Feminism and Neoliberalism: Women Farmers Rewriting a Gendered Land Tenure Reform in Sidi Kacem

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Abstract

This paper addresses the collective land tenure reforms of 2019, specifically from the perspective of local women farmers in the Moroccan Gharb region. One of the questions the paper seeks to answer is how the rhetoric of "women's rights" interacts with, resists, or supports neoliberal land tenure reforms. This paper relies on participant observation of classes attended by local women farmers about these new land tenure reform laws and policies as well as in-depth interviews with women farmers. The focus is on how a global and local corporate agenda is being implemented, and how it is creating a mainstream discourse on "women's rights" and "gender inclusion". The paper explores how local women farmers are negotiating with dominant land tenure policies and feminist rhetoric staged by the government, donors, and women's rights NGOs regarding the representation of women's land rights.

Keywords: land tenure, gender, governance feminism, Moroccan women small farmers, neoliberal reforms

Introduction

Women's inclusion in the 2019 land tenure reform came both as a response to a rising women's movement around collective land expropriation and privatisation (Ait Mous and Berriane 2016; Eddouada, 2021, 2022) and in compliance with the American partner Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) stipulation that the programme be gender inclusive. As I will argue, this egalitarian, gendered rhetoric, as initiated by the prominent women's rights

group *Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc* (Democratic Association ofWomen of Morocco) (ADFM), and supported by State policies subsequently put forward by MCC's gender inclusion programme, forces an abstract, urban, middle class, and Western feminist lexicon on working-class peasant women farmers' complex experiences with land and agrarian change.

This paper examines the encounter between feminist rhetoric and the corporate land privatisation process from the perspective of the women small farmers affected by the 2019 land tenure reform. Legally speaking, and in the rhetoric of the various education and socioeconomic programmes that supported the reform, the changes were framed in terms of a shift from collective to individual land tenure. Indeed, the 2019 reform programmes received international funding from the American MCC because the effort aimed to turn collective land into private individual property. In Morocco, that process is called *melkinisation*; private, titled lands (as opposed to lands held collectively or by the State, for example) are referred to as *melk*, so the term "melkinisation" refers to a specific privatisation process that involves the conversion and redistribution of collective land into *melk* (private property).

In what follows, I first provide the theoretical and historical background of the 2019 reform by outlining the contours of the concept of governance feminism and its manifestation in rural Morocco. Second, I discuss scholarship that problematises the encounter between feminism and corporate capitalism. Specifically, I examine the gap between women farmers' understanding of their own liberation and the way it is perceived by the ruling classes, who have designed the new public roles for these women in their communities. Third, this paper examines the responses of women farmers, both individually and collectively, focusing on how their responses conform to or subvert systems of power and domination, including governance feminism. Among the questions the paper attempts to answer is how women's rights rhetoric interacts with and supports neoliberal land tenure reforms and, more specifically, how the alliance between feminism and corporate capitalism is at once received and undercut by local farmers. The paper relies on 1) in-depth interviews with women farmers who embody "public" roles that have placed them at the forefront of the land reform efforts in the Beer Taleb ethnic collective and 2) participant observation of functional literacy classes in a small village located in Beer Taleb commune.

Local women farmers had been attending that class for twelve months at the time of observation, and all of them happened to be in the ethnic collective that was selected as the site for launching the melkinisation programme.

While this paper focuses on the effects of the 2019 legal amendements, it is important to understand that this land tenure reform resurrected a history of tension between communal, rural peasant values, on the one hand, and market-based, bourgeois urban values, on the other, as both the colonial 1919 laws and the 2019 reforms confirmed the authority of a centralised power while serving an extractive capitalist rationale. In this context, the alignment of the official narrative of gender-based egalitarian reform with contemporary feminist activism provides moral support for yet more extraction that has long benefitted urban capital at the expense of local peasants. Moroccan legal sociologist Néjib Bouderbala's (1996) analysis of Moroccan plural land tenure laws has demonstrated how legal plurality reveals an ancient tension between agrarian, pre-Islamic customary law (Orf) and urban, Islamic, centralised merchant-centred law. Yet as Bouderbala (1996) lays bare, the 1919 law defined, for the first time, the legal framework for collective property rights, which fell under the custody and political authority of the colonial State. Thus, for Bouderbala, extractive and political colonial control resided in finding legal formulas that would undergird colonial land tenure, the protection of colonial property and maintenance of the status quo in the countryside, and the adoption of a property regime that permitted the development of capitalist exploitation of the communal land. Bouderbala's analysis of land tenure laws reveals a top-down, colonial attitude that the post-colonial State inherited and further sharpened—one that persists in today's governance feminism.

