The gender of democracy:

why it matters in the Middle East and North Africa[1]

Valentine M. Moghadam   Purdue University

Introduction

The year 2011 will always be remembered as the year of mass social protests for democratization and justice that led to the collapse of authoritarian governments in the Middle East and North Africa. The explosions of popular protest have led analysts to discuss causes and speculate about consequences and outcomes. Opinions have been aired about the role of young people, of the demands of "the Arab street", and of the possible transition to a liberal or Islamist or coalition type of governance. Middle East specialists have been long aware of the problems of authoritarian regimes, widening inequalities and income gaps, high rates of youth unemployment, deteriorating infrastructure and public services, and rising prices attenuated only by subsidies, issues that have been expertly examined in a prodigious body of academic and policy-oriented research. On the basis of that literature as well as on the popular demands heard across the region, solutions to the structural and institutional problems would seem to include a democratic transition, economic reform centered on the needs and rights of citizens, justice for those harmed by past policies and oppressive laws, and institutions that will enable equality as well as guarantee rights.

But something has been missing from the recent discussions and analyses. Let us pose it in the form of a number of questions. Is "the Arab street" masculine? What kind of democratic governance can women's rights groups expect? Will women – and women's rights advocates – participate in the democratic transition and the building of new institutions? Or will an outcome be – to use the terms coined by East European feminists in the early 1990s – a "male democracy" and "democracy with a male face"? What connection is there between the advancement of women's rights and the advancement of democracy?

Feminist scholars have noted the absence of considerations of gender in studies of democracy and democratic transitions. This is despite the fact that "what is politically distinctive about women worldwide is their exclusion from the political process and their collective status as political outsiders; what is politically distinctive about men worldwide is their universal presence in national, international, and political institutions and their disproportionate dominance in these institutions" (Beckwith, 2010: 160). To correct the imbalance, there is a growing feminist literature on democratic transitions (Alvarez, 1990; Waylen, 2007; Viterna and Fallon, 2008; Jaquette, 2009; Di Marco and Tabbush, 2010; Baldez, 2010), to which this paper contributes.

Traditional approaches to democratization found a strong relationship between economic development and democracy, or between the presence of a large middle class and democratic development (Moore, 1966; Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens 1992). Today, feminist social scientists argue that a polity is not fully democratic when there is no adequate representation of women (Phillips, 1991; Phillips, 1995; Dahlerup, 2006; Eschle, 2000; Moghadam, 2004). Nonetheless, many commentators and policy-makers continue to address democratization, especially in

connection with the Middle East, without taking women and gender issues into account (Diamond, Plattner and Brumberg, 2003). Fish (2002) does link the underachievement of democracy in the region in part to the treatment of women, and a similar argument is made by Inglehart and Norris (2003), but they do not connect democratization with women's participation.

In this paper I make a four-fold argument. First, I argue for a strong relationship between women's participation and rights, on the one hand, and the building and institutionalization of democracy on the other. Evidence from Latin America, southern Africa, the Philippines, and Northern Ireland shows that women's participation was a key element in the successful transitions; that outcomes could be advantageous to women's interests; and that women's political participation reflects and reinforces democracy-building (Alvarez, 1990; Fallon, 2008; Jaquette, 2001; Jaquette, 2009; Roulston and Davies, 2000; Tripp, 2001; Waylen, 1994; Waylen, 2007).

Second, I draw attention to what is known as the "democracy paradox" or the gender-based democracy deficit; that is, the marginalization of women from the political process in a democratic polity, or the dangers posed to sex equality by the opening up of political space to fundamentalist forces. Democracy is assumed by many commentators to serve women well, but the historical record shows that democratic transitions do not necessarily bring about women's participation and rights. Examples are Eastern Europe in the early 1990s; Algeria and the elections that brought about an Islamist party (FIS) in 1990/91; and Iraq and the Palestine Authority, where elections in early 2006 did not bring to power governments committed to citizen or women's rights.

Third, if the longstanding exclusion of women from political processes and decision-making in the Middle East and North Africa is a key factor in explaining why the region has been a "laggard", compared with other regions, in what Samuel Huntington called democratization's third wave, then women's participation and rights could not only speed up the democratic transition in the region but also enhance its quality. Fourth, the mass social protests in MENA

were as much a call for social justice as for civil and political rights. Attention to social and gender equality will ensure a more stable democracy and democratic consolidation.

