

# Citizenship, Civil in the

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## Introduction

As issues of citizenship and civil society have taken center-stage in recent years – partly as a result of the challenges of globalization, and partly as a result of democratic struggles in various parts of the world – the question of women's citizenship has assumed prominence. Some feminist scholars stress the longstanding struggle of women for rights and empowerment (Lister, 1997; Narayan, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1999). Others argue that the autonomous, rights-bearing citizen is a Western construct, and that citizenship and civil society are patriarchal and capitalistic constructs (Pateman, 1988). Nevertheless, rights, citizenship, civil society, and democratization are increasingly in demand in developing countries, including the Arab world. For women, citizenship concerns social standing, political participation, and national membership. Empirically, women's citizenship is reflected in their legal status, in access to employment and income, in the extent of their participation in formal politics, and in the formation of women's organizations.

In T. H. Marshall's (1964) famous formulation, the 18th century was the century of civil rights, the 19th century that of political rights, and the 20th century the era of social rights. Marshall's historical study was conducted in England, but his model has been applied for all of Europe by scholars of social policy and of citizenship. The trajectory of citizenship has not been exactly the same in developing and post-colonial countries. Much of the struggle over citizenship has unfolded in the twentieth century, and continues. Revolutions and liberation movements have contributed to concepts of rights, but in most cases, explicit calls for civil, political, and social rights are part of more recent demands for democratization and civil society. This is true also of the Arab region, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights organizations spread during the 1990s. I argue that in many countries in the region, women are at the center of struggles to define and extend democracy, citizenship, and civil society. By bringing the question

of women's rights to the fore, and by insisting that the state amend existing laws and guarantee rights for women, feminists and women's organizations are challenging the role of the state and the status of the citizen.

## On Citizenship and Civil Society

T. H. Marshall's definition of citizenship as "full membership in the national community" encompasses civil, political, and social rights and obligations. As such, it is a legal status as well as a practice and a process. Turner (1990, 2000) points out that citizenship refers to both passive and active membership in a community. It is about universalistic rights enacted into law and implemented for all citizens, and not informal, unenacted, or particularistic. Rights are not citizenship rights unless they are universally applied within the country and backed by the state. Figure 1 shows what civil, political, and social rights for women might look like.

Citizenship is intimately linked to civil society and the state. In liberal theory, the state is the guarantor of citizen rights, while also extracting obligations from citizens (such as payment of taxes, military duty, voting, obedience to laws, and so on). In some interpretations, the state is seen as protecting citizens from the vagaries of the market. Thus the public sphere of the state provides a counterweight to the private sphere of the market. Civil society — the realm of associational life, civility in public discourse, and state-society relations — is the crucial mediator between state and citizen. Civil society organizations balance the strength and influence of the state; they are supposed to protect citizens from abuses of state power; they play the role of monitor and watchdog; they embody the rights of citizens to freedom of expression and association; and they are channels of popular participation in governance.

Debates revolve around the precise nature of the relationship between state and civil society. Marxists

# Society and Women Arab Region

argue that civil society is never independent of the state; in liberal capitalist societies, the state needs and uses civil society to ensure that consensual hegemony is maintained. Others point out that civil society, left to itself, generates radically unequal power relationships, including reactionary movements, which only state power can challenge. “Only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society; only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state” (Walzer, 1998: 305).

The notion of global civil society extends this argument to the international sphere. In this view, international NGOs seek to pressure states and institutions of the global market - such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization - to make them more responsible. The relevance of global civil society to the Arab region lies in the discursive space, legitimacy, and sometimes resources that global civil society offers to women’s rights and human rights organizations seeking to achieve their objectives in the region’s politically restrictive and culturally conservative environment. International NGOs such as Amnesty International, inter-governmental agencies of global governance such as the United Nations, bilateral agencies such as CIDA and USAID, and the major foundations such as Ford and MacArthur have designed “civil society institution-building” projects to promote think-tanks, human rights organizations, women’s organizations, chambers of commerce, purchasing and market-

ing cooperatives, environmentalist societies, community centers, and so on.

