



AL-Raïda ^{مجلة} **الرائدة**

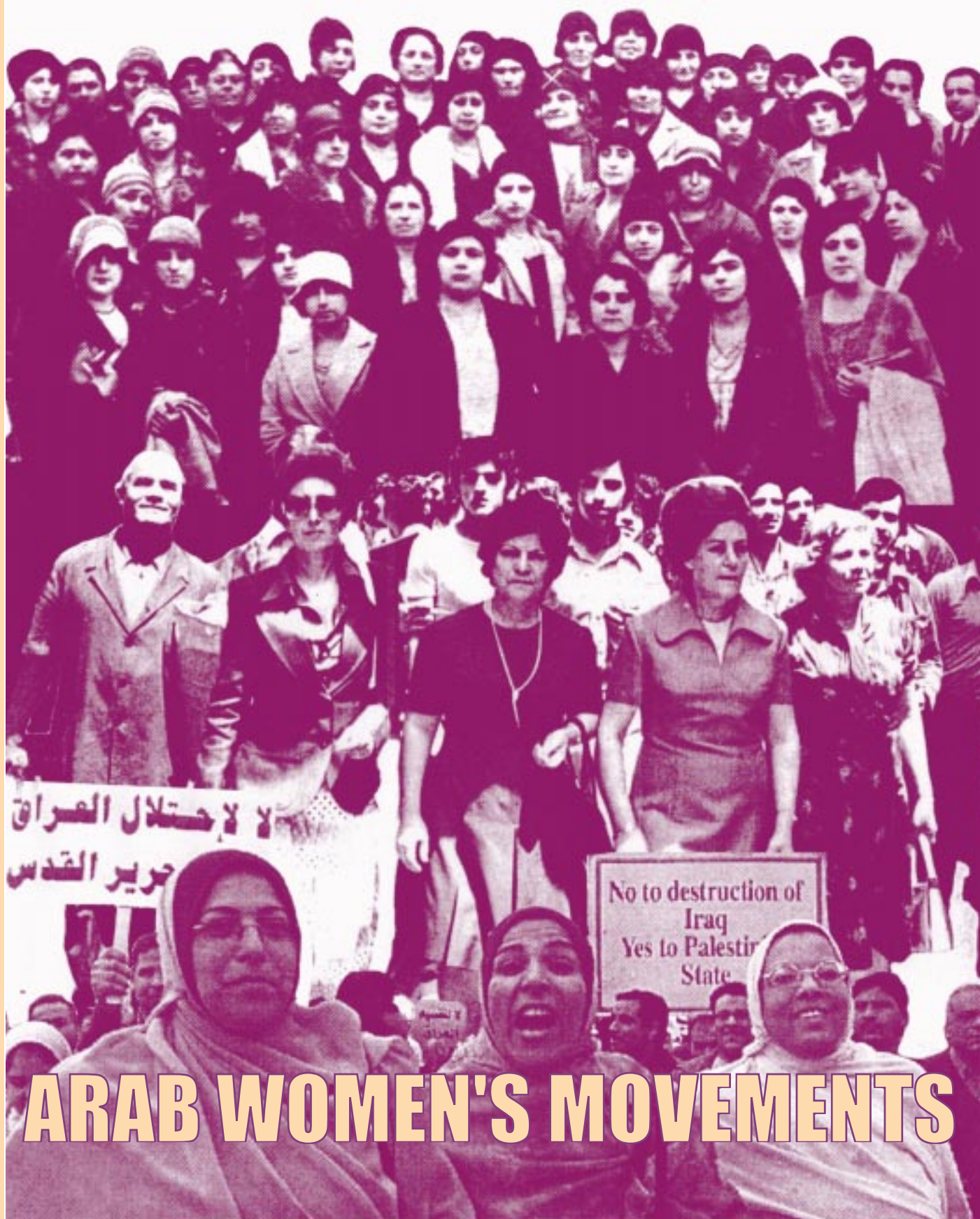
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ARAB WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

ABOUT IWSAW

The Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was established in 1973 at the Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College). Initial funding for the Institute was provided by the Ford Foundation.