Governance Feminism in Rural Morocco: The Millennium Challenge Corporation as an Example of American State Feminism

Halley et. al.'s (2018) concept of governance feminism is crucial for understanding the way that the 2019 land tenure reform and women's land rights efforts appropriated and deployed feminist and human rights lexicon as a strategy of co-optation. According to Halley et. al., governance feminism is "every form in which feminists and feminist ideas exert a governing will within human affairs—to follow Michel Foucault's definition of governmentality, every form in which feminists and feminist ideas 'conduct the conduct of men'" (ix). They further assert that governance feminism involves "the five C's: collaboration, compromise, collusion, complicity, and co-optation" (xv). Halley et. al. note that governance feminism raises questions such as "what forms of feminism 'make sense' to power elites as they gradually let women in? …. What are the distributive consequences of the partial inclusion of some feminist projects? Who benefits and who loses?" (ix). The authors also show the success of governance feminism in changing laws and institutions, as well as its emancipatory impact on women; they argue that "in as much as the United States is currently the sole global superpower—its feminists had entrée all over the world on transnational routes of circulation" (Halley et. al. 2018, xx). Because an important element in the Moroccan-American bilateral agreement aimed to encourage "land productivity"—that is, to open collective land to the market economy—in the case of Morocco's land reform, governance feminism is substantiated by the reform's gender inclusion programme and the role that this apparently feminist idea plays in "conduct[ing] the conduct of men" (ix).

The MCC website and social media accounts show frequent events—conferences, workshops, reports and figures—related to the ongoing collective land privatisation effort, which includes over 55,000 hectares of land in the irrigated perimeters of Gharb to the west, a coastal lowland plain that extends about 50 miles (80 km) along the Atlantic coast and reaches some 70 miles (110 km) inland, and Haouz to the south. According to a video clip on the MCC Facebook account promoting this programme (https://www.facebook.com/MillenniumChallenge), the project aims at "supporting 30,000 heirs of collective land, including 15,800 women, in the establishment of land titles,

capacity building of 132,000 farmers through theoretical and practical training and exchange trips, financial support for 15 women and youth cooperatives, and implementation of functional literacy [programmes for] 9,132 female participants."

Gender inclusion stands out as one of the main pillars of MCC's investment, with the intention of fostering a local dynamic that supports the programme's goals. For that reason, some of the funding went toward studies meant to help identify the channels through which this reform could best be communicated to the local population. These studies led to the determination that a type of education known as functional literacy would be a good tool for targeting and socialising local populations, especially women farmers, in the values of "land productivity", "development", "autonomy" and "entrepreneurship" (Millennium Challenge Corporation). The programme additionally included exchange visits and cooperative grant money contests. In this vein, both the Moroccan and American MCC offices celebrated the closure of the project with the establishment of a permanent structure called the *Centre d'inclusion des femmes au foncier* (Center for Women's Inclusion in Land Property) (CIFF).

In an interview with Moroccan TV channel Medi 1 TV, Alice Albright, CEO of MCC, indicated that gender is an important component of what she calls land productivity, citing the impact of the programme on local women's autonomy as well as general land productivity (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moxIeKvWDTk). Albright's statement typifies the use of feminist language by corporate, State-affiliated institutions and is thus an example of governance feminism—in this case, of American State feminism, in the guise of the MCC, "exerting its governing will" (Halley et al. 2018, ix P) in rural Morocco.

In Beer Taleb, as well as in many other ethnic collectives in rural Gharb, American State feminism has created an unprecedented marketplace for human rights. Moroccan-American bilateral cooperation, generally, and MCC's gender inclusion programme, more specifically, provides the channel through which American State feminism travels to Morocco. The programme appears primarily to respond to women's inclusion in the land titling process by "taking up the language of injury and redress" (Abu-Lughod et al. 2023, 2). In addition to the naming of women as collective land beneficiaries for the first time, the

aforementioned programmes, including the functional literacy classes, confirm the formal legal emancipatory framework of the 2019 land reforms, and its apparent success as a form of governance feminism. Indeed, during the aforementioned public TV interview, Alice Albright states that the programme has achieved all of its objectives and has made Morocco an example to be followed. As this and other statements from Millennium Challenge Corperation officials show, the main themes of this programme are gender inclusion and land productivity, which go hand in hand in this program. Beer Taleb, for example, shows evidence of the birth and growth of an unprecedented social life oriented towards women's rights.[1] In addition to the functional literacy classes and teacher training that educators are to attend either in person or online, women of the village have gone on several "educational excursions", where they learned about successful women's cooperatives in other parts of the country. They now know, through these programmes, that they no longer can be only farmers, mothers and/or housewives; they need to get involved in more income-generating activities in order to integrate into the market beyond their family village economy.

