or the Federation for the Democratic Left, a consortium of three smaller opposition parties. The left-wing FGD, founded in 2007, later appealed to many of the actors and demands of Morocco's *February 20* movement,

which called for widespread government reform and was an offshoot of the 2011 Arab Spring protests and revolutions that swept the Arab world from North Africa to the Middle East. In 2010, Balafrej left his previous party, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP), because he did not believe that it possessed the enthusiasm and ambition necessary to transform Morocco into a true democracy.³³ Upon leaving the party, he created a movement called Clarity, Ambition, Courage, which he fused with the FGD in 2015 in order to gain traction in Parliament. He has long been a proponent of women's rights and gender equality. After reading about Balafrej, I decided to reach out to him to arrange an interview in which to discuss in further detail his perception of the various roles women play within the government and within political parties.

I was also able to speak with Loubna Amhair, a former Parliamentarian who held office for five years with the *Movement Populaire* (MP), from 2011 to 2016. She ran on the national women's list, but decided not to seek reelection in 2016. She now works for several non-governmental organizations, including Emily's List, Forward Global Women, and the International Network of Liberal Women. These organizations, though each have a distinct mission, work generally toward the goal of involving women in political and democratic processes. Because of her fascinating and impressive list of accomplishments and titles, and her former career as a Parliamentarian, I was grateful for the opportunity to learn more about her experiences and opinions. Finally, although I was sick on the day of the interview, I thankfully still obtained the transcript of an interview with a Rabat-based university professor named Latifa El Bouhsini because my peer was able to interview her with the aid of a translator.

Because each of these individuals is either a public official or an official representative of his or her organization, obtaining verbal consent was very straightforward. Each was sent a copy

³³ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

of my IRB-approved consent form prior to the interview. Before the beginning of each interview, I again clarified the terms of consent with each interviewee. I emphasized that their participation is voluntary, and told them should they wish any information they disclose to remain anonymously sourced, I would happily oblige. The participants expressed their understanding of the form, did not have additional questions for me regarding consent, and gave me explicit verbal permission to attach their names to the information they provided me. Only in one case did a participant ask me to keep an opinion anonymous should I choose to include it in my analysis. This is because the interviewee felt that the opinion he or she expressed was a personal opinion, and not the opinion of the body he or she was speaking on behalf of, and I assured this individual that I would do so. Additionally, each participant gave me explicit verbal permission to record the interview on an audio application on my phone in order to transcribe it afterwards and draw direct quotes to include in my paper.

Constraints and Challenges

My research and interview processes thankfully ran very smoothly. Those individuals who got back to me were very kind and understanding of cultural differences. They took time out of their busy schedules to speak with students of another country for the sole purpose of assisting with a research project, and I was continually shocked by their willingness to do so. However, in reflecting on my methodology, I am compelled to confront the ethics of this kind of research. While I deeply appreciate their willingness to meet with me on such short notice, I frequently wondered if it was morally acceptable for me - an international student - to impede on their limited time and take time from them that might otherwise be spent assisting constituents and

Moroccan citizens. I accounted for this by supposing that if they did not believe they had the time to do so, they would not have agreed to interviews, and I hope this is true.

Another internal qualm with which I grappled throughout the process was the issue of passing judgment on a nation to which I do not claim citizenship or expertise. I feared that throughout my interview questioning, I gave the impression to interviewees that I thought Morocco's political structure and cultural landscape to be somehow inferior to those of the United States or other western countries, though I in no way believe this to be true. Several of my interviewees pointed out that America, too, has shockingly low female political representation. I wondered about my personal right to speak on the matter in the Moroccan context, given my lack of citizenship, the brevity of my stay in Morocco, the limitations of my knowledge on the subject, and my nationality from a country that is plagued by equally pressing issues of sexism and gender discrimination in most facets of life. I resolved, therefore, to conduct my research more as a study for purposes of personal exploration, rather than a project that concludes with my own recommendations for the future.

Finally, language gaps proved to be a hindrance to me in choosing interviewees because I speak neither French or Arabic at the level necessary for conducting an interview. While most of my interviews were in English, one was in French with a peer translator, and another in Darija with a Moroccan university student translating for me. Due to uncertainty about whether potential interviewees would be able to respond to an email or voice message in English, I was hesitant to reach out to all of the officials and politicians with whom I would have otherwise been enthusiastic to speak. I therefore chose to first reach out to those who I was certain spoke English fluently, and resolved to reach out to those about whom I was less sure only after my initial attempts with English-speakers. Additionally, while both translators were extremely

qualified to do so, some specific phrasing and important terminology was inevitably and unfortunately lost in translation. Therefore, though I feel sure I am still able to capture the general sentiments and opinions of these particular interviewees, it is regrettable that I could not interpret their words for myself.

