

Gender and Democracy
A Conference Tour in Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal

Guita Grin Debert

The Conference Tour was an extremely interesting opportunity to share knowledge and to make contacts with scholars and researchers from Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal.

The tour was carried out from April 30 to May 23, 2005. It was a very short period for a broad and clear overview of the visited institutions. As anthropologists, we are very suspicious of over-generalizations and hasty identifications. However, the Conference Tour was an enriching experience from the intellectual point of view, given the warm reception, the faculty's interest in knowledge about Brazilian society and also their interest in offering the visitant a large range of information about the visited country. Therefore, I would risk saying that these characteristics give a very unique dimension to the South-South Conference Tour and make of the South-South scholarly cooperation initiative of SEPHIS a rich and rewarding experience for its participants.

In Morocco, Fatima Harrak's generous hospitality and intellectual support deserve a special mention for she kindly provided a stimulating passage point to Moroccan academic life. In my first day in Rabat, after a walk downtown to watch the Labor Day March, Ms Harrak offered a welcoming reception at her house where I had the opportunity of meeting a group of academics and researchers of the Institut des Études Africaines (IEA) and of other universities. It was a very productive and pleasant meeting.

I was impressed by the cosmopolitan knowledge shared by the group and by the broad range of their information on Brazil and its political and economic situation as well as on other South American countries. They acutely answered the questions I posed in order to better understand the diversity of groups present in the Labor Day March choosing examples from other countries to explain the peculiarities of Moroccan monarchy. It was also an occasion to grasp the peculiarities of Moroccan universities and academic formation.

My interest in visiting Hassan II University in Casablanca - which was not part of the original conference tour program - arose in that reception. The Hassan II University attracts students from one of Casablanca's poorest areas and so offered a very interesting contrast with Ifrane's al-Akhawayan University, an elite university that I was to visit the following day.

In addition, this first contact at the welcoming reception showed that it would be important to enlarge the lecture I had prepared in two directions. On the one hand, to include the question of democracy and racial relations in Brazil, a theme that seemed to me to interest in particular the Institut des Études Africaines (IEA)'s researchers. My idea that gender studies in Brazil do not make much sense if the racial question is not taken into account deserved a test in the Moroccan context. I suggested to Fatima Harrak that this question was to be approached after my talk on Gender and Democracy at IEA and after the discussion of my paper by Fatima Zahara Tamouh. To that end – and with the help of Lilia Moritz Schwarcz's writings on racial relations in Brazil – I prepared some overhead transparencies in order to show inter-ethnic relations models different from the ways North-Americans separate whites and blacks. In the North-American model, the separation is radical and, as it is said, "one drop rules". In Brazil, on the contrary, social class, educational level and consumption forms are combined with skin color shades in the people's classification. A grid of more than 132 color shades was used by Brazilians to identify themselves in the race/color question surveyed by the last Brazilian Census. That part of my lecture elicited many comments and questions; as did my original paper and the well-prepared and intelligent comments made by Dr. Tamouh.

The welcoming reception in Rabat also showed the importance of presenting the particularities of Brazilian social sciences and the way we work in anthropology. Brazilian anthropology has a very straight relation to other human sciences and the problems related to cultural change are central in our research projects. Our interest in the processual dimension of social life creates a very close relationship with historians, profession of most of the people present at the welcoming reception. I made this presentation at the meeting organized by Dean. Keddouri, at Hassan II University, with the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. It was in that meeting that we defined a common interest in holding a seminar or workshop of Moroccan and Brazilian academics and researchers to discuss violence. We would like to think over again the concept of violence keeping in mind its collective or inter-personal character, contrasting contexts where violence has an economic purpose and involves properties, to violence where economic interests are absent, and what moves violent manifestations is, above all, the annihilation, destruction or submission of others that are different in racial, national, religious, cultural or sexual terms.

I was also very interested to know the project of Hassan II University, because it has the purpose of allowing the access of lower economic level students to the university. Increasing the admission to the university of students lacking material possessions is a question that has mobilized Brazilian educational policy makers. Different proposals, from quota systems for black and poor people to the building up of universities in poorer areas, are now at stake in Brazil and it would then be very productive to see the impact of these policies in Morocco, in a large city like Casablanca.

