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**Keynote Address from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences**

***Engendering Democracy after the Arab Spring\****

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**ABSTRACT**

A gender analysis is needed for a deeper understanding of democracy and democratic transitions. While many commentators of the Middle East have focused on the participation (and transformation) of Islamist parties as key to a democratic transition, they tend to overlook what are in fact key constituencies, natural allies, and social bases of democratic politics—women and their feminist organizations. Women may need democracy in order to flourish, but democracy needs women if it is to be inclusive, representative, and enduring. A comparative perspective as well as a focus on the Middle East/North Africa region illustrates the relationship between the advancement of democracy and the advancement of women.

**KEY WORDS** Democracy; Gender; Middle East and North Africa; Arab Spring; Women's Rights

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 to 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. There also has been much speculation about the prospects of democratization in Egypt and Tunisia, as well as in other countries undergoing social and political protests and change.

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Something has been missing from the recent discussions and analyses, however. Let us pose this issue 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 a “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; Baldez 2010; Di Marco and Tabbush 2010; Jaquette 2009; Viterna and Fallon 2008; Waylen 2007), 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 (Dahlerup 2006; Eschle 2000; Phillips 1991, 1995). 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 fourfold 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, 2009; Roulston and Davies 2000; Tripp 2001; Waylen 1994, 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 potential dangers posed to sex equality with the opening of political space to fundamentalist forces. Democracy is assumed by many analysts 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 1990–1991; and Iraq and the Palestine

Authority, where elections in early 2006 did not bring to power governments committed to citizens' 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 "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. Finally, the mass social protests in the Middle East and North Africa were a call for social justice as much as for civil and political rights. Attention to social rights and gender equality will ensure a more stable democracy and democratic consolidation.

Before I elaborate on my argument, it may be useful to draw attention to a number of events that constitute an important backdrop to the mass protests and political revolutions of 2011: (1) 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; (2) the Moroccan family law reform (2003–2004), the end result of an 11-year feminist campaign that tied national development to women's participation and rights; (3) 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; (4) the Kefaya movement in Egypt in 2005, which challenged the apparent permanence of the Mubarak presidency, and the workers' protests in Mahalla el-Kubra in Egypt in 2008, which constituted a call for economic justice, and various subsequent labor actions; and (5) the Iranian Green Protests of June 2009, perhaps 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. In all of these events, 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" (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 effects. In a liberal democracy, a high degree of political legitimacy is necessary, as are an independent judiciary and a constitution that clearly sets out the relationship between state and society and between citizens' rights and obligations. A written constitution serves as a guarantee to citizens that the government is required to act in a certain way and to 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).<sup>1</sup>

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; United Nations Development Programme 2002, 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, 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 overemphasis 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.<sup>2</sup>

World-polity scholars have examined the worldwide expansion of women’s suffrage as evidence of norm diffusion and policy isomorphism (Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan 1997). Feminist scholars point out that political rights notwithstanding, women have experienced a wide gap between formal and substantive equality (Lister 2003; Pateman 1986; Rai 2000). 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 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 has advocated a benchmark of at least 30 percent 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 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 Crick 2000; DiMarco and Tabbush 2010; Dryzek 1996). 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 participation in any democratic polity. The responsibility to ensure economic, civil, and political rights devolves on the state.

*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, 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 percent female quota and in 2009 had a 38.5 percent 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 percent, 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 nongovernmental organizations (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 (Tripp 2001; Zulu 2000).

In the Philippines, women played important roles in the labor and liberation movements. The feminist coalition GABRIELA 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 (Roces 2010). Since then, women have had 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 percent 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, Eastern 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 (Fabián 2010; Heinen 1992; Matland and Montgomery 2003; Ruesh Meyer and Wolchik 2009; Waylen 2007). Eastern 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 communist notions of equality, in which many of the institutional arrangements that had guaranteed the participation of women, workers, peasants, and other groups were dismantled. The Eastern 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.<sup>3</sup>

When and where are women's interests served by democratization, and democratization served by women's participation? The literature on gender and revolution (Kampwirth 2002; Shayne 2004) has identified several factors as shaping patriarchal or egalitarian outcomes: preexisting 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 (2007) 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, and the nature of institutional legacy of the nondemocratic regime.<sup>4</sup> In addition, research on women and politics has found that party-list proportional representation systems and those systems in which 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 redistribution 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; Eschle 2000; Lorber 1994).<sup>5</sup> Third, women are actors and participants in the making of 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 Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2008) is evidence of the masculine nature of the region’s political processes and institutions. It should be noted that the world average for female parliamentary representation is 19 percent.

