

Rethinking Fatema Mernissi on Women and Politics: Changing Realities in the Maghreb

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Mernissi was one of the first feminist scholars to bring attention to the ways in which women leaders in Islamic countries throughout history have been undervalued and not given adequate attention. In her book *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (1993) she highlights various Turkish, Mongol, and Arab women who led armies, formed empires and led countries as queens and sultanas between the 3rd and 17th centuries. Although some historians find that the book offers an eclectic and sometimes problematic historical account, she makes a convincing case in challenging the misogyny and ignorance of those who believe women have not led Muslim lands.

Mernissi also challenged notions of power in Islamic countries that see it as being partly divine and partly secular in ways that work to exclude women. In other words, she argues that there has never been a woman caliph since the claim to that position is divine. A caliph is the representative of God on earth, and in the case of the Moroccan king he is the commander of the faithful and someone who can prove his connection to the prophet. Women could aspire or inherit the title of *sultana* (sultan), *malika* (queen), *al hurra* (title given to women queens or nobility), *sitt* (lady) or *khatun* (female nobility in Asia, female version of *khan*), but women could never aspire to the title of "caliph". Mernissi recreated an understanding of Islam that accommodated gender equality in the political realm. She argued that there is a contradiction in Islam between its spirit of equality and the notion of aristocracy and nobility that was claimed by

the elite. At the core of Islam is the principle that all believers are equal and it is this notion that she wants to link to gender equality in order to argue for women's leadership in the political realm.

Mernissi critiqued both Islamic leaders and Western observers who made the claim that Islam was antithetical to women's political leadership. This claim is still made in the contemporary era, even after there is ample evidence that Muslim countries have had women rulers both historically and increasingly in the present. Today, one reason these arguments are still made by scholars, journalists and other observers has to do with the relatively low rates of female political representation in the Middle East, in particular, and the use of religion as an argument to keep women from entering office in this region.

In the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, Islam is often seen as tied to patriarchal attitudes by scholars who study attitudes (Alexander and Welzel 2011; Benstead forthcoming; Inglehart and Norris 2003). World Values surveys show that in non-Muslim countries 56% of people support women as leaders compared with 26% in Muslim countries surveyed. Nevertheless, this has not precluded women from becoming leaders in Muslim countries, especially when institutional innovations like quotas are in place. Thus, while it is important to consider attitudes, it is equally important to look at the actual practice of female representation in various parts of the world, because attitudes do not always correspond to the practice. In fact, sometimes it is precisely because of weak support for women leaders that gender quotas are introduced.

In the MENA region, there is much more support for women as leaders in Lebanon and Kuwait than in most other countries (61% and 41% respectively), yet they have among the lowest rates of representation in the region (Table 1). This is not to say attitudes are irrelevant. The fact that Tunisia and Morocco have among the highest levels of support for women's leadership contributes to their higher rates of representation. But there is no straight correlation between values and practices and to the extent that there are patterns, they require explanation.

Table 1
Attitudes vs. Women in Parliament

	Supportive of women as leaders	Percentage of women in Parliament
Algeria	34	32
Sudan	25	31
Tunisia	44	31
Iraq	26	27
Morocco	51	18
Libya	23	16
Egypt	30	15
Jordan	25	12
Lebanon	60	3
Kuwait	41	2
Yemen	29	0

Source: Arab Barometer, Afrobarometer

Mernissi recognized the many Muslim societies that have had women leaders from the Arabs to the Persians, Mongols, Berbers, Kurds, Sudanese, Indians and many others. However, even as she advanced the idea of an egalitarian ethos in Islam, she talked about Islam as though all Islamic societies throughout history have shared a common antipathy to women leaders for the same reason having to do with religion. Thus, a tension emerges in her own work between her extensive evidence of the existence of women leaders and the claim that Islam acts as a constraint on female leadership the world over and throughout the ages.

If one looks at countries that have populations evenly divided between Muslims and Christians in Africa, for example, there are differences between both populations, but not necessarily in the same direction. While Christians favor women leaders 5-10% more in Cameroon, Benin and Nigeria, in Tanzania it is the Muslim population that favors women leaders more than the Christian population by 5% (Table 2). Generally, it is the overall culture of the society that influences these attitudes for all groups, but at the end of the day, if there is political will and if measures like quotas are introduced, these attitudes do not matter as much.