Summing up, the work program in Morocco modified the original project, as a result of my interest in increasing the productivity of contacts in the country. I hope these contacts may be fruitful in the near future.

The following summary shows the activities developed during the ten days of my stay, ten days of hard work but also, and at the same time, of pleasant intellectual exchange and unforgettable architectural and artistic beauty that permeate Moroccan historical cities.

- 30 April 9:30 Arrival at Mohammed V Airport in Casablanca . Reception at airport and driving to Rabat.
- 1st May Watching Labour Day March
4:00pm Welcoming Reception offered by Mrs Harrak at her home
- 2 May Driving to Al-Akawayn University, Ifrane
Visit Meknes
Welcoming Dinner
- 3 May Tour of Al-Akawayn University campus
Lecture in English before an audience of students and Faculty
Discussant Dr. Mohamed Bouzidi
Lunch with AUI Faculty
Meeting with Prof. Najia El Alami and students of Gender Studies
Club students
Meeting with Dean Mohamed Dahbi,
School of Arts and Human Sciences
Visit to Ifrane
- 4 May Visit of the town of Azrou and the Centre de Developpement

Communautaire

Departure for Rabat through Fes and visit of the Medina

- 5 May AM - Visit Rabat
3:00 Lecture at the Faculty of Art and Social Sciences, “UNESCO
Chair Woman and its Rights at University Ibn Tofail in Kenitra
Discussant : Dr. Fouzia Rhissassi
- 6 May Driving to Casablanca
Meeting with dean Keddouri and the faculty of the School of
Humanities and Social Sciences, University Hassan II,
Mohammedia. Talk about Anthropology and Human
Sciences in Brazil
- 8 May Return to Rabat
- 9 May Visit the Institut Des Etudes Africaines
3:00pm : lecture at the Institut
Discussant: Dr. Fátima Zahra Tamouth
- 10 May Driving for Casablanca Airport, departure for Tunis

Two contacts deserve to be highlighted in this list. First, the contact made with the students of the Gender Studies Club at Ifrane’s al-Akhawayan University. Through that contact I was told of the difficulties students had in bringing to debate questions related to feminism, even in so advanced a University, which makes use of the most modern teaching technologies and counts with a large proportion of women both as faculty and students. Second, my visit to the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Kenitra’s Ibn Tofail University, where I was exposed to a more complex view of the work and research on women in Morocco. I was given a good number of publications on the theme, in the form of books and journals, works that I have been reading and, given the difficulties of access, I have been lending to Brazilian researchers interested in gender questions in Islamic countries.

In Tunisia, my stay was scheduled for a shorter period, from May 10 to May 14. The hospitality and knowledge offered by Dr. James Miller, director of Centre D’ Etudes

Maghrebines à Tunis (CEMAT), is also worth of notice. He generously shared his knowledge with me, tirelessly answering the questions I asked in order to know more about Tunisia. I arrived in the evening, and Dr. Miller and his Assistant-Director, Riadh Saadoui received me at the airport. The idea of promoting a successful conference tour was developed to the detail, with talks and contacts with institutions, researchers and militants on the gender question, but also with an eye to the cultural and artistic dimension of Tunisian history and society. In addition to the scheduled conferences, my stay's program included visits to institutions deemed to be important in the question of women's promotion, as the CREDIF – Centre de Recherches, d'Études, de Documentation et d'Information sur la Femme – which is the research branch linked to the Ministère des Affaires de la Femme, de la Famille, de l'Enfance et des Personnes Agées (MAFFEPA). In that visit, I was able to acquire a good number of publications with analyses of specific contexts and research results.

The most interesting experience was that at CAWTAR – Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research. Dr. Soukaina Bouraqui, lawyer and the Center's chairperson, received me cordially and made a brilliant defense of my lecture talk named “Combat sur la violence en Amérique Latine: leçon à tirer”. The lecture was presented for an audience of some 20 people among university professors, researchers, public officials and decision makers interested in the questions of women, children and teenagers. Her defense enhanced my following presentation on “Gender and Democracy” at CEMAT, for I had been exposed to the types of objections I was to meet.

