

# Domestic Violence in the African North

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## Introduction

Theories, debates, and activism on sexual health and rights have travelled with reasonable speed in North Africa in the past three decades or so and considerable headway has been achieved on this front (see Charrad, 2010; Sadiqi, 2008; Ennaji & Sadiqi, 2011). However, although related, questions of domestic violence, which may also include sexual assault and rape, have been rather side-lined theoretically, in spite of the fact that activism and legal reform remain strong in the region, and in spite of the fact that gender-based violence is considered essential to the most fundamental provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>1</sup> This regression in theoretical work on domestic violence in the region resulted in lack of action on the part of policy-makers.

One can understand that domestic violence is generally eschewed in policies promoting gender equality in the region, as such policies are blind to what is undertaken in the private sphere, generally considered not political because not economically productive. But academic theory on the topic cannot make any headway without focusing on the private with the aim of rendering it public. Indeed, although it is true that law and family constitute only one element of the broader constellation of gender relations and institutions, it is a crucial and understudied one. In other words, North Africa has witnessed deep social, economic, and political transformations in the last three decades, and there is a need to reopen the old debates on domestic violence in new ways that address these recent transformations. It should be noted at this juncture that the overall status of women in this part of the world is rather privileged in comparison to those of many Arab and Muslim countries. A number of questions may be raised in this respect: Are the theoretical debates on domestic violence in the 70s and 80s still valid now? What impact do the significant advances on the legal, economic, and political fronts have on these debates? What role could the changing notion of the family, perceived as a central safe haven in North African societies, have on these debates?

1. In 1992, the Committee on CEDAW formally affirmed that violence against women constitutes a violation of internationally recognized human rights, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a public official or a private person. CEDAW was adopted by the General Assembly in 1979 and entered into force in 1981. The countries of North Africa signed CEDAW, two of them without reservations.

In an attempt to answer these questions, this paper is organized as follows: Section 1 provides an analytical overview of the major theories on domestic violence. Section 2 deals with the changing nature of the family in the region. Section 3 presents the state of affairs with regard to domestic violence in the African North, and the last section presents new ways of dealing with domestic violence in light of the discussions in the previous sections.

## Theories of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the use of abusive and threatening behavior (usually by men) to exert and maintain control and power over victims (usually women). Domestic violence may be physical, verbal, or psychological. The most well-documented type is the physical type. Theories of domestic violence allow an understanding of why women are battered. Such theories are based on numerous interviews with women victims of domestic violence over long periods of time. The aim of these theories is to devise effective intervention strategies and response to the problem of domestic violence. There are several major theories of domestic violence.

The first theory, also called the psychological theory, that violence in general is caused by psychopathological factors and mental illness. This theory was coined by the battered women's movement which started in the United States in the early 1970s. Men who abused their wives were considered to be mentally ill and women who remained in violent relationships were also considered to be mentally deficient. Medication or psychiatric treatment was believed to be the cure. This theory was discredited on the grounds that the behavior of batterers did not correspond to profiles of individuals who suffered mental illnesses. Whereas people who suffer from mental illness, such as schizophrenics, do not choose their victims, domestic abusers attack only their intimate partners. Further, battered women were not systematically mentally ill and their hysterical behavior (which contrasts with the batterer's calmer behavior) is often misinterpreted (Zorza, 2002).

The second theory, the Learned Behavior Theory, considered domestic violence to be a learned behavior. According to this theory, the batterers learned violence in their families as children and victims sought out abusive husbands because they witnessed their mothers being abused. This theory has yet to be corroborated because it suffers from insufficient statistical evidence. Furthermore, although boys who witness their fathers battering their mothers end up battering their wives, girls who witness battering are not more likely to be abused as adults than girls who don't (Zorza, 2002). However, a recent research project by the Family Violence Prevention Fund concluded that women who were physically or sexually abused as children may be more likely to be abused as adults. Many studies have however established a relationship between witnessing domestic violence and battering. These studies emphasized that witnessing is one of many sources of information, however, such information may also be obtained from the larger society where the control of wives, and women in general, is often enforced through violence. The batterers' intervention programs further show that when boys witness domestic violence, they not only learn violence per se but also learn lessons about gender roles (i.e. the respective roles of men and women) that contribute to their abusive behavior as adults (Zorza, 2002).