Taken together, these programmes and the statements from MCC show a clear correlation between free market economy values and liberal State feminist language, exemplifying some of the scholarship that has analysed the rapport between feminism and capitalism. For example, Issa G. Shivji raises questions about democracy and fairness as opposed to what he calls "top-down bureaucratic approaches and notions of 'administrative justice'" (Shivji 1998, 57). While the Moroccan reform illustrates an example of top-down administrative justice, it also had to show some kind of receptive attitude to feminist grievances. This apparent response to feminist claims mostly focused on the positive legal acknowledgement of women's rights to the land. Dzodzi Tsikata's (2003) analysis of debates surrounding land tenure reform in Tanzania and its impact on women's interests shows how women constitute a site of contest among government officials, academic researchers and NGO activists. Shahra Razavi (2011) and Ambreena Manji (1998) show the shortcomings of merely adding gender to an

1 I borrowed this term from Lila Abu-Lughod's piece "The Active Social Life of 'Muslim Women's Rights': A Plea for Ethnography Not Polemic, with Cases from Egypt and Palestine." Abu-Lughod explains social life as "differential mediation through various social networks and technical instruments" (Abu-Lughod 2010).

existing system of agrarian change, arguing that gendered analysis should instead entail a change in the "core assumptions" that address various aspects of agricultural issues (Razavi 2011, 47). Relatedly, Naidu and Ossome (2016) have also noted the failure of land reform to keep promises of economic growth and inclusion of all segments of society. They note the importance of invisible labour in a capitalist market, despite the fact that the latter devalues the former (51-52). Additionally, Naidu and Ossome (2016) discuss feminist pleas for a gender-based land reform so that women can use land as a negotiating card with patriarchy; however, they acknowledge that women can sometimes withdraw from the costly family contentions that land rights can bring about and, further, that land reform can be pointless when so many are landless or hold very little land. Indeed, many of the women interviewed for this article confirmed the pointlessness of having to split an already small portion of land with their brothers. Most of them said that gaining land rights is not worth losing what such brotherhood means to them.

Land Rights and Women's Rights: Government Use of Feminist Rhetoric

Women's land rights activism in Morocco gained prominence in early 2000, when Rkia Belot, a land rights activist from the suburbs of Kenitra, sought the support of the Rabat-based NGO ADFM (Ait Mous and Berriane 2016; Eddouada 2021). In the intervening years, women's rights have become the principal framework for land-grabbing endeavours, providing necessary moral support—in the vein of governance feminism—for both the eradication of the commons and the rapid implementation of neoliberal efforts to commodify communal land (Eddouada 2021; Berriane 2015; Ait Mous and Berriane 2016). While some Moroccan scholars, such as Fadma Ait Mous and Yasmine Berriane (2016) and Fatiha Daoudi (2011), have analysed the ADFM-led movement for equal shares in collective land, this paper focuses on women who are not necessarily part of the movement and who have never been exposed to the language of rights.

Perspectives from Women Farmers in Beer Taleb Commune: Navigating Institutional Complexities

The experiences of women farmers described in this section show what happens when local women's stories interact with corporate and governmental attempts to "maximise land productivity". My interviews with some of the local women farmers suggest that many had prior experience, beginning in 2005, with governmental income-generating project grants under the INDH (National Human Development Initiative), the government programme aimed at reducing poverty through income-generating and "participatory democracy" projects. Like the more recent melkinisation effort, "the INDH aims to bring a neoliberal modernity that embodies the principles of participation, self-entrepreneurship and attention to civil society" (Hibou and Tozy 2020, 463). In effect, the INDH served to consolidate the power of the Ministry of Interior and invalidate local government, and was instrumentalised to create and then co-opt NGOs as well as local associations (Rignall 2021). As the NDH attempted to encourage local economic projects and other initiatives, it also targeted and encouraged female entrepreneurship.

Fouzia's story: educating local women

Fouzia is a woman in her forties and a mother of three. She is the teacher of the functional literacy classes I observed for three months. Her assessment of her experience constitutes one of the main narratives guiding my analysis of the ongoing feminisation of land tenure reforms in Sidi Kacem. Fouzia lives in a small village called Ouled Jlal in the suburbs of Sidi Kacem. She dropped out of school just before completing her high school education. She remembers her school life with much pain and tears because she had to live for a while with some relatives who did not treat her well. Later, she moved in with another family, where she exchanged domestic labour for room and board so that she could continue her schooling. She mentioned that her host family treated her better than her relatives. When I asked her if she could describe why those school days were so hard, Fouzia suddenly burst into tears. Her sister, who was also sitting with us in the living room, had a tense and serious face; I felt that something difficult and sensitive must have happened and that her sister must have known about those events.