Civil society is a modern construct that allows citizens to maintain solidarities through associational life. It consists of voluntary associations, professional organizations, and all manner of non-governmental organizations – some of which may be at philosophical and political odds with each other. Civil society also encompasses social movements and popular struggles, which often are in conflict with the state. How these competing interests and conflicts are handled and resolved depends on the strength of democratic institutions, the nature of the state, and the balance of social power. At present, the Arab countries have strong states and weak democratic institutions (Hinnebusch, 2000). In the sphere of emergent civil society, much of the social power is wielded by religious institutions and Islamic forces; the family is another strong institution, and it is protected by Islamic family laws. In sociological terms, the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* in the region has allowed primordial institutions such as the family

**Figure 1. Types of Women’s Citizenship Rights**

Legal/Civil Rights	Political Rights	Social Rights
1. Right to contract	1. Right to vote	1. Health services
2. Equal treatment under the law	2. Right to run and hold office	2. Family allowances
3. Freedom of expression	3. To form or join a political party	3. Primary and secondary education
4. Freedom of religion	4. To engage in fund-raising	4. Higher education
5. Right to privacy	5. Naturalization upon residency	5. Vocational education
6. Control over body	6. Refugee and contract rights	6. Social insurance
7. Choice of residence	7. Minority rights	7. Compensatory rights
8. Choice of occupation	8. Dissident rights	

Source: Adapted from Janoski (1998).

and religion to retain their power in the face of emerging modern and secular forces and institutions (see, e.g., Ibrahim 1992; Turner 2000). As such, civil society can only be thought of as incipient in the region. The state, Islamic forces and “primordial associations” are at odds with certain emerging civil society demands – especially those pertaining to the human rights of citizens, freedom of expression and association, and the rights and equality of women. Thus citizenship rights – as they are being defined by human rights organizations and women’s rights organizations in the region – are highly contested terrain.

Three final points that pertain to current debates about civil society are in order. First, the concept of civil society was revived in the late 1980s by East European dissident intellectuals who were opposed to the strong party-state. Civil society gained currency in the international development community as an alternative site for the delivery of aid, through the participation of NGOs. The concept of civil society spread in the Arab region in the 1990s, mainly in connection with political and economic liberalization. Its impetus therefore is as much global as it is local and regional. A second point is that civil society is not synonymous with NGOs, as is sometimes implied in the development literature. Third, there is a difference in viewing NGOs in neoliberal economic terms (instrumentally, as the substitute for state involvement in social provisioning for citizens), and in viewing them as civil society orga-

nizations (as the expression of associational rights and a measure of the quality of the relationship between the state and the citizenry). NGOs are proliferating in the Arab region, but many of them are engaged in social-welfare activities while others suffer from state restrictions or repression (see, e.g., Clark, 2000).

### General Characteristics of the Movement for Women’s Citizenship

Much has been written about the problematical nature of women’s citizenship rights in Arab societies. It results from several sources. First, it originates in the absence of secularism and the preeminence of religious laws. Religious law is elevated to civil status, and religious affiliation is a requirement of citizenship. Religious-based family laws render women dependents and minors as second-class citizens. Although Islamic law gives women the right to own and dispose of property, they inherit less property than men do. Furthermore, inasmuch as religious/civil laws require that women obtain permission of father, husband, or other male guardian to marry, seek employment, start a business, or travel, this means that women are seen as incapable of entering contracts on their own. Children acquire citizenship and religious status through their fathers, not their mothers.