The third theory, the Loss of Control Theory, is closely related to the previous one as both take violence to be the result of a loss of control. Men are abusive because they cannot control their anger or frustration or because alcohol enables them to lose control. According to this theory societal expectations are gendered and men as men are prevented from expressing anger and frustration, and hence release their accumulated feelings through the use of violence. However, abusers show control in their violence tactics; they carefully target certain people at certain times and places.

For example, they choose to attack their partners in private or make sure they do not leave visible evidence. They may also choose to resort to verbal abuse, property destruction, or threatening children (Schechter & Ganley, 1995).

The fourth theory, the Learned Helplessness Theory, stipulates that women who are repeatedly battered internalize a “learned helplessness” which prevents them from resisting violence or leaving their husbands/partners. However, research has shown that women in general have very rational reasons for staying: fear of their husbands’ revenge on children, lack of financial means to support their families, or fear of family and community rejection. Also, women do resist violence and endeavor to secure their safety in active ways, such as developing survival or coping strategies. Moreover, this theory overlooks important factors such as the economic, social, and familial reasons which oblige a woman to either adopt an attitude of “staying, leaving and returning” according to circumstances or remain in the relationship. Women often negotiate with their partners during this period and may use their family to mediate. Further, the Learned Helplessness Theory assumes that all battered women have a low self-esteem, overlooking the fact such characteristics may be in fact the physical and psychological effects of the abuse. All in all, the “learned helplessness” theory is static and overlooks the fact that abused women do not constitute a homogeneous group with similar experiences and that their response to violence changes according to circumstances. Women are generally responsible for the stability of their couple and hence their husband’s violence.

The fifth theory, the Cycle of Violence Theory, considers violence to be “cyclic”, namely that batterers experience intermittent violent and repentant periods in their lives. This theory argues that men are not taught to show their feelings and express their anger and frustration. However, a number of case studies have shown that batterers don’t repent and that the “cycle of violence” is in fact “constant” (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). Like the previous theory, this theory is static and does not deal with intentionality. It is often paired with the “family/relationship conflict” model which stipulates that in intimate relationships, both men and women mutually contribute to violence. The main drawback of this theory is that it reduces violence to some kind of “provocation” and, as such, is just another form of victim blaming. This theory does not explain instances where husbands or male partners use trivial issues to start the violence or beat their spouse/ female partner when the latter is asleep (for more details on this point see Paymar, 1994).

To fill this gap, the “Power and Control Wheel” theory (Schechter & Ganley, 1995) was devised. While building on previous theories in recognizing the socialization factor, this theory focuses on the fact that physical violence is the result of tactics and calculation geared towards exerting and maintaining power over the victim. The use of physical violence is not the result of repetitive expressions of anger or loss of control, but part and parcel of a larger pattern of behavior aimed at holding the victim under control. This theory encapsulates best the existing unequal power relation within the couple; it also explains the fact that violent behavior is generally tolerated within cultures and reinforced by political institutions and economic arrangements. As such, this theory provides a new understanding of abuse.

However, by restricting violence to domestic spheres, this theory does not quite totally capture the phenomenon of violence. Violence needs to be conceptualized in the larger social context. The relationships of inequality and dominance are not only shaped by personal choices and desires by dominant men; society constructs unequal social and economic relationships between men and women, as well as within marriage and families. The crucial thing is to understand how the way we respond to violence engenders an atmosphere of intolerance to or acceptance of the violence perpetrated in intimate relationships. According to UNICEF's Digest 1, 7 (2000), various cultural, legal, economic and political factors help perpetuate domestic violence against women. This view establishes a link between the macro-economic dislocation, women's increasing economic activity, and family violence. It ranges from the macro level (wars, government, repression, etc.) to private acts between the couple.

A common understanding of the causes of domestic violence can help communities develop more effective responses to this type of violence; such an understanding helps avoid conflicting responses that could undermine efforts to protect victims and hold batterers accountable. This is particularly important in developing nations like the ones in the African north where women's issues are entangled with human rights and official politics, creating genuine dynamics of change. Dealing with domestic violence is a new topic that did not come about with women's rights only, but also with the changing nature of the family in the region.