After leaving school, Fouzia went to Tangier and found work. On one of her visits to her family, however, she was told that somebody had asked for her hand and that she should get married. She did and moved to Casablanca to live with her husband. Yet after a few years, Fouzia returned to the village. "Life was too hard and expensive there," she said. After raising her three children, Fouzia finally went back to school and, in 2020, took her baccalaureate exam at the same time as her son, 20 years after she had first left school. She successfully passed her exams and enrolled in the Islamic Studies Department at Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra, where she is pursuing a BA degree, although she cannot regularly attend classes and sit for every exam. Fouzia is highly respected in her village; students seek her help with homework, and she happily offers her time to tutor them. She is even known to local authorities for her education. For that reason, as confirmed by the cheikh, she was one of the women whom local authorities proudly introduced to Ivanka Trump when she visited the region in 2019.

Fouzia was invited to the official ceremony that Trump attended alongside several other women farmers including Fatiha, Aisha, and Jamila. The choice to have these women farmers present at the ceremony, as Samira Mizbar, a gender inclusion programme official, noted, came after a great deal of research involving interviews and suggestions from local authorities. In an interview with me, Mizbar added that the women selected needed to be local farmers with entrepreneurial qualities; they also needed to be fearless and feel comfortable speaking in public and posing in front of the camera. The ceremony included various members of the power elite, such as top Moroccan governmental officials, large-scale local and international media, and American donors, represented by top MCC officials—i.e. representatives from the major institutions that Fouzia and other women farmers have to navigate as they seek education and land rights. Al-Gharb was specifically selected as a pilot region because it offered an example of Morocco's private property land titling that equally included men and women.

From the perspective of Fouzia and other women I interviewed, the narrative of gender equality and modernisation championed by the melkinisation programme and its rhetoric looks abstract and empty. Fouzia herself represents a living experience of the emptiness of the neoliberal promises that "development" and "prosperity" will come with the commodification of communal land. In

order to implement its gender-inclusive programme, the national agency working against illiteracy started the functional literacy programme that has targeted women as future landowners and business owners. As noted above, Fouzia was one of the first women to start teaching these literacy classes. Before that, she had gone through various training workshops that showed her how to use the textbook designed for these classes. In addition to being one of five women selected to represent the whole region at the programme's official launch, Fouzia was chosen to implement the values of "citizenship and active participation in development" that she proudly disseminates during her classes. She is so committed to her new role in the village that she offers a room in her house as a classroom when her students stopped attending the classes at the village school because it was too far (around 70 women regularly attend her classes). Fouzia wanted to use the local mosque as an alternative classroom, but her application was rejected. She records videos of her classes and her awareness-raising sessions with the women of her village in order to have evidence of her dedication to this programme.

I interviewed Fouzia together with two sociologists and accompanied by the village cheikh early in the day. We were six people sitting in her living room. Fouzia patiently answered all the questions, and at the end of the visit, she walked us to the classroom in her house. The room was decorated with statements showing the classroom values, such as "The farmer is a citizen who participates in her country's development". As a practice exercise in one of her literacy classes, Fouzia had written on the board, "Women contribute to their country's development"; "Women and men are equal"; "A woman is an MP, farmer and teacher"; "Work is one of women's rights, we have to start a cooperative and contribute to the national economic development". Each student came to the board and read the sentences in front of the class.

Fouzia believes that the government's official involvement in land titling will end the uncertainty, confusion and, especially, the family disputes about where people's land borders begin and end. However, I could see her struggle to own the language and the story of her land amidst the many people and interests negotiating the contested site of "women's rights to the land" which—as noted—now includes Moroccan urban veteran feminists, multiple government institutions (including the Ministries of Interior and Agriculture and local development associations), and American corporate partnerships with the Moroccan

institutions that are implementing the neoliberal land privatisation reforms. When she talked about how she would assess her experience with the literacy programme, Fouzia revealed much disappointment regarding how it has turned out. Initially, she had believed in the serious commitment of the government, given the VIP names that were associated with the programme. Referring to the day of Ivanka Trump's visit with the Moroccan government delegation, Fouzia said that she trusted this programme after the impressive ceremony she attended. Yet her trust is being tested every day by the total absence of accountability, especially given that she has not been paid after serving for twelve months as a teacher in the programme. All her calls to the local development association subcontracted by the literacy agency to implement the programmes have gone unreturned (while telling me this, Fouzia kept showing me text messages from the local association leader telling her that he was in a meeting and would call her back). Her visits to the local office of the literacy agency have failed to clarify her situation (a local expression meaning financial compensation the local association promised her for twelve months teaching). Because of difficult access to any interlocutor, she tried to use the presence of an important Moroccan official with the MCC's gender inclusion programme who was at the aforementioned conference to ask for help with clarifying her situation, but the official kept delaying a clear response. For all of these reasons, Fouzia is gradually realising the emptiness of the promises she so deeply believed at the outset, especially with regard to her involvement as an active agent of "change" as defined by the new land tenure reform policy. Indeed, Fouzia felt that she probably could have had more access to the benefits of this programme if she had demonstrated business skills instead of her voluntary education services. Recently, in fact, some women were awarded grants for cooperative projects by the same programme. She mentioned that she had seen on TV that some of the women in neighbouring villages were awarded this grant, and she wondered whether it would be better for her to use some of her time to start the kind of couscous cooperative that an official at the local office of "agricultural investment" had advised her to found. Despite her disappointment, Fouzia still believes that educating women in her village is her mission, and she talks about the invaluable reward of seeing how much women learn from her classes, as they move from absolute illiteracy to a literacy level sufficient for reading and memorising verses from the Quran for