Second, there is the role of the state, which is best defined as “neopatriarchal” in the Arab region

**Table 1. Women in Public Life, Arab Countries**

Country	Year women received right to vote	Year women received right to stand for election	Year first women elected (E) or appointed (A) to parliament	Women in Government: Ministerial Levels (%)	
				1996	1999
Algeria	1962	1962	1962(A)	0	0
Bahrain	1973	1973		0	0
Egypt	1956	1956	1957(E)	3.1	6.1
Iraq	1980	1980	1980(E)	0	0
Jordan	1974	1974	1989(A)	6.1	0
Kuwait	*	*	*	0	0
Lebanon	1952	1952	1991(A)	0	0
Libya	1964	1964	E	4.5	12.5
Morocco	1963	1963	1993(E)	0	4.9
Oman	*	*	*	0	0
Qatar	*	*	*	0	0
Saudi Arabia	*	*	*	0	0
Syria	1953	1953	1973(E)	6.8	11.1
Tunisia	1959	1959	1959(E)	2.9	10.0
UAE	1997+	1997+	**	0	0
Yemen	1967***	1967***	1990(E+)	0	0

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 2001, Table 25.  
 + No information or confirmation available  
 \* Women’s right to vote and to stand for election has not been recognized  
 \*\* Exact date when a woman was first elected or nominated to parliament is not available  
 \*\*\* Refers to the former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen

(Sharabi, 1988; Moghadam, 1993). Although there is some tension between the state and communal entities such as tribes and extended families, the neopatriarchal state upholds the traditional order in a modernizing context. Thus it is the state that reinforces family laws and family and social control over women. Third, there is the discrepancy between constitutions that award equal rights to men and women and family laws derived from the Sharia (Islamic canon law) that undermine this equality. Religiously-based family laws reinforce the distinction between the public sphere of markets and governance and the private sphere of the family.

Fourth, there is the absence or underdevelopment of democratic institutions in the region. The neopatriarchal state is authoritarian, hence the limited nature of civil society and of political participation. Male citizens have few political rights, and women even fewer. In several Arab Gulf countries, women have yet to receive basic political rights.<sup>1</sup> Even in countries where women do have the right to stand as candidates, few make it to national office. In 1996 five of the region's fourteen countries had women in their cabinets. Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Algeria each had two female ministers. There was one woman member of the Palestinian National Authority. In 1998 two women were appointed to cabinet posts in Morocco, when a socialist was appointed prime minister – both developments highly unprecedented in this conservative monarchy. No Arab woman has ever been prime minister of her country. The percentage of women representatives in the national assembly is tiny: between

one and ten percent. (See Table 1.) This may also be related to their economic participation, which is limited, especially when compared with other regions. (See Table 2.) It is precisely this state of affairs that the women's organizations are seeking to change.

Women's second-class citizenship has long been institutionalized, but it is being challenged by Arab women's organizations. In general, feminists and the women's organizations are challenging women's location in the private domain and men's control of the public domain. In particular, they are calling for: (1) the modernization of family laws, (2) the criminalization of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, (3) women's right to retain their own nationality and to pass it on to their children, and (4) greater access to employment and participation in political decision-making. They are also pointing out that existing family laws are at odds with the universal standards of equality and nondiscrimination embodied in international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

My research strongly suggests that in many Arab countries, the struggle for civil, political, and social rights is led by women's organizations, which are comprised of highly educated women with employment experience and international connections. The fact that these organizations exist at all is a sign of important demographic changes, of women's increasing access to the public sphere, and of the gradual process of political liberalization in the region. What

**Table 2. Gender Gaps in Economic Activity, by Region**

Region	Female Economic Activity Rate (age 15+)		
	Rate (%) 1997	Index (1985=100) 1997	As % of Male Rate 1997
All Developing Countries	39.3	111.3	68.0
Least Developed Countries	41.1	99.7	76.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	37.8	97.7	73.9
East Asia	55.1	114.2	86.6
East Asia (Excluding China)	41.2	126.1	69.7
South-East Asia and the Pacific	41.7	118.6	74.1
South Asia	29.1	99.4	51.7
South Asia (Excluding India)	29.5	114.2	55.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	28.8	140.0	51.3
Arab States	19.2	123.7	38.6
Eastern Europe and the CIS	45.6	97.3	82.4
Industrialized Countries	41.9	119.4	72.6
World	40.2	111.3	69.8

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 1999, p. 236.

is noteworthy is that the women's organizations are working to change the nature of that public sphere, to enhance the rights of women in the private sphere, to advance democratization, and to build civil society.

