

## **Women, the environment, and the ability to act in Morocco: gentle effervescence**

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"Very poor people have little choice but to live with disaster."  
Mike Davis *Planet of the Slums* 2006. 122

In November 2016, Morocco hosted the 22<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Conference of Parties (COP 22) in Marrakech. The forum was an opportunity for Moroccan women NGOs to take center-stage in the debates on climate change, land rights and gender challenges. Indeed, women are primarily affected by climate change as the gender division of labor within households as well as income and resources gap greatly disfavor women. Yet, their needs are mostly overlooked in the narrative of environmental governance.

This article aims to study two different but interconnected issues related to the environment: on the one hand, the feminization of the forest engineering profession and the impact it has on the effort of forest management and conservation or lack thereof, and on the other, the land rights movement led by the *soulaliyate*<sup>1</sup> women who are protesting against their exclusion from collective lands.

The two subjects will be approached through the prism of "critical mass" theory and "social visibility"<sup>2</sup> as defined by feminists in the mid-1970s.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, feminist scholars, activists and philosophers have long claimed that history either underrepresent or misrepresent women's contribution to the collectivity while it highlighted men's efforts.

### **I- The role of women in forest management in Morocco: Critical mass and change**

The theory of "critical mass" is borrowed from physics, it means the point of an irreversible chain of reaction in any process. In social dynamics, critical mass means the representation of any minority within a group of power that can impact this same group.

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<sup>1</sup> The Soulaliyates are the women descendant from tribes/ethnic groups, they are excluded from the inheritance of collective lands and have been struggling since 2007 to demand the abolition of the *Dahir* (Royal Decree) of 27 April 27<sup>th</sup> 1919 and the recognition of their right to inheritance on an equal footing with men.

<sup>2</sup> Visibility has been the subject of several studies: Martin Jay examines in *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* its dominant position in twentieth century western culture with political and social oppression.

<sup>3</sup> Bridenthal Renate and Koonz Claudia. 1977. *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. Boston: ed. Houghton Mifflin.

In general, this force of change is located in a presence of 20% to 30% of the group (Dahlerup, 1988). Even if the performance self-assessment of these minorities called "Token" (Crowley, 2004) is not always satisfactory, their presence is the beginning of a change that will certainly impact their peers. Several studies have attempted, for instance, to demonstrate how the presence of a critical mass of women in the legislature has led to the adoption of legislation in favor of women (Kanter, 1977, Dahlerup, 1988, 2006, Childs & Krook, 2008). Early work on the issue looked at how women in such contexts lived their experiences as a minority within male dominated institutions; it focused on how they strategized to survive and perform despite the challenges they faced. Both Kanter's and Dahlerup's work is important as it enables us to understand the evolution of the gender dynamics in power structures over the years as the representation of women grows into significant numbers. Kanter asserts that the majority within a social group dominates not only the group but also its culture, so that the *tokens* are forced into a symbolic representation of their social group, but can't impact the group (Kanter, 1977). Ironically, minority status exposes minority subjects to greater visibility (Kanter, 1977) not in terms of recognition, but rather because it puts their work under close scrutiny, so much so that any shortcomings or limitations are often pointed at and directly related to their gender. Therefore, *Tokens* have to perform better than others; they enter the labor market with a clear disadvantage: that of being the subject of multiple stereotypes that are hard to overlook. (Correll, 2013). Accordingly, Correll argues that we sex-categorize people around us in all situations and contexts, whether they are standing in front of us or we are handling their applications or watching their performance. The categorization affects our expectation of that individual, which will then lead to bias (Correll, 2015) therefore, our judgment of the person's performance is flawed because it is built on assumptions of categories'capabilities or limitations rather than on a person's real achievements.

The sex-categorization, I argue becomes more acute when both male and female choose to experience something different from what their gender assigns them to in a given context. Men and women in less conventional jobs for instance are constantly challenged while navigating between bias and self-limitation. Layers of complexity exacerbate the sex-categorization in traditional cultures along with race, class and ethnicity. Concerns about these biases arise when they affect the lives of individuals; limiting their potential or disadvantaging them considerably for career choice or advancement.

### **1- The Feminization of Forest Engineering in Morocco: the insignificance of numbers**

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Higher Education, the rate of feminization of the student body in the engineer programs is 16.23%. Although the figures seem very low, the field of engineering has always been very attractive especially to young women who see in it the prospects of professional stability and social prestige. The engineering schools are highly selective, the number of seats are limited, and admission is based on grade selection and entry exams. In general, students applying for engineering programs also apply to other selective programs such as medical, dentistry or

architecture schools. In most cases, the choice is based on the social status attached to the future profession they will get, not interest in a particular field of study.