their prayers. As Fouzia says, with strong enthusiasm and faith, that reward is worth all the hard unpaid work and the time she spends on this programme.

Another form of the communal: Fouzia's class and students' perspectives

My encounter with Fouzia's students was limited to the classroom setting, and I only had the chance to have in-between-class conversations with a few women sitting next to me. Both these short conversations and the class response showed that the women's interest in class represents another form of the communal, which reinvents itself despite the values dictated by the "teachings" of the textbook. During the class review, the women showed huge enthusiasm for memorising Quranic verses. Some students stood out because of the number of verses they could memorise. Finally, the teacher led a demonstration of the full class reciting Quranic verses. In another moment of powerful communal spirit, the class made its last statement (since this was the official last class in the one-year functional literacy gender inclusion programme) about how women speak back to the new reform policies' values of profit, entrepreneurship and autonomous individualism. The women's statement, in contrast, seemed to revolve around the power of the community, religious education and piety.

Although the textbooks the students and the teacher were using largely echoed the reform policy values of autonomy and profit, the women managed to invent their own classroom norms and values that did not dutifully follow what the textbook dictates. Over time, the class became a space where women learned and memorised the Quran, nurtured both their individual and communal spiritual lives, learned how to read since this is after all a literacy class for illiterate students, and enhanced their already existing and abundant social life in a classroom setting. Sitting together in a circle on the floor, they followed class while breastfeeding their babies, inquiring about each other's physical and mental health, sharing stories and practising group therapy. During the class, I learned that two of the women in the room had recently lost their sons, who had emigrated abroad. They recounted that their sons kept coming to them in their dreams, telling them about the afterlife. Another woman was leaving for Mecca for a 40-day Ramadan *Umrah* (pilgrimage), all paid for by her immigrant daughter in France. Yet another woman sitting next to me in the class, who needed to travel

to spend Ramadan with her two daughters in Tangier, said that she already was missing her class and her classmates; she texted everyone to ask about how the class went, noting that this class had become a very important part of her life. Indeed, the last class before Ramadan was also supposed to be the closing session for the programme, but it was in reality the end of the official literacy class only. The students, or the "beneficiaries," as their instructor, echoing land rights language, called them, wanted to continue to show up during Ramadan in order to read and memorise the Quran. All of them said that they did not wish to see their class end and that they would keep attending even after the end of the programme. As mentioned at the outset of this section, this class seemed to have created a friendly space of communion, with the prospect of entrepreneurial opportunity receding into the background as both a possibility and an abstract idea.

That sense of community developed clearly among the students, but the day of the programme evaluation marked a turning point for the rapport between the local farmers and the donor institution and local authorities. A group of American, French and Moroccan officials turned up to meet the class. Both Fouzia, the teacher, and the students were surprised by the last-minute change in meeting venue from their classroom in Fouzia's house in Ouled Jlal to another location in Sidi Kacem. A vehicle drove all the students and the teachers to a school in Sidi Kacem urban centre, and the students had to answer questions about their class experience and how far this classroom in Sidi Kacem was from their homes. The teacher reported the students' disappointment, anger and frustration with being compelled to pretend that the new meeting venue was their classroom and to lie and contribute to a fake and deceptive story about their class. The teacher was told that the meeting's setting was changed for reasons that had to do with the officials' safety. When I asked about the meaning of safety, since I had been travelling alone to the village and experienced nothing but absolute safety there, the teacher told me that, in this case, safety meant that the officials would not feel comfortable walking in a place "full of thistle". The teacher of the class noted that she saw the number of students go down after the day of the programme evaluation. The instrumentalisation of the evaluation, even if it aligned with the official programme's aims, disregarded the experience and the agency of the women and further foregrounded the top-down tone of the privatisation policy.