Before elaborating on my argument, it may be useful to draw attention to a number of events that constitute an important backdrop to the mass protests of 2011: (a) the launching of the *Arab Human Development Report* in 2002, in which the authors identified three major deficits in the region: gender inequality, authoritarian rule, and restrictions on knowledge; (b) the Moroccan family law reform, 2003-04, the end result of an 11-year feminist campaign that tied national development to women's participation and rights; (c) the One Million Signatures Campaign, launched in Iran in 2007, a door-to-door grassroots movement for the repeal of discriminatory laws and a call for women's equality through constitutional change; (d) the workers' protests in Mahalla el-Kubra, in Egypt in 2008, which constituted a call for economic justice, and various subsequent labor actions; and (e) the Iranian Green Protests of June 2009, the first genuinely democratic mass protests in the region in this century, challenging the results of a rigged election and calling for an end to authoritarian rule. Here women were a large and vibrant presence. These events should be seen as precursors to the demands for democratization in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere; as part of the region's "collective action repertoire" against authoritarian rule, repression of dissent, and social inequalities; and as reasons why women's empowerment has to be part of any democracy transition.

Democracy, Gender, and the State

"Two characteristics of the mainstream literature on democratization prove particularly problematic for the incorporation of women and gender: a narrow definition of what constitutes democratization and an elite focus" (Lisa Baldez, 2010: 200). Definitions and understandings of democracy focus largely on qualities, procedures and institutions, but Benjamin Barber (1984) has noted that different types of democracies and their varied practices produce similarly varied ef-

fects. In a liberal democracy, a high degree of political legitimacy is necessary, as is an independent judiciary and a constitution that clearly sets out the relationship between state and society, and citizen rights and obligations. Written constitutions serve as a guarantee to citizens that the government is required to act in a certain way and uphold certain rights. It is worth noting, though, that "the liberal conception of democracy advocates circumscribing the public realm as narrowly as possible, while the socialist or social-democratic approach would extend that realm though regulation, subsidization, and, in some cases, collective ownership of property" (Schmitter and Karl, 1991: 77). This observation points to the difference between formal and substantive democracy as well as the difference between formal political rights and the material means to enjoy or exercise them (what are known as social and economic rights of citizenship).[2]

As many scholars have noted, Middle Eastern states have implemented economic reforms in line with the global neoliberal agenda, but political reforms have been limited (see for example Lust, 2010; Schwedler and Gerner, 2008; UNDP, 2002; UNDP, 2004). States such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan have been referred to as "liberalized autocracies" because of the power vested in the monarchs or presidents. The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its regular but controlled elections and restricted citizen rights, may be referred to as an "illiberal democracy." Commentators emphasize these realities, along with the need to establish "the core of democracy – getting citizens the ability to choose those who hold the main levers of political power and creating checks and balances through which state institutions share power" (Carothers and Ottaway, 2005: 258). Such commentators envisage a scenario in which political parties are allowed to form and compete with each other in elections.

And yet, one might argue that the distribution of political resources or power through competitive elections is a narrow definition of democracy – and may in fact be risky in a fledgling democracy where parties coalesce around sectarian interests. An over-emphasis on free elections obscures the importance of institutions and constitutional guarantees of rights that are

echoed in other legal frameworks and protected by the courts. For democracy is as much about citizen rights, participation and inclusion as it is about political parties, regular elections, and checks and balances. The *quality* of democracy is determined not only by the form of the political institutions in place and the regularity of elections, but also by the institutionalization of equal rights, the extent of citizen participation in the political process, and the involvement of diverse social groups in political parties, elections, parliaments, and decision-making bodies.[3]

Feminist scholars point out that political rights notwithstanding, women have experienced a wide gap between formal and substantive equality (Pateman, 1986; Rai, 2000; Lister, 2003). For example, "many states have constitutional provisions against discrimination on gender and other grounds – but to what extent are women's interests represented when political parties neither field women candidates nor make women's issues a fundamental part of their policies?" (Imam and Ibrahim, 1992: 18). This gap explains contemporary demands for institutional changes and various political and social reforms to expand women's public presence: childcare centers, paid maternity leaves, and paternity leaves; and political party quotas (Eschle, 2000; Lister, 2003; Phillips, 1995). Such mechanisms and reforms are needed to "level the playing field", allow women to catch up to men, and compensate for past marginalization and exclusion. The United Nations now advocates a benchmark of at least 30% female representation in a legislative body.