### **The Changing Nature of the Family in North Africa**

Domestic violence is closely related to the nature and structure of the family. North African societies are deeply patriarchal and the family space has always functioned as the realm of male dominance over women and children. Such family spaces were often households sheltering members of the extended family with the father or grandfather as the head figure. In these societies, men decide to marry, not women; women are "given" in marriage. Further, within the North African family structure, the rule is to "correct" children with the aim of "raising and educating" them (there is only one term for both in Arabic: *rabbi*). Consequently, it is natural to hit children and women with the aim of "correcting" them.

This cultural given started to change with women's education and entry into the labor force. The independence of the Maghrebian countries was accompanied by massive scholarisation of girls in urban areas. Women's education and women's entry into the workforce have been accompanied by a gradual transformation of households into nuclear families sheltering parents and children. The transition from bigger to smaller families has had its challenges: various types of violence accompanied the new gender negotiations within the family. In 2003, Fouzia Ghissassi and Abderrazak Moulay R'Chid edited a book where a number of Moroccan university teachers and professors gave testimonies about domestic abuse (Ghissassi, Fouzia and Abderrazak Moulay R'Chid, 2003). Considering that domestic violence is a universal phenomenon that has been attested in the cultural histories of all nations, talking about it, especially in educated circles, is still a taboo.

In the last decade or so, the result of a combination of economic crises, unemployment, and a superficial form of religiosity led to a crisis of masculinity in the Maghreb, a

fact which resulted in increased domestic violence. The North African family has long been described as a patriarchal unit, and it has been noted that Muslim family laws have served to reinforce patriarchal gender relations and women's subordinate position within the family. Again, considering that patriarchy is universal and multifaceted, Arab-Islamic patriarchy is different from mainstream Western patriarchy in the sense that whereas the former is more "private" and based on space, the latter is more public and is based on the power of "image" which creates "models" for men and women. Arab-Islamic patriarchy also considers the family, kin ties, and women's reproductive capacities as "essential" and "natural". It should be noted, however, that the emphasis on biology has led to reductionist and functionalist accounts of the family that we find in both Arab-Muslim and mainstream Western societies. In both societies, the family serves to socialize children into society's normative system of values and provides an emotional environment that will ensure a psychologically protective environment for the (male) worker/breadwinner. In both types of society, these nurturing functions are carried out by the wife and mother.

It is for these reasons that in modern North African societies, the role of women and the family should be taken into account. Marriage and family are central to social reproduction. It is also at this juncture that religion and culture intermingle to the extent that the two melt into one. For example, the Egyptian Islamist Seyid Qutb described the family as the nursery of the future which breeds precious human products under the guardianship of women. In this context, a woman's primary functions is that of a wife and mother and that of a man is that of breadwinner and source of authority in the private and public spaces. It is this authority that sanctions domestic violence on the cultural level.

Domestic violence may have roots that transcend the boundaries of the family. The state, for example, may directly or indirectly monitor domestic violence through its own mechanisms. Studies have shown that state-building in the Maghreb has been based on family regulation (Charrad, 2010). The state's grip on the family is channeled through the regulation of marriage registration and the laws which differ according to societies (Sadiqi, 2008). In addition, states enact laws regulating women's reproductive rights, contraception, as well as divorce, death, custody, etc. In brief, the family is not an enclave in its relationship with the state.

### The State of Affairs with Regard to Domestic Violence in North Africa: Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia

Of the three countries of the Maghreb, Morocco fares best in its dealings with domestic violence. However, the road is still long as the following facts show.<sup>2</sup> Article 490 of the penal code criminalizes extramarital sex for women, calling for punishments ranging from one month to one year in jail. These cases are rarely taken to court, since a conviction depends on either eyewitness testimony or a confession by one of the perpetrators. An unmarried woman's pregnancy is proof of sexual relations and may lead to criminal prosecution, while the fault of her male partner is not recognized by law. Further, no laws specifically prohibit domestic violence, though general prohibitions against assault found within the penal code are theoretically applicable to such situations. Physical abuse is grounds for divorce, but the wife must be able to call on witnesses to support her claims (see Article 100 of the *moudawana*). If she is unable

2. The information about Morocco in this section is taken from *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa, Morocco. An Analytical Assessment of the 2004-2009 Period*. New York: The Freedom House. New York: Spring 2010.

to prove her case, the authorities will return a woman to her abuser's home, leaving her in a worse situation than before she filed the complaint. Consequently, few women report domestic abuse. Sexual assault and rape are both criminalized under the penal code, although spousal rape is not. The maximum sentence for each crime is five years in prison. Given prevailing societal concepts of personal and family honor, victims of sexual violence rarely come forward for fear of shaming their families.