However, the feminization of the forest engineering sector in Morocco is very recent as the profession was thought to be tough and inappropriate for women. It was not until the 1990s that the first women forest engineers started to make inroads in the field. Today, female students at the *École Nationale Forestière d'Ingénieurs (ENFI)* constitute one third of the total number of students. After successfully passing application selection, admission tests, all the students (males and females) take up residence at the school and follow a strict program where physical training and military discipline as well as theoretical and practical curriculum are taught. As the forestry sector is government-run, ENFI graduates, unlike other engineers, are all offered jobs with the government immediately upon graduation as they are called on to join one of the 12 Regional Directorates (divided into 55 subdivisions or 'Delegations') of the *Haut Commissariat des Eaux et Forêts et de Lutte Contre la Désertification (HCEFLCD)*. But, of the twelve Directorates only the one in the region of Fez is headed by a woman, whereas all of the 55 Regional Delegations are headed men. One may wonder where are all the trained female engineers? What responsibility, if any do they hold within their institutions? Or is the situation no different from other parts of the world where the engineering sector is strongly dominated by men? isn't their absence the result of the prevailing sex-category stereotype? Numerous studies examined the impact of stereotype in limiting interest or even success for women in the field (Beasley & Fischer, 2012; Brett & al, 2013). Many point at what is known as the *stereotype threat* that impacts the performance of female engineers. The psychological pressure on women who feel that they are "outsiders" to the profession lowers their intellectual performance. (Steele, 1997; Beilock, & al 2007.)

Yet, regardless of their number or the difference of context, or even of the work culture, women forest engineers are remarkably absent from decision making positions. But given the rapid degradation of forests in Morocco, wouldn't it make a difference if women brought their own perspective to the efforts of preservation? Wouldn't that contribute to overturning the process of deforestation and environmental degradation. Indeed, the role of female engineers is vital in ensuring sustainable development. Being a woman, I argue, may be the first step in the participative ecology preservation effort. Women are apt to engage the communities living in enclosed areas in dialogue and make sure they –whether male or female- get an equal share of the income generated by the forest, with no political considerations or discrimination. Indeed, women are able to show empathy, both as a persuasion strategy, but also as an experience to explore ways to work with women in rural areas and help them ensure the livelihood of their children, guarantee their education and at the same time care in greater respect for the environment. The lack of understanding of the complexity of gender and gender roles and the variation of these concepts in different contexts, rural, urban, ethnic...etc. adds layers of complexity that can be difficult to overcome if one is to present a strategy to save the environment.

But, since all of the engineering positions in the sector of forestry are guaranteed by the state (career, promotion, health and retirement benefits) women engineers of forestry are less tempted to invest their energy getting out there and initiate change. In the absence of competition-based incentives, and of recognition thereof, female forest engineers avoid

any confrontation with either their line managers or colleagues over issues related to their work. After all, they have received paramilitary training throughout their education at ENFI, and obedience and discipline are key to their promotion. The promotion system being based on obedience to hierarchy and the number of years at the job, women engineers despite their being ambitious, do not dispute not being considered for a higher position within the institutional hierarchy.<sup>4</sup> It is not surprising then that many female forest engineers invest their time and effort more in their family lives rather than in their careers; a choice that seamlessly conforms with what society expects of women. As the work environment is socially and culturally constructed, it therefore constitutes the articulation and prolongation of the society's continuum of values. It comes as no surprise at all, that women engineers will yield to traditional gender roles defined by their culture. Studies on the feminization of certain professions in Morocco (Badissy, 2011; Boutkhil, 2016) show the challenges that women face when they enter prestigious positions such as university professor or Judge. While some professions such as medicine, dentistry, pharmacy and primary education have almost attained gender parity; discrimination against women and their exclusion from decision-making positions remains a widespread practice in the work field.

It is true that Morocco has made considerable progress in legislation<sup>5</sup> in favor of women's rights, but it is unfortunate to note that these advances are not reflected in the inclusion of women in the workplace. The report of the Economic and Social Council on the state of gender equality in Morocco<sup>6</sup> points to the decline in female activity from 28.1% in 2000 to 25.1% in 2013. The numbers may not seem alarming, but it is important to consider that the decrease comes at a time when more and more girls have a college degree, the tendency should have been an increase in their presence in the job market. While professional activity is considered non-negotiable for men especially if they hold a degree, it remains culturally secondary to the biological role of women and tend to minimize its importance. Women are deemed better at raising children, educating and caring rather than taking responsibility at the workplace, managing or leading a team. Such stereotypes<sup>7</sup> have been around to the point that women, although trained at such things, doubt in their capabilities and accept minor roles.

Studies in social psychology have shown that stereotypes about men and women influence professional relationships and polarize the performance of each other creating a space favorable to discrimination against women. (Goldin & Rouse, 2000; Correll, 2007). Stereotypes limit women, but they open up possibilities for men; thus, studies show that

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<sup>4</sup> In my interviews with ENFI graduates and HCEFLCD, I came across a similar case where an employee was discontented with the justification she received for not being retained for a position she had applied to, but she did not dispute the decision.

<sup>5</sup> Morocco has undertaken legislative reforms to promote women's rights (Labor Code, 2003, Family Code, 2004, Nationality Code, 2007, Electoral Code, 2009, Constitution of 2011.)