Still other material conditions are needed to enable women's full citizenship: equality and justice within the family, security in the home and on the streets, and freedom from sexual harassment in the workplace. As an Egyptian women's rights lawyer poignantly put it: "What use is the vote to a woman who is imprisoned in her home? Who cannot initiate a divorce even if she is trapped in a miserable marriage?" (Zulficar 2005). In this way, democracy may be seen not exclusively as a process and procedure that takes place at the level of the national policy, but as a multifaceted and ongoing process at different levels of social existence: in the family, in the community, at the workplace, in the economy, in civil society, and

in the polity (see Dryzek, 1996; Crick, 2000; Di Marco and Tabbush, 2010). For women in the Middle East and North Africa, whose labor force participation rates are among the lowest in the world, the achievement of economic citizenship is a necessary condition for their participation in any democratic polity.

Women and Democratic Transitions: Some Examples

In Latin America, women's movements and organizations played an important role in the opposition to authoritarianism and made a significant contribution to the "end of fear" and the inauguration of the transition (Alvarez, 1990; Jaquette, 1994, 2001; Waylen, 1994; Waylen, 2007). Here women organized as feminists and as democrats, and often allied themselves with left-wing parties. Where women were not key actors in the negotiated transitions, they nonetheless received institutional rewards when democratic governments were set up and their presence in the new parliaments increased. As Jane Jaquette (2001: 114) observes:

"[F]eminist issues were positively associated with democratization, human rights, and expanded notions of citizenship that included indigenous rights as well as women's rights. This positive association opened the way for electoral quotas and increased the credibility of women candidates, who were considered more likely to care about welfare issues and less corrupt than their male counterparts."

Argentina, for example, adopted a 30% female quota and in 2009 had a 38.5% female share of parliamentary seats as well as a woman president. Chile saw the prominence of the women's policy agency SERNAM, and while the female parliamentary share was just 12%, a woman president was elected in 2006; former President Michelle Bachelet came from the feminist and social democratic wing of Chile's political spectrum. Brazil saw the adoption of a strong law penalizing violence against women, and at this writing has a woman president. Jaquette (2009: 216) notes that even after the women's movement lost momentum, women's NGOs continued to advocate for

women's rights or to provide needed services for low-income women "without losing their feminist edge."

The important role of women in the anti-apartheid and democratic movement of South Africa is yet another historic example. In South Africa as well as in Burundi, and Rwanda, women's roles in the democratic transitions were acknowledged and rewarded with political party quotas, gender budgets, and well-resourced women's research and policy centers. In turn, such initiatives to support and promote women's participation and rights reinforced and institutionalized democratic institutions (Zulu, 2000; Tripp, 2001).

In the Philippines, women played important roles in the labor and liberation movements. The feminist coalition GABRIELA (Roces 2010) was formed in 1984 and challenged the 1985 presidential elections that Marcos won. Such groups, along with women in general, were a visible presence in the "people power" revolution that overthrew the Marcos regime. Since then, women have a strong presence in politics as well as in the labor force. In Northern Ireland, the 1998 signing of the Good Friday Agreement opened up new opportunities for women to participate in formal politics; in the first post-Agreement Assembly, 14% of those elected were women (Cowell-Meyers, 2003). This resulted from the activism of the Northern Ireland Women's Rights Movement, founded in 1975, the peace work of Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams, the Belfast Women's Collective, the Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation, and the Women's Coalition (see Roulston and Davies, 2000).