These objections deserve a presentation, for they allow us to think on important differences between Morocco and Tunisia, differences we tend to overlook when thinking of the Maghreb as a homogeneous totality.

In a brief summary of my conference, I can say that its central point was to deal with the dilemmas of a public policy to fight violence against women, namely, the Specialized Police Precincts for the Defense of Women. These precincts were the state's answer to the Brazilian feminist movement that emphatically denounced the “machismo” that oriented the way law was applied and the procedures adopted by the police. The machist police procedures prevented that women's physical aggressors and honor murderers were tried and sentenced. My objective was not to make a defense of the

precincts as the best solution for violence against women. But I do consider that the existence of the precincts has a very important symbolic effect, to clearly demonstrate that women have equal rights. The precincts are governmental institutions with police power that show that women are not properties of their husbands or kin. In my talk, however, the objective was to call attention to the arena of ethical conflicts that an institution of that kind creates for its agents. I was particularly interested in the dilemmas posed by the difficulty in harmonizing the police ethics and judicial procedures with feminist ethics and with the consciousness of the hazards the victim incurs after denouncing the aggressions perpetrated by their husbands or mates. That consciousness collides with the slowness of legal procedures, procedures created to deal with conflicts between strangers (conflicts where victim and defendant have not relations, as in the cases of robbery or traffic accidents).¹

In Morocco, the reaction and discussions of my conference's theme involved an evaluation of how fundamentalist forces would react to an institution of that kind. How to ensure that a feminist and secularist perspective could orient the agents' practices in these institutions? If fundamentalist forces dominated the police precincts, to what extent would physical aggressions against women be seen as necessary to grant the correct performance of the social roles as mother, wife, or sister?. What was at stake in the debate was to know if the precincts would be an advantage for fundamentalism (hierarchy) or for secularism (equal rights). The question the audience placed was to know to what extent violence against women, having a separate locus of processing, could be treated as a minor question. It was, after all, very different from the debate on Police Precincts for the Defense of Women among Brazilian feminists, in which the opposition particularism / universalism dominated the discussions: some groups arguing that all precincts, as a question of principle, had to follow a feminist point of view. Other groups, in opposition, argued that given the machismo among police officers that ideal was difficult to conquer. From this second point of view the precinct for the defense of women had to be created to fairly and democratically attend to women that, for being women, suffered physical aggressions and murder attempts. In Morocco, it was evident that the dilemmas present in the opposition secularism / fundamentalism oriented the reflection on gender and democracy.

¹ The full text of the Conference in French was published by CODESRIA/SEPHIS.

I am alert to the challenges of cultural and historical comparison, but it was clear that in Tunisia, the debate aroused by my lecture touched a different sensibility. “How can someone who has democratic values and ideals think of the police as an agent capable of granting justice and fairness?” That was the question asked by one participant in the audience, in a vexed and to some extent rude manner that allowed me to understand the type of objection the audience made to my presentation. Contrary to what happened in Morocco, the opposition between secularism and religious fundamentalism did not characterize the Tunisian intellectuals’ political dilemmas; what did characterize their dilemmas was the opposition dictatorship / democracy, or political repression / freedom of expression. The police was seen as an institution of authoritarian regimes, the institution that allowed for the reproduction of dictatorship and oppression forms. The police was in one word the central organ of repression to freedom of expression. It was a tour de force – that I expect successful – to show that civil police is a constituent part of the judicial system in democracies and that, therefore, there is no democracy without a police apparatus.

This debate in Tunisia, however, brought to my mind the objections made to Women’s Police Precincts when they were created, in the eighties, when Brazil was facing the transition from authoritarianism to a democratic regime. At that time, repression and torture were the hallmark of our perception of the police.