OBJECTIVES: The Institute strives to serve as a data bank and resource center to advance a better understanding of issues pertaining to Arab women and children; to promote communication among individuals, groups and institutions throughout the world concerned with Arab women; to improve the quality of life of Arab women and children through educational and development projects; and to enhance the educational and outreach efforts of the Lebanese American University.

PROJECTS: IWSAW activities include academic research on women, local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures and films; and educational projects which improve the lives of women and children from all sectors of Lebanese society. The Institute houses the Women’s

Documentation Center in the Stoltzfus Library at LAU. The Center holds books and periodicals. The Institute also publishes a variety of books and pamphlets on the status, development and conditions of Arab women, in addition to *Al-Raida*. Eight children’s books with illustrations, and two guides, one of which specifies how to set up children’s libraries, and the other which contains information about producing children’s books, have also been published by IWSAW. In addition, the Institute has also created income generating projects which provide employment training and assistance to women from war-stricken families in Lebanon. The Institute has also devised a Basic Living Skills Project which provides a non-formal, integrated educational program for semi-literate women involved in development projects. Additional IWSAW projects include The Rehabilitation Program for Children’s Mental Health; Teaching for Peace; and the Portable Library Project. The latter project was awarded the Asahi Reading Promotion Award in 1994. For more information about these or any other projects, write to the Institute at the address provided above.

ABOUT AL-RAIDA

Al-Raida is published quarterly by the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) of the Lebanese American University (LAU), formerly Beirut University College, P.O. Box 13-5053, Chouran Beirut, 1102 2801 Lebanon; Telephone: 961 1 867618, ext. 1288; Fax: 961 1 791645. The American address of LAU is 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1846, New York, NY 10115, U.S.A.; Telephone: (212) 870-2592; Fax: (212) 870-2762.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT: *Al-Raida*’s mission is to enhance networking between Arab women and women all over the world; to promote objective research of the conditions of women in the Arab world, especially conditions related to social change and development; and to report on the activities of the IWSAW and the Lebanese American University.

Each issue of *Al-Raida* features a File which focuses on a particular theme, in addition to articles, conference reports, interviews, book reviews and art news.

REPRINT RIGHTS: No unsigned articles may be reprinted without proper reference to *Al-Raida*. Permission to reprint signed articles must be obtained from the IWSAW.

SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES: We seek contributions from those engaged in research, analysis and study of women in the Arab world. Contributions should not exceed ten double-spaced typed pages. Please send a hard copy and a diskette. We reserve the right to edit in accordance with our space limitations and editorial guidelines. Submissions will not be published if they have been previously published elsewhere.



Arab Women’s Movements

Guest Editor: Rosemary Sayigh

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Al-Raida

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SUBSCRIPTION

THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FEE FOR AL-RAIDA IS US \$ 30. SUBSCRIPTIONS BEGIN IN JANUARY AND END IN DECEMBER.

The Way it Evolved ...

No title could have been more suitable for IWSAW's quarterly publication than *Al-Raida* (The Pioneer), since IWSAW was the first institute dedicated to women's issues in the Arab world. After its establishment in 1973, the Institute's directorship was entrusted to Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr who, from 1973 to 1997, succeeded in maintaining its pioneering role, thanks to her long-term vision and relentless efforts.

It was three years after its foundation that the Institute decided to publish, both in English and Arabic, an eight-page newsletter. The first issue, which was stenciled, appeared in May 1976; its editor was Rose Ghurayyib, who remained in this post until 1983, and continued to contribute to *Al-Raida* until 1993.

With time, *Al-Raida* has developed in content, size, and appearance. Between 1976 and 1983, its table of contents included profiles of women, interviews, conference reports, summaries of studies, articles, as well as book reviews. In the mid-1980's, it started publishing research-based articles in addition to the previous sections. In the late 1980's, due to censorship, the limited number of subscribers in the Arab world, and financial constraints, the Institute stopped publishing the Arabic version of *Al-Raida*.