As for "honor killings," in which women are murdered by family members for perceived sexual or moral transgressions, they do occur in Morocco but are rather rare compared with some other countries in the region. As with other forms of gender-based violence, honor killing is traditionally seen as a private issue, consequently the police are rarely summoned and are hesitant to intervene. Article 475 of the penal code stipulates that a kidnapper or seducer of a minor girl can be acquitted if he marries her.

Although prohibited under Article 184a and Article 184b of the penal code, prostitution is common, especially in urban centers. However, the government neither prosecutes nor protects women who have been coerced into providing sexual services. Trafficking in persons, particularly in child maids (children working as house helpers), is a problem.

Article 10 of the constitution formally protects all people from arbitrary arrest and detention. Article 10 states: "(1) No one can be arrested, detained, or punished except in the cases and forms provided by law. (2) The home is inviolable. There can be no searches or inspection except under the conditions and the forms provided by the law". In practice, however, women may be singled out for arrest when they are deemed to behave immodestly, particularly in rural communities.

In a move that bore both symbolic and substantive meaning for women in Morocco, the government announced on December 10, 2008 (the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), that it would lift all reservations to CEDAW.<sup>3</sup>

When it ratified the convention in 1993, Morocco, like many other Arab and Muslim countries, had reservations on several articles that were thought to conflict with Islamic or national law: e.g. Article 9 which relates to the transmission of nationality to children, and Article 16 regarding the equality of men and women's marital rights. The King later declared that the reservations were "obsolete" in light of the progressive national laws adopted in recent years. The public response regarding the lifting of reservations created a stronger legal basis for additional progress on women's rights issues, and carried a political and universal message that was widely applauded by civil society (Touahri, 2008a).

3. See Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, "The Withdrawal of the Reservations to CEDAW by Morocco," news release, December 17, 2008). <http://www.euromedrights.net/pages/556/news/focus/68402>

Despite all this female victims of spousal violence are still not well protected by the law or society. Women often have difficulty providing evidence of domestic violence, as they usually lack witnesses and their word is not given much weight by the authorities. The Ministry of Social Development, Family, and Solidarity began publishing official data on violence against women in late 2007. In March 2008, the Ministry responded to an upsurge in reported incidents by announcing an action plan to increase the number of support centers for victims and to prepare a draft bill that would specifically outlaw violence against women. According to the ministry, some

17,000 incidents of gender-based violence were reported in the first three months of 2008 alone, 78.8 percent of which were committed by the victims' husband (Touahri, 2008b). Violence against women instigated by men under the strain of financial difficulties is also on the rise (Barakat, 2009).

In February 2007, the same Ministry presented a draft bill offering a legal framework for protecting women's rights by providing safe spaces for female victims of violence. If a woman is a victim of violence perpetrated by her employer, she will be provided with a safe harbor in her workplace and, depending on her condition, she will get reduced work hours or temporary cessation of work. Support networks and shelters for abused women started to appear in big cities like Casablanca, Rabat, and Fes in the last few years.

There exist around 100 counseling and listening centers in Morocco. These centers help women victims of domestic violence cope with their tragedies by providing legal, psychological, and social support. The role of these centers is also to organize sensitizing campaigns against domestic violence, formation seminars, and follow-ups for women victims of domestic violence. These centers were initiated by the National Network for Centers of Listening and Legal Advice ANARUZ which is a national coalition of 39 psychological counseling and legal assistance centers for battered women. It was established in April 2004 following a consensus workshop that brought together several organizations and counseling centers in Morocco.

On February 2, 2009, the Union for Women's Action and the ANARUZ network launched an initiative to organize public forums aimed at sensitizing local communities to the plight of female victims of violence, set up "listening centers" where abused women are encouraged to speak about their traumatic experiences, and create a free telephone hotline to give legal help and counseling to women. A victim can either file a complaint with the court or, if she can afford it, hire a lawyer to handle the case.