<sup>6</sup> Economic and Social Council, Auto-Saisine n ° 18/2014. Promotion of equality between women and men in economic, social, cultural and political life "Discrimination against women in economic life: realities and recommendations

<sup>7</sup> We use Lippmann's definition of the stereotype (1921) which describes it as images in our heads and simplified descriptive categories by which we seek to situate others or groups of individuals. A kind of cognitive shortcuts.

the discrimination against mothers at the workplace greatly impede their career and delays their promotion. However, paternity is often perceived as a safety for the employer, entitling fathers to more privilege in terms of salary (Budig, 2014). These disparities reveal that most cultures continue to perceive women's work as being less important than that of men who are generally considered heads of households. Yet, stereotypes emanate as much from men as from women themselves who not only accept but justify them. In a shocking study, psychologist Anna Fels found that women are taught from a younger age that ambition is a dangerous terrain, it not only shows them as egoistic and manipulative but defeminizes them. (Fels, 2004)

## **2- Forestry management and preservation: The cost of ineffective feminization**

Moroccan forest land cover about 12.7% of the national territory, it is considered the private domain of the State and local residents have a right to use certain commodities (Mhirit & Bléro, 1999). It creates about 28. 000 jobs in forestry campaigns, 14,000 jobs in the processing sector, 26,000 jobs in the collection of fuel wood, and other 50 000 jobs in different other sectors, totaling about 100 million working days (Naji, 2010). It is obvious that such figures stir up the desires of speculators of all kinds. Indeed, political, economic and social issues prevail over the aspiration to preserve the environment. If the forest covers about 30% of the timber and industry needs and covers one-third of the energy and cattle feed, it is a boon for the communes as it generates more than 200 million DH annually to rural communes (Benziane, 2007). But forests are also the site of political competition between tribes trading votes for free bonuses at the expense of the environment.

Since the nineties, Morocco has launched a periodic inventory of the country's forests and in-depth diagnostics in order to limit the degradation of the forest domain and develop a strategy for its development in the short, medium and long term. The National Forest Program (NFP) has relied heavily on the participatory approach to include local people in forest conservation efforts. Regional and provincial directorates of the HCEFLCD played a key role in these consultations.

Despite the skepticism one might have about the efficiency of participatory governance, it is believed that good governance requires consultation of a large base of beneficiaries so people on top make informed decisions. This approach empowers stakeholders at all levels because it departs from a simple, but key idea: that people are the “experts” of their own environment (social and otherwise). However, the limitations of such an approach reside in the lack of women’s participation in rural areas where they might be intimidated to attend meetings and speak up. Alternative scenarios where men from tribes consult with women and speak on their behalf actually dilute the whole concept of women’s participation. In fact, women are often absent from the governing bodies of most associations and cooperatives, which deprives them from attending coordination meetings, or sharing their grievances and negotiating for their own interests. (Baguare, 2013) In addition to the cultural limitations, language problems constitute a real challenge for women to articulate their needs or voice their dissatisfaction and discontent. Most women in these regions are illiterate and largely speak Amazigh, while meetings are conducted in a mixture of Moroccan Arabic Darija with a mixture of

classical Arabic, which limits their ability to communicate during the meetings. With these constraints, one is forced to admit that the way participatory approach is executed clearly limited its scope.

Yet, the work done by development economist Bina Agarwal on the participation of women in forest management has informed many communities on the importance of the inclusion of women in forest governance. She pointed out that State approaches to forest conservation has been proved inefficient since statistics showed the rapid degradation of these areas with serious deforestation in some regions. Agarwal studied the impact of women's absence from forest management and its economic impact on households. She advocates for greater presence of women in the governing bodies of forests (Agarwal, 2001), since women's contact with the forest is much longer and more important than that of men. Indeed, whether in Asia or Latin America or even in Morocco, women more than men depend on forest resources mainly for the gendered division of labor within rural households. Indeed, in most countries, poor women don't own land, their means of living, and those of their families, depend largely on forests: wood for cooking and heating, herbs, grazing and small farming. All of these activities are done in an anarchic way. Men mostly deal in important products such as timber, carob, cork, tannins, truffles, acorn, fodder, mushrooms, medicinal plants and cattle grazing, while women contribute in these but are not always empowered to make a stable and equal revenue. Theoretically, these activities in the context of Morocco at least are strictly reserved for limited beneficiaries<sup>8</sup> under strict regulation. However, studies from HCEFLCD<sup>9</sup> prove that those activities are extensively exhausting the fauna and the flora because of overgrazing estimated between 45% to 62%, irrational extracts of products, lack of proper equipment and the absence of a rational strategy on the use of the resources. According to the ministry of agriculture, over 98% of the farms are spontaneous relying only on precipitation. This fragile situation is made even worse by the number of intermediaries intervening between farmers and market. Those traders control the market and have exclusive monopoly over regions and products. There are over 500 cooperatives in forestry with a total of 18 000 members, however, most of them are illiterate which puts them at a great risk of exploitation.<sup>10</sup> Most members complain that income distribution is not always fair if we compare the work that some members do within the cooperative. The stake in the cooperatives is even higher as Morocco ranks 12<sup>th</sup> worldwide for the production of aromatic and medicinal plants, offering over 4,200 species. The average annual sales of aromatic and medicinal plants are 5.3 million dirhams (Maazouz, 2016.) Women's cooperatives have been vital in this business as cheap labor force on the one hand and as an obvious windfall of money for projects thought by men and mostly benefiting them more than women. Indeed, many studies have shown that while most cooperatives profess to empower women, their claim that such empowerment leads to more leadership in the household remains questionable (Gillot, 2016, Guérin, 2011). In

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<sup>8</sup> Amenouz, 2016 offers a detailed definition of "Beneficiaries" and its historical and political evolution.