I will present next the reactions to my conference in Dakar, and I am sorry not to have been to Algeria in order to have a better view of the oppositions that seem to mobilize the debate in the different Maghreb countries and in Senegal. Before that, however, I would like to mention that one of the most important results of the trip to Tunisia was the possibility of exchange of students and researchers between CEMAT and UNICAMP. I was glad to welcome at UNICAMP, in November and December, 2005, a student indicated by Professor Miller that is interested in participating of our Master’s program at UNICAMP, with a study on migrations in Brazil. I will do my best to make this exchange possible and to welcome other researchers from Tunisia to UNICAMP (Department of Anthropology) and PAGU – Center for Gender Studies at UNICAMP (an interdisciplinary center of studies and research).

The following summary shows the activities developed during my stay in Tunis:

May 10 Arrival at Tunis and meeting with CEMAT Assistant Director

Riadh Saadaoui and Director James Miller

- May 11 Technical Visit to CEMAT
Technical Visit to Association Tunisienne des Femmes
Democrates, hosted by Mrs Nadia Hakimi
Visit to CAWTAR – Center of Arab Women for Training and
Research
Lecture/seminar at CAWTAR: “Combat sur la violence en
Amerique Latine: leçon a tirer”
- May 12 Technical Visit to CREDIF
Lecture at CEMAT “Gender and democracy”
- May 13 Day visit to Bardo Museum and Cartage
- May 14 Guided Visit to Tunis Medina

In Senegal, my stay went from May 19 to May 22 and I benefited from Ndéye Sokhna Guèye’s hospitality. She did her best - in such a short period - to maximize my opportunity of knowing the country and its academic life. In the morning of the 20th I was welcomed by the professors of the History Department at the Université Cheik Anta Diop (UCAD) and they gave me an outline of the work and research conducted in their department. I also presented to them an overview of the studies in History and social sciences in Brazil. Still in the morning we went to the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), where I met Adebayo Olukoshi, its Secretaire Executif, and other researchers, with whom I had lunch. It was an occasion for me to get acquainted with the initiatives of CODESRIA in the areas of research and formation of researchers and to think how good it would be to count with such a council for social research d in South America. At CODESRIA I was able to purchase the bibliography on gender and democracy produced in Senegal, as such bibliography is difficult to come by in Brazil.

In the afternoon, we went back to UCAD to prepare for the conference, scheduled for 15:30. It was an intellectually rich opportunity to count on Prof. Penda Mbow as chairperson of the session: her opening presentation allowed me to envisage the challenges

involved in the feminist struggle in Senegal. The audience was composed of approximately 70 people, comprising professors, students and other experts that work in non-governmental organizations dealing with the gender issues. . My conference and Penda Mbow's comments provoked many debates that had to be suspended in order to follow the schedule. The interruption was in the form of an invitation for a cocktail where the debate could be continued informally. The opportunity was put to good use, above all by students interested in studying Brazil.

I said above that the opposition secularism / religious fundamentalism mobilized the debates in Morocco, while in Tunisia the interest focused in the opposition authoritarianism / democracy. In Morocco, one can say that there was a triumph of the secularist tendencies after the Casablanca 2003 bomb attacks assumed by fundamentalists. That triumph is still evident in the new family law that grants more equity to women. Running the risk of being charged of lack of conceptual rigor, I would say that the relevant people I met in Morocco share a secularist cosmopolitanism world view and ethos. This view and ethos sharply contrast with the younger students I saw - as the girls at the university campi using the shador - and the reports I hear on students attacking professors seen as too western-oriented. My impression is, however, that a certain dose of melancholic "secularist cosmopolitanism" envelops the professors I met. While in power positions at the centers and universities I visited, they envisage the possibility of a backlash - a mean adverse reaction to differences and the uprise of a blatant aversion to cultural and religious diversity.

. It is very sad for us - the professors I met and myself, we the so-called baby boom generation - to know that such replacement may be engaging the younger generations. That kind of sensibility contrasts with the critical enthusiasm of Tunisian intellectuals I met, particularly those involved in non-governmental organizations. As I already said, the opposition that mobilized the Tunisian debate was that between dictatorship and democracy and the vehement indignation with which they treated the political regime, its violence and corruption, seemed paradoxically to indicate an optimism in relation to democratic transition, seen as inevitable in some foreseeable future.