In contrast, East European women were not able to influence the transition and lost key rights, as well as levels of representation, when the post-communist democratic governments initially were set up (Heinen, 1992; Matland and Montgomery, 2003; Waylen, 2007; Rueshmeyer and Wolchik, 2009; Fabián, 2010). East European feminists coined the terms "male democracy" and "democratization with a male face" to describe the outcome of the transition from communism to liberal democracy, when women's representation in parliaments dropped dramatically from an average of 30 percent to 8-10 percent. This outcome is usually attributed to a reaction against com-

munist notions of equality, when many of the institutional arrangements that had guaranteed the participation of women, workers, peasants and other groups were dismantled. The East European case – an example of the "democracy paradox" –shows that liberal democracy is not necessarily women-friendly and could in fact engender a male democracy, privileging men and limiting women's representation and voice.[4]

When and where are women's interests served by democratization, and democratization served by women's participation? The literature on gender and revolution (Moghadam, 1997; Kampwirth, 2002; Shayne, 2004) has identified several factors as shaping either "patriarchal" or "egalitarian" outcomes: pre-existing gender relations and women's legal status and social positions; the extent of women's mobilizations, including the number and visibility of women's organizations and other institutions; the ideology, values, and norms of the ruling group; and the revolutionary state's capacity and will to mobilize resources for rights-based development. This analysis finds its complement in Georgina Waylen's discussion of key variables shaping women's experiences with democratic transitions: the nature of the transition; the role of women activists; the nature of the political parties and politicians involved in the transition; the nature of institutional legacy of the non-democratic regime (Waylen, 2007).[5] In addition, research on women and politics has found that party-list proportional representation systems, and those where one of the primary political parties is leftist, have significantly more women in political decision-making positions (Htun, 2000). External factors – such as transnational links or the promotion of women's rights by international organizations – may be influential as well (Paxton and Hughes, 2007; Viterna and Fallon, 2008).

We can propose, therefore, that the *gender* of democracy matters in at least three interrelated ways. First, as Ann Phillips has explained, women have interests, experiences, values and expertise that are different from those of men, due principally to their social positions. Thus women should be represented by women, at least until parity is achieved. Second, if the "core of democracy" is about the regular redistri-

bution of power through elections, then attention must be paid to the feminist argument that gender is itself a site and source of power, functioning to privilege men over women, and to privilege masculine traits, roles, values, and institutions over feminine equivalents in most social domains (Connell, 1987; Lorber, 1994). Third, women are actors and participants in the making of a democratic politics, certainly in civil society and their own organizations, sometimes in government (Krook, 2010; Krook and Childs, 2010). Thus, if patriarchal and authoritarian regimes are to be supplanted by democratic governance, then women's participation is key to effecting such a transition.

Linking Women's Rights and Democratization in the Middle East

If one indicator of democratic participation is representation in parliaments, then the 7 percent average female representation of the MENA region (circa 2008, data from the Interparliamentary Union, www.ipu.org) is evidence of the masculine nature of the region's political processes and institutions. The figures have increased for some countries; Tunisia's female share after the 2009 elections increased to 27.6% and Egypt's female share jumped from 2% to 12.7% after the elections of November 2010. It should be noted that the world average for female parliamentary representation is 19 percent.

Women as Agents and Allies of Democratization

Across the region, women's organizations self-identify as *democratic* as well as feminist, often issuing statements in favor of equality, participation, and rights. The region's feminists are among the most vocal advocates of democracy, and frequently refer to themselves as part of the "democratic" or "modernist" forces of society. For example, a Tunisian feminist lawyer associated with the Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates has said: "We recognize that, in comparison with other Arab countries, our situation is better, but still we have common problems, such as an authoritarian state. Our work on behalf of

women's empowerment is also aimed at political change and is part of the movement for democratization."[6] On the 50th anniversary of Tunisia's landmark *Code du Statut Personelle,* women's groups joined with human rights groups and the country's main trade union to celebrate women's rights (Arfaoui and Chékir 2006). A press release issued by the Association of Tunisian Women for Research on Development in 2008 declared that "no development, no democracy can be built without women's true participation and the respect of fundamental liberties for all, men and women" (AFTURD, 2008).

