

5. Yes. For example, the present Family Code in Morocco is discriminatory. It is based on the wife's obedience to her husband and not on partnership and equal rights. We need to fight for reform by underlying that the Code does not reflect the true essence of Islam: equality and interpretation.

6. Yes. We need to work on our own models. Even in the Arab world, there are differences in the readings of 'struggle', and the tools that are used. We share things with Western feminism, Arab-Islamic feminism, Third World feminism, and other feminisms. My view is to be democratic at the theoretical level; we have no other option. Feminisms never grow in a theoretical vacuum; and if our theoretical frameworks emerge from social realities then they will be viable.

8. Yes. We need more democratization in our women's movements. I mean by this more structuring at the level of administration, for example limiting leadership of organizations to a specific duration, more transparency in the management of funds, and elections.

9. Not yet. In Morocco, with which I am most familiar, gender relations are still regulated by heavy patriarchy even in households where women are feminist leaders. Such changes surely take time and depend mainly on attitudes acquired outside the family, in school for example. One way of improving things is by working on school manuals from a gender-equality point of view.

10. Non-Arabic speaking minorities need to be more integrated into the women's movement. There's something new, however - a burgeoning awareness among democratic movements of the importance of language in this region. Morocco is a multi-lingual country where language is a powerful identity-builder. Within this 'linguistic' revival, Berber, a hitherto marginalized language (and culture) is emerging as a 'democratizing' factor; a factor which could keep the balance between religious extremists and the state. Linguistic rights are being understood as part of other human rights, and militancy to obtain them is part of the overall democratic project in Morocco. I read this development as a continuation of the type of struggle which the women's movements have been engaged in. However, it also problematizes the

term 'Arab' in Morocco as this excludes Berbers, who form 40% of the Moroccan population. The term 'Arab women's movement' is itself problematic for me: my country Morocco is officially Arab, but although I am Moroccan I am not Arab!

11. Linguistically the term is legitimate, but within each specific culture it should deconstructed. I said something about this above (10).

12. Very positive especially in consciousness-raising.

13. A 'dissemination' effect; it is like wearing the scarf for religious 'feminists'.

14. Female illiteracy and the misuse of populist ideology.

15. Prepare as many students as possible to take over. Make choices available for the younger generation. Encourage multilingualism.

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1. Among the achievements is contributing to the discourse on Arab women within the Arab region as well as internationally, and particularly in the Arabic language, specifically in the fields of development and literature.

Among the failures are: weak link with political processes; failing to involve more men in the gender equity debate; viewing income/capability poor women as 'the other'; failing to involve the younger generation of both genders more effectively; supporting women's liberation/gender equality in the public sphere while failing to translate this into reality in the private sphere - what I call 'pseudo-feminism'.

2. The charge is not justified in the sense that gender equality is a universal human rights issue. Keep in mind that there are reactionary/anti-gender equality movements in the West (eg. the Born Again Christian move-

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ment which has been active in fighting women's reproductive rights etc, and on which the Bush agenda depends). We also need to keep in mind that 'gender equality' has been also pushed by international NGOs as part of their development agenda; and Arab governments dependent on foreign aid have had to adopt these agendas. The conservative male elites ruling the Arab region have taken on this agenda out of political necessity and expediency, and not necessarily out of conviction. Keep in mind also that elite Arab women are not necessarily real modernizers; they may be 'modern' (western) in their dress and lifestyles, but they also contribute in many ways to reinforcing the class/poverty divide and existing gender power relations. Just think of elite women's dependence on female household help, now increasingly from South East Asia. This is part of what I meant regarding the public versus the private sphere in relation to 'feminism', in response to question 1.

We also need to remember that Western feminism is generally opposed in the Arab region as being anti-family. We should not generalize this as there are obviously many Western feminisms. In reality and universally, supporting gender equality and addressing gender gaps imply changes in gender roles, male and female self-images, that is, changing power relations at the personal level. The reality in the West (as reading the press in the UK reveals again and again) is not so different: women there are considered to be mainly responsible for the care of children and family. So Western feminism has not necessarily achieved its aims, except maybe for the economically better off women.

Our best response is to stress the universalism of human rights, of which gender equality is an integral part. Cultural specificities can all too often, in fact tend to be, used as an excuse not to rethink gender relations fundamentally in ways which address class divides and other divides (ethnicity, religion, location, the political system, etc.).