### *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 percent from 1995 to 2009) to respectable figures for Tunisia (23 percent), according to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2008).<sup>6</sup> 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, 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, 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 unsupported by strong institutions did not serve women well. Algeria had long been 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 intimidated unveiled women, as well as 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; Salhi 2011).<sup>7</sup> The Algerian experience has been highly instructive; it compels us to appreciate a more expanded understanding of democracy, including strong institutions that promote and protect civil liberties, participation, and inclusion.<sup>8</sup>

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 specter 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.

Prior to the political revolution in Egypt, and certainly on the part of the 2005 Kefaya movement, calls had been issued for political reform and democracy, but in some quarters, such calls were gender blind and were inattentive to matters of inclusion, participation, and especially women’s rights. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, wanted “the freedom of forming political parties” and “independence of the judiciary system,” which are laudable goals, but they also called for “conformity to Islamic Sharia Law,” which is not conducive to gender equality or to the equality of Muslim and non-Muslim citizens in all domains (Brown, Hamzawy, and Ottaway 2006). Since the political revolution, the Muslim Brotherhood has won a large percentage of parliamentary seats, and the even more fundamentalist Nour Party also won a large number of seats. Can Egypt effect a democratic transition if half the population is excluded from shaping the political process or if women’s rights are ignored? 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 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 (Al-Braizet 2002; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Jamal 2005; Moaddel 2007; Rizzo 2005; Tessler 2007, 2010).<sup>9</sup> This suggests that many citizens may understand democracy as a way to rid themselves of unpopular regimes and to 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.

### *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."<sup>10</sup> On the fiftieth 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."

In Iran, after more than a decade of quiet activism, a feminist movement erupted on the political scene in 2007, quickly becoming a highly visible force for change, initiating campaigns for women's equality and rights, staging public protests against arbitrary arrests, and calling for democracy and rights. For this, they have experienced state repression and many members have received prison sentences, but their cyberactivism continues (Moghadam and Gheythanhi 2010).<sup>11</sup>

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 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 2002:80–1). 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 (Moghadam and Gheyntanchi 2010; Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006; Skalli, 2007). 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* (ADFM).<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

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 2009).

## **ENGENDERING DEMOCRACY IN THE ARAB SPRING**

Equating democracy with free and fair elections presents at least two problems. First, the distribution of political resources or power through competitive elections is an overly narrow definition of democracy; it obscures the importance of institutions, state capacity, and constitutional guarantees of rights no matter which party wins an election. Second, it occludes the gendered nature of politics and the longstanding marginalization of half the population. As we have seen, "free and fair elections" may perpetuate inequitable representation.

Democracy by fiat, by decree, or from above cannot ensure the citizen participation and rights that are key to the success of the project. Successful democracies emerge from strong and healthy civil societies that include local authorities, political parties, trade unions, professional associations, and other NGOs with a commitment to citizen rights. This paves the way for the expansion and

codification of rights to women, minorities, and other excluded social actors through a rights-based model of state building. Eric Hobsbawm (2005) has correctly noted that the conditions for effective democratic governance are rare: an existing 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, political parties, the judiciary, and 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 about the distribution of political power through elections (United Nations Development Programme 2002).

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 (in Iraq’s National Assembly, for example) and candidates in upcoming elections in Kuwait and Jordan.<sup>14</sup> 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 continued, “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.”

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

been pursued by women's rights activists immersed in the 2011 democratic transitions, as in the examples below from Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia.

