Aili Mari Tripp explains why autocratic leaders in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria have embraced more extensive legal reforms of women’s rights than their Middle Eastern counterparts. The study challenges existing accounts that rely primarily on religiosity to explain the adoption of women’s rights in Muslim-majority countries.

Based on extensive fieldwork in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and an original database of gender-based reforms in the Middle East and North Africa, this accessible study analyzes how women’s rights are used both instrumentally and symbolically to advance the political goals of authoritarian regimes as leverage in attempts to sideline religious extremists. It shows how Islamist political parties in the Maghreb have been forced to dramatically change their positions on women’s rights to ensure political survival. In an original contribution to the study of women’s rights in the Middle East and North Africa, Tripp reveals how women’s rights movements have capitalized on moments of political turmoil to defend and advance their cause.

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Seeking Legitimacy

Why Arab Autocracies Adopt Women’s Rights

AILI MARI TRIPP
University of Wisconsin, Madison
To my fabulous, energetic, and artistic sisters
Eva Swantz and Lea Swantz
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Credit: Eva Swantz
Acknowledgments

My first interaction with Moroccan women activists was in 1989 when I met Fatima Mernissi in Helsinki, Finland, at the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER), where I was conducting research. There she had organized a meeting of anti-fundamentalist activists from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, and several of us at WIDER met with her and other conference participants who were to form the Collectif Maghreb-Égalité 95 in 1992. The group became a network that inspired many of the gender reforms described in this book. I remember being totally in awe of this tall brilliant woman in a long red dress, so poised and confident, with such depth of knowledge and insight. Later I read her books, including Beyond the Veil (1975) and Islam and Democracy (1992), and felt drawn to Morocco and the sense that there was something special about the country and its people. I wanted to know more. I embarked on a twenty-five-year detour and went on to research and write about women’s movements in East and West Africa, but I always knew I would somehow find my way to the Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia), having focused my graduate studies on the Middle East and North Africa. My instincts were right. Little did I know how much my scholarship and life would be affected by this encounter with Mernissi.

Writing this book has been an incredible personal and professional journey for me: sometimes challenging, but definitely more rewarding than I ever imagined when I first embarked on this project. I cannot even begin to express how grateful I am to all the people who helped me along the way. The generosity and warmth of people in the Maghreb was overwhelming at times.

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Thank you from the bottom of my heart to all who were part of my fantastic Maghrebian adventure! Until we meet again, 

شكرًا جزيلاً!
Abbreviations

AAMU Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema
ADFM Association démocratique des femmes du Maroc (Moroccan Women’s Democratic Association)
AFEPEC Association féministe pour l’épanouissement de la personne et l’exercice de la citoyenneté (Association for the Development of the Person and the Exercise of Citizenship)
AFTURD Association des femmes tunisiennes pour la recherche sur le développement
APC Assemblée populaire communale
APN Assemblée populaire nationale (Algerian People’s National Assembly)
ATFD Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates
AU African Union
AWI al-ʿAdl wal-Ihsane
CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEWLA Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance
CIDDEF Centre d’information et de documentation sur les droits de l’enfant et de la femme
FARD Femmes algériennes revendiquant leurs droits
FGM female genital mutilation
FIDH Fédération internationale des droits de l’homme
FIS The Front for Islamic Salvation
FLDDF Fédération de la ligue démocratique des droits des femmes
FLN Front de libération nationale (National Liberation Front)
IAF Islamic Action Front
ICRAM Initiative concertée pour le renforcement des acquis des marocaines (Government Plan for Equality)
LTDH Ligue tunisienne de défense des droits de l’homme
MENA Middle East and North Africa
MPDC Mouvement populaire démocratique et constitutionnel
List of Abbreviations

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>MSP</td>
<td>Movement of Society for Peace</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTI</td>
<td>Islamic Tendency Movement</td>
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<td>NCW</td>
<td>National Council of Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Overseas Development Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>PANIFD</td>
<td>Plan d’action national pour l’intégration de la femme au développement (Action Plan for the Integration of Women in Development)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PJD</td>
<td>Party of Justice and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPS</td>
<td>Parti du progrès et du socialisme (Party of Progress and Socialism)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>Personal Status Code</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCAF</td>
<td>Supreme Council of the Armed Forces</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIGI</td>
<td>Social Institutions and Gender Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>UAF</td>
<td>Union de l’action féminine</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNFT</td>
<td>Union nationale de femmes tunisiennes (National Women’s Union of Tunisia)</td>
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<tr>
<td>USFP</td>
<td>Union socialiste des forces populaires (Socialist Union of Popular Forces)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WLUML</td>
<td>Women Living under Muslim Laws</td>
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