Table 2

Support for Women Leaders in Countries with Equal Muslim and Christian Populations

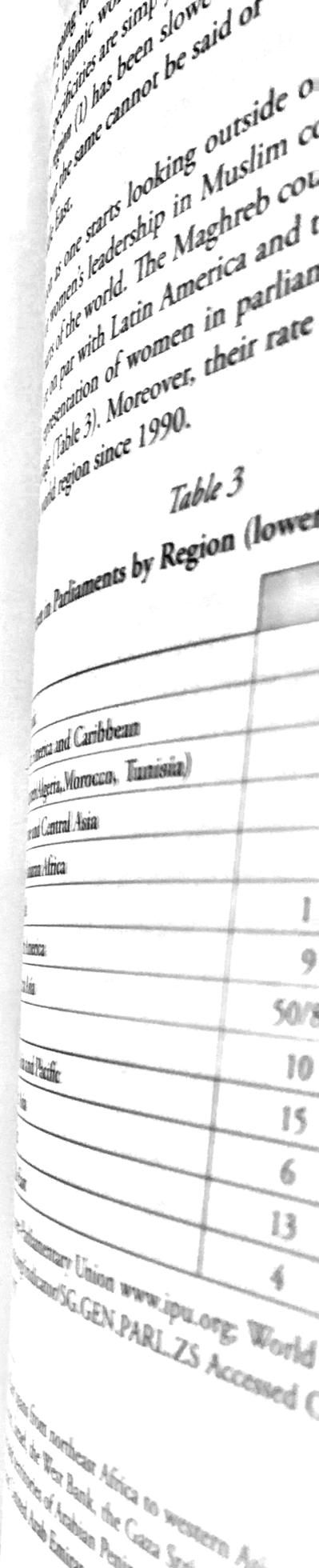
Supportive of women as leaders	Cameroon	Benin	Nigeria	Tanzania
Muslims	62	71	41	69
Christians	69	76	51	64
All	69	73	49	68

Source: Afrobarometer, www.afrobarometer.org

By looking at the actual record of Muslim countries in the contemporary period, I show in this chapter that there is enormous variance between Muslim countries globally when it comes to women's political leadership. By focusing on the MENA region itself, I show how there are enormous differences within this region as well. Although religion may be used as a rationale for limiting women's leadership, the fact that there are such large differences within the region suggest that there are many other factors at play that are tied to cultural, historical and political differences that have little to do with Islam.

Women's Political Leadership in Muslim Countries

First, historically there have always been low rates of female political representation throughout the globe and so the Islamic societies Mernissi looked at are no exception in this regard. This does not invalidate her critique, but it does suggest that there may be other aspects of women and leadership in Islamic countries that need to be considered. Second, in the modern era, those countries that historically were more authoritarian, dictatorial, and run by the military also tended to be slower to increase female representation. Here again, those predominantly Muslim countries that followed this pattern also saw fewer women in power. Third, since countries around the world have started introducing gender quotas, the authoritarian aspect has become less salient globally and the predominantly Muslim countries are once again, no exception. The question then becomes, why talk only about Islam in relation to women and power? What are the other historical, cultural and political factors like regime type that influence female representation? To be sure Islam has been used in specific ways to limit women's access to the public sphere. But to be fair, most religions have been used in this way, although with their own specificities.



I am going to argue that it does not make much sense to talk about a Muslim or Islamic world when it comes to women's political rights. The regional specificities are simply too great. It may be the case that the Middle East as a region (1) has been slower in terms of the visibility of women in politics, but the same cannot be said of other Muslim countries outside of the Middle East.

As soon as one starts looking outside of the Middle East region, the picture for women's leadership in Muslim countries becomes comparable to other parts of the world. The Maghreb countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) are on par with Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe in terms of representation of women in parliament and they are above the world average (Table 3). Moreover, their rate of increase surpasses that of any other world region since 1990.

Table 3

Women in Parliaments by Region (lower house), 1990, 2015

	1990	2015
Nordic	36	41
Latin America and Caribbean	12	28
Maghreb(Algeria,Morocco, Tunisia)	2	27
Europe and Central Asia	17	26
Sub-Saharan Africa	8	24
World	13	23
North America	9	22
Central Asia	50/8*	21
Asia	10	20
East Asia and Pacific	15	19
South Asia	6	19
Pacific	13	14
Middle East	4	11

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union www.ipu.org; World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS> Accessed October 7, 2016
*1985/1997

(1) The Middle East spans from northeast Africa to western Asia and includes Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and the various states and territories of Arabian Peninsula (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates).

