



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Moroccan feminist groups campaign to reform Moudawana (Personal Status Code/Islamic family law), 1992-2004

Time period notes: *The struggle to reform the Moudawana took place over decades, a movement that began with the inception of the law in the late 1950s. However, this particular campaign, led first by the Union de l'Action Feminine (UAF, Union for Women's Action) and later by the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM, Moroccan Women's Democratic Association), is important because it is marked by two major successes, one in 1993 and the other in 2004, that have since redefined both how women are viewed in the public sphere (by the law and by society) as well as how women's groups can gain access to the political arena to have their demands realized.*

March

1992

to: February

2004

Country: Morocco

Location City/State/Province: Rabat (the capital city) and Casablanca

Location Description: *the main actions took place in the cities listed above, but many campaigns reached out to cities and rural areas throughout the country*

Goals:

Reform of the Moudawana (Islamic family law) so that it treated women and men equally through such issues as a new requirement for a bride's verbal consent to marriage, the elimination of a father's right to force his daughter to marry, a requirement to obtain a judge's permission in cases of polygamy and a husband's repudiation of his wife; the abolition of marital tutorship, the elimination of the principle of obedience to the husband, the establishment of new divorce procedures, the establishment of eighteen as the legal age for marriage for men and women alike, the expansion of legal guardianship rights for women, restrictive regulation of polygamy, and allowing grandchildren to inherit from maternal as well as paternal grandparents.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions › 'one million signatures' campaign as a petition to reform the Moudawana
- 010. Newspapers and journals

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

Methods in 4th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 050. Teach-ins

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › “Building a democratic Moroccan society depends on the respect of women’s rights.”
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 050. Teach-ins
- 179. Alternative social institutions › creation of shelters and community centers for abused women, single mothers, and orphans

Methods in 6th segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 050. Teach-ins
- 162. Sit-in
- 179. Alternative social institutions › continuation of shelters, literacy/education campaigns, and the creation of Anaruz to monitor the application of the reforms

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- women's groups

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Union de l'Action Feminine (UAF, Union for Women’s Action), Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM, Moroccan Women’s Democratic Association)

Partners:

Réseau d'Appui au PANIFD (RAP, Network of Support for PANIFD), Front de Défense des Droits des Femmes Marocaines (FDFM, Front for the Defence of Moroccan Women's Rights), Coalition Printemps de l'Egalité (CPE, Spring of Equality)

Coalition), Collectif Maghreb Egalité 95 (CME 95, Maghreb Equality Collective 95)

External allies:

Women's Leadership Partnership (WLP), World Bank

Involvement of social elites:

Prime Minister Abderrahmane El Youssoufi supported the PANIFD for a time

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Collectif Maghreb Egalité 95 (CME 95)
- Maghreb Equality Collective 95)

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Front de Défense des Droits des Femmes Marocaines (FDFM-Front for the Defence of Moroccan Women's Rights)
- King Mohamad IV
- Prime Minister Abderrahmane El Youssoufi
- Réseau d'Appui au PANIFD (RAP-Network of Support for PANIFD)

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Coalition Printemps de l'Egalité (CPE-Spring of Equality Coalition)
- Prime Minister Abderrahmane El Youssoufi (Exit)
- Women's Leadership Partnership (WLP)

Groups in 6th Segment:

Segment Length: 2 years

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Organism National pour la Protection de la Famille Marocaine (ONPFM, National Group for the Protection of the Moroccan Family), Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD, Justice and Development Party)

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

counter petitions, march in the city of Casablanca on March 12, 2000, the same day as a march held by the campaigners; literacy campaigns; occupations in the beaches; newspaper and magazine articles attacking the campaigners; pamphlets explaining their position; visits to mosques and other public spaces to do teach-ins.

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Nearly all of the demands made by the narrowly-focused CPE were met by the recommendations of the RCC and subsequent passage of the reforms by the Parliament. This meant that not all of the original demands of the ADFM were met entirely. Due to the breadth of their demands reaches into several realms of Moroccan society: social, political, religious, and legal; the fact that they weren't all met does not indicate that the campaign was unsuccessful but rather that the work is unfinished, to be picked up by subsequent campaigns.

In April 2004 they formed the Anaruz national network that offers information and legal assistance to women victims of violence as well as monitors the application of the new Family Code to ensure that it is properly enforced. These efforts have helped to make the transition from paper to action such that the reforms have made a significant impact on women all across the country.