In 1994, another significant change took place: *Al-Raida* started featuring a file focusing on a specific pressing theme, with its usual sections also revolving around it.

In addition, the eight- page newsletter has expanded into issues that vary between 48 and 100 pages, depending on the material in hand. A deliberate effort was also put into improving its layout and appearance.

Another major development occurred in the early 1990's: an *Al-Raida* advisory board was established. It consists at present of eight members from various disciplines and kinds of institution (academic, NGOs, UN agencies). Its contributors come from a wide range of nationalities, specializations and backgrounds.

It is worth noting that *Al-Raida*'s subscribers are mainly Western university libraries, women's studies centers, NGOs, and individual researchers. Furthermore, since 2002, it has become available on-line in both English and Arabic, serving researchers and various international organizations.

IWSAW's next objective is to make *Al-Raida* into a refereed journal. Although this objective will require a tremendous effort, we at the Institute are confident that we will be able to meet this new challenge.

Mona Chemali Khalaf
Director
Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW)
Lebanese American University

Letters to Al-Raida

Dir. 16. Jul 2003 11:11

From: Kadinin İnsan Hakları-Women for Women's Human Rights/NEW WAYS <elaanil@wwhr.org>
To: <al-raida@lau.edu.lb>
Date: Freitag, 9. Mai 2003 5:00
Subject: copies of "Sexuality" issue

Dear Myram Shir,

Hello from Istanbul. I am writing to you from Women for Women's Human Rights - NEW WAYS. We've received the "Sexuality" issue of Al-Raida (in which there's an article by my colleague Pinar) - the whole issue is absolutely wonderful! Many thanks and congratulations to everyone who has put effort into it.

We will be holding a workshop on "Sexual and Bodily Rights as Human Rights in the Middle East and North Africa" at the end of month and we think it's a great opportunity to distribute the "Sexuality" issue of Al-Raida. Can you advise us as to how we can obtain about 30 copies?

Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Best Wishes,

Ela Anil
Kadinin İnsan Hakları Projesi (KİHP) - NEW WAYS
Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) - NEW WAYS

Subject: to the editors of al-Raida
Date: Tue, 26 Sep 2000 18:37:23 GMT
From: "Lynn Welchman" <lw10@soas.ac.uk>
Organization: S.O.A.S.
To: inssaw@ciwin.lau.edu.lb

Dear editors and assistant editors of Al-Raida

... May I express enormous appreciation for the work on Al-Raida, which is extremely useful in many different ways. I have received some copies from a friend, Emma Playfair (director of INTERRIGHTS in London) and we are now in the process of sorting out a subscription, which should reach you soon.

To introduce myself briefly, I am director of the Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law (CIMEL) which is part of the Law Department at the School of Oriental and African Studies, at London University in the UK.

... I am preparing a new masters course here in the SOAS Law Department, entitled Law and Society in the Middle East and North Africa, ... I am in the process of preparing reading material for the students, and would like to ask your permission to reproduce (by photocopy) the al-Raida 'files' from two past issues:

1. Al-Raida volume XV nos. 80-81 Winter/Spring 1998, pages 11-52 (Arab countries and CEDAW); and
2. Al-Raida volume XIV no.76 Winter 1997 pages 8-2 (Women in the Arab Family)

...If you don't feel that you can agree to this, I will of course understand. Anyway, sorry to have taken so long in this email! And I do look forward to your response with thanks

Lynn
Dr. L. Welchman
Director
Centre of Islamic and Middle Eastern Law
Dept. of Law
SOAS

choisir
La cause des femmes
Fondé par Gisèle Halimi et Simone de Beauvoir

GH/AM
Paris, le 3 avril 2003

Merci chère Mona pour ta lettre et l'envoi des très intéressants numéros de votre revue « Al-Raida ». Ils « tournent » entre les mains et les yeux des responsables du Bureau de CHOISIR.

J'ai gardé moi aussi le meilleur souvenir de notre rencontre et j'espère que nos échanges accroîtront notre coopération.