<sup>9</sup> Study by HCEFLCD. 2008. *Stratégie Nationale de Développement du Secteur des Plantes Aromatiques et Médicinales au Maroc*.

<sup>10</sup> Evaluation of the work of forest cooperations by Jocelyn Lessard director of Fédération québécoise des coopératives forestières (FQCF) during his visit in May 2016

most cases, the work within the cooperative is an extra chore that adds up to the rest of tasks women do within their homes.

However, the participatory<sup>11</sup> approach in forest management is not limited to the inclusion of few members of the rural population; such an approach is intrinsically false because the needs and conditions of women are more complex than they appear. Only an effective presence of women in management bodies within cooperatives and committees will ensure a change in the conservation of the environment. Indeed, the empirical study conducted in India and Nepal shows that the presence of a female representation of 25% to 33% in forest management committees is capable of significantly improving the state of forests. The presence of this critical mass both for engineers, technicians and government representatives as well as for the beneficiaries will guarantee an open and more effective dialogue about sustainability. Women's dependence on forest resources has been proved the same almost in all underdeveloped countries (Shackleton et al., 2011). Therefore, gender aggregated data on forest use --that takes into consideration the time women and girls spend in preparing food, gathering wood, fetching water, washing, caring for the family, shepherding in addition to shelling the Argan fruit or harvesting Rosemary or other plants—is essential to understanding the value of including them as important stakeholders in forest conservation. Women understand the value of forest regeneration for their everyday routine because they are the first beneficiaries in terms of time and effort management, they can drive the change within their households if they are fully included in the whole process. Positive impact of women's inclusion in forestry management will only increase when other more educated women i.e. forest engineers are taking charge.

### **3- The role of women in forest management in Morocco: when Social visibility is more effective than education**

The struggle for *visibility* originated in the eighties and nineties of the last century when debates on identity politics stimulated much interest in minority identities resisting totalizing discourses. At its core is the effort to reconstruct the narrative of women's concealed histories. Feminist thought thus challenged the assumption that the presence of women in the public sphere is a sign of their *visibility*, such a simplistic statement hides complex cultural structures of resistance to women's full participation as equal citizens. They point out that women's presence in the public arena does not necessarily resolve the question of their *visibility*, because while they may be present physically, their role is not as important as the one played by their male counterpart. *Visibility* is therefore rooted in a power struggle played out at the boundaries of race, class and gender, so that while minority women, for example, are denied visibility in certain spheres, their bodies are *hypervisibile*, commodified and sexualized (Mowatt & Al. 2013). Hegemonic groups systematically dominate the scene and exercise a power of concealment on minority groups that is both "dangerous and painful" (Rich 1984) the concealed identity may be

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<sup>11</sup> For more Bina Agarwal 2001 "Participatory Exclusions, Community Forestry, and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework"

visible, but stripped of its capacity to act. In the same vein, Andrea Mubi Brighenti directly links *visibility* to the question of the exercise of democracy. He asserts that visibility cannot be reduced to a simple visual problem, it is a symbolic field that corresponds to positions of power and perceptions not directly perceptible. It resides in the intersection of the two domains of aesthetics (relations of perception) and of politics (relations of power) (Brighenti 2008). *Visibility* therefore defines positions of power and marginality as is the case in patriarchal cultures where although more and more women have jobs, they hardly make it to middle management positions, let alone senior management ones. This discrimination marks this insurmountable line that separates men and women; it shows the power of men and the marginality of women. Consequently, the *visibility* of women in the public sphere does not necessarily lead to the recognition of their entitlement to the same rights as men on an equal footing. They are aesthetically seen but not politically perceived.

Visibility and *intervisibility* impact the lives of the subjects seen. The relationship between the looker and the looked at constitutes the site of mutual recognition, the site of the construction of the "subject." visibility leads to recognition, it could be strategically used and manipulated to obtain real social effects. (Brighenti 2008) The case of the *soulaliyates* in Morocco is a good illustration of how the construction of this social group that was initially denied any political recognition forced its presence through protests, banners, slogans and media coverage. The women that compose this group succeeded in imposing their presence at the forefront of the political arena. Their invisibility within the tribes had certainly deprived them from their rights as women within a tribal system, but it has empowered them to be visible beyond the boundaries of the tribe.