It is not just the Maghreb countries that have higher rates of representation for women that are above the world average. Senegal is a predominantly Muslim country where women hold 43% of the legislative seats, one of the highest rates in the world. Sudan stands at 31%. In Central Asia, the percentage of women in legislatures in the Soviet era was 50%, the highest in the world. This dropped after the breakup of the Soviet Union when quotas were abandoned but it has subsequently increased once again (Table 2). In South Asia, it is not the Muslim countries which bring down the numbers for that subregion (Bangladesh 20%, Pakistan 21% and Afghanistan 28%), but rather the predominantly Hindu, Buddhist, and Catholic countries of India 12%, Sri Lanka 6%, Bhutan 9%, and Maldives 6%.

Overall, the percentage of women in predominantly Muslim countries around the globe is 19% compared with 22% for non-Muslim countries. However, when region and quotas are introduced into the equation, Alice Kang and I (2008) found in a cross-national study that the proportion of the population being Muslim no longer influenced legislative representation of women. The Middle East as a region stood out with the lowest rates of female representation in the world (See Table 1). Moreover, Kang and I also found in a more recent study (2016) that at the end of 2014, 72% of Muslim-majority countries in Africa had adopted gender quotas, compared with 52% of Christian-majority and 31% of mixed religion countries. In fact, some of the earliest adopters of reserved seat systems in the world were the Muslim majority countries of Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan, and Sudan.

But even in the Middle East, there is tremendous variance, with women in countries like Iraq holding 25% of the seats and United Arab Emirates 23% while others like Yemen and Kuwait have no women in their legislative bodies.

Some, like Michael Ross, have argued that it is oil rents that suppress female labor force participation in parts of the world like the Middle East and thereby suppress female political representation. Women in the labor force are seen as responsible for pressing for greater representation. However, this does not account for women's movement pressures for quotas, irrespective of women's labor force participation. In fact, we are seeing women becoming more active in politics in many oil producing countries like Sudan and Algeria, mostly as a result of the introduction of quotas and pressures from women's rights activists. This is happening even in the Middle East where oil producing countries are increasing rates of

female representation. Women in UAE and even in Saudi Arabia hold 23% and 20% of the seats in the legislature respectively, albeit they are appointed in Saudi Arabia. Today, MENA oil-producing countries have an average rate of 13% of female legislative representation compared with 14% for non-oil producers. In Africa, there is no difference between oil and non-oil producers when it comes to women's representation. Algeria has the highest rate of legislative representation of women in the MENA countries, yet it is an oil producer. Thus, when quotas are taken into account, the role of oil diminishes in importance and one has to look elsewhere for explanations for women's political representation.

If one looks at another aspect of female leadership, heads of state, it is worth noting that there have not been many female heads of state anywhere in the world. Muslim-majority countries have not done significantly worse than other countries in this area and there is no glaring Islamic deficit of heads of state (Tables 4 and 5). Granted it is a fairly new phenomenon, but this is true the world over.

Table 4

Women Presidents in Predominantly Muslim Countries

Name	Country	Years in Office
Megawati Sukamoputri	Indonesia	2001-2004
Mame Madior Boye	Senegal	2001
Atifete Jahjaga	Kosovo	2011-
Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé	Mali	2011-2012
Aminata Touré	Senegal	2013-2014
Bibi Ameenah Firdaus Gurib-Fakim	Mauritius	2015-

Table 5

Women Prime Ministers in Predominantly Muslim Countries

Name	Country	Years in Office
Benazir Bhutto	Pakistan	1988-1990
Begum Khaleda Zia	Bangladesh	1991-1996
Benazir Bhutto	Pakistan	1993-1996
Tansu Ciller	Turkey	1993-1996
Sheikh Hasina Wajed	Bangladesh	1996-2001, 2009-
Adiatu Djaló Nandigna (Acting)	Guinea Bissau	2012

Women's Rights: The Maghreb and the Middle East

However, as with the regional differences, if one looks at more general data on political participation, the Maghreb stands out. Take for example, the Maghreb countries, which are predominantly Muslim (Table 2). The Maghreb countries of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria have on average 16% *more* women in parliament compared with the Middle East countries and they have the highest rates of female representation in the parliament in the MENA region (31.6% and 31.3% respectively). Even Mauritania, which is in the broader Maghreb, has higher rates of representation of women in parliament at 25%. Women in Morocco claim 17% of the parliamentary seats, which is still higher than the average of 10% for the rest of the MENA region.