Donnez-nous de vos nouvelles.

Très cordialement,

La Présidente
Gisèle HALIMI
lettre dictée et signée en son absence

Gisèle Halimi

le 2 Mai 2000

Mme Chemali Khalaf

"... J'ai lu quelques numéros de la Revue *Al-Raida*. De qualité scientifique internationale, elle est d'un grand intérêt. Pour mon propre projet de recherche, les numéros sur les droits humains (74 -75) et sur CEDAW (80-81) comportent des informations et des analyses précieuses. ..."

Denise Couture
Professeure agrégée
Faculté de théologie
Université de Montréal

Arab Women's Movements: Late Subject of History

Rosemary Sayigh*

Women's movements in the Arab world seemed both a necessary and a difficult choice as topic for *Al-Raida's* 100th issue. Necessary because it is surely one of *Al-Raida's* chief raisons d'être to discover and re-present women-based organizing throughout this vast area. Difficult because of the short time for collecting materials, unevenness of research and knowledge, disconnections between activists, organizations, and regions, and the rapid recent expansion of women's NGOs that makes even listing them a major project. In spite of the number of women and gender study centers that exist in Arab countries, the data they have is still slight and hard to access.¹ Many women's organizations still don't have electronic mail, especially in the poorer countries. Above all, there's no single center whose function is to accumulate studies, collate, connect and disseminate them.

From the beginning of discussions about the issue with *Al-Raida's* editorial committee the first dilemma arose: should we focus on 'feminist' movements or on 'women's' movements? There were several voices in favor of 'Arab feminism': as a more interesting topic, and one that challenges Western feminist notions that there was no such thing, that it all began with reactions to, and imitations of, the West. But 'Arab feminism' also raises

thorny questions of definition: some would argue that any women's organization can be called 'feminist' if it brings women out of the home into public life, and teaches them organizing skills. Others would say that only those organizations that explicitly call for gender equality can be qualified as 'feminist'. A related debate of strong current interest revolves around the term 'Muslim feminism' – can this be accepted as such, as Heba Ezzat argues in this issue, or is it a contradiction in terms?² To deal adequately with such a complex question calls for a whole *Al-Raida* issue to itself. So rather than plunge into a quagmire debate about names, definitions, and boundaries, we decided to use the more inclusive term 'women's movement', posed by scholars as identifying a type of women's activism that is less separatist, less critical of the family, community and 'patriarchy' than radical feminism in the West.³

Here again, however, it can be asked how do we define a women's movement? Does it mean any group founded by women, or that works for women, or most of whose members are women, or - exclusively - a group that aims to achieve 'women's rights'? A leading scholar of women's movements, Maxine Molyneux, suggests, "A women's movement does not have to have a single organizational expression, and may be characterized by a diversity of interests, forms and spatial location."⁴ Arab women's movements have always been closely linked - ideologically and often structurally - to broader political and social movements, even while expressing women's

consciousness and interests more or less explicitly. In a debate highly relevant to this kind of organizing, both separate and 'embedded', Molyneux argues against those who would exclude women's branches of political parties and state-linked mass organizations for women as not primarily organized to advance women's gender-specific concerns, noting that they "deserve consideration in order to evaluate their significance both as political phenomena and for what they signify for their participants" (p 145). This remark is a useful reminder that an organization is not defined by declared aims alone, but needs to be assessed along several dimensions, including its effects for members. Because of the difference between Arab countries in terms of socio-cultural constraints, we also need to be aware of suppressed 'womanism' (as in the case of Saudi Arabia, where only professional or business women's organizations are allowed), as well as the different ways that states have controlled women, whether through single national unions, strict NGO regulation, permanent leaderships, and other forms of 'state-feminism'. The crisis-ridden nature of the region also forces women's organizations to develop in a constantly changing ideological and political context, generating swings in state and public opinion attitudes towards the 'woman question'. Such a context spells unevenness - between regions and over time - and necessitates that we should avoid easy assumptions, for example that change always equals progress, that the proliferation of women's NGOs and women's conferences necessarily empowers women organizationally vis-à-vis the state, or that women's greater visibility in the public domain signifies real change in gender relations.⁵