ANALYSIS

Each political activist, Parliamentarian, and organization I interviewed offered me a unique perspective which was reflective of their personal insights, the opinions of the bodies they represented, as well as cultural attitudes. My questions were largely based on the literature I reviewed prior to the interviews. Several interviewees confirmed the opinions and information in the literature, while others challenged or contradicted the articles I read. Overall, however, most of the interviewees corroborated the existence of the issues about which I had previously read, and were able to explain them to me in further detail, as well as offer additional insights into how and why the issues exist. Through a mixture of facts, statistics, and personal opinions, interview participants helped clarify the complexities surrounding the diverse roles and challenges of political women in the Moroccan context, and also alluded to or stated outright the changes they would like to see made in the coming years.

Gender and Youth Quotas

The gender quotas within Parliament effectively increased women's political representation by reserving a certain number of national seats for women. This quota, also referred to as the "women's list," was introduced in 2002 and has contributed to a sharp rise in women's Parliamentary participation - from .6% female representation in the 2002 election to

21% in 2016's general election.³⁴ However, several of my interviewees identified problems related to the gender quotas. Both Omar Balafrej and Loubna Amhair, both either current or former Parliamentarians, separately explained to me that while the quota system helps women get elected on the national list for one term, it has not yet translated to women winning reelection in Parliament, and does not help them in local or regional elections. Women are only able to win election on the national women's list for a single term. This means that if they choose to seek reelection, they must do so on the regular list, without the protections of a gender quota. As Amhair described, the gender quota was meant to be a temporary installation in order to accelerate the process of incorporating women in Parliament.³⁵ The initial intention was to help women gain seats so that they could prove their fitness for office to their constituents and their male colleagues, and gain the necessary experience to continue holding office. However, as Amhair personally experienced, parties quickly replace women with men upon the conclusion of their term serving on the women's list.³⁶ Even the most active women in Parliament have significant trouble winning reelection outside of the women's list.

In addition to a gender quota, a youth quota was adopted under the 2011 Constitutional reforms. This list reserves thirty seats for people under forty years old, and was adopted in the reforms in an effort to incorporate young people in government, and alleviate the growing public demand for youth representation and inclusion. As Mr. Milic of the National Democratic Institute explained, these seats were, until the 2016 election, presumed by most to be reserved for men.³⁷ However, the NDI, with the help of several other NGOs, effectively increased the number of women participating in this list; no women were elected on the list in 2011, but eleven gained

³⁴ (Ennaji 2016, p. 6)

³⁵ (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

³⁶ (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

³⁷ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

youth list seats in 2016.³⁸ He, too, explained that while these lists are helpful in allowing women to gain Parliamentary seats, they do little to transform general attitudes towards political women. Therefore, while many recognize the positive steps towards the inclusion of women in Parliament, my interviewees on the whole corroborated the idea that parties must do more than simply support women's election on the national list. They must listen to these women's ideas, give them more opportunities to occupy internal leadership positions, and support them in campaigns for reelection.

Roles of Women in Parliament

Because the adoption of gender and youth quotas are the primary reason that women are elected to Parliament, I wondered if women are treated differently than men and given different leadership opportunities within their parties once elected to Parliament. While most of my interviewees agreed that it varies from party to party, they had different perceptions of the extent of the discrepancy between roles occupied. Slobodan Milic described how many female members of Parliament are there only because their parties either wanted to reward them for some favor with a seat, or wanted the positive publicity that accompanies incorporating gender equality into their platform.³⁹ Additionally, female Parliamentarians are well aware of the brevity of their time in office, and recognize that they likely will not win reelection should they choose to run. For these reasons, some women holding office are not particularly active or passionate about the issues their parties support. Therefore, the roles they take on are sometimes only symbolic in nature, rather than legitimate outlets and opportunities for women to exhibit their political capabilities.