Aisha's story, in "conversation" with local journalists and sociologists

Through the same network of journalists and sociologists that introduced me to Fouzia, I also met Aisha, a farmer in the same village as Fouzia; in fact, Aisha told me that she planned to join Fouzia's class. Aisha is one of the women involved in the NDH, and, as president of a local cooperative, she received a government loan. She believed that the five-year project was unsuccessful; the goat farming did not suit Al-Gharb's land, and all the goats died. Despite the project's failure, Aisha's name became known to the local authorities, and as one of the women concerned with the melkinisation project, she was also invited to the launch event. While at the event Aisha and the other women—who are all potential beneficiaries of the new land tenure reform—were introduced as exemplars of "gender inclusion", Aisha would only have access to land because her father passed away, and she would only get half of what her brother received, as stipulated by the norms of inheritance law. Her father left behind 3.5 hectares and had three sons and five daughters, all of whom are heirs of the land according to the new law. When asked about her plans for her future land ownership, she mentioned that her share would be very small; she also noted that it would not be worth contesting it, as doing so would ruin her relationship with her brother. She would rather leave her share to him because he had been farming the land since their father's death. After the news of women's shares in the land became known, her brother took the initiative to give her MAD2,000 (around USD200); Aisha would receive this amount as annual compensation for her share of the land. Although the amount is little and mainly symbolic, both Aisha and her husband thought that the change in access to land was very significant.

When I spoke to Aisha, she was accompanied by her husband, who sometimes intervened and answered for her. The local village Imam, he talked about how an injustice (*zolm*) was being lifted with the promise of change. They both agreed that even if the MAD2,000 DH that Aisha receives is essentially a symbolic amount, it nevertheless represents an acknowledgement of women's rights to the land. In this vein, a local journalist commented that, if the event inaugurating the melkinisation policy constituted a rupture with the past, the presence of Ivanka Trump constituted a shift toward a new era—a shift from darkness to light. Like Aisha's husband's assertion, the journalist's comment pointed to a shift from absence to acknowledgement of women's rights; he

added that Ivanka Trump was like an "angel" who came to liberate women and leave. At this point, the journalist and sociologist dominated the discussion. The sociologist explained that the context of the event was influenced mainly by a women's rights culture that is championed by many international organisations. These organisations require a gender-oriented approach to be implemented in every project. The journalist highlighted the 2011 constitution and Morocco's adoption of international standards of equality. In response, the sociologist noted that, in addition to the dynamics put forth in the constitution, there was also a local women's rights dynamic. Yet international aid is always conditioned by "gender inclusion" and international cooperation always makes women's representation a primary condition, in addition to what is stipulated in the 62/17 law that codified equality for the first time. However, implementation is different from the text of the law, as the sociologist noted, and in fact, the law and practice are two completely different things. During this conversation, the sociologist added that what he referred to as "human rights culture" would also include the NDH, which began the intervention into local dynamics that created the context for the assertion of women's land rights in a place like Sidi Kacem. The NDH, according to the sociologist, afforded these women an opportunity to learn values such as association work, life and work outside the domestic space, and income-generating projects. In his view, this milieu enabled local women to learn about the existence of associations and possibilities for funding. The sociologist added that the new law builds on these existing policies to create a "new reality".

As the conversation continued, the sociologist nuanced his analysis and pointed out that this land privatisation effort was not really about gender or the development of rural areas; the priority, according to him, was to submit land that has been outside intensive capitalist exploitation and integrate it into the "modern economic wheel". He raised the question of whether the melkinisation effort could deliver on its promise of creating a rural middle class, as the new 62/17 law clearly depends on the constitution of a middle class in rural Morocco. He reminded us that the overall purpose of these efforts was to integrate 15 million hectares into the market economy so that rural Morocco would have to include working-class or waged farmers, middle-class farmers, and "big" farmers. The sociologist concluded by noting that this was the economic dynamic that

the State was planning to create. Indeed, as noted, the State's agenda is to open this land to the modern market economy; the discussion of women or land rights holders, in general, is marginal to this debate—the point at which feminist ideals are instrumentalised in support of already existing capitalist aims. The sociologist's argument during this conversation suggests the ways in which class and gender continue to impact each other and to shape agrarian reform overall, as noted earlier. That is, the instrumentalisation of feminist ideals here is clear insofar as the incorporation of those ideals insulates any of the farmers from exposure to corporate and capitalist exploitation, though their class status may affect how deeply they are exploited.