From the beginning we aspired to a presentation that would be both historical and evaluative. It soon became evident that this was far too ambitious an aim for the space and time at our disposal. We discovered that not many historians have worked on the Arab women's movements, so that the kind of substantial, analytical evaluations we hoped for could not readily be found - especially if we wanted them to embrace larger regions rather than remain within the boundaries of nation-states. A second challenging aspect of our topic was how to 'cover' and represent the 22 Arab League states, spread over a vast stretch of North Africa and West Asia, comprising a total population of 274 million (4.6% of the world's population in 1998). In spite of their shared Arab language and culture, these countries are heterogeneous in many ways, marked by different population 'mixes' (linguistic, sectarian, ethnic), by different histories of colonial domination, varied types of political/legal regime, and current external relationships - differences that have influenced the way women's organizations in each have developed. This heterogeneity means that one country cannot be taken to represent others even if they are part of the same

region, or share the same level of economic development. Close neighbors may be highly dissimilar when it comes to the state of women's movements. Look at Saudi Arabia and Yemen for example; or Tunisia and Libya; or Lebanon and Syria.

'Covering' women's organizations in all 22 Arab League states was difficult in another way: there is a marked lopsidedness in data availability between 'accessible' countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Tunisia, Algeria - where women's organizations are comparatively well studied - and others about which little information is available (at least in English), or where information is mostly provided by non-indigenous sources: notably Comoros, Djibouti, Libya, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, and the UAE. In the middle comes a third category, eg Iraq, Kuwait, Sudan, Yemen, about which some studies exist, or which are attracting new scholars, or where Internet is proving its worth as an alternative source. Sudan is a particularly interesting case of an Arab country that has gone through shifts of regime and a long, disastrous civil war, but where women's movements have not only survived but spread to minority and exiled communities, and played an impressive role in peace-building attempts.⁶

The existence in Sudan of a plurality of women's organizations, springing from several of its many minorities, including those in exile, is a timely reminder of the need to question an old assumption in Arab women's studies of a necessary correspondence between boundaries and the national/ethnic identity of women's movements. With the tremendous displacements of populations due to conflict and poverty, the term 'Arab' must include a large, internally differentiated diaspora. If we are talking about 'Arab women's movements', then we have to look not only at growing communities of Arab exiles and emigrants in the wider world, but also - to complicate things further - at expatriate Arab communities within the Arab world (Sudanese in Cairo, Iraqis in Beirut and Amman, etc). If we are talking about 'women's movements in the Arab region', we must look among ethnic/linguistic minorities within the region - Berbers, Armenians, Kurds, Circassians, and other ethnic minorities. Nor should we forget political movements such as the Saharawis, Arabic-speaking but claiming national independence. In Morocco today, Berbers enjoy increasing scope for claiming their own distinctive voice and organizations.⁷ Kurdish women's organizations are taking root in areas where Kurds have relative freedom, as in northern Iraq. One of the oldest immigrant groups, the Armenians, have women's associations in every part of their large Arab diaspora, especially in Lebanon. Information about these expatriate and non-state women's movements is scattered and marginal compared with the steady accumulation of studies that stay

* Independent researcher, author of books on the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and articles on the Palestinian women's movement.

within state/nation boundaries. We could begin to think about them in this issue but not 'cover' them. This remains work for the future.⁸