Between 1992 and 2004, several NGOs built up around feminist ideologies, and a strive for women's rights took over the leadership of a working group that campaigned for reforms of the Moudawana, or Personal Status Code, which severely restricted the rights of women in Morocco. The struggle to reform the Moudawana took place over decades, a movement that began with the inception of the law in the late 1950s. However, this particular campaign, led by first by the Union de l'Action Feminine (UAF, Union for Women's Action) and later the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM, Moroccan Women's Democratic Association), is important because it is marked by two major successes, one in 1993 and the other in 2004, that have since redefined both how women are viewed in the public sphere (by the law and by society) as well as how women's groups can gain access to the political arena to have their demands realized.

The UAF began its campaign on March 3, 1992 with the announcement through its newspaper, 8 Mars, that they were launching a "one million signatures" campaign that would demonstrate the large public support for the reforms that many feminist groups were demanding of the Moudawana. The petition reached its million signatures goal and was presented to the Prime Minister who, with King Hassan II, formed a commission of religious scholars to review the UAF's demands, which included the removal of laws on polygamy and of the principle that a husband has ultimate authority over his wife. Members of the religious right responded with a counter-petition as well as a fatwa, a non-binding religious opinion concerning Islamic law given by an Islamic scholar, which countered the claims made by the UAF concerning their interpretation of equality, justice, and tolerance. Despite the counterattacks, the commission formed by the King pushed some of the reforms that had been demanded in the petition such as a new requirement for a bride's verbal consent to marriage, the elimination of a father's right to force his daughter to marry, and a requirement to obtain a judge's permission in cases of polygamy and a husband's repudiation of his wife. Although these changes were not a particularly grand success because they did not get at the heart of the demands the UAF and others were hoping for, these gains were especially important because they broke through a long-standing belief that the Moudawana was intractable due to its justifications rooted in religious doctrine.

Having gained the 1993 reforms, the ADFM took the lead with the formation of a working group that mobilized some of the financial capital of international organizations such as the World Bank and the intellectual and conceptual framework developed generally during the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing and specifically by the Collectif Maghreb Egalité 95 (CME 95, Maghreb Equality Collective 95), a network of women's organizations in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia that combined the experiences of women from the three countries to form strong arguments from sociological, human rights, religious and legal perspectives. These perspectives were then utilized to organize a multi-pronged approach which could apply the best arguments depending on the context that was synthesized into a readily available and accessible guide entitled *Dalil pour l'égalité dans la famille au Maghreb* (Guide to equality in the family in the Maghreb). In Morocco, this guide served as a valuable tool to consolidate and strengthen the campaign especially as it explained clearly the religious arguments that were needed to confront

the stronghold of the conservative groups on the interpretation of Islamic law.

In 1999, building on these resources, the ADFM created Le Plan d'action national pour l'intégration de la femme au développement (PANIFD, the Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development) which outlined a strategic proposal for how and why the women of Morocco would achieve the necessary legal changes in the Moudawana. The ADFM released the Plan at a strategic moment which took advantage of seismic changes in the political landscape such as the 1997 elections that placed the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP, Socialist Union of Popular Forces) with a now substantial percentage in the legislature, the appointment of Abderrahmane El Youssoufi of the USFP to the position of prime minister, and the death of King Hassan II who was replaced by his son King Mouhamed VI. These changes were significant because the people and groups that came to power were more sympathetic to the women's groups' concerns and liberalization in general. Therefore, the initial response by the government was highly positive. On March 19, 1999, Prime Minister Abderrahmane El Youssoufi announced publicly that he strongly supported the PANIFD.

However, the popularity of the PANIFD caused an even stronger counterattack by the opposition groups lead by the Parti de la Justice et du Développement (PJD, Justice and Development Party) the Organisme National pour la Protection de la Famille Marocaine (ONPFM, National Group for the Protection of the Moroccan Family) that spread their message through mosques, marketplaces, popular media outlets, and lobbying the government. Their arguments that the PANIFD violated the sharia (the body of religious Islamic law) eventually convinced the government to remove its support of the plan.