In the Maghreb, women have increased representation primarily through the introduction of various forms of gender-based quota laws, which improve women's chances of being elected. In fact, as Gihan Abou Zeid (2006) argues, Morocco, which adopted quotas in 2002, served as the reference point for other Arab countries in adopting quotas. The adoption of quotas is evident in other arenas as well. At the local level, women in Morocco won 21% of the commune seats and 38% of the regional council seats in 2015, twice as many as in 2009.

In the case of Algeria, the changes in representation have been dramatic and can be tied, in part, to post-conflict effects found in other parts of Africa (Tripp 2015). Algeria experienced an extremely brutal war from 1991 to 2002 between government and Islamist forces. Since that time, women's proportion of legislative representation in Algeria has increased from 2.4% in 1987 prior to the war to 31.6% after the 2012 elections. Algeria has the highest rate of female legislative representation in the MENA region. In addition, 7 out of 34 (20%) of cabinet members are women, which is the highest percentage among the Arab countries. Recently, the government appointed three women army generals, bringing the number up to four, thus making Algeria the Arab country with the most high-ranking female army commanders.

The Gender Equality Gap of the World Economic Forum looks at a composite of political participation measures, including women in parliament, in the cabinet, and heads of state and compared to other parts of the MENA region, the Maghreb countries not surprisingly stand out (see Table 6). It is also the case that the biggest change between 2006 and

2015 has generally been in the Maghreb when it comes to overall political participation (Table 7).

Table 6
Gender Equality Gap in Political Participation and Overall, Maghreb and MENA, 2015

Country	Political Participation		Overall Rank	Overall Score
	Rank	Score		
Israel	54	0.205	53	0.712
Algeria	55	0.205	128	0.632
Mauritania	57	0.195	132	0.613
Tunisia	69	0.170	127	0.634
UAE	93	0.115	119	0.646
Morocco	97	0.110	139	0.593
Saudi Arabia	121	0.077	134	0.605
Jordan	123	0.073	140	0.593
Syria	130	0.059	143	0.568
Egypt	136	0.048	136	0.599
Iran	137	0.037	141	0.580
Bahrain	138	0.037	123	0.644
Yemen	140	0.026	145	0.484
Kuwait	141	0.220	117	0.646
Oman	142	0.021	135	0.604
Lebanon	143	0.021	138	0.598
Qatar	144	0.013	122	0.645

Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2015

Other Legal Changes in the Maghreb

These changes in women's political status are taking place in the context of other changes in women's legal and social status. In terms of legislation, laws advancing women's status are being passed in the Maghreb at a faster pace than elsewhere in the MENA region. Quota laws to increase women's chances of being elected were passed about the same time (Morocco 2011, Algeria 2012, Tunisia 2011). In the MENA region, only the Maghreb

Table 7

**Gender Equality Gap, Maghreb and MENA,
Political Empowerment Change 2006-2015**

Country	Political Empowerment
Mauritania	0.159
Algeria	0.155
UAE	0.100
Saudi Arabia	0.077
Tunisia	0.060
Morocco	0.057
Israel	0.055
Turkey	0.051
Egypt	0.026
Jordan	0.025
Kuwait	0.018
Yemen	0.018
Bahrain	0.013
Iran	0.006
Syria	0
Lebanon	-0.007
Oman	-0.014
Qatar	-0.008

Source: World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report, 2015.

countries, Egypt and Yemen have laws that allow women to pass along their nationality to their children and all these laws were passed after 2004. All three Maghreb countries have made significant constitutional changes regarding women's status in recent years. All three countries have adopted various laws affecting violence against women. The Personal Status Code (*Mudawana*) also known as the Family Code in Morocco was passed in 2004, marking a watershed in women's rights in that country. The Algerian Family Code was amended in 2005, although it is still highly contested, with many feminists trying to abolish it and others seeking to reform key divorce provisions affecting women. Tunisia already had since 1993 the most progressive family code in the region.