As part of the Arab Spring, Morocco saw the formation of the *Mouvement 20 février*, which included representatives of youth groups and women's groups, among other civil society actors. As a result, but also as part of the slow process of democratization that has taken place since 1998, King Mohammad VI announced political reforms. The new constitutional amendments, endorsed by a large majority in the 1 July 2011 referendum, will limit the king's power—something that the country's progressives had been seeking for some time—while also recognizing the country's cultural diversity (Silverstein 2011). In a reflection of the importance of the women's movement in Morocco, 5 of the 18 members of the Consultative Commission for the Constitutional Reform were women. The Springtime of Dignity coalition issued a memorandum to the Consultative Commission calling for the primacy of international conventions, namely the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); equality in civil rights for women and men; substantive equality and institutionalization of affirmative mechanisms and measures for women's equality (Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace 2011).

Moroccan women's rights groups are part of a North African network called the *Collectif Maghreb Egalité 95*, active since the early 1990s. In May 2011, the ADFM hosted a meeting in Rabat that focused on women and the democratic transitions in the MENA region. The Moroccan Minister of Women's Affairs, Nouzha Skalli, well known for her progressive views, was in attendance, as were representatives of the new United Nations agency UN Women, among other international organizations. The meeting expressed its support for the democratic transitions and called for women's equality and rights.

The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) has monitored the social realities of women's lives, most notably by examining the problem of sexual harassment of women and by lobbying against it. ECWR's presence on the Internet and its use of social media to disseminate its messages has helped it become one of the most effective women's rights groups in Egypt. In 2009, ECWR announced that it would monitor the upcoming elections to ensure transparency as well as opportunities for women candidates. In August 2010, it issued a statement criticizing 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 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 discernible 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).

Since the downfall of the Mubarak government, the ECWR has issued regular press releases and petitions criticizing the exclusion of women from transitional bodies, calling for more women's participation in the judiciary, in local governance, and as provincial governors. The ECWR also collects and disseminates a tally of discriminatory practices, assaults on women, and attacks on religious minorities.

When ECWR's director, Nehad Aboul Komsan, was detained for her activities, a concerted media campaign and international appeals resulted in her quick release.<sup>15</sup>

Compared with Morocco and Tunisia, Egypt lags behind in legislation pertaining to women as well as in terms of women's social conditions. Preexisting conditions include a very conservative society and culture. Between 1995 and 2010, Egyptian women held just 2 percent of the seats in parliament; the chambers of the judiciary were only recently opened to women (and even then, the highest court remained closed to them); and the country's family law privileges men. Such preconditions are not favorable to a lasting transformation of gender roles.

Tunisia, however, differs in this respect, and at the time of its political revolution had more positive preconditions, including (1) a larger female share of employment, (2) a larger female share of parliamentary seats, (3) a stronger tradition of secular republicanism, (4) a stronger and longer tradition of women's legal rights (the 1956 family law), (5) well-established feminist organizations and policy institutes with transnational links, and (6) gender norms that are more egalitarian than elsewhere. In addition, Tunisia's transitional governing body endorsed parity in political representation.

Tunisian women had perhaps the highest sustained level of female parliamentary participation in the MENA region, and that should be seen as an accomplishment, even accounting for the authoritarian nature of the *ancien regime*. Relatively small but well-organized, the Tunisian feminist movement had developed a sophisticated critique of the state and patriarchy, was an active member of the *Collectif Maghreb*, and helped produce a number of important documents and reports on women's conditions in Tunisia. The country's ties to the European Union and the country's relatively strong trade union, the UGTT, are also advantages. On 8 March 2011, the launch by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) of a new Arab women's trade union network took place in Tunis, and ITUC Secretary-General Sharan Burrow praised the Tunisian democratic movement, saying

The winds of change, for more democracy, rights, social justice and decent work, now sweeping across the whole Arab region are an historic opportunity for women to win the equal standing that is their due in society, in the labour market and in their trade union organizations. Arab women must be fully involved in this surge towards democracy, in the policies and structures, and the ITUC is committed to giving its full support to this fight for equality in the Arab region.  
(International Trade Union Conference 2011)

Since the political revolution in Tunisia and the electoral victory in October 2011 of an-Nahda, a moderate Islamic party, feminist organizations have been protesting any discourses or legislative moves that might undermine the expansive rights that Tunisian women have won over the decades, and individual feminists have been in dialogue with the ruling party to ensure that those rights remain intact.<sup>16</sup> Tunisian civil society includes many progressive organizations and political parties; apart from the UGTT and the feminist organizations, there are the Progressive