³⁸ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

³⁹ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

However, Milic went on to stress that the women who are in Parliament because they are passionate about the causes and constituencies they serve do so with extreme enthusiasm and commitment.⁴⁰ These women, though they have high ambitions for the future of Morocco and often attend committee meetings with better attendance than men, are still not entrusted with responsibilities equal to those of men. Instead, women are often placed only in committees related to family and domestic life, rather than other, similarly serious issues of national concern outside of those that are generally considered to be strictly “women’s issues.” Omar Balafrej and Loubna Amhair expressed similar sentiments, saying that while women in Parliament have repeatedly proved their legitimacy and competence with their attention to detail and strong work ethic, they are still not treated as equals by their male counterparts. Balafrej said that though his party, the FGD, is led by a woman, most political parties have only men in management and leadership positions.⁴¹ Amhair explained how she and her female colleagues had to continually fight to change the mindset of men in Parliament, and to remind them that they were elected as fairly and rightfully as were the men.⁴²

In fact, women in Parliament are often actually more qualified and well-trained for office than the men are. Female candidates are expected to have more education when running for office than are male candidates, and they are also offered assistance with campaigning, public speaking workshops, and additional training from NGOs and other sources. Milic cited a study which found that women in politics are much more widely considered to be trustworthy and less likely to be corrupt than men are. Additionally, several of my interviewees noted that women frequently have higher attendance rates at meetings and discussions. Balafrej described that

⁴⁰ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

⁴¹ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁴² (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

within the finance committee, in which he holds a seat, women attend the meetings with much more consistency than do the male members.⁴³ Amhair confirmed this concept, claiming that during her career in Parliament, women were by far the most present at committee meetings. She added to this that women Parliamentarians are also better at describing their political ideologies, and are more likely to stick to and defend their party platforms - “we know how to formulate a message, and how to ask the right questions.”⁴⁴ As she explained, this is because women usually campaign for spots on the national women’s list, and therefore gain significant experience with solidifying their personal and party ideologies in order to explain them to potential voters. These first-hand experiences and insights from within Parliament serve to contradict the idea that men are more politically adept than women, and demonstrate that female Parliamentarians are frequently even more committed to their position and obligations than are their male counterparts.

It is worth noting that there was some disagreement among interviewees about which parties offer more leadership opportunities and meaningful positions to women. Some believed the differences were between the monarchy-backed, government parties and the regular, civil parties, while others said it is more an issue of whether the party was “professional” or “unprofessional.”⁴⁵ Still another said the discrepancies were based primarily on religious affiliation. One interviewee described how the government-backed parties tend to include women only symbolically, and both men and women in these parties act as “technocrats” who serve the government’s interests rather than the people’s. This interviewee contrasted government parties with “true” parties, or those in which Parliamentarians are democratically elected and which have diverse political goals. The latter parties are much more likely to support

⁴³ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁴⁴ (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁴⁵ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

women, recognize their political capabilities, and help them attain equality politically, publicly, and privately.

However, Milic offered an alternative description of disparities between parties, saying that the relevant factor was not whether the party was government-backed or “true,” but rather the extent to which the party is a legitimate, well-established source of authority and political sway.⁴⁶ The more powerful, widely-accepted the party, the more likely women are to hold positions of leadership within them, as he explained. Finally, Balafrej suggested that Islamist parties are instead the parties in which women are most likely to face gender-based exclusion because of a firm ideological basis in traditional patriarchal principles.⁴⁷ It is difficult to speculate which description of party differences is the most accurate, but the significance here falls in the interviewees’ inability to agree about precisely which factors influence the unequal roles played by women and men within their parties and within the Parliament. Their contradictory perceptions about which factors influence gender dynamics within Parliament demonstrates that most parties are culpable in one way or another of excluding women from their proceedings. Therefore each and every political party should take significant time to reflect on their internal structure and operations in order to create more opportunities for women to attain leadership positions.

Gender Discrimination within Parliamentary Parties

In addition to the disparate roles that men and women play, women are also subject to discrimination in Parliament on the basis of their gender. However, as with the responses to the question of roles and responsibilities, the extent to which women face this discrimination was a

⁴⁶ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

⁴⁷ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

point of contention among interviewees. All who responded to the question of discrimination agreed that it varies widely based on the party. Within some political parties, men view women as their equals and recognize that the women earned the positions they occupy through hard work and dedication. In others, men perceive women to be inferior or undeserving of their positions. Balafrej alluded to the fact that some male Parliamentarians will not even so much as shake women's hands or acknowledge their presence at committee meetings.⁴⁸ Similarly, Amhair described a time that a female colleague of hers was advised to dress differently by a male counterpart.⁴⁹

However, several interviewees said that while discrimination is inherent in the election process, it exists to a much lesser extent on a day-to-day basis. Amhair explained that had never personally experienced discrimination. Latifa el Bouhsini, who has also worked in the public sector, reaffirmed this sentiment, saying sexism is nearly nonexistent in government positions.⁵⁰ Both women explained that they would not tolerate discrimination if it occurred, and that they had to learn ways to deal with gender-based tension and conflict as legislators.