Nevertheless, such reforms are not evident in other MENA countries to the same extent. In 2011, Tunisia became the first country in the region to withdraw its reservations to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Morocco did the same with some of reservations. The reservations in Tunisia pertained to equal rights for women in passing on their nationality to their children; in responsibilities in marriage and divorce; in guardianship and adoption of children; in choosing a family name, profession and occupation; and in property rights. This opens the door to important reforms in Tunisia's family code.

Algeria passed a law regarding violence against women in 2016 and Morocco and Tunisia are in the process of considering similar legislation. Morocco has made changes in the Penal Code that made sexual discrimination and domestic violence a crime. They also eliminated provisions in the Penal Code that made it easier to provide shelter to women survivors of violence. In 2014 Morocco repealed article 475 of the Penal Code, which protected a rapist from prosecution if he married his victim.

One attempt to quantify these changes through the SIGI index shows that overall on all measures, except for those of restricted resources and assets, the Maghreb countries do better than other countries in the MENA region (See Table 8).

Table 8

Index of Gender Equality, Legal Framework, Practices and Beliefs in MENA and Maghreb (0=low discrimination; 1=high discrimination)

	Maghreb	MENA (excluding Maghreb)
Discriminatory family code	0.44	0.65
Restricted physical activity	0.27	0.44
Restricted resources and assets	0.52	0.52
Restricted civil liberties	0.30	0.80
Overall	0.15	0.38

Source: SIGI index, <http://genderindex.org/>

Discriminatory Family code: norms and laws and practices: women's status in the household and the family; age of marriage, early marriage, parental authority and inheritance.

Physical integrity: violence against women, laws on sexual harassment, attitudes toward violence, prevalence of violence in lifetime

Restricted resources and assets: Secure access to land and non-land assets, access to financial services [Maghreb same as other MENA countries]

Restricted civil liberties: Access to public space; political voice; political representation.

It is important to point out that in spite of this legislation, the application of the law is still weak and the political commitment to enforce the laws is not always evident. However, these benchmarks do serve as indicators of normative change among significant sectors of the elite and among opinion leaders. They have seeped into the consciousness of society and have begun to change behavior even if slower and in ways that are not always desired (Žvan Elliott 2015).

One related factor in all of this is education. On average the Maghreb countries have higher enrolment ratios in lower secondary school for example, in which the gross enrollment ratio for the Middle East is 91% while for the Maghreb countries it is 110%. For girls the percentage is 90% for the Middle East and 105% for the Maghreb for 2014. The percentage of women in universities exceeds that of men in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco and in Morocco they exceed male students in medicine and technological fields. In the past decade, women have increased from 43% to 53% of the student body in higher education in Morocco (Millennium Development Goals, HCP, 2012).

Women's Rights in the Maghreb: Differences and Similarities

Variance within the Maghreb

As pointed out, the Maghreb countries stand out from the rest of the MENA region in terms of political representation and other measures of gender equality. This is in spite of the fact that there are enormous differences between the three countries. Unlike the other two countries, Morocco is the only monarchy; it was never part of the Ottoman Empire; and because of the conflict in the southern provinces/Western Sahara, it is also not part of the African Union, which means that it has not experienced the same pressures for gender reform as the other two countries (e.g., Maputo Declaration around women's rights). Its semi-autocratic monarchy nevertheless regards itself as modernizing. The king, under pressure from

women's organizations, has been pushing for women's rights reforms along with other reforms, and intervened at strategic moments to advance various reforms affecting women.

Algeria is the only country of the three which has twice in recent history experienced major war (1954-62, 1991-2002). The latter post-war legacy has important implications for women's rights and follows patterns of other post-conflict African states (Tripp 2015). Of the three countries, it has the most authoritarian regime and is a presidential republic. It also has the weakest women's movement, in part because of its more limited political space. It is also the only oil producer of the three countries, which some have argued impacts women's representation negatively (Ross 2008). Unlike Morocco and Tunisia, Algeria placed a premium on educating girls after independence and made education compulsory for all up to the age of 16. This had implications later on for women's entrance into professions and politics.

Tunisia has had a more secular orientation than the other two Maghreb countries and is regarded as a leader in the MENA region when it comes to women's rights. In 1956, Bourguiba introduced a Code of Personal Status (CSP), which established that family structures should be based on the legal equality of men and women. He abolished polygamy and introduced legal divorce, set a legal age for marriage and gave women the right to work and to obtain an education. The 1959 constitution further institutionalized these rights. Women gained the right to contraceptives in 1961 and the right to abortion in 1973. The top-down nature of the women's rights reforms in Tunisia under Presidents Habib Bourguiba (1956-1987) and Ben Ali (1987-2011) meant that in this country the close connection between women's rights and authoritarian rule was exceptionally difficult to shake in later years even though women's rights activists also suffered under the Bourguiba and Ben Ali regimes. Of the three countries, only Tunisia is a democracy and a semi-presidential republic.