The media plays a role in raising awareness of violence toward women and showcasing the activities of civil society groups on the issue. There is an ongoing debate in the media and within society about the creation of rehabilitation centers where violent men would be helped to control their behavior and psychological problems. Investigative reports and advertisements regarding violence against women are aired on television, and guests on talk shows are invited to discuss the topic. However, the mainstream media does not reflect the real progress made by women, and rarely uses gender-sensitive language. Although it has attempted to tackle issues such as sexual harassment, domestic violence, and gender roles, these efforts have been insufficient.

Statistics show that domestic violence has the lion's share in terms of violations affecting women in Morocco. A report, covering the period between September 2005 and October 2006, issued by ANARUZ and addressing issues related to violence based on gender estimated that an average of 74 percent of women suffer from gender-based violence. The report underlined the need to criminalize violence against women generally and domestic violence in particular. It called for activating the role of the prosecutor to ensure the protection of a divorced woman's right when she returns to the matrimonial home. The report also called for the establishment of shelters and the spread of listening centers nationwide. It highlighted the importance of coordination

between the government, women's groups, and human rights groups in order to produce a comprehensive national report on violence against women that binds all the parties involved.

In parallel, the Global Rights in Morocco, in collaboration with partner NGOs from various regions across the country, launched a campaign of legislative advocacy using two new tools: a poster called "Penalties, Privacy, No Tolerance: Claims of women for a law against violence", and a discussion booklet that accompanies it. These tools are intended for local NGOs in their advocacy for women's rights in Morocco. The poster illustrates twelve reasons for a comprehensive law on violence against women, and is available in French, Arabic and Tifinagh (the language of the Amazigh, the indigenous population in North Africa). The discussion booklet explains the rationale for these proposals, and provides statistics and testimonies of women, and concrete examples of laws that are contained in the framework for model legislation on violence in the family and interpersonal relations, based on the UN stance on the issue of violence against women.

On the ground, the most important and operative center that deals with domestic violence cases is the Nejma Center at the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM). The main motive compelling women to go to Nejma centre is a desire to release pent-up feelings related to violence that they have been repressing for years. By contrast, the major reasons that keep them from going to the center are: their inability to confront society especially in cases of rape or sexual harassment, their fear of homelessness and destitution (in case they are poor and jobless with children), the women's conviction that what happens in their personal life should remain a private matter irrespective of the violation and the impact it is having on their life, and their reluctance to seek legal advice given that there is lack of trust in the law and the institutions related to it.

The main problem that these centers face is securing evidence that rape took place in order to be able to protect the victim, not to mention the impossibility of finding witnesses given the nature of the circumstances in which rape takes place. This allows many rapists to escape punishment. Here is a case reported by Nejma center: a 22 year old woman was stopped by a man with a butcher's knife and was led to a secluded place. She was raped and taken to the rapist's home where she was kept for 3 days. During this time, the young woman was repeatedly beaten and raped. Upon her release, she filed a complaint to the court. However, despite her physical injuries and the doctor's certificate, she was not given justice because of lack of witnesses.

In other cases, the victims of rape are often seen as the criminals, or at least the ones who provoked the violence by the way they dress, talk, look, etc. In these cases the abuser is seen as a victim who committed his crime without "meaning to" do it. This is what a victim said to Nejma Center when she presented her complaint against her ex-husband and his friend who came to her house and raped her.

On May 15, 2010, a draft law to criminalize domestic violence was presented to the government by Nouzha Skalli, the then Minister of Social Development, Family and Solidarity. Although this bill opens a window of hope, it has not been passed yet.

In Algeria, facts show that some 7,400 women filed domestic violence complaints in



2009, 1,555 more than in 2004, according to the law enforcement agency that handles such cases. According to Belala (2006), in the work referencing the Berber-speaking nomads who live in the Sahara region, “Violence against women is a pervasive problem in Algeria. It touches all social classes and all regions, except in the extreme south where the Tuaregs banish men who rape women”.<sup>4</sup>

SOS Woman, an Algerian NGO set up some 15 years ago, was the first group to publicly denounce domestic violence against women. This was a pioneer act in Algeria’s modern history. According to this group, although domestic violence is increasing in Algeria, victims still fear scandal and thus avoid taking these cases to the police or the court. The spokesperson of this group said: “Victims talk to us anonymously on the phone. We get hundreds of calls from women who complain of being sodomized or forced to do things they are not morally comfortable with”.