The case of the *soulaliyates* is highly symbolic even though the financial stakes are the real driving force behind their resistance to repeal the *Dahir* (Decree) of April 1919 that "sanctified" the exclusion of women from land ownership, reinforcing thus the patriarchal perception not only of the tribe, but also state-approved discriminatory policies. Indeed, even though Moroccan society has evolved since 2004 and women's conditions have relatively improved, it seems clear that the *Dahir* uses the incentive of rights to collective land to intervene not only in individual's rights to mobility, but in their free choice of their partners and that of their reproductive rights. The law backed the tribesmen's control of the mobility of rights holders and set the geographic limits within which women are confined; if they marry outside their own ethnic group, they lose their entitlement to collective land. This restriction does not affect men if they decide to do the same. Likewise, young men lose their rights if they decide not to marry or not to have children, the imperative of "*chef de famille*"<sup>12</sup> entails having children. The persistence of such a narrow definition of who is entitled to land is in contradiction with the social and political changes occurring in the country. Land rights are not based on (male or female) citizen's indivisible rights, but rather on the biological roles of reproduction, even though many claim that the norms set for community land inheritance are fair. The logic of head of household's entitlement to community land is based on the assumption that men are the only providers for the family. However, one can argue that men migrate to seek better opportunities while women are "stuck" on a land that sometimes they can't benefit from.

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<sup>12</sup> For a long time, the right of succession was limited to the head of the household defined as a married man with children. Lately, some tribes have included single young men on the list of rights holders.



## II- The Struggle for Land rights:

### 1- Rural ethnic women's fight for equality

Moroccan women have over the last two decades succeeded to repeal the outdated family law that held them under the tutorship of the closest male member in the family. They have successfully elected more women to the legislature, and obtained clear recognition of their equality with men in the constitution. Yet they have failed to push for a clear legislation to ensure equality between all rights holders to communal land. Women's access to land ownership remains complex and subjected to two different types of laws: a traditional regime governed by customs and the Muslim law (the precepts of the Maliki rite) administered by the religious notaries (*Adouls*); and a modern regime called "land registration" administered by notaries, and instituted by the *Dahir* of August 12, 1913 during the French protectorate. In addition to the previous distinction, a "plurality" of land statuses<sup>13</sup> is recognized by the law as emphasized by the human rights activist Fatiha Daoudi. (Daoudi 2011.) These two distinct laws for land are not typical to Morocco, they exist also in many Muslim majority countries (Sait 2015).

As a sure consequence of exclusion, Moroccan women's access to agricultural land ownership remains very low in comparison with other sub-Saharan African countries. Indeed, only 7% of urban properties and barely 1% in rural areas belong to women. According to the 1996 agricultural census, only 4.4% of farms are held by women<sup>14</sup> (Sarhani 135). These numbers are shockingly low as studies have shown that land ownership by women does not only empower women to be autonomous, but significantly reduces incidences of gender based violence as well. As Agarwal (2010) argues, land ownership is still seen as a valuable form of property vital for social status. The following table shows the male monopoly of land in the countries in the MENA region:

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Decroux cites seven different land statutes in Morocco: 1) property *Melk*; 2) collective lands *Joumou'a*; 3) lands *Guich*; (4) the private domain of the State; 5) the *Habous*; 6) registered land and 7) Muslim customary rights. Apart from the land registered, these statutes obey the Moslem law and the customs. See also M'Hassni et al. "The Land Systems in Morocco. A Security and a Faculty of Sustainable Development, Urban and Rural. " *International Federation of Geometers*.  
[https://www.fig.net/resources/proceedings/fig\\_proceedings/morocco/proceedings/TS1/TS1\\_5\\_mhassni\\_et\\_al.pdf](https://www.fig.net/resources/proceedings/fig_proceedings/morocco/proceedings/TS1/TS1_5_mhassni_et_al.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> The FAO website provides official statistics for women in agriculture around the world.  
<http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/data-map/statistics/en/>

**Table 4: Distribution of Agricultural Holders by Sex in the Middle East/North Africa (Indicator 1)**

Country	year	total number	total female	% female	total male	% male
Algeria	2001	1,023,799	41,793	4.1%	982,006	95.9%
Egypt, Arab Rep.	1999	4,537,319	236,632	5.2%	4,300,687	94.8%
Iran, Islamic Rep.	2002	84,679	4,989	5.9%	79,690	94.1%
Jordan	1997	91,585	2,712	3.0%	88,873	97.0%
Lebanon	1998	194,829	13,785	7.1%	180,479	92.6%
Morocco	1996	1,492,844	66,395	4.4%	1,426,449	95.6%
Saudi Arabia	1999	242,267	1,868	0.8%	240,399	99.2%
Tunisia	2004-2005	515,850	32,980	6.4%	482,900	93.6%
<b>Regional average (weighted)</b>				<b>4.9%</b>		<b>95.1%</b>

Source: FAO Gender and Land Rights Database.

Regional average is weighted with total holders of each country

But women's exclusion from land property is not inherent to developing countries only, it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth century that things started to change in Europe. In Morocco, like most Muslim majority countries, inheritance laws guarantee the right of women to the family heritage be it land, estate or other. However, the customary law in many regions in the country forbid women from inheriting the land for fear of removing the patrimony from family or tribal control. (Le Coz 1964) This exclusion was justified by the assumption that women can't be farmers, although, most of the labor force in agriculture has progressively become female.