Mounira Charrad (2001) has further highlighted other differences between the three countries as they relate to their gender policies. She argued that kin-based power systems have influenced women's rights outcomes in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. She found in these countries that the more autonomous the state was from tribal kin groups, the more liberal the policies were towards women, particularly with respect to family law. In Morocco, the tribal structure was tied to the state and in Algeria the state depended on support from kin groups, whereas in Tunisia the

state that emerged was largely autonomous from kin groups. As a result, more conservative policies emerged in Algeria and Morocco compared with Tunisia, which was able to adopt more progressive women's rights policies early on.

Today, however there has been a convergence among all three countries in terms of women's rights when one takes into consideration constitutional and legal reforms along with political representation. And so, in spite of these historical and structural differences the three countries, and in some respects Mauritania in the broader Maghreb as well, seem to share some important commonalities when it comes to contemporary women's rights.

Commonality in the Maghreb

One historical commonality is the French legacy, although Algeria was an actual department of France; the colonization was much lengthier (132 years); and it had a huge settler population, while Morocco and Tunisia were protectorates of France, destined to become independent. The experience of Morocco and Tunisia with colonialism was much shorter than Algeria's: 44 years in the case of Morocco and 75 years in Tunisia. As a result of these differences in colonial relations, only Algeria fought a long and bloody war of independence against France, obtaining its independence in 1962.

France was never a paragon of gender equality, not at the time of independence nor subsequently. France's own laws incorporated gender equality fairly late relative to other European countries. Men had juridical power over wives within the family and women remained legal minors until after World War II. Women in France were among the last in Europe to gain the right to vote in 1944 and to stand for election. Women did not gain parental authority equal to men until 1970, when men finally forfeited the rights that came with their status as head of the family (Mayer 1995). Even with the adoption of parity laws in 2000, women made up only 12% of the parliament in the subsequent election in 2002, and still today they only hold 26% of the seats in parliament, which is lower than the rate in Tunisia and Algeria today. Thus, it is difficult to imagine the French colonial experience as one that would have created positive gender effects for women in the Maghreb.

However, if there is one French legacy that they share which might influence the status of women in the region it is the unified and codified

legal system that all three countries adopted. However, this does not explain the higher rates of women in politics. Nor does it seem to have affected other countries in the region like Lebanon, where the French ruled between 1920 and 1943, or Syria, where the French had a mandate between 1923 and 1946, or even Egypt, which endured a very brief French occupation between 1798 to 1801. Lebanon, Syria and Egypt have had less successful experiences in advancing women's rights compared with the Maghreb countries, even though Lebanon has a larger educated class and has stronger attitudinal support for women's rights throughout its population (Table 1). Thus, the French legacy needs to be interrogated more closely.

Cultural Pluralism in the Maghreb

Another possible commonality is a cultural one. In Algeria, 57.3% said Tamazight was their first or second language while in Morocco the figure is 17.6% and only .1% in Tunisia, according to the 2013 Arab Barometer. However, the number of Amazigh in Morocco is much larger, ranging from 13 to 20 million, and the number in Algeria ranges from 9 to 13 million depending on how they are counted. Many if not most Amazigh are of mixed heritage and many no longer speak Tamazight.

Interviews I have conducted with Moroccan women's rights activists, particularly Amazigh (Berber) activists, highlight the link between the presence of the Amazigh population and identity in the region, which is expressed in a form of cultural pluralism, because of an awareness of the multiple ethnic heritages one finds in the region. They argue that this cultural pluralism has allowed for greater openness to many kinds of difference in ways that one does not find in other parts of the MENA region and less rigid adherence to Islamic law. This is not entirely borne out in surveys (Afrobarometer and Arab Barometer) in which attitudes of Amazigh vs. Berber groups do not show significantly different attitudes toward women's rights or tolerance to diversity. For example, it is not possible to discern different attitudes toward women in politics when comparing tribal affiliations within the region (see Table 9). If one looks at this in terms of linguistic groups, the results are much the same with 32% of Berbers and 37% of Arabs agreeing that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.