Campaigns and Elections

Campaign financing was referenced in the literature I reviewed as a source of gender discrimination only rarely, but many of my interviewees brought it up when discussing the ways in which political parties can influence election outcomes. They described that in Morocco, it is illegal to raise funds from the public for a campaign, and thus campaigns are financed exclusively from personal and party funds.⁵¹ The party has significant control in choosing which

⁴⁸ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁴⁹ (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁵⁰ (L. El Bouhsini, personal communication, April 20, 2018)

⁵¹ (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

candidates will be funded during each election cycle. While parties are sometimes willing to monetarily support female candidates when they women are running on the women's list, they are much less willing to do so for women's second terms. Amhair witnessed this trend firsthand after her five-year Parliamentary term with the *Movement Populaire* (MP) ended. Even though she had grown up learning about the party's platform because of her father's long career within the MP, and even though she had spent five years honing her knowledge of the functions and responsibilities of Parliamentarians, her party replaced her with a male candidate for the 2016 general election. "The argument is that it's about elections, it's not about you," she said, describing how her party justified replacing her. "It's like with you, they are gambling. But the thing is, they are also gambling with the men, because I know many men that fail. Not all the male candidates are elected - but we don't talk about that."⁵²

Several of my other interviewees also alluded to the issue of political parties withdrawing support from women politicians after their term on the women's list has ended. Balafrej cited this lack of continued support as a shortcoming of the quota system, explaining that political parties frequently fail to support female candidates for second terms, in local elections, and for leadership positions within the party. To him, this trend demonstrates that gender quotas were an ineffective fix to the greater issue of party leaders not trusting women with important responsibilities, and not viewing their political capabilities to be equal to those of men.⁵³

There is also a great deal of secrecy in the process of candidate selection leading up to campaigns. As Milic described, parties come up with excuses to keep women off of their ballots - especially women who have already served a term on the women's list. The party leaders will tell women candidates that they do not have the name recognition necessary to win, even if they

⁵² (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁵³ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

may have earned the right to the spot on the ballot through hard work. He explained, “The party tells you, even though you’ve worked really hard in the Parliament, the best records in terms of attendance, in terms of the committee work, nobody knows who you are.”⁵⁴ He went on to describe a time when a female candidate was unaware that she had not been included on the ballot until the day of the election. This lack of transparency in the selection process was brought up by female politicians as one area in desperate need of reform in the 2016 “Women @ the Forefront” conference hosted by the NDI.⁵⁵ Withholding crucial party decisions from the women within the party is a method of intentionally excluding women from the selection process, thereby drastically reducing their chances of gaining the party’s support during a campaign for reelection.

The Role of Nonprofit and Non-Governmental Organizations

From my interviewees, I learned that organizations funded by sources outside of Morocco’s government contribute significantly to attaining gender equality in politics. The National Democratic Institute and the *Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc* are just two such organizations that support female candidates and elected officials in a wide variety of ways. Slobodan Milic of the NDI was able to provide me with a better understanding of the ways in which NGOs can have an impact on the political scene in Morocco. He described several of the many services the NDI offers women politicians: campaign management and assistance, public speaking workshops, assistance with social media and constituent outreach, as well as advocacy efforts to reform the electoral framework in order to provide additional political

⁵⁴ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

⁵⁵ (NDI 2016)

opportunities to women.⁵⁶ They also pair female Parliamentarians with female ambassadors from other countries and facilitate discussions on the realities of occupying a profession in the male-dominated political arena. Yasmine Zaki of the ADFM described how her organization, too, aid political women in a variety of ways. Among other services, the ADFM helps facilitate discussion across party lines in Parliament about issues related to women's rights, reinforces women's rights by lobbying for certain legislation, and helps educate the general public about women's leadership and opportunities for women and young people to get involved in politics.⁵⁷

These organizations are important because they provide women with the opportunity to be competitive candidates in a traditionally male-dominated political context. They support and listen to Moroccan women, and incorporate them in structural and advocacy decisions. Zaki pointed out one challenge, which is that these organizations must be legally registered with the Moroccan government in order to qualify for international funding from foreign embassies and NGOs.⁵⁸ An additional license must be obtained in order to fundraise domestically. This means that organizations, though they operate independent of the government, must be pre-approved by the monarchy in order to get the necessary funding to conduct operations within Morocco. It also means that potentially beneficial foreign humanitarian and democratic organizations have restricted access to Moroccan civil society and to maintaining consistent funding, even after they have established offices here.