In Iran, the growing women's movement has become a highly visible force for change, initiating campaigns for women's equality and rights and staging public protests against arbitrary arrests that have huge social and political ramifications. For this, they have experienced state repression and many members have received prison sentences, but their cyberactivism continues.[7] In Egypt, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) has monitored the social realities of women's lives (e.g., lobbying against the problem of sexual harassment of women) while also integrating itself in the larger movement for human rights and democratization (e.g., election monitoring; calling for more women's participation in post-Mubarak Egypt).[8]

Examples of women's participation in (quasi-)democratic transitions, similar to the international cases mentioned above, may be found in the Middle East and North Africa as well. Political scientist Yesim Arat (1994) points out that in the 1980s, at a time when Turkey's civil society was under tight military control, the new feminist movement helped to usher in democratization through campaigns and demands for women's rights, participation, and autonomy. In her study of the Palestinian women's movement, Andrea Barron (2002) explains how women's roles in the first intifada had received recognition; thousands of women had been arrested and yet thousands others had provided important social services and logistical support. In the 1990s the three top priorities for women's rights advocates were changing the personal status laws, fighting domestic violence, and increasing women's political participation. The movement was

identified as an agent for democracy "because of the *substance* of its goals—obtaining equal rights for half of Palestinian society—and because of the *process* it is using to accomplish its objectives." In particular, Barron cites four "democratic practices" of the movement: (1) establishing an autonomous social movement with strong ties to political society; (2) expanding political participation and knowledge about the laws and customs that affect women; (3) campaigning for equal protection of the laws; and (4) cultivating a democratic political culture that supports pragmatic decision making and respects political differences (Barron, 2002: 80-81). Even after the second intifada emerged, the women's movement was still regarded as an important national agent of democratization, although it subsequently faced many obstacles.

Yet another example comes from Morocco. The Moroccan feminist campaigns for the reform of family laws, which began in the early 1990s, should be regarded as a key factor in the country's gradual liberalization during that decade. When Abdelrahman Yousefi was appointed prime minister in 1998 and formed a progressive cabinet, women's groups allied themselves to the government in the interest of promoting both women's rights and a democratic polity (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006; Skalli, 2007; Moghadam and Gheytanchi, 2010). Subsequently, Moroccan feminist organizations endorsed the truth and reconciliation commissions that were put in place to assess the repressive years prior to 1998. A number of key Moroccan women leaders previously associated with left-wing political groups (notably Latifa Jbabdi of l'Union d'action feminine) gave testimony about physical and sexual abuse during the years of repression (Slyomovics, 2005). More recently, women's rights groups have helped form a coalition that includes physician groups and is known as the Springtime of Dignity, in a new campaign for penal code reform spearheaded by the Association démocratique des femmes marocaines.[9] All these activities have enhanced the prominence of Morocco's women's rights advocates while also demonstrating the strong links between the advancement of women's rights and the advancement of democratization.[10]

The examples above would confirm that women's

rights movements are not "identity movements" but rather democratizing movements that entail redistribution as well as recognition and representation (as formulated by Nancy Fraser). As the literature on social movements shows, women's organizing tends to be inclusive, and women's movement activism often involves the explicit practice of democracy (Beckwith, 2010; Eschle, 2000; Moghadam, 2005; Vargas, 2010).

The Gender-based Democracy Deficit in the Middle East

Women's parliamentary participation ranges from the lows of Saudi Arabia Iran, and Egypt (0% - 4% from 1995 - 2009) to respectable figures for Tunisia (23%), according to figures from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The generally low figures for the region may be explained at least in part by the fact that political rights were granted to women relatively recently, and mostly in the 1950s and 1960s. Jordanian women won the right to vote in 1974 and Kuwaiti women in 2005. Only Turkey granted women political rights as early as 1930. Countries that have introduced parliamentary quotas include Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, but in most of the region, the levers of political power are almost exclusively in the hands of men, and this correlates with a high degree of authoritarianism and the persistence of patriarchal laws and norms.

As a result, women's groups have been calling for greater recognition and representation for at least a decade, while also expressing caution about exclusionary political processes. The historical record shows that women can pay a high price when a democratic process that is institutionally weak, or is not founded on principles of equality and the rights of all citizens, or is not protected by strong institutions, allows a political party bound by patriarchal norms to come to power and to immediately institute laws relegating women to second-class citizenship and controls over their mobility. This was the Algerian feminist nightmare, which is why so many educated Algerian women opposed the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) after its expansion in 1989. The quick transition un-