### Organizing Women

The 1990s have been described as the "third wave of democratization", and part of this process has been the proliferation of civil society organizations. Much has been written about the expansion of human rights, environmental development, and various political organizations that are said to comprise civil society. Less has been written about women's organizations and their relationship to civil society, the state, and democratization.

In the Arab region, the 1990s have seen the proliferation of women's organizations – some explicitly feminist. I have identified seven types of women's organizations: service organizations, worker-based organizations, professional associations, women-in-development (WID) NGOs, research centers and women's studies institutes, women's auxiliaries of political parties, and women's rights or feminist organizations. All are contributing to the development of civil society in the region, although the feminist organizations are perhaps doing so most consciously. The WID NGOs have an important function in fulfilling the development objectives of civil society: decentralized, participatory, and grassroots use of resources. For example, in countries such as Bahrain, "women's voluntary associations have come to form an integral part of civil society", which is responsible for "initiating all organizations for the handicapped as well as institutions for modern education" (Fakhro, 1997: 2).<sup>2</sup>

It is the women's rights or feminist organizations, however, which may be the most significant contributors to citizenship and civil society. These organizations target women's subordinate status within family law, women's low participation in formal politics, and violence against women. Members of such organizations, such as the Lebanese Committee for Women's Rights, often run (successfully or otherwise) for political office. Women's rights and feminist organizations seem to be most numerous in North Africa, where they formed the Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité, which was the major organizer behind the "Muslim Women's Parliament" at the NGO Forum that preceded the Beijing Conference in September 1995. The Collectif (later 2000) formulated an alternative "egalitarian family code" and promotes women's political participation. Social rights were also on the agenda, and were promoted by the Democratic League of Women's Rights, which organized a roundtable on the Rights of Workers. During 2000 there was much controversy surrounding the proposed national plan for women's

development. An ambitious document to extend education, employment, and political participation to Moroccan women, it came under attack by conservative Islamic forces. In response, Moroccan feminists took to the streets in support of the plan. Tunisian feminists and women's NGOs have been more successful in working with government agencies to develop and implement a national action plan in accord with the Beijing Platform for Action (WEDO, 1998). Indeed, more so than in other Arab countries, North African feminists have developed a kind of social feminism, one which emphasizes not only the modernization of family laws (important as it is in promoting women's civil rights), but also the rights of women workers. This may be due to the different history and political culture of North Africa, which includes a stronger tradition of trade unionism and socialist and social-democratic parties. Indeed the women's section of Morocco's Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP, which became the ruling party in 1998), active within the women's section of the Socialist International, hosted a special meeting of the international group in Rabat in July 2000.

Another way that Arab women have been contributing to civil society is through literary efforts, including the publication of books, journals, and films. Morocco's Edition le Fennec has produced numerous books on women's rights issues as well as many literary works by women. Also in Morocco, l'Union de l'Action Féminin produces the monthly 8 Mars. Mention should also be made of the first Arab Women's Book Fair, held in Cairo in November 1995 and organized by Noor, a woman's publishing house in Cairo. Al-Raida itself is an important example of the burgeoning feminist press in the Arab region. It has covered topics such as women in Arab cinema, women and the war in Lebanon, women and work, and violence against women.

Demographic, political, and economic changes are the internal factors behind the growth of women's organizations, but global effects have been important as well. The role of the UN and its world conferences has been especially important. Women's organizations from the Arab countries first met at a regional meeting — sponsored by the UN's regional commission for West Asia as part of UN preparations for the Beijing Conference — which took place in early November 1994 in Amman, Jordan. The two-week deliberations resulted in a document entitled "Work Program for the Non-Government Organizations in the Arab Region" (Moghadam, 1998). That document summarized women's conditions in Arab countries as follows: (1) Women suffer a lack of employment rights and undue burdens caused by economic crisis and structural adjustment policies. (2) The absence of



democracy and civil rights harms women especially. (3) There is inequality between men and women in authority and decision-making. (4) Women suffer from violence, including “honor crimes”. The solutions offered were comprehensive. The document called for the immediate ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and a revision of all national laws that discriminate against women. It called for legal literacy and free legal services for women, and the promotion of women judges. It called for “revision and modernization of the legislation related to women’s status in the family”, and the insertion of the rights of the wife in the marriage contract. And it called for “the amendment of nationality laws so that children can join their mothers and enjoy their nationalities” (pp. 25-26).