Morocco as an Incomplete Democracy

In much of the literature I reviewed, authors and scholars addressed or alluded to the idea that monarchical, authoritarian oversight and superiority over Parliament acts as a hindrance to

⁵⁶ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

⁵⁷ (Y. Zaki, personal communication, April 22, 2018)

⁵⁸ (Y. Zaki, personal communication, April 22, 2018)

women's political participation in Morocco, and to democracy more generally. This concept was confirmed by several interviewees, who agreed that although there is a voting system in place to elect Parliamentarians and local officials, a number of factors prohibit Morocco's democratic functions from reaching their full potential in practice. Firstly, several of the individuals I spoke with confirmed the notion that political party lines are very frequently blurred and ambiguous, frustrating efforts to rally support for specific causes and politicians. Slobodan Milic explained that the current structure of electoral law, which prevents any party from obtaining anything near a majority in Parliament, detracts from legislative power as a whole.⁵⁹ This system creates internal rifts, which prevents Parliament from wielding enough power to rival the authority of the king. By placing a check on the power of any one party, the monarchy effectively "marginalizes" the Parliament and its actors.⁶⁰

The lack of gender-proportional representation in Morocco's governing bodies is another deterrent to democracy because it prevents women from being accurately represented among and by policy makers. To paraphrase Yasmine Zaki's translated explanation, in order for there to be a democracy in Morocco, "there has to be equality in the facts, in the law, but also at the level beyond the law - at the societal level."⁶¹ As the ADFM underlines, Morocco will only obtain democracy when women are given equal opportunities in all aspects of life.

Another hindrance to democracy that Zaki pointed out is the way in which elections are held. Voting-age Moroccans must register to vote five or six months before the election, which means that potential voters must express their intent to vote far before electoral lists are even finalized.⁶² A lot can change in the months leading up to elections, and therefore it is important

⁵⁹ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

⁶⁰ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

⁶¹ (Y. Zaki, personal communication, April 22, 2018)

⁶² (Y. Zaki, personal communication, April 22, 2018)

that constituents be able to register closer to election day. Other barriers to democracy that she identifies include the prevalence of monetary corruption, which sways voting decisions, and widespread illiteracy, which often leads to people voting for an individual rather than a party platform or ideology.⁶³

Omar Balafrej, too, emphasized that the Moroccan government does not currently operate as a democracy, and that most political parties don't possess the ambition to transform the country into one. He also suggested that the incompleteness of the political structure - neither a complete dictatorship nor a complete democracy - creates a lack of trust in the government, as well as a sense of apathy. Many people do not believe their votes and political opinions can change either law or culture - "[they think that] the real power is at the king's hands and it will not change."⁶⁴ These many limitations to the democratic operations of Parliament demonstrate that gender equality is but one of many challenges to the legitimacy of this governing body.

Looking to the Future

My interviewees largely confirmed many of the issues brought up during my review of literature. They verified the legitimacy of structural hindrances, including the shortcomings of the quota system, the campaign finance system, and the idea of Morocco as an incomplete democracy. They also corroborated the existence of discrimination within parties in terms of nomination, financing, and leadership decisions. They helped clarify the challenges of incorporating civil society and nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations, and expressed concerns about the ambition of the monarchy to transform Morocco into a more just, democratic society. However, in addition to pointing out the challenges faced by women in Moroccan

⁶³ (Y. Zaki, personal communication, April 22, 2018)

⁶⁴ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

government, many of my interviewees offered their personal insights and suggestions about future initiatives that both the government and civil society should adopt in order to enact real, positive changes moving forward.

Many of their goals for the future involve educational reform. Balafrej emphasized the need to allocate more federal funding to education, because it is strongly linked to democracy. In his opinion, education should receive the most attention in determining a federal budget, and other publicly funded services should be funded by whatever is left over. Having an active, educated civil society is the key to “evolving peacefully toward a more democratic and more modern country.”⁶⁵ Amhair reiterated this belief, describing education as “an open door to the future.”⁶⁶ When she ran for office in 2011, education was one of her platform’s primary focuses. She cites her access to education as the reason she was able to succeed politically, and believes every Moroccan should have that same opportunity. Access to education - specifically for women and girls in Morocco - is a central goal towards which she continues to work every day. Education helps level the playing field between men and women, and adds legitimacy to democratic processes by allowing for a more informed, enthusiastic civil society.