Shrifa, the entrepreneur farmer

The local sociologist also introduced me to 59-year-old Shrifa, whom he referred to as a woman who did a man's job because she was responsible for her whole family and for farming the land and running family business. When we visited Shrifa, her husband was away at work in Essaouira in the South, because, as she explained, the family needs a monthly income, which agriculture did not provide. Besides farming her land, Shrifa had started a snail's cooperative with her two daughters and sister-in-law. One of her daughters was the president of the cooperative, but she was not present during our two visits; we only spoke with her on the phone. Despite multiple attempts to tell Shrifa that we had nothing to do with the government, our second visit was extremely uncomfortable because the interview felt to her like a government or police inquiry. I learned later that Shrifa and her daughter had applied for a grant from the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) to fund their cooperative, so perhaps they were not willing to provide information that could be used against their grant application. Shrifa's daughter, Majdoline, did end up getting the grant and was one of the women featured on a public TV programme that advertised the new land tenure reform policy.

Fatiha, the educator and potential landowner

Fatiha was a thirty-two-year-old preschool teacher. Her story, like those of the other women mentioned here, illustrates her hope and ambition to own a piece of land. When asked about what owning land meant to her, she said that she was finally able to feel that she exists, despite the fact that she had not yet obtained her papers (her *titre foncier*). Like many of the other women, Fatiha was encouraged to take part in what the local sociologist called the public sphere, and she seemed very much integrated into that realm. She did not farm her land herself and was happy that her younger brother was willing to take on her father's role in farming it. She would not put up with a controlling husband who could not tolerate her "public" responsibilities, and she hoped that her future husband would understand that she is not a typical rural woman. Together with other women in the village, she aspired to partake in the village's booming corporate culture and start a livestock project.

Jamila, the widow farmer

Jamila was a 45-year-old widow with three children. She dropped out of school after three years of schooling because, as she said, her "parents did not quite understand the importance of education". Jamila identified as a farmer. She became a single mother when her husband died in 2010. At that time, Jamila also became responsible for the three hectares of land that her husband left. She did not have the means to farm it herself, so she first rented it for half of the harvest and later rented it out for an annual amount of MAD10,000 (around USD1,000). Jamila dreamed of digging her own well to irrigate her land, once she obtained her land title. She would also be able to apply for a loan for her project. The annual USD1,000 rent that she received hardly paid three months of her living expenses, Jamila said, so all these years she had relied on family support to raise her three children. One day, Jamila received a phone call from the local authority office *Q'iyada*, and then a woman arrived from Rabat to collect information about her and her children. Jamila did not think that anything had changed since the land melkinisation ceremony; rather, she felt that officials had shown up and then disappeared,

> We do not know why this woman came [talking about Ivanka Trump]. After three years, and since 2019, nothing substantial has happened. They told us that in five years all the land will be titled. They said that they will start with our village; in that case, we should already have gotten our paper. Until now, we have not seen anything. I feel that the women including myself were used as a decoration for the event. I told the governor that today you need us, that we never see any one of you around, they only wanted to have their event, take pictures and disappear. They all laughed [referring to the officials] because they knew I was right. I went to this meeting because I thought that it was a good initiative; this whole region is marginalised and does not get any government attention. Nobody from the government has ever visited this place; it was a good thing that at least journalists came and got to know this part of the country, so it was a kind of advertisement for this area for it to become known to journalists and to the world, that at least Ouled Taleb in Sidi Kacem gets to be located on the world map. We have nothing to lose, even if we had to wake up before dawn in order to be on time and had a sleepless night.

Across these stories are glimpses of Fatiha's reserved attitude and quiet indignation, Aisha's unconditional enthusiasm and optimism, and Jamila's straightforwardness. Taken together, these responses sum up a situation of confusion, as well as a general feeling of absence and silence after such a sudden and intense presence. Jamila also noted the unfulfilled promises made to the population: the promise of prosperity that was supposed to have materialised with land privatisation seems to have been held hostage to hurdles unknown to the local population. Moroccan MCA officials have revealed the complicated and detailed procedures that are intended to be inclusive even though they primarily honour the country's commitments to its international donors. In this vein, the official narrative does not reflect the unresolved land disputes and conflicts between policy and realities on the ground. The government, key donors, and NGOs deploy the rhetoric of feminism and gender inclusion as it is useful to the broader aims of the neoliberal project that fundamentally undergirds the land reform and melkinisation effort. As Jamila noted, even though the women derive some benefit from the reforms, they and "women's rights" constitute a "decoration" that legitimises broader corporate capitalist goals.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on local women's experiences of the process of land tenure reform as it is shifting from the communal to the individual. Women's disillusionment with the promises of reform is an example of rural life's dependency "on one of the decisive battlegrounds of neoliberal globalisation" (Moore, 2008 cited by Rignall 2021, 54). As Rignall (2021) contends, "Governments around the world have scaled back expenditures and services in rural areas while concentration in global agro-food systems has increased corporate pressures on agrarian livelihoods, especially those of small farmers and agricultural laborers". Despite the regional differences between Rignall's fieldwork site in the Moroccan South and Al-Gharb, her analysis reveals similar capitalist threats to small farming and peasant life. Her analysis showcases the reactions of the farmers, who do not necessarily stand in opposition or resistance to the pressure from global capitalism, but display various instances of "crafting their own rurality" and "reinventing commons" (Rignall 2021)—reactions and attitudes that are very similar to those of Aisha, Fatiha, Shrifa, and, to a lesser extent, Jamila. Fouzia's work and investment in the education of the women of her village; Aisha's daily hard work on her family land; Fatiha's mutual support for her family; Shrifa's family cooperative; and Jamila's dedication to her land and her children's education all indicate that capitalism does not, or perhaps cannot, really "destroy reciprocity or the potential of agrarian livelihoods" (Rignall 2021).