Table 9

Support for Women Leaders in Algeria by Ethnic Group

	Total	Arab	Chaoui	Kabyle	Mouzabite	Tergui	NA*
Support women as leaders	36.4	34.7	30.8	31.9	25.4	15.2	41.5

Source: Afrobarometer 2014/2015, N=1199.

* "Don't think of self in those terms" Question: *Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men*".

But it may be the case that the legacy of a historically matrilineal society along with a history of women leaders allows for more openness to women's leadership and rights in the region overall. The population is heavily mixed between Arabs and Amazigh and so rather than teasing out an "Amazigh" effect, it is perhaps more useful to think of these Maghreb countries as belonging to a general cultural milieu, which is distinct from others found in the Middle East. When one compares the Maghreb countries with others in the region, the more generalized cultural attitudes that come from this mix of tribes becomes more apparent. The Maghreb countries are overall much more supportive of women as leaders than the rest of the MENA region (Table 10). This is also borne out if one looks at the actual rates of representation.

Table 10

Women as Political Leaders (percentage)

Question	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Maghreb average	Middle East average
Disagree: Men better political leaders	34	51	44	43	32

Source: Arab Barometer, R3, 2013, <http://www.arabbarometer.org/>

Religiosity

Some have argued that it is religiosity (or the level of attachment to religion) may explain some general trends regarding women's rights. Lower levels of religiosity are frequently associated with higher levels of support for women's rights (Inglehart and Norris 2003). When asked about their beliefs and practices, people in the Maghreb countries, particularly Algeria,

overall exhibit less religiosity than the Middle East (Table 11). This is not to say they are not religious, but that they are less attached to religion as an identity. This may have some implications for the attitudes towards women leaders, which also diverge to the same extent in these countries.

Table 11

Religiosity: Practices and Beliefs, Maghreb and MENA

Question	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Maghreb average	Middle East average
Read or listen to Qur'an or Bible: Always	12%	20%	52%	28%	38%
Do you pray daily: Always	56	69	64	63	74
Are you a religious person?	24	36	33	31	39

Source: Arab Barometer, R3 2013, <http://www.arabbarometer.org/>

In Morocco and Tunisia there was less support for penal laws and personal status laws being in accordance with Islamic Law and in Tunisia less support for inheritance law being in accordance with Islamic Law. Inheritance law impinges on women greatly. In Algeria, there is stronger support for this than in the Middle East, which is surprising given the attitudes towards religiosity (Table 10), although the population is sharply divided on this issue. These attitudes toward religiosity are evident also in attitudes toward Islamic law, where the Maghreb countries are less supportive of Islamic law as an ideal, particularly Tunisia.

Attitudes Towards Gender Equality

Attitudes towards religiosity are typically correlated with attitudes towards gender equality. But as we have mentioned earlier, neither of these attitudes is necessarily correlated with actual rates of representation, which depend on many more factors, including political will and use of institutional mechanisms like quotas to change the balance. When it comes to gender equality, particularly political participation and education, all three Maghreb countries not surprisingly are more supportive of gender equality than the Middle East (Table 11). On the issue of women working outside the home both Algeria and Tunisia are more favorable than the Middle East and Morocco and Tunisia have higher rates of female labor force participation than the average for the MENA region.

Table 12

Attitudes Towards Gender Equality, Maghreb and Middle East, 2013

Question	Algeria	Morocco	Tunisia	Maghreb	Middle East
Agree: Gender equality in constitution [1]	69	86	78	78	85
Agree: Married woman can work outside home [2]	87	73	83	81	82
Disagree: Men better political leaders [3]	34	51	44	43	32
Disagree: University education more important for males [4]	94	69	82	82	73

Source: Arab Barometer, 2013, <http://www.arabbarometer.org/>

*MENA excluding Maghreb

1. New constitution draft: what is the importance in insuring equal rights between men and women (Agree, Agree strongly)
2. A married woman can work outside the home (Agree, Agree strongly)
3. In general, men are better at political leadership than women (somewhat disagree, strongly disagree)
4. University education for males is more important than university education for females (Somewhat disagree, strongly disagree)

Historic Influences

These patterns of contemporary leadership are not new. Although Mernissi primarily focused on women leaders outside of North Africa, there were numerous women leaders who to this day are celebrated in the Maghreb in popular culture and girls are to this day named after them. One of the earliest women leaders who is still recalled today was Tin Hinan, who was a Tuareg queen warrior who lived in the fourth century. She is still known as *Tamenukalt*, which means “leader” or “queen.” She is said to have been of the Braber tribe of Berbers who came from a Tafilalt oasis in the Atlas Mountains in the area of modern Morocco.