Political considerations also control land ownership; if in the past, the rivalries and disputes between tribes justified the exclusion of women, today the financial stakes and political interests are the most likely reasons. The collective lands governed by the *Dahir* of April 27<sup>th</sup> 1919 are defined as the properties of the tribes and are declared "inalienable, non-assignable and non-transferable." Estimated at around 15 million hectares, collective lands constitute almost one third of the agricultural, forest, pastoral territory, divided between pastures (12.6 million hectares), agriculture (2 million hectares), forests, protected areas and urban perimeters (Ait Mous & Berriane 2015; Berriane 2015). These lands represent the assets of more than 4631 ethnic groups/tribes nationwide, and approximately 2.5 million rights holders.<sup>15</sup> Subsequent changes in organizing the exploitation of these lands took place in March 1926, October 1937, December 1941, and in February 1963 when a major reform was introduced. It consisted in replacing article 4 of the 1919 *Dahir* with article 11 which states that "by way of derogation from the provisions of the present article, the acquisition of a collective building by the State, municipalities, public institutions and ethnic (tribal) communities, may be carried out either by mutual agreement in the case where the collective owner and the tutorship council are in agreement or by expropriation in the opposite case."<sup>16</sup> In fact, The *Dahir* of 1919, establishes the administrative tutorship of the Ministry of Interior on the collective

<sup>15</sup> Moroccan Women and Collective Lands. 2009. Report of *Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc* and *Forum des Alternatives Maroc*.

[http://www.genreenaction.net/IMG/pdf/Maroc\\_\\_les\\_femmes\\_et\\_les\\_terres\\_collectives.pdf](http://www.genreenaction.net/IMG/pdf/Maroc__les_femmes_et_les_terres_collectives.pdf) Retrieved on August 12, 2017

<sup>16</sup> « par dérogation aux dispositions de l'article du présent dahir, l'acquisition d'un immeuble collectif par l'Etat, les communes, les établissements publics et les collectivités ethniques (tribus), peut être réalisée, soit de gré à gré, dans le cas où la collectivité propriétaire et le conseil de tutelle sont d'accord, soit par voie d'expropriation dans le cas contraire ».

lands. It grants the right to these lands exclusively to "heads of households", thus excluding women and young bachelors from the right of use on these lands in an almost systematic way. In 1957, the Ministry of Interior even published a memo on the standardization of the conditions for the division of collective land and a definition of the "heads of households": "men married for at least six months or widows of collectivists with at least one child." This transformation of plural customary practices into a standardized governance regime has favored the exclusion of women.

However, the nominal phrase and the definition of "head of family" refer to a patriarchal conception of the family that matches neither the spirit of the Constitution nor the definition of family in the Family Code. Maintaining this today is a clear infringement of article 4 of the family code and article 19 of the constitution.<sup>17</sup> The reason behind cultural resistance to the principle of joint responsibility of the spouses over the family is the fear of altering the authority of man as head of the family and the possible social transformations that may come with it—which by the way are already happening. Placing the system governing collective lands under the aegis of custom rather than modifying in agreement with the principles of the constitution is an ambivalent way of preserving the interests of powerful individuals and organization. This is even more obvious as there is no clear and precise clause in the Dahir of 1919, nor in the changes brought to the text that explicitly prohibits women from access to collective lands. This was the argument used by the *Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc* (ADFM) that joined the strenuous advocacy movement since 2007 in its defense of ethnic women's rights to property.

In fact, ten years after the women of the *Haddada* tribe first protested against this injustice, the *soulaliyate* movement counts more than 2000 women.<sup>18</sup> To counter the mounting pressure, the authorities responded by three palliative measures. The first action was a memo dated July 23rd 2009 addressed to the *Wali* (highest appointed authority in a Region) of the El Gharb-Chrarda-Beni Hssen Region and Governor of the Province of Kenitra with the objective of running a pilot project in the province where the parties concerned were to engage consultations to reconsider the terms of rights holders in order to "enable women, like men, to be included in the lists of rights holders." In November 2009, as a result of the above-mentioned initiative, 792 women from Qasbat Mehdiya were finally able to receive the remaining portion of the compensation paid to the tribe in one of the previous transactions from which they were excluded. Even though the

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<sup>17</sup> Article 4: "Marriage is a legal contract by which a man and a woman mutually consent to unite in a common and enduring conjugal life. Its purpose is fidelity, virtue and the creation of a stable family, under the supervision of both spouses according to the provisions of this Moudawana."

Article 19: "The man and the woman enjoy, in equality, the rights and freedoms of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental character, enounced in this Title and in the other provisions of the Constitution, as well as in the international conventions and pacts duly ratified by Morocco and this, with respect for the provisions of the Constitution, of the constants [constantes] of the Kingdom and of its laws. The State works for the realization of parity between men and women."