Another primary reform several of the interviewees identified is that of politician-constituent relationships and transparency. Women Parliamentarians should work to strengthen these relationships and build name recognition among their voter base, which can assist them in proving to their parties that they are deserving of support. As Milic explained, the NDI offers female politicians assistance with social media and other channels of constituent outreach in order to strengthen and solidify support networks.⁶⁷ Amhair confirmed that reaching out and listening to constituents is the most important role of Parliamentarians, yet one that is sometimes

⁶⁵ (O. Balafrej, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁶⁶ (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

⁶⁷ (S. Milic, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

ignored.⁶⁸ This is particularly difficult for women in Parliament, because the women's list is a national list rather than that of a local constituency. Women are therefore responsible for responding to broader needs, rather than attending to more local needs. Measures should thus be taken to allow women to run for and obtain more local positions of political leadership, and to do so will require more services similar to those offered by the NDI, which help women share their ideology and ambitions more widely.

CONCLUSION

As several of my interviewees and readings pointed out, Morocco is not alone in its struggle for gender equality in its governing bodies. Its specific circumstances and structures are unique, but it is one of dozens of countries currently undergoing a transformation toward more equal governance. Throughout the world, in every region, women are vastly underrepresented politically, and often feel discouraged from becoming involved in the political realm by discriminatory cultural attitudes. However, no man can represent a woman as well as a woman can. Therefore women should make up a proportionate number of legislators in both national and local governing bodies in order for these bodies to accurately serve their constituents' needs.

In spite of the obstacles women face within the Moroccan political context, many women have successfully overcome these countless barriers, built name recognition for themselves, and demanded respect from their colleagues and constituents through consistent hard work and determination. They have gotten to where they are not because they are women, but because they are compassionate and ambitious public servants. Nabila Mounib, Nadia Yassine, Bassima El Hakkawi, and Nouzha Skalli are just a few names that come to the minds of many Moroccans when they think of powerful women in government. These women are among those who have

⁶⁸ (L. Amhair, personal communication, April 19, 2018)

managed to secure positions of leadership, thereby defying their male counterparts' expectations of their political capabilities.

The non-governmental organizations which I read about and met with are examples of beneficial civil society efforts to reform Moroccan structures and attitudes which inhibit the inclusion of women in government. They lobby for and against legislation, host training and educational events and workshops, and work more generally to address the wants and needs of political women. These efforts have accomplished positive changes in years past, and it is crucial that they continue to offer these services and more in the years to come. They work not only to assist female Parliamentarians and other officials, but also to effect cultural change more broadly.

Changes also must come from within the Parliament, the political parties, and the monarchy. Many politicians and former politicians, including Omar Balafrej and Loubna Amhair, work tirelessly toward reforming government structures and cultural attitudes that suppress female political involvement, while others are complicit in the exclusion. Those Parliamentarians who recognize the injustice and corruption within the government and work proactively to address it are crucial to improving and reshaping the legislative bodies from within. As I both read repeatedly and learned from interviewees, political parties bear a great deal of the responsibility for the incorporation and preservation of women in positions of power and leadership. The regional coordinators, in particular, have the ability to put forth candidates and finance campaigns, and thus they must step up to the challenge and make the effort to ensure that this is accomplished.

As explained both by interviewees and the literature I reviewed, true change cannot and will not be achieved in Morocco overnight or by simply increasing or reinforcing quotas within

Parliament. The national lists, though they allow women to physically occupy political space, do little to change political parties' and men's attitudes towards women, as evidenced by the difficulties associated with reelection and election on local lists. Instead, broader cultural reforms and shifts are necessary to reach the desired female representation within Parliament and its parties. This shift must be accompanied by shifts in perceptions and treatment of women in all aspects of civil society; it cannot stand alone. This can and must be accomplished by means of better access to education, more outreach efforts and transparency from the government, and more opportunities for the average citizen to learn about government and get involved politically. Only then will the Moroccan political realm be a context in which women can rise to and maintain positions of leadership, and Moroccan women will finally see their rights and opinions protected and represented by governing bodies.

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