What are some recent campaigns towards women’s full citizenship that have implications for more expanded political rights and for the development of civil society? The modernization of family law and the enhancement of women’s rights with respect to marriage, divorce, and child custody have been the principal objective of feminists in Egypt (among other countries). They succeeded in having reforms adopted that ease the restrictions of women’s capacity to divorce and make male unilateral divorce more difficult. In 1999, Egyptian feminists secured the reversal of Article 291 – which exonerated rapists who married their victims. They also succeeded in introducing a new marriage contract that would stipulate the rights of the wife.

In Jordan, the criminalization of honor killings of daughters and sisters has become a major social issue, a preoccupation for feminist lawyer Asma Khader, journalist Rana Hussein, and other activists. The state, however, remains somewhat timid in the face of a tribe and kin-based social structure. Women leaders such as Toujan Feisal and Emily Naffa are also at the forefront of Jordan’s democracy movement. In Lebanon, feminists have formed The Permanent Arab Court to Resist Violence Against Women, and a Feminine Rights Campaign to focus on gender equality in divorce. They are also working to increase women’s parliamentary participation. In Palestine, feminists succeeded in having more schools established for girls, securing social rights for working mothers in the Labor Law, removing the regulation that a male guardian authorize a woman’s request for a passport and travel, and producing the first women’s newspaper, *Sawt an-Nisssa*.<sup>3</sup>

In Morocco, l’Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines (ADFM) prioritizes the identification and removal of obstacles to women’s political participa-

tion. To that end it formed the Centre pour le Leadership Féminin (CLEF).<sup>4</sup> Algerian feminists – who are active in the struggles for modernization of family law and against religious extremism – also have a considered position on democracy. As one explained:

If democracy is the predominance of numbers, regardless of quality, I don’t want to be a democrat, because this can allow extremist groups to take power and oppress people, especially women — this is my Algerian experience. ... If democracy is the right to speak out and be heard, as a voice and not just as a number, then I am a democrat. But if democracy is the freedom to choose between Coca-Cola and Pepsi, Levis or Nike, BBC or CNN, McDonalds or Pizza Hut, then I am not a democrat.<sup>5</sup>

The cooperation of women’s rights and human rights organizations – especially in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Palestine – is a fruitful one, for the expansion of both civil society and citizenship rights. Four examples will illustrate this point. In Egypt, women’s organizations, human rights organizations, and some professional organizations collaborated to protest the imminent passage of a controversial NGO law. The women’s groups included the Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance, the Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights, and the New Woman Research Center. A hunger strike and a sit-in were organized, mainly by women activists. They included two women psychiatrists associated with the El-Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, a women lawyer with the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services, and a writer associated with the Forum for Women’s Development.<sup>6</sup> In a second example, the campaign against female circumcision in Egypt is conducted by a coalition of women’s, human rights, child welfare, and family planning organizations. Third, demonstrations and public support for Youssefi government’s proposed Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development, which would include reform of Morocco’s family law, has been organized by Moroccan feminist groups and political parties such as Al Istiqlal and Al Taqaddom Wa Al Ishtirakiyya.<sup>7</sup>

In the fourth example of collaboration between human rights and women’s rights organizations, the First International Conference of the Arab Human Rights Movement took place in Casablanca, Morocco, on 23-25 April, 1999. It issued a Declaration that called for an end to the practice of torture; the need to respect freedoms of expression, assembly, and association; the realization of economic and social rights; securing citizens’ rights to participation, including guaranteeing public oversight of

the public revenues of the state; and the recognition of women's rights as an integral part of the human rights system. The Declaration asserted that women's enjoyment of human rights is an integrated and comprehensive process that should encompass all facets of life within and outside the family. It is worth quoting from the Declaration in some detail, as it shows the promise of such cooperation, as well as the obvious influence that the feminist groups have had within the human rights community:

Real equality between women and men goes beyond legal equality to encompass changing the conceptions and confronting the stereotypes about women. Thus, it requires not only a comprehensive review of laws, foremost of which are personal status codes, but also the review and upgrading of educational curricula as well as the critical monitoring of the media discourse.