<sup>18</sup> Statistics provided by Saida Drissi President of ADFM during a press conference on March 2017. A study on the socio-economic profile of women soulaliyates carried out by *La Ligue Marocaine pour la Citoyenneté et les Droits* A summary is available at: Théa Olivier. 2017. "Study: portrait-robot of women soulaliyates in Morocco" Telquel. [http://telquel.ma/2017/03/08/portrait-robot-femmes-soulaliyates\\_1538211](http://telquel.ma/2017/03/08/portrait-robot-femmes-soulaliyates_1538211)

compensation for the land sold previously was below expectations --as it has been indexed to the Islamic inheritance system, the movement's outcome remains a significant achievement as it made possible for rights holders to seek reparation from a court of law to dispute the exclusion.<sup>19</sup> In this sense it can be considered a milestone in the long struggle for economic equality between men and women in Morocco

The second act was the issuance in October 2010 of a second memo by the Ministry of Interior addressed to the Walis and governors of all the 12 regions of the country conferring upon all *soulaliyate* women the status of rights holders to collective land. Finally, in March 2012, the latest memo provides additional clarification for better implementation of this process. (Ait Mous & Berriane, 2015).

However, while some regions have begun to include women in official lists of rights holders, others still continue to resist on the basis that the memo does not have the power of law; it is merely an internal memorandum for organizational purposes. The major change yet in the Soulaliyates' case is the election in 2014 of five women delegates<sup>20</sup> to the council along with three men for the Haddada tribe near Kenitra. These delegates will sit for a six-year term renewable once in the representative committees of the rights holders (*Jmaa*), which is composed of the representatives of the Ministry of Interior, and of the HCEFLCD.

## 2- The Disaster of urbanization and environmental justice

Although the *Dahir* of 1919 states that collective lands belong to the ethnic community and are therefore inalienable (Article 4), it does give the supervisors of the *Jamaâ* (tribal assembly) and other members of the Trusteeship Council (Article 11) the right of transferring the property and even selling the land. As a result, estate developers have been eyeing these lands, especially the ones in the suburbs of big cities. Thus, in recent years many real estate projects emerged on those collective lands, which created multiple problems for rights holders.

The most recent example of land transfer that has triggered a large movement of resistance and unrest both for the investors as well as for the rights holders is the case of Douar Sbita. The luxurious resort complex of *Plage des Nations City Golf* that was constructed on collective land is located just ten kilometers north of the capital city, Rabat, in one of the most fertile and lush plains of that region. The project covers an area of more than 300 hectares and comprises a luxury residential complex, over 2,500 villas and 7,500 apartments and an 18-hole golf course. The site is unique, it offers a

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<sup>19</sup> On October 10, 2013, the Administrative Court of Rabat decided in favor of women's rights to collective lands on the basis of articles 6, 19 and 32 of the Moroccan Constitution. Only such a solution would seem to agree with the spirit of current law and should be generally approved. But this decision cannot of itself constitute a jurisprudence. According to Circular No. 4474 of the Ministry of the Interior of 13 June 2004, the role of the delegate is to decide on the granting of the right to usufruct, and establishing the lists of beneficiaries, the distribution of profits and the resolution of conflict. (see the Guide for Delegates of the Communal Lands, published by the Ministry of the Interior, 2008)

<sup>20</sup> The elected women are: Rkia Bellot, the leading figure of the movement, Mennana Znaïdi, Mina Mouimi et Mina Nhaili were elected in the delegates council, *Naiibate*

breathtaking view of the Atlantic Ocean, and is steps away from the Maâmoura forest, considered the lung of the densely-populated region of the Gharb.

Based on an uninhibited neo-liberal economic model that often claims an exemplary sustainability, the project nevertheless embodies the perfect example of the globalization of consumerist standards of living that are considered highly damaging to ecology. The rhetoric of ecology and sustainable development seems to have become more a marketing argument than a collective effort that will enable nations to insure fair and equitable development alternatives to all citizens. The *Plage des Nations City Golf* project that claims to respect the environment stands on fertile agricultural collective lands after long episodes of struggle with rights holders<sup>21</sup> that caught national and international media attention.

The last residents of Douar Sbita on whose land the project stands received an eviction notice on January 30, 2017 so that other sections of the project can be built. Grabbing the land of these families, who live mainly on agriculture, means not only the loss of a house but also the taking away of their only source of income. "As a result of forced evictions, the inhabitants are left without any means of earning a livelihood and, in practice, with no effective access to legal or other resort. Forced evictions intensify inequality, social conflict, segregation and invariably affect the poorest, most socially and economically vulnerable and marginalized sectors of society, especially women, children, minorities and indigenous peoples."<sup>22</sup> In fact, the Human Rights NGO LMCDH conducted a study on the profile of a sample of 3000 Soulaliyates aged between 17 and 99 years to determine their socio-economic background. (Ollivier, 2017) The chilling results of their analysis uncovered the truth of those left behind. There are about six million soulaliyates who are denied the recognition as rights owners, the majority of them have no education and only 3.8% are civil servants with a monthly salary, health coverage and a retirement plan. the rest of them are stay home wives depending on the salary of their husbands, or have occasional daily jobs either as housekeepers or nannies, which puts them in a situation of immense precariousness.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Read the detailed report prepared by the *Moroccan League for Citizenship and Human Rights* on the conditions of the acquisition of the land base published on 18 December 2016. <http://alaoual.com/society/46688.html>. According to the report, in addition to the derisory purchase price per m2 (50dh) a series of violations of the procedures were committed by the purchasers of the land at Douar Sbita. They excluded women, widows and divorced from the compensation of rights holders of the Oulad Sbita tribe. The struggle of Oulad Sbita's rights holders received extensive media coverage (NYTimes, TV5, France24 and a Facebook page: We Stand With Douar Sbita)