3. Religious revivalism must be seen in the context of the complex linkages between the cultural/social, political and economic. Keep in mind that the political elites in the Arab region are linked to/dependent on the West economically and politically. Parallel to this is the reality that poor and marginalized communities in the Arab region are increasingly unable to depend

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on state social and welfare services (because of the impact of 'structural adjustment'). These factors form an obvious link with conservative/fundamentalist Islamist forces.

By definition no patriarchal-based religion can be the basis for a pro-gender equality struggle. Here is where the concept of citizenship becomes so important in my view, because it stresses, or ideally should stress, the common factors that link citizens with one another irrespective of gender, age, religion, etc. This is also why I am politically so against the debate on 'majority/minority' in the Arab region, using religion as the divide.

4. There's nothing wrong with pluralism in this sense. We should remember that women are not homogeneous politically, socially, economically, or culturally. But pluralism should not lead us into forgetting to stress that gender equality, like all other equalities, is a human rights issue, and to keep this common factor in mind.

5. Absolutely. And this means getting both women and men to work together, and avoid the current situation where men/male elites apparently feel 'threatened' by such a struggle. Again the stress on human rights is vital since it helps us to get disentangled from these endless debates about 'cultural authenticity'. Another key word here is 'choice': for women to have the choice to be as 'modern' or as 'conservative' as they want, and not have this imposed on them by others.

6. Why not? There are many political and economic commonalities on which to base affiliations. However, we need to remember the heterogeneity of women, their interests and agendas.

7. See answer 2.

8. Absolutely. The question is how? This involves and includes engendering the discourses on democracy and civil rights. Arab women need to be more pro-active politically. And that is the heart of the problem, i.e. the social cost to women in terms of male kin resistance; the social and economic price they may have to pay to be active politically; the danger of our assumption that when Arab women are politically active they will necessarily be progressive on gender issues; and the generally insufficient

male support. But then look at the difficulty of getting women into Parliament in the UK! To repeat: as long as family life is considered to be primarily women's responsibility, this means that the 'time factor' (ie. women having time to organize) will remain a huge problem. Yet there are many examples (eg. Bangladesh, parts of Latin America) showing that women's political action at certain levels and within certain boundaries is possible.

9. No; see answers 1 and 2 above. We still live in a world where women working for change are perceived to be 'strong' (*qawiyya*); implicit in this is the notion that the male kin (father, husband, brother, etc.) must be 'weak'. To some extent the notion of gender equality continues to be perceived in terms of winners (women) and losers (men).

10. This is what I meant above about gender equality being an integral part of human rights; also the concept of citizenship. But we also need to admit the reality that non-Arabic speaking minorities face serious political, social and economic problems linked to prevalent notions of the nation-state, and dominant nationalisms. In any case this is another debate where the crucial cross-cutting variables of gender and poverty have been ignored.

11. I prefer the term 'Arab feminisms', which is more realistic in view of the many divisive variables. I would also stress that when Arab women are 'active' on women's issues this does not necessarily imply that they are politically and socially progressive.

12. On the one hand it has been positive, by making many gender issues more visible. But it has also had an adverse impact in providing the 'reactionary brigades' (which I define as those who do not accept any discourse on equality, whether in respect of gender or any other variable) with the platform at which to launch their 'arrows'. Further, if UN agencies have a gender policy this does not necessarily imply that all their staff are 'gender-aware', or supportive of gender equality. Apart from UNIFEM's obvious mandate/focus of activities, the only UN agency that to my knowledge has an explicit corporate gender policy is the World Food Program. The recent evaluation indicates that while much has been achieved, a lot remains to be done. But there is now the expectation of

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accountability for gender mainstreaming among senior staff; and that is crucial. The World Bank is improving too, at least in its stated policies, though a lot remains to be done in respect of staff accountability. UNDP has also done a lot vis-a-vis gender, but staff accountability remains a problem.

13. Generally positive in my view, but we need to keep in mind that Arab women have diverse agendas, political and otherwise. Less positive effects have been the way that 'WID', 'WAD' and 'GAD' have led to a new female professional category called the 'gender expert', hence a new type of occupational segregation. Though it needs to be said that male professionals have generally not shown much interest in gender issues. Attitudes in organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank, but also in quite a few UN country offices in the Arab region, illustrate this point. It also needs to be said that professional women have in some cases tended to exclude men (after all gender has provided new employment opportunities for professional women who for various reasons do not have access to employment in the public and/or private sectors). We still have not reached the stage where gender, like poverty, is the business of everyone involved in development. Part of the problem is that the so-called gender experts have not always been clear or successful in getting the message across that the priority focus on women is because of the need to tackle gender gaps; but that gender is about changing existing power relations between men and women at all levels.