Democratic Party (which was an-Nahda's main secular rival during the elections) and the Modernist Democratic Pole (which includes Tajdid, the former communist party). The *Haute instance pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution, de la réforme politique et de la transition démocratique* has a woman vice president (professor Latifa Lakhdar, a women's rights activist and secularist) as well as many women members (such as women's rights/human rights lawyer Alya Chérif Chamhari). Representatives of these organizations were present at a UNESCO seminar, *Démocratie et Renouveau dans le monde arabe* (Paris, 21 June 2011). Among the many cogent statements made, two struck me as especially important. Mme Chamhari declared that "the Tunisian revolution is fundamentally a struggle for social equality and women's equality," and Mahmoud Ben Romdhane of Tajdid reminded the audience that while "Ben Ali, degage" had been a key protest slogan, another one had been "l'emploi, notre droit."<sup>17</sup>

## 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 seem 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 key constituencies, natural allies, and social bases of 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 electoral politics that occur 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.

This paper has examined the recent historical record on democratization and identified the major factors that appear to shape gendered outcomes. Whether outcomes are patriarchal or egalitarian depend on women's preexisting legal status and social conditions, the type of transition taking place and the nature of the leading groups within it, the ability of women to mobilize and organize, and transnational links and influences. In this regard, Tunisian women are in a more advantageous position than are Egyptian women; in Morocco, women's rights groups have made considerable headway. In all cases, however, women's participation is key to the building of a democratic culture as well as to democratic consolidation. If the

modernizing bourgeoisie was the lynchpin of democracy in Barrington Moore's schema on the transition from agrarian to industrial society, today, the "modernizing women" of the Middle East and North Africa are the principal agents of democratization—and of cultural change—in the region. Given that exclusion, notably the exclusion of women, has been 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.

## ENDNOTES

1. For more on formal and substantive democracy, politics, and citizenship rights, see Marshall (1964), Crick (2000), and Lister (2003).
2. 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).
3. 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 United States and the United Kingdom. In addition, democratization has been known to foment ethnic conflict, especially in fragmented or ethnically divided societies. (See Chua 2003.)
4. Waylen (2010) argues that pacted and 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 do not have sufficient time to mobilize and insert themselves in critical democratization processes, resulting in their exclusion from the new democratic transitions.
5. Here, power is understood not as an individual trait but in structural terms as deriving from and inhering in social relationships. Across history and in today's world, the social relations of gender have marginalized women from political power; what is more, the neoliberal era prioritizes what may be regarded as masculine or masculinist institutions (for example, the finance sector, large corporations, the military) over feminine ones (welfare sectors, for example).
6. Tunisia's female share since 1995 tended to be in the 23–25 percent range but after the 2009 elections increased to 27.6 percent; in Egypt, the female share jumped from 2 percent to 12.7 percent with the adoption of a quota system for the November 2010 elections. In both cases, the parliaments were dissolved with the downfall of the governments in early 2011.
7. Recall that the Refah Party in Turkey faced a similar outcome but chose to reorganize itself rather than take up arms.
8. 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.



9. 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 DC, January 2009).
10. Bochra Ben Hmida of Femmes Democratés, in a conversation with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 9 September 2004.
11. See the End Stoning Forever Campaign (<http://www.meydaan.com/English/aboutcamp.aspx?cid=46>), the Change for Equality Campaign (<http://www.change4equality.com/english/>), and Feminist School (<http://feministschool.net/> and <http://feministschool.net/campaign/>).
12. See <http://www.learningpartnership.org/lib/morocco-springtime-dignity-coalition> (accessed 20 February 2011).
13. In an interview with the author in Montecatini Terme, 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 retained excessive powers, which prevented 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.
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. I was a participant, and the quotes are from my notes.
15. See [www.ecrwonline.org](http://www.ecrwonline.org)
16. Personal communication from Khédija Arfaoui, Bellagio, 14 September 2011, and various e-mail exchanges. Over the years, I have collected many documents and reports issued by Tunisian women's organizations.
17. Author's notes at the UNESCO seminar.

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