In Senegal, what seemed to mobilize the debate after my lecture was an opposition between action and research. Why so many research and intellectual discussions if we

know very well what it is necessary to improve the people's life? It was clear that the younger had the certainty that we all know very well what is to be done, and that theoretical debate and even research were a loss of time, a bad investment that delays social change. Penda Mbow and I made an effort to show the difficulties and problems involved in proposing efficient public policies without data on the target population and their interests that only research rigorously conducted can reveal. I do not know if we were successful, but there was doubtlessly a debate and an enthusiastic polarization around the opposition between practice and research and the young in the audience above all supported action with energy, enthusiasm and intellectual engagement.

The stay in Senegal was crowned by the Saturday 21st visit, with Ndéye Sokhna Guèye, to Ile de Goré. Apart from its natural beauty, the island has a historical dimension for it was from their coast that came the African slaves who were to work in Brazilian plantations.

As I said it was a very short time to have a broad and clear view of the dilemmas faced by Senegal's intellectuals on gender and democracy but I am sure that CODESRIA is presently developing an interesting research program that will promote studies and discussions on gender and on other subjects relevant to the construction and consolidation of democracy. The contacts already established between some of its researchers and Brazil promise fruitful relations, as the one I expect to maintain in the long run with Ndéye Sokhna Guèye perhaps through the exchange of researchers and professors from CODESRIA and UNICAMP.

I am very sorry for not having been to Algeria, for a stay there could have completed a view of the different forms of defining the political dilemmas involved in the relation between gender and democracy. The problem derived from the lack of time to apply for the Algerian visa, because of the delay in the invitation letter of the Centre National de Recherches en Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle at Oren I needed to obtain a visa at the Algerian Embassy. Brazilians do not need a visa to go to Morocco and Tunisia, but we need one for Senegal and Algeria. In Sao Paulo, where I live, there is a Senegalese Consulate that issues visas in two or three days. These visas, however, expire in one month and, since Senegal was to be my tour's last stage, I planned to ask for it in April's last week, for its validity to extend to May 23rd. Algeria does not have a consulate in São

Paulo. The visa has to be applied for personally at the Embassy in Brasilia, some thousand kilometers from Sao Paulo, or two and a half hours by airplane. The visa takes about a week to be issued, and has to be fetched also personally. The alternative was to send the documents by mail to an agent indicated by the Embassy who, through a relatively small amount of money, clears the formalities and sends back the passport. This agent asked for a minimum of 15 days after receiving my documents – invitation to Oren included. I informed Ndéye Sokhna Guèye of the problem, but she encountered difficulties contacting the people in charge of receiving me at Oren, for they were traveling at the time. Having received by post the invitation dated April 6th, on the 14th I was informed that there was an Algerian Embassy in Rabat that could issue the required visa. So I decided to begin the trip with the Senegalese visa in my passport and to apply for the Algerian visa in Rabat. In my second day in Rabat, May 2nd, before going to Ifrane, I went with Mr Khalid Baalou, IAS' researcher, to the Embassy, where I left a copy of my passport, photographs, the necessary filled forms and the invitation letter. I was informed that the visa would take 24 hours and that, in my return to Rabat, it would be enough to take my passport that would immediately be stamped, if the visa had been issued. After my return from Ifrane, Mr Khalid Baalou called the embassy many times, being informed that the visa had not arrived. The last information came in May 9th, when I decided to cancel my trip to Oren and asked Fatima Harrak to send an e-mail to the director at the Center informing them of the cancellation and explaining the reasons. The Center's direction insisted in my visit and contacted Prof. Miller in Tunis saying that I could go without a visa for I would find at the airport, at the customs office, an authorization of the Algerian Foreign Ministry to enter the country. I felt very insecure in following this track and to arrive to airport without a written authorization to enter the country. That insecurity increased through contacts with fellow Brazilians who were emphatic in saying I should not leave Tunisia without an Algerian visa or at least some formal written document. Thus for the second time I forsake the possibility of going to Algeria .

I am very sorry the letter inviting me to Oren did not arrive earlier. It would have spared all these problems in a Conference Tour where work was very intense, welcome was marvelous and the intellectual experience was and continues to be gratifying, given the quantity of material on the visited countries I keep reading with great pleasure and interest.