14. Divergent political and economic interests; failing to develop effective strategies to actively involve men (though this does not mean that we overlook the serious obstacles which men may put in the way of such cooperation; ie. the 'male brigades' who feel individually/collectively threatened by change).

15. More transparency and honesty in discourses. This means stressing what unites women individually and collectively, but also realizing that this notion of 'sisterhood is global' tends to become an excuse for avoiding serious debates about what divides women within individual Arab countries, as well as between Arab countries.

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The Gender-Sensitive Fact-File: Profiles of the Arab League Countries

The Institute of Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), established in 1973, took the whole Arab region as its field of observation and reporting. This far-reaching ambition has sustained the Institute and its publications, especially *Al-Raida*, ever since. Yet the goal of covering such a large area is a challenging one: the Arab League states - 22 - stretch from Mauritania in the West to the Comoros Islands in the East; in addition they vary greatly in size, material resources, political regime, economy, and population composition. Accounting for women's situation and level of organization in each country demands effort and communication resources, especially when one remembers the region's numerous minorities - religious, ethnic, and linguistic.

In this centenary issue, *Al-Raida's* editorial committee decided that it would be valuable to remind ourselves of the scope of our geo-political setting by trying to construct a 'profile' of each Arab League member country which would show the most basic facts about women's situation there: Has X country a constitution? Does the constitution affirm equality between the genders? Is there a nationality law, and does it discriminate against women? Has X country signed international gender equality resolutions such as CEDAW? Where do women stand in relation to the legal and political systems? Do they have the right to become lawyers and judges? What kind of family law and personal status law prevails? Are they allowed to vote? And so on. Through a process of consultation we tried to select those 'facts' that would give a picture not only of the legal and political framework of women's lives, but also of their situation in regard to education, employment, health and culture.

Given the focus of this issue on women's movements, our original intention was to include in the file lists of women's organizations. But this proved impossible, either because of their great number in many countries (eg. Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco), or because we were unable to establish contact with some countries (eg. Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Oman, Somalia). So we limited our search to the following four questions: i) does X country have a section of government concerned with women's issues? ii) does it have a National Council of Women? iii) does it have a National Plan of Action? (both these were recommended at the Beijing Conference of 1995); and iv) does it have NGOs that monitor women's situation? It's difficult to be sure how accurate our information on Gender Monitoring and Action is, but we hope our questions will

rouse local activists to send us their corrections, as well as encourage new researchers to enter this field.

We ought to mention the difficulties we encountered while researching the Fact File, since they are an indication of the state of knowledge about women and gender in our region:

- There is a dearth of data of the kind we wanted.
- Much of the available data is non-comparable across countries.
- Most of the data available on Arab websites about Arab women is actually taken from external sources, mainly the United Nations, but also the U.S. State Department, the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, the Library of Congress Country Studies, the Commission of Human Rights, and the CIA.
- It was particularly hard to find data on certain countries and, more surprisingly, the UNDP's Human Development Report (2002) fails to include Palestine and Iraq.
- A lot of Internet sites give statistics without corresponding dates.
- Different sources - national, regional, and international - are often contradictory.

Given these difficulties, we do not consider the Fact File as a final product, but rather as a work in progress. The statistics and facts offered here may be disputable (like all facts and statistics), but the possibility of comparing women's literacy levels, economic activity rate, or average age at first marriage across all 22 Arab countries yields some significant correlations as well as some surprising results.

We acknowledge our indebtedness to ESCWA's country profiles, the Emory Islamic Family Law website, Macmag-Glip's project on Nationality Laws, and UNDP's Pogar. We urge anybody with more specific or different data to contact IWSAW so as to update the profiles, and make them more accurate and useful.

- Ndf = no data found.
- The gross enrollment ratio means the number of pupils enrolled in the given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the relevant official age-group. This is why it may be more than 100%.
- All the maps (except Palestine) are taken from *The 21st Century World Atlas* (1998) USA: Trident Press International.