supported by strong institutions did not serve women well. Algeria had been long ruled by a single party system in the "Arab socialist" style. The death of President Boumedienne in December 1978 brought about political and economic changes, including the growth of an Islamist movement that was intimidating unveiled women, and a new government intent on economic restructuring. The urban riots of 1988 were followed quickly by a new constitution and elections, without a transitional period of democracy-building. The electoral victory of the FIS – which promised (or threatened) to institute Sharia law, enforce veiling, and end competitive elections – alarmed Algeria's educated female population. That the FIS went on to initiate an armed rebellion when it was not allowed to assume power following the 1991 elections only confirms the violent nature of that party (Bennoune, 1995; Cherifati-Merabtine, 1995; Messaoudi and Schemla, 1995; Moghadam, 2001; Salhi, 2011).[11] The Algerian experience has been highly instructive; it compels us to appreciate the more expanded understanding of democracy, including strong institutions that promote and protect civil liberties, participation, and inclusion.[12]

While acknowledging the role of Turkey's new feminist movement in the democratization process of the 1980s and 1990s, political scientist Yesim Arat has more recently examined the Turkish version of the democracy paradox (Arat, 2010). She explores the gendered implications of the intertwining of Islam and politics that took shape after the process of democratization in Turkey had brought to power the AKP, a political party with an Islamist background. This development, she argues, revived the spectre of restrictive gender roles for women; the expansion of religious freedoms has been accompanied by potential as well as real threats to gender equality. Despite the public and media focus on Turkey's longstanding ban of the Islamic headscarf in universities, Arat argues that a more threatening development is the propagation of patriarchal religious values, sanctioning secondary roles for women through the public bureaucracy, the educational system, and civil society organizations.

In Egypt in recent years, calls that have been issued

for political reform and democracy appear to be gender-blind and inattentive to matters of inclusion, participation, and especially women's rights. The Muslim Brothers, for example, want "the freedom of forming political parties" and "independence of the judiciary system", which are laudable goals, but they also call for "conformity to Islamic Sharia Law", which is not conducive to gender equality or the equality of Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in all domains (Brown, Hamzawy and Ottaway, 2006). Can Egypt effect a democratic transition if half the population is excluded from shaping the political process? Egyptian feminist lawyer Mona Zulficar (2005) has stated: "We don't want democracy to have a gender. We want it to be inclusive. Unfortunately democracy is patriarchal, because it is rooted in patriarchal culture."

The mass protests in Egypt of January-February 2011 saw participation by many Egyptian women, both veiled and unveiled. Mass social protests tend to have a dynamic of their own; they are by nature transgressive of established laws and norms, inclusive, and participatory. And yet post-movement politics can revert to the status quo ante, especially if conservative groups take control of the political process in the absence of strong coalitions of progressive forces. It is worth noting that an August 2010 statement issued by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) criticized the Muslim Brotherhood for mock presidential elections held by its Youth Forum that denied the request by the Forum's Muslim Sisters' Group to be included in the nominations to the mock presidency. The ECWR statement asserted that the Brotherhood's decision violated Egypt's constitutional equality clause and on the basis of the gender-egalitarian spirit of Islam (Komsan, 2010a). Of course, the constitutional equality clause had not exactly promoted gender equality in Egypt, and had had no discernable effect on the gender composition of the parliament. In November 2010, the ECWR issued another press release protesting the parliament's overwhelming vote against the appointment of women judges (Komsan, 2010b). After the collapse of the Mubarak government, the ECWR mobilized a large number of women's groups to issue a series of petitions calling for women's participation on the consti-

tutional committee and as judges. In their most recent press release (27 July 2011), the ECWR called for greater participation of women in local governments and as provincial governors.

The World Values Survey and other polls find strong support for democracy in Arab countries, but also high levels of religiosity (support for religious governance) and limited support for women's equality and rights, including support for women as political leaders (El-Braizat, 2002; Inglehart and Norris, 2003; Rizzo, 2005; Jamal, 2005; Moaddel, 2007; Tessler, 2007; Tessler, 2010).[13] This suggests that many citizens may understand democracy as a way to rid themselves of unpopular regimes and establish Islamic laws and norms, rather than as a political system that guarantees the equality, freedoms, rights, and participation of all citizens. Such a view bodes well neither for women's rights nor for the rights of religious minorities. It remains to be seen if Egypt and Tunisia in particular will ensure meaningful involvement of women's rights organizations in the democratic transition, along with the building of new institutions and laws that guarantee civil, political, and social/economic rights more broadly.