In this respect, the Conference stresses the necessity of engaging women's and human rights NGOs in the process of reviewing current legislations and in upgrading civil and criminal laws, with a view to res-

olutely confronting all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

The Conference also calls upon the Arab governments that did not ratify [the Women's Convention] to do so expeditiously, and those that ratified it to lift their reservations.

It also calls upon women and human rights NGOs to work to refute these reservations, to challenge the culture of discrimination, and to adopt courageous stances in exposing the practice of hiding behind religion to legitimize the subordination of women. These NGOs should also give special attention to the continued monitoring of the compliance by Arab governments to their international commitments concerning women's enjoyment of their rights.

The necessity of considering the possibility of allocating a quota for women in parliaments, representative institutions and public bodies as a temporary measure. This should stand until appropriate frameworks for women's voluntary activity take shape and

**Table 3. Women's Organizations in the Arab Region (By Type and by Country, 1990s)**

Type/Country	Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Morocco
Service Organization	SOS Femmes en Détresse	Red Crescent Society	Noor al-Hussein Foundation	Assoc. for Protection of the Family
Professional Association	SEVE (women in business)	Women's Cmte. of the Chamber of Commerce; Medical Women's Association	Professional and Business Women's Assoc.	Federation of Women in Liberal and Commercial Careers
Development Research Center and Women's Studies Institute		New Woman Research and Study Center; Ibn Khaldun Center Dev. Studies	Princess Basma Women's Resource Center	Center for Studies and Research on Women (Fez)
Women's Rights Organization	Egalite; Triomphe; Emancipation; Rassemblement des Femmes Democratiques	New Civic Forum; New Woman Society; Women's Rights Cmte. EOHR	Jordanian Women's Union	Moroccan Women's Democratic Assoc.
Women in Development NGO		Assoc. for Development and Enhancement of Women		Committee of Moroccan Women for Development
Worker Based and Grassroots Women's Organizations		ETUF Women Workers Dept.		
Official Women's Organization	Union Nationale des Femmes Algeriennes	National Council for Women	General Fed. of Jordanian Women	

until awareness of the necessity of equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination becomes more widespread.<sup>8</sup>

I end this section with two final comments concerning feminism and Islamism in North Africa, and the implications for civil society and for gender norms. Feminist organizations in North Africa (and especially in Algeria) have been criticized by some for their opposition to fundamentalist movements and the legalization of Islamist organizations. And yet, given that a necessary condition of civil society is the “civility” of its constituent organizations, such feminist opposition is understandable. Surely it defeats the purpose of civil society when organizations (such as many fundamentalist groups) that threaten or brutalize citizens (such as unveiled women) are included in its constituency. A related comment is that in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, feminists (and intellectuals) are seen as ramparts against the danger of fundamentalism. Statements by government officials that are reported by the media, and some newspaper editorials, have referred to the feminists’ strong opposition to fundamentalism as constituting a major bulwark against the success of

Islamists and for modernity and democracy. Such representations of women – in which women are depicted as citizens and political actors and not only as wives and mothers – may herald a transition in gender relations, at least in some countries of the region.<sup>9</sup>

**Some Concluding Observations**

Citizenship and civil society are contested concepts and conditions, reflecting historical processes and social relations, culture and political economy. They are products of internal processes as well as external pressures. (See Figure 2.) Still, Arab women’s struggles confirm T.H. Marshall’s thesis regarding the historical process of the expansion of the rights of citizens. The incorporation of new groups into the body politic – such as the European working-class in the early 20th century and Arab women in the late 20th and early 21st century – heralds the expansion of rights and the enlargement of civil society.

