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Women in Morocco: Gender Equality

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Women in Morocco: Gender Equality

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Abstract

This newsflash focuses on gender equality in Morocco. The articles are a result of research conducted throughout the semester (Spring 2014), as well as a service-learning trip to Rabat, Morocco (May 2014). The newsflash delves into several different aspects of Moroccan life, such as changes to the family code, job creation, equality in education, and the portrayal of women in the media, specifically magazines. This newsflash gives a general knowledge of the changes taking place in Morocco. It allows readers to understand, on a basic level, what is unfolding in Morocco today.

WOMEN IN MOROCCO

Gender Equality

by Emily Gunner



Women in Morocco are beginning to stand up and seek to gain equality as a right, rather than as a privilege. Issues like inheritance, violence, rape, and the family code (Moudawana) have all been examined and critiqued, and

Moroccan women are demanding revisions. Certain organizations have started to stand visibly behind Moroccan women and support them in this fight. While laws are slowly changing, the difficulty of enforcing them remains.

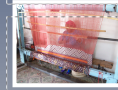
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Changes to Moudawana (the Family Code)

About a year after the rallies in Rabat and Casablanca, where Muslim fundamentalists and women's groups held counter demonstrations, Mohammed VI announced in 2001 that he would undertake a reform of the Moudawana. He also took several steps that were seen as promoting women's status in Moroccan society, like mandating that 10% of seats in the lower house of the parliament be saved for women. The following are some of the reforms made to the updated Moudawana since 2004:

- Both spouses share responsibility for the family;
- The minimum age for men and women to be married is 18 unless specified by a judge;

- A man can only take a second wife if a judge authorizes it, and only if there is an exceptional and objective justification for it, the first wife consents, and the man has sufficient resources to support the two families;
- If a man does not fulfill his obligations according to the marriage contract, or causes his wife harm such as abandonment or violence, she has the right to file for divorce.

(hrea.org)

L'Association Solidarité Féminine – Casablanca, Morocco

In the Arab world, it is often considered taboo to talk about single mothers. Many unwed mothers are condemned by society as prostitutes and even rejected by their families or ostracized by society, even in cases such as rape. But Aïcha Ech-Channa, president and founder of Solidarité Féminine (1985), has been encouraging mothers to stand up for themselves and for their babies, and to fight to improve women's social status. The L'Association Solidarité Féminine provides single mothers with job training, a small income, and offers legal, professional, and psychological support through its social projects like the hammam, salon, and fitness center (Nytimes.com).

When I was in Morocco, I was able to visit this organization and attend a lecture by Ech-Channa. During this lecture, she mentioned why she, a former nurse and social worker, decided to begin the fight for unwed mothers and their children. She told us it all began when she was working for the Moroccan Ministry of Social Affairs. Ech-Channa witnessed a young girl walk in with her baby boy to give him up. She was breast-feeding him, which according to Ech-Channa, showed that the girl did not want to give her child up. She pulled the baby away to fingerprint the paperwork and breast milk analyzed



saying how she couldn't forget that moment and knew she had to do something.

In 2002, L'Association Solidarité Féminine was officially recognized by the government as a charitable organization.

Jobs for Women



Near Toufestalt, Morocco in the mid-Atlas mountains, several women have found a new way to create a source of income: marketing their art of rug making. While visiting the area in May 2014, I had the privilege to watch one of the women at the little shop do magic behind a huge metal loom. Each intricate pattern that they insert into the rugs has a special meaning behind it. The women there shared that each rug takes about four months to make. But what it comes down to is, these women are working and making money all by themselves—especially since their husbands work far away in the cities while they tend to raising their family. Morocco is taking one step at a time towards the equality of women.



Children in a Primary School near Toufestalt, Morocco. The ratio of boys to girls was fairly equal in the classroom.

Equality in Education

According to UNICEF reports on education, girls and young women lag behind men in obtaining education in Morocco. When comparing the youth literacy rate, the rate for young women is 72% while it is 87% for young men. The net enrolment ratios in

primary school are about the same for both boys and girls (91% for boys and 88% for girls). However, in secondary schools gender parity has not been achieved yet (Unicef.org).

An Example Close to Heart



While staying in Rabat, Morocco during May of 2014, I lived with a host family that included two children (2 and 4 years old) as well as their mother, Fatima Ezzahra, and father, Aziz. I was able to become a part of their family during the short time I stayed and became very close to them. It was easy to see that through several different instances there was gender equality in the family. Now, while not all families are identical, it can be noted that this is just one instance of family life in Morocco. But observing the simple “my darling” that Aziz said to his wife, or when Aziz and Fatima Ezzahra would cook together, or when Aziz simply played with his kids, it is clear that gender equality does exist in some cases, at least in daily life, and hopefully will spread and thrive throughout the country.

Gender Equality & Dismantling of Patriarchal Structures

According to Doris H. Gray, a professor at Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco and in the department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at the Florida State University, a main point in the search for justice in gender equality is the “dismantling” of patriarchal structures. To many, patriarchy is seen as “the major stumbling bloc to the advancement of women’s rights.” In Gray’s book *Beyond Feminism and Islamism*, she refers to the work of Allan Johnson and his four

principal aspects of patriarchy, which are as follows: (1) Male domination; (2) Obsession with control; (3) Male identified; (4) Male-centricity. The issue most female Moroccan activists, from Islamists to liberal advocates, struggle with is the superior social status that is associated with the male-centered system. Her research highlights how many feminists in Morocco work toward carving out more space for their own rights while not abandoning their faith. (Doris H. Gray)

Moudawana Affects Portrayal of Women

After the family code, Moudawana, was reformed in 2004, many changes were made that positively affected women and their sense of equality. One notable multi-dimensional transformation can be found in the portrayal of women in Moroccan magazines. The Moudawana has affected many magazines because they are considered to be a guide and the voice of women in Morocco.

The portrayal of women in magazines has changed drastically since 2004 when the Moudawana was updated. The role of women depicted before the changes to Moudawana were commonly of cooking, cleaning, and taking care of

children and husbands. Magazines often showed women fully clothed and covered. However, after the Moudawana was reformed, pictures in magazines began to differ. They started to depict a more gender equal image. Women are often photographed outside their houses, for example, in an office at work. Women are also captured wearing more fashionable clothing. Body image has also changed. Women are no longer depicted as weak or timid, but rather portrayed as strong and confident.

The following are a few examples of pictures from Moroccan magazines. (Academia.edu)



1996



1999



2007

Final Words

My experiential learning project, based on research conducted before studying abroad and the actual study abroad trip to Rabat, Morocco in the summer of 2014, can contribute to those planning an immersion experience by providing an introduction to the gender equality issue in Morocco. This newsflash covers many topics and the dynamics relating to gender equality within Moroccan society. My research also covers the progression the Moroccan country is making towards creating a positive environment aimed at promoting gender equity. This newsflash gives a general level of knowledge for those to continue research more in depth in the areas that they may find interesting and important to their immersion experience.

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