<sup>22</sup> UN OHCHR [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/ForcedEvictions.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/ForcedEvictions.aspx)

<sup>23</sup> "Toutes les femmes soulaliyate divorcées, veuves, sans enfant mâle ou mariées à des hommes appartenant à une autre collectivité ont été chassées par leurs frères et leur père et ont dû se réfugier dans le bidonville situé en contrebas du village d'El Haddada, encerclé par les constructions et les ordures", explique Rkia Bellot, originaire de la Jemaâ El Haddada, icône aujourd'hui du mouvement national des Soulaliyate né en 2007. Dounia z. Mseffer, (All divorced, widowed soulaliyate women, without male children, or married to men belonging to another community, were driven out by their brothers and fathers and had to seek refuge in the slum below the village of El Haddada, encircled by construction and garbage ", explains Rkia Bellot (born in 2007), a native of Jemaâ El Haddada, today an icon of the national movement of Soulaliyate. <http://femmesdumaroc.com/reportage/egalite-des-sexes-le-long-combat-des-soulaliyate-2711#0QuavmxSGj1wGq8P.99>

The families of Douar Sbita did not choose to leave their land to live in the slums of the city, but they were forced to live with the disaster as Mike Davis underlines they will probably swell the rank of the shantytowns of major metropolises. In his analysis of the slums of the world, Davis paints a dark picture of the relationship between the extreme neoliberalism that humanity is experiencing in these modern times and the enormous ecological, economic and security disasters that this will engender. (Davis, 2007) The UN-HABITAT report confirms this alarming situation showing that the urban population of developing countries has grown at a rate of 3 million people per week in recent decades (UN-HABITAT, 2008: 15). Urban metropolises are developed in an emergency and sometimes even in anarchy without rational planning for ecological balance and sustainability. This is exactly the case of Moroccan cities where the surrounding fertile farmlands are rapidly receding in favor of eyesore *rurban* sprawl. The populations that once cultivated the land is then replaced by others that have lost their own land to severe droughts and the rapidly advancing desertification.

### **Conclusion:**

The debate on environment is intricately tied to issues of solidarity, well-being, equity, sharing and redistribution of wealth. These concerns command a new perspective on ecological action; that of the preservation and secure access of all to the common foundation of social cooperation. Conversely, social justice issues redraw the contours of ecology: today it is no longer possible to reduce the latter to a conservationist concern with "nature", nor is it possible to address social justice questions without taking into account environmental justice. Movements and organizations that defend environmental justice are the signs high social inequality. They denounce situations of natural resource grabbing that result in diverse forms of discrimination and socio-economic exclusion. The emergence of these movements, which started decades ago, has spawned a wave of research and debate on the unequal distribution of environmental costs and benefits. Environmental justice has since become locally based, theoretically broad and plural, intersecting concepts of distribution with acknowledgement of differences and participation. Indeed, acknowledging diversity, specificity, representations and problems of local communities in environmental decisions is a form of justice that does away with policies that constrain and oppress individuals' rights, and constitutes, thus, the foundation of distributive injustice. On the other hand, lack of acknowledgment or recognition of differences inevitably yields non-participation and absence of dialogue between the rights holders and authorities in charge of protecting the environment.

In this article, I tried to demonstrate that critical mass of women engineers in forestry does not necessarily mean effective and significant impact, and that is the result of a set of institutional and cultural constraints. Taking stock of experiences worldwide where women involved in the preservation of natural resources did have a positive impact of environmental preservation while safeguarding the livelihood of communities immediately related to forest and other fragile ecosystems, our expectations and hope was that in Morocco too, a different sensitivity can be brought by educated women to this

field. We, however, find that even though critical mass is attained, the glass ceiling is still there, for women not only cannot attain decision-making positions, but they are actually “encouraged” by a complex socio-cultural-political system to yield those positions to their male colleagues. The result is that what their counterparts achieved through the particular sensitivity, empathy, and inclusion of local populations in India and South America for example, is lost on us and on the public efforts to ensure a sustainable environment. In this, forestry is no different than Health, Justice or Education, where despite the presence of women has reached critical mass, their visibility is insignificant as long as decision-making positions remain unattainable to them. In contrast, and as the example of uneducated *Soulaliyate* women demonstrate, effective visibility is the result of struggle and militancy especially when one’s rights are in jeopardy. It is quite obvious that the inclusion and the accompaniment of the local communities in their diversity to reflect on their conduct with the environment could give a better understanding and better chances for addressing environmental issues. On the contrary, if they feel their needs ignored and if they are not included in the decision-making process, we can only expect resistance if not sabotage of the measures and initiatives imposed from the top, even if they are appropriate.

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