The building of civil society and women’s contributions to it, however, faces formidable obstacles and challenges. These emanate largely from the state and religious institutions, which regard democratization and independent organizations as threats to their power and interests. Thus NGOs, including women’s organizations, face legal restrictions, find it difficult to obtain funding, and risk surveillance, harassment and worse. The case of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the Ibn Khadun Center and the magazine Civil Society by the Egyptian authorities is only the most publicized example. Another example, of course, is the unilateral closing down of Nawal Saadawi’s Arab Women’s Solidarity Association (AWSA), which had the temerity to oppose the Gulf War and Egypt’s role in it. Elsewhere, denigration of women’s organizations by Islamists has been a problem for women’s organizations that are trying to establish credibility and legitimacy. In Algeria, for example, Islamists often derided the women’s organizations as “hezbe franse”, suggesting that they carried out colonialist objectives and served as a “fifth column” for France.

Legal and financial constraints may be a reason why Arab women’s organizations are not as well integrated into transnational feminist networks as are women’s organizations in other developing regions (e.g., Latin America, India, Southeast Asia). The current era of globalization is seeing the emergence of new forms of collective action, such as transnational advocacy networks, or transnational social movement organizations, which are said to be part of the emerging global civil society (Moghadam 2000). There are now transnational environmental, human rights, indigenous rights, and women’s networks. Transnational feminist networks include DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), Women Living Under

Palestine	Tunisia
Women’s Health Program	Tunisian Mothers Association
	National Chamber of Women Head of Businesses
Women’s Studies Program of Birzeit University	Center of Research Documentation and Info on Women (CREDIF)
Al-Haq Center for Legal Aid and Counseling	Assoc. of Democratic Tunisian Women
Women’s Unit, Bisan Research and Development Center	Gen. Assoc. for Vocational Training and Prod. Families
Palestinian Working Women Society	National Commission on Working Women
Women’s Affairs Technical Cmte.	Union National des Femmes Tunisiennes



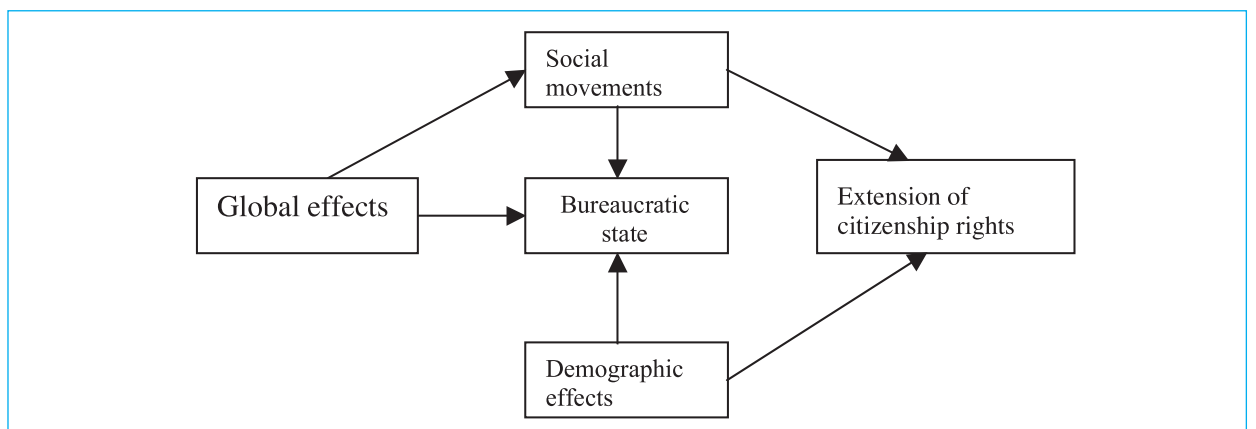
Muslim Laws, and the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice. Participation in transnational feminist networks and similar global advocacy networks could assist Arab women's struggles at the local and national levels by providing them with needed solidarity and support.