Today there are three leaders who are remembered in the Amazigh parts of Algeria. One is King Massinissa, who ruled the territory from Morocco to eastern Libya called Numidia from 206 BCE until 148, when he died. The other famous leader is his grandson Jugurtha, who overthrew Massinissa's heirs, in 117 BCE and who fought the Roman Empire for eight years until he was captured and killed. The third was a woman, Dihiya (also known as Kahina in Arabic). She was an Amazigh queen warrior who lived in the 7th

century in the territory known as Algeria and according to Hsain Ilahiane's *Historical Dictionary of the Berbers (Imazighen)* she is known for having twice beaten back Ummayyad (Arab and Muslim) invaders of the Aures in Eastern Algeria and Western Tunisia, pushing them back to the borders of modern Libya. Musa bin Nusayr and his army eventually defeated her and she died in a battle near Tabarka, Tunisia. Some claim she was Christian, others that she was Jewish. To this day there is a statue that commemorates her in Baghaï and she continues to be portrayed on Amazigh websites and in graffiti and songs. She has come to symbolize, according to Cynthia Becker, "a liberal-oriented transnational Berber movement that emphasizes gender equality as well as religious and ethnic tolerance. Kahina symbolizes Berbers as a people who refuse to be subjugated, free and willing to fight to retain their freedom against outside invasion."

Throughout the history of the region there have been many women leaders of different kinds. Fatima al Fihri founded the Al Quaraouiyine mosque-religious college in 859 and it is said to be the first university in the world. She also founded the first library in the world. Her sister Maryam also founded another mosque in Fes, Al Andalus.

More recent leaders come from the Moroccan nationalist movement like Malika El Fassi who was born in 1919 to a scholarly family and joined the nationalist organization Taifa in 1937. She was the only woman out of 66 to sign the manifesto of independence in 1944. She fought for women's literacy and the right to go to school and opened a girls' secondary school and university in 1947 together with her husband and with the support of the King Mohammed V. She also founded several charities like National Mutual Aid and Association Al Mouassat. In Algeria, there were the famous independence fighters Djamila Bouhired, Jamila Bouhired, Lala Fatma Nsoumer, Hassiba ben Bouali, and Zohra Drif who joined the 11,000 other women fighters in the war against France. These are just a few examples of the names of women leaders who are remembered to this day in the region and who give people a sense that women's leadership has deep roots in the region, predating Islam.

Conclusion

This essay took Mernissi's interest in women's role as political leaders in Islamic countries as a starting point in order to explore the wide variance around women's rights and political participation in Muslim majority

countries, particularly between the Maghreb and the Middle East. I have further explored the reasons for the differences between these regions in women's rights elsewhere (Tripp 2016). Suffice it to say the higher rates of political representation in the Maghreb have to do with the role of the women's movement, varying degrees of political opening in all three countries, which allowed women's organizations to mobilize, sometimes with international support and encouragement, political will at the top, and a coalesce of Islamist and secularist political interests around the issue of increasing women's political presence, at least as legislators. There has also been a diffusion of influence in the Maghreb and in the wider Mediterranean region.

We see from this study that religion is but one factor in explaining women's political leadership in the MENA region. To understand why the Middle East has the lowest rates of representation of women in politics in the world we need to look at religion but go beyond superficial explanations that attach undue importance to religious factors. By comparing the Maghreb and other Muslim majority countries in the Middle East, one sees the fallacy of only looking at religion as the most important factor in explaining differences in women's political representation and that a variety of complex historical, cultural and institutional factors are at play. Muslim-majority countries outside of the Middle East are, in fact, not that different from non-Muslim countries in advancing women politically and in many cases, they are ahead.

This is not to say that women are well represented in political leadership anywhere in the world, but to the extent that they are or are not, Islam as a religion is not necessarily the dominant reason. If it were, we would expect to see it influencing women's political representation throughout the world in Muslim countries. All religions have been used at one time or another the world over to justify excluding women from politics, but one still needs to consider broader cultural and institutional factors than simply religion.

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