Drawing on the concept of governance feminism, this paper's exploration of this case of women farmers' land rights has offered a glimpse into the complexities of the relationship between corporate capitalism and feminism, a relationship that cannot be narrowly described. Indeed, the advent of a global capitalist feminism that Nancy Fraser describes as the "uncanny double" of a feminism genuinely devoted to achieving true justice does not mean that feminism must be dispensed with altogether (Fraser 2009, 114). In such circumstances, however, and as Fraser notes, it is imperative to move forward with "self-aware[ness]" and a sense of history (114). In the Moroccan context, that means distinguishing between the gender inclusion programmes, instrumentalised for a top-down neoliberal agenda, which operate under feminism's "uncanny double", and a genuinely engaged approach that understands the history and

the significance of collective land. As the State-promoted developmentalist discourse that associates land grabbing with progress and valorises collective land for development purposes, it also deployed arguments that the land tenure changes would involve a redistributive action that would include women for the first time in Moroccan history. Indeed, the 2019 land tenure change is a culmination of changes that started in 2009 in the form of government circulars that allowed women access to collective land's compensation benefits (Berriane 2015). These circulars came as a response to protests led by women's rights NGOs that were asking for equal access to land rights (Eddouada 2021; Ait Mouss and Berriane 2016). Urban feminist groups celebrated these changes as a revolution, yet land rights activists from outside urban women-led movements have critiqued them for being class-biased and for imposing an urban feminist lexicon on rural women's different and specific struggle with land expropriation. Thus, while the discord between urban activists and rural activists is due to a large extent to class divisions, it is also attributable to the context within which rural land rights activists and urban feminists were socialised and introduced to activism (Eddouada 2021, 2022). Naidu and Ossome's (2016) study of the case of India is a useful point of comparison, as it shows another instance in which class biases divided feminist demands for equal land rights and methods for addressing rural women's landlessness. Naidu and Ossome also remark that "class and ethnicity often supersede gender identities" (2016, 69). The discrepancy between feminist demands for a gendered egalitarian approach to land privatisation and the local Oulad Taleb stories related to land that are presented in this paper show a similar disjuncture. While liberal urban feminist groups' insistence on autonomy from family and tribal connections stand against women's access to the land, the farmers I worked with do not see the point of risking family bonds for a small or non-existent piece of land; they would thus make choices based on the communal values of reciprocity and solidarity rather than on individual desire. Women farmers' actions are therefore grounded in values and norms that disrupt feminist resistance to male authority and advocacy for gender equality above all else, but perhaps, they do seek true justice and collectivity in the mould suggested by Fraser. Their stories emanate from a sense of collective belonging to the land as farmers, mothers, wives, daughters and sisters, which does not conform with feminism as it is represented by the

aforementioned urban feminist groups. However, despite the hegemonic status of State-sponsored feminism and neoliberalism, women farmers do not choose to situate themselves in opposition to domination. As Saba Mahmood (2005) puts it, "Agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms" (15). Thus, by opening themselves up to possibilities promised by the aforementioned land tenure reform, women farmers situate themselves within, rather than against, or in resistance to, the reform. They welcome and sit in the functional literacy class, but they define it on their terms. In this way, the Oulad Taleb farmers are able to subvert melkenisation's top-down policies from *within* structures set up by the State to control both "subjects and environment" (Scott 1998) in the name of modernity and progress. As James C. Scott (1998,7) puts it: "… certain kinds of states, driven by utopian plans and an authoritarian disregard for the values, desires, and objections of their subjects, are indeed a mortal threat to human well-being". The melkenisation policy, based on the preestablished ideas about prosperity, well-being and equality that come with a top-down gender-inclusion programme, might, as this paper has tried to demonstrate, turn out to have room for a utopia. In other words, the dynamics that this gender-inclusion programme has initiated and any alternative versions of justice and collectivity the women farmers may make of it, or within it, remain to be seen.

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