A reading of the literature produced by women's organizations and by women's rights activists suggests some gaps in the conceptualization of rights and obligations, and some tensions that need to be resolved. Among them are class issues (including the social rights of working women and men, and of the poor), the status and rights of immigrants and of contract workers, and the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. The relationship between the state and citizens, and their respective rights and obligations, also require elaboration. It is true, as many feminists argue (e.g., Lister, 1997), that the empowerment or full citizenship of women is an inseparable part of the formation of civil society. But it is also true that the emergence of civil society is contingent upon the existence of a state that enforces universal legal norms and guarantees protection of civil, political, and social rights regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and religion. Through their insistence on the rights of women-as-individuals, women and the feminist organizations are forcing a reconsideration of the role of the state vis-à-vis its citizens. But this role and relationship need to be elaborated and more explicitly addressed. This is admittedly difficult, given the prevailing undemocratic environment and the constant threat of closure and arrests. But it is, in a sense, the "historic task" of democratic associations and civil society organizations.

Perhaps the most difficult tension may be that between a national identity based on Islamic civilization and culture, and the call for civil and political rights, and a democratic civil society, that may be construed as unduly inspired by Western traditions. In many countries there is still a powerful official ideology that

invalidates "Western" concepts and practices and relies on the politics of "authenticity". Thus, nationalism and Islamism remain the major discursive frameworks. Among the countries of the region, Tunisia seems to be crafting a national identity and legal framework that reflect its own Arab-Islamic heritage as well as social and gender rights as understood internationally, albeit within a dirigiste political environment. Elsewhere, the women's organizations need to develop a framework for recognizing identities and elaborating equal rights for all, in a way that draws on history, cultural understandings, and global standards. An advantage to participating in transnational feminist networks such as DAWN is the ability to "compare notes" and exchange ideas on these and other matters with representatives of women's organizations from, for example, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and South Africa.

In the meantime, the "modernizing women" of the Arab world are challenging popular understandings and legal codes regarding the public sphere and the private sphere; they are demanding more access to the public sphere, full and equal participation in the national community, and full and equal rights in the family. These gender-based demands for civil, political, and social rights would not only extend existing rights to women but also, and more profoundly, broaden the political agenda and redefine citizenship in the region. Aziz al-Azmeh (1993: 36) notes that the struggle for citizenship will complete the transition from communal to civil society, but that, like all historical processes, it is highly conflictual. In Arab countries, agents of this conflictual historical process include Islamist movements, intransigent or colluding states, and women's organizations. Women's struggles – whether around the modernization of family laws, or in the fight against fundamentalism, or around the demands for greater employment opportunities, political participation, or nationality rights – are the central motor of the drive for citizenship and civil society.



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## End Notes

1. In the latter part of 1999, Qatari and Kuwaiti women won the right to vote and to participate in elections, but they will not be able to exercise political rights for several years.
2. From another vantage point, however, this may be seen in more critical terms as a failure of the state and as a neoliberal solution.
3. Suheir Azzouni, director of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, Palestine, in a talk delivered at the ERF/MDF3 conference, Cairo, 8 March 2000, and personal communication.
4. Nouzha Skalli, ADFM vice-president, in a talk delivered at the ERF/MDF3 conference, Cairo, 8 March 2000.
5. Nadia Leila Aissaoui, head of the Association for Reflection, Exchange and Action on Environment and Development, as reported in *International IDEA*, winter 1999, p. 19.
6. *Civil Society*, vol. 8, issue 90, June 1999, pp. 22-23.
7. For an elaboration of the proposed action plan and the opposition to it, see Rania Al-Abiad, "A Turbulent Morocco: A Khutta, A Mudawwana, A Reform Movement and Rivalry Frames", *Al-Raida*, vol. XVII, no. 89 (Spring 2000): 30-34.
8. *Civil Society*, vol. 8, issue 91, July 1999, pp. 20-23.
9. That the well-known Algerian feminist Khalida Messaoudi – once a major critic of the state for its Family Code and later a target of Islamic fundamentalists – is now an advisor to President Boutaflika is indicative of this change in attitudes towards activist women. See Moghadam (2001).