Engendering Democracy

Conditions for democratic governance include a state enjoying legitimacy, consent, and the ability to mediate conflicts between domestic groups; along with strong and effective institutions. While these conditions are rare in the Middle East and North Africa, surely the way to establish them – and to prevent "democracy without democrats" (Salamé, 1994), "autocracy with democrats" (Brumberg, 2002), or "illiberal democracy" (Zakaria, 2003) – is to promote programs for women's empowerment, build institutions for gender equality, and implement policies to increase women's political participation in government, in political parties, in the judiciary, and in civil society. This is why it behooves advocates of political reform to understand the interconnections among women's rights and democracy, and to acknowledge that a democratic system without women's human

rights and gender equality is an inferior form of democracy.

There is evidence that those in and around the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) have understood this. Although the 2004 report on freedom lacked gender insights, its definition of "good governance" is consistent with the feminist argument that democracy is about citizen participation and rights, and not merely the distribution of political power through elections. For the AHDR (UNDP, 2004: 8), "good governance safeguards freedom to ensure the expansion of people's choices (the core of human development) and rests upon effective popular participation and full representation of the public at large." It is buttressed by first-rate institutions that operate efficiently and with complete transparency. Those institutions are subject to effective accountability among themselves, protected by the government's separation of powers, and by a balance among those powers; they are also directly accountable to the populace through popular selection processes that are regular, free, and scrupulously fair. Democratic governance ensures that the rule of law is supreme; and the law itself is fair, protective of freedom, and applies equally to all. And it sees that an efficient, fair, and strictly independent judiciary upholds application of the law and the executive branch duly implements judicial rulings.

A workshop that took place in Amman, Jordan in December 2005 assembled women's rights activists from an array of countries in the Gulf, the Maghreb, and the Mashrek; among them were members of parliament (e.g., in Iraq's National Assembly) and candidates in upcoming elections in Kuwait and Jordan.[14] In the discussions that took place, a participant from Jordan said: "The performance of both men and women in the parliaments has been inferior. In general the political parties are weak. Only the Islamic ones are strong. We need and we want a culture of democracy." She went on to say that: "We are in favor of democracy. All countries went through a difficult stage of building democracy. Islamists should come to power and show themselves to be capable of doing good or of being incompetent. Let the Islamists join the parliamentary process. They will get exposed

as having no program or plan. The problem in our country, though, is that too many people are selected and appointed." In referring to democracy as a broad cultural as well as political project, the Moroccan woman participant said: "Democracy should be discussed at all levels – micro, meso, macro. Not just national politics, but also family, organizations, enterprises." One of the Iraqi participants pointed out that despite the quota law, women were still underrepresented in key institutions. As she explained: "In our country the judiciary will be important, because it will make many of the major decisions. But at the moment there are only 8 women judges compared with 468 male judges."

The workshop participants discussed strategies for building democracy with women, and emphasized issues such as working within political parties to integrate women's rights into party platforms; coalitions between women's organizations, political parties, and trade unions; working for equality clauses in constitutions; reform of family laws to ensure gender equality; working with media; advocating for political quotas; supporting women candidates. They also spoke about the importance of engaging in Islamic *ijtihad,* establishing transnational linkages, and advocating for "true democracy".

Conclusions

Feminist scholars have long criticized the gap between formal and substantive equality, along with women's marginalization from political decision-making. Since at least the 1995 Beijing conference, these issues have been placed on the global agenda, and various mechanisms, such as gender-based quotas, have been proposed to ensure and enhance women's political participation and representation. The era of globalization favors the expansion of democracy, but scholars, policymakers and many activists are largely inattentive to the gendered nature of democratization processes. What is more, they seemed enamored with a neoliberal model of democratization rather than an expanded *social* democracy predicated on concepts of citizen participation and rights.

While many commentators have focused on the participation (and transformation) of Islamist parties as key to the transition to democracy in the Middle East, they tend to overlook what are in fact a key constituency, a natural ally, and social base of a democratic politics – women and their feminist organizations. Women may need democracy in order to flourish, but the converse is also true: democracy needs women if it is to be inclusive, representative, and enduring. MENA feminists are aware that they can be harmed by an electoral politics that occurs in the absence of a strong institutional and legal framework for women's civil, political, and social rights of citizenship. Hence their insistence on egalitarian family laws, criminalization of domestic violence, and nationality rights for women – along with enhanced employment and political participation. If exclusion – including the exclusion of women – is part of the logic of the authoritarian state in the Middle East and North Africa, then the inclusion of women in the political process could help to change the nature of the state. A rights-based model of democracy, along with a rights-based model of economic development and growth, will realize the aspirations of those who launched the mass protests of January-February 2011 and since.