Tunisian women are privileged given that gender equality is inscribed in the Tunisian government policies since 1956.<sup>5</sup> However, the implementation of this gender equality is still a challenge. As far as domestic violence is concerned, the Tunisian official discourse does not consider it a social phenomenon, but a rare occurrence. However, according to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1999), domestic violence – including sexual violence, battering, and other physical and psychological violence – is widespread in Tunisia; what is rare is official data on this phenomenon. The 1999 edition of *Collectif Maghreb Egalité* revealed many cases of threats and intimidation against women within the confines of marriage.

The only Tunisian association that runs a shelter for abused women is the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD). In 2001, this association issued a report on women victims of domestic violence. According to this report, most women who seek shelter in ATFD are beaten either by their husbands/partners or by a male member of their extended family. As in the Moroccan case, the main reasons that cause women not to report violence are economic dependence and lack of self-esteem. As for the official stance on domestic violence, the Tunisian state prefers to let the extended family handle it.

On the legal front, domestic violence is dealt with in Article 218 of the Tunisian Penal Code. An amendment was introduced on this article in 1993, in order to increase penalties when an assault is committed by one spouse against another or in cases where the assault is committed by a parent on a child. According to the Tunisian Penal Code, the penalty for domestic violence under article 218 is imprisonment for two years and a fine of 2,000 dinars with the sanctions being increased to three years’ imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 dinars if it was carried out with premeditation. In situations where the spouse or child victim decides to withdraw the case, the article stipulates that the proceedings, trial, or enforcement of the penalty shall be discontinued.

Thus, overall, while rape or sexual violence within marriage is on the verge of being criminalized in the Moroccan law system, the Tunisian law (couched in Article 218 of Tunisian Penal Code) does not explicitly prohibit it. Domestic violence is prohibited in Morocco in accordance with the guidelines submitted by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women to the fifty-second session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.<sup>6</sup> It must be noted, however, that women NGOs

4. See <http://www.wluml.org/node/3406>

5. Habib Bourguiba, the first Tunisian president after independence in 1956 is credited with the inscription of women’s rights in Tunisia’s laws.

6. U.N. doc. E/CN.4/1996/53, Add.2

in the three North African countries are striving to raise people's awareness about the issue of domestic violence through campaigns and various initiatives. Institutionalized will, proper training, law enforcement, and the punishment of domestic violence are still much needed in the region.

### Concluding Comments

The nature of domestic violence as well as its causes has changed in the last few decades. Today, in the era of Islamophobia, domestic violence is considered by many to be a problem in Muslim-majority cultures. Ways of dealing with violence have also changed in accordance with the overall historical and socio-economic context, as well as with the advent of the internet and cyber media. New laws are drafted and non-governmental organizations are offering services and raising awareness on an issue whose existence has been denied historically.

There is no consensus among scholars as to the relationship between Islam and domestic violence. The debate among religious leaders and Islamic scholars in this domain focuses on whether there is a religious provision (or stipulation) that a man may beat his wife. Forms of wife beating under specific circumstances are explicit in the Qur'an, especially An-Nisa, 34. Some scholars think that beating is the last resort and should not result in physical injury. Verse 34 of an-Nisa is one of the most important verses with respect to the husband/wife relationship in Islam. In most translations, it gives permission to men to beat/hit (they both have the same word in Arabic) their wives if they fear "rebellion," or "*nushûz*". Many interpretive problems have arisen regarding the occasions (if any) in which beating is appropriate, the type of beating prescribed, and whether beating remains discountenanced even if acceptable.

Theorizing domestic violence in North Africa is becoming a necessity. At a time when technology is pulling down the good old space frontiers between the private and the public spaces, violence has increased rather than decreased due to the shrinking of family size, less interference from the extended family, stress, etc. The new interest in Islam is adding a new dimension to this theorization.

Some headway has been achieved at the level of policy-making in Morocco but the road is still long before the taboo surrounding domestic violence is removed. Women in the African north are more and more educated and politically aware of their rights in and outside their homes. They are also more and more aware of the facilities the new media is offering them: various blogs on battered women's testimonies are used by advocates of women's rights to lobby on behalf of these women.

Morocco is at a very crucial transitional stage to democracy and it is high time women's rights advocates of all types focus on domestic violence. The new June 2011 constitution has for the first time in the history of Morocco institutionalized equality: a very good and promising move.

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