In response, organizers of the PANIFD, especially the ADFM, organized two new networks of NGOs: Réseau d'Appui au PANIFD (RAP, Network of Support for PANIFD), Front de Défense des Droits des Femmes Marocaines (FDFM, Front for the Defence of Moroccan Women's Rights). The RAP included more than 200 organizations related to human and women's rights and focused on mobilizing a large public support to demonstrate the expansiveness of the support for women's rights in the country. The FDFM covered just over 50 organizations focused on mobilizing the trade unions and cultural organizations to counter the attacks from the conservative groups. Both networks set out on education campaigns that involved holding large teach-ins that informed people of the stakes involved and how people could contribute. They also proved integral in bringing out the tens of thousands of women and men to march in the streets of the capital, Rabat, on March 12, 2001 in support of the PANIFD. This date was important because it was a public holiday so that many could come out to demonstrate and it was International Women's Day. In response, the opposition groups mobilized a rally in Casablanca on the very same day that by some estimates reached the hundreds of thousands. The opposition used sensationalist claims of religious and national identity, which placed the women's activists as outsiders. They carried banners with the slogan, "Yes to the integration of women in development. No to westernization and submission."

In reaction to these large rallies, King Mohamad VI decided to take up the issue himself, activating his authority as Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful), in order to determine the best interpretation of the sharia. He formed the Royal Consultative Commission (RCC), which was composed of religious scientists, lawyers, sociologists, and doctors. Due to members in the RCC who held highly conservative beliefs, the deliberations were very slow moving, but the ADFM and other women's groups quickly responded to the new institution by forming a new coalition that narrowed its goals to putting pressure on and monitoring the RCC entitled the Coalition Printemps de l'Egalité (CPE, Spring of Equality Coalition). The CPE launched several awareness raising campaigns to continuously keep the pressure on the RCC. They began to disseminate information on the stories of real women who had suffered from domestic violence, repudiation, and early marriage in order to demonstrate the difficult reality of Moroccan women and build the case for the reforms. They developed a slogan that accompanied each story, "Building a democratic Moroccan society depends on the respect of women's rights."

As the wait for the recommendations of the RCC dragged on, the CPE doubled their efforts to keep the issue at the forefront of public debate so that it would not be lost amongst the many issues facing Moroccan society at the time. They held poetry readings on the radio in favor of the reforms, built community centers for shelter, created pamphlets with legal advice for women, and launched literacy campaigns throughout the country. Then on March 8, 2002, they held a sit-in in front of the House of Parliament in Rabat to demonstrate that they were still very serious about the progress being made on the reforms. The PJD and other opposition groups also organized less successful literacy campaigns and tried to have a more public presence by

hosting prayer rituals on beaches where their “Islamic” clothing contrasted with the more revealing bathing suits of the general public. However, these actions caused more controversy for them than it did good.

Then in May of 2003, suicide bombers from a radical Islamic terrorist organizations bombed several locations in the city of Casablanca. The fact that they were Moroccans who had killed fellow Moroccans angered many citizens of the country and the general consensus turned away from extremist Islam and turned toward new interpretations of religious law that would include women. The CPE and other feminist organizations seized this moment as an opportunity to push their demands forward.

In October 2003, the RCC finally delivered their recommendations to King Mohamed VI and the parliament. After five months of deliberation, in February 2004, the Moroccan Parliament passed a new code that included over 100 amendments and covered such issues as the abolition of marital tutorship, the elimination of the principle of obedience to the husband, the establishment of new divorce procedures, the establishment of eighteen as the legal age for marriage for men and women alike, the expansion of legal guardianship rights for women, restrictive regulation of polygamy, and the allowing of grandchildren to inherit from maternal as well as paternal grandparents.

The gains to women’s rights after the reforms to the Moudawana were enormous and represented a huge shift in Moroccan society toward better understanding women’s issues. Nearly all of the demands made by the narrowly-focused CPE were met by the recommendations of the RCC and subsequent passage of the reforms by the Parliament, and many of the more broadly defined demands of the ADFM were also met. However, the success of the campaign did not mean the end of the work done by these organizations, and in April 2004 they formed the Anaruz national network that offers information and legal assistance to women victims of violence as well as monitors the application of the new Family Code to ensure that it is properly enforced. These efforts have helped to make the transition from paper to action such that the reforms have made a significant impact on women all across the country.

Research Notes

Influences:

The Dalil pour l’égalité dans la famille au Maghreb (Guide to equality in the family in the Maghreb) was translated into Persian and used as a basis to launch a similar 'one million signatures' campaign in Iran (2).

The transnational Musawah campaign that began in February of 2009, which is a movement calling for equality and justice for Muslim women around the world, has modeled much of their strategies on those used in the Moroccan family law reform, especially in the creation of its Platform for Action (2).

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