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Notes

[1] This paper originates in an invited essay for the *Arab Reform Bulletin* (Moghadam 2004), and a presentation made at the International Conference on Democracy and Human Rights in the Arab World, organized by UNESCO and the Egyptian National Council for Human Rights, Cairo 19-20 December 2005. The present paper expands on a version that appears in Di Marco and Tabbush (2010) and foregrounds the democratic transitions in the Middle East and North Africa.

[2] For more on formal and substantive democracy, politics, and citizenship rights, see Marshall (1964), Crick (2000), Lister (2003).

[3] One may raise serious questions, for example, about the quality of "democracy" in countries like Pakistan and Indonesia, where oppressive blasphemy laws prohibit dissent and critical thinking while also creating a climate of fear for those from minority religions. Indonesia often promotes its presumed pluralism and diversity as an example for the Islamic world, but see "Wave of Islamic Anger" (*Time*, Feb. 21, 2011, p. 19).

[4] There are other paradoxes associated with democracy or democratic transitions. Wide social inequalities are found in democracies such as Brazil, India, the Philippines, and South Africa; and in mature democracies such as the U.S. and U.K. In addition, democratization has been known to foment ethnic conflict, especially in fragmented or ethnically divided societies. See Chua (2003).

[5] Waylen (2010) argues that relatively drawn out transitions with negotiation processes that are relatively open, transparent, and accountable appear more likely to be accessible to women actors (and minority groups). By contrast, with rapid transitions, women's do not have sufficient time to mobilize and insert themselves in critical democratization processes, resulting in their exclusion from the new democratic transitions.

[6] Bochra Ben Hmida of Femmes Democrates, in a conversation with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 9 September 2004.

[7] See the following sites: End Stoning Forever Campaign: http://www.meydaan.com/English/aboutcamp.aspx?cid=46
Change for Equality Campaign: http://www.change4equality.com/english/
Feminist School: http://feministschool.net/ and http://feministschool.net/campaign/

[8] See their website: www.ecrwonline.org

[9] See http://www.learningpartnership.org/lib/morocco-springtime-dignity-coalition. Accessed 20 February 2011.

[10] In an interview with the author in Montecatini Termé, Italy (27 March 2009), former cabinet minister Mohammad Said Saadi emphasized that Morocco's political opening had been thwarted. The main problem, he said, was that the monarch retains excessive powers, which prevent both political democratization and egalitarian economic measures. Dr. Saadi is part of a loose coalition of progressives, including socialists and nationalists, who wish for a transition to the "Spanish model".

[11] It will be recalled that the Refah Party in Turkey faced a similar outcome, but chose to reorganize itself rather than take up arms.

[12] Tessler (2007) makes the interesting observation that Algerian respondents to the fourth wave of the WVS (collected between 2000 and 2002) show less attachment to religiosity. Only one-third of respondents agree or strongly agree that it would be better for the country if people with strong religious beliefs held political office (p. 114). This is no doubt a result of their experience with Islamist *intégrisme* and terrorism.

[13] The Arab Human Development Report 2005 reported more encouraging findings, on the basis of its own survey, but questions have been raised about the reliability of the methodology and findings. Mark Tessler, personal communication, Washington D.C., January 2009.

[14] Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Middle East Project, conference on "Strategizing Women's Role in Influencing Legislation", Amman, Jordan, 2-5 December 2005. The present author was a participant, and the quotes are from my notes.

Valentine M. Moghadam is Professor of Sociology and Director of Women's Studies at Purdue University. She is the author of *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (1993, 2003), *Globalization and Social Movements: Islamism, Feminism, and the Global Justice Movement* (2009) and many other publications. In addition to her academic career, she has been a UN staff member and a consultant to international organizations. Email: **moghadam@purdue.edu**

Dr. Moghadam will be joining Northeastern University, Boston, as Director of International Affairs and Professor of Sociology in January 2012.