Since we could not cover the histories of women's movements in every Arab country, and did not want to present the histories of a few as representative of the rest, we tried to group them into three main regions: Egypt and the Mashreq (Fawwaz Trabulsi), the Maghreb (Rabea Naciri), and the Gulf (Sabiqa al-Najjar). Regrettably some countries fell through the broad meshes of this net, eg Libya, Sudan, Yemen and Iraq, as well as more recent Arab League members such as Mauritania and Somalia, still not fully absorbed into the Arabic circuit of communication. Yet these three regional papers demonstrate the advantages of adopting a broader-than-state framework for looking at women's organizations, through highlighting comparisons that single country studies suppress. Two other papers complete the first 'historical' section of the issue: Bouthaina Shaaban on early Arab women writers, the precursors of women's organizations; and Islah Jad on the contemporary stage of 'globalization', with its substitution of NGOs for political and social movements. This set of historical contextual papers foreshadows a more comparative and analytical approach to the mobilization of women for intertwined causes - anti-colonial, national/social, statist, political, religious, feminist, professional - throughout the region, from the beginning of the 20th century to the present time.

One of the key questions we asked people in the email interviews that form the second section of this issue focused on the relationship between Arab women's movements and 'Western feminism'. Some respondents scored hard-hitting points here, noting the way this 'accusation' is brought against women's movements but never against national or social ones that equally could be accused (if it is an accusation) of having grown out of Western models. But this is a polemic that should be shifted from 'essentialist' arguments about the nature of Western or Arab feminisms to the historical contexts in which each movement developed. Surely the major distinction that can - indeed must - be drawn between 'Western feminism' and the Arab women's movements is the very different historic conjuncture in which each emerged and developed. Feminist movements in most of Europe and North America developed from within established nation-states in which women were disenfranchised whereas adult men enjoyed full citizenship and suffrage. Western feminisms arose to contest women's exclusion from political, legal and economic rights. Arab women's movements, on the other hand, developed in a period and region characterized by discontinuity and instability: European intrusion (economic, cultural, military, political), the disintegration of the Ottoman order,

nationalist struggles in which women participated, the consolidation of new states and national boundaries, external attacks and internal conflict, economic polarization between rich and poor regions and classes - these have set the framework in which movements for change in gender ideology and practice in Arab societies have developed. In such an overall context, women's movements have been bound by complex ties of feeling and identification to the communities to which women 'belong'. This has not prevented them from crystallizing 'feminist' aims - reform of family law, 'women's rights' - but crisis and external threat has made it hard for them to prioritize these aims. Always there have been problems that appeared more important than gender equality.⁹ Women's placing as Rabéa Naciri well puts it "at the intersection between two identities: that of an oppressed community and that of subordinated women",¹⁰ is the crucial characteristic separating the feminism of Arab women from that of women in the 'developed' world.

Because of this very different context, the relationship of women's movements to the state in the Arab world is more complex and harder to manage successfully than for feminist movements in the West which engaged in straightforward contestation. In the Arab world new, fragile states enlisted women in numerous ways: as emblems of modernity or cultural authenticity, as arms of social outreach to rural regions, as state employees, or as a female service sector.¹¹ In the immediate post-independence period Arab states appeared to many women as a counterbalance to the control over them of clan and community, a space for the exercise of their 'public' interests and administrative abilities. States provided women with low-cost education, hope of progressive legislation, small budgets for their organizations. Hence a complex relationship of appeal to, and struggle against, states that themselves vary over time in terms of the dominant aspect of their 'women politics', alternating between support, constraint, and manipulation.¹² Weak in international and regional terms, Arab states are 'strong' vis-à-vis their own peoples, engendering constraints on the expansion of social movements, at the same time as they have failed to solve basic economic and social problems. This 'mix' of authoritarian constraint and incapacity has generated many forms of popular reaction, among them religious revivalism. Religion appeals to the many excluded from political and economic privilege, both as a critique of elite corruption and inefficacy, and as response to continuing Western domination. Women's organizations are caught unwillingly in the middle of this complex contestation. Answers to our email questionnaire show how clearly women perceive economic crisis and general impoverishment as constituting the main obstacle to the expansion of women's struggle for gender-equality. Though activists and scholars alike welcome the support

for programs of gender equality emanating from the 'international community' - the UN and its agencies, Western donors and NGOs - there is also a perception that this phalanx of institutions is embedded in an unequal international distribution of power. An UN-generated language of 'gender in development' has little chance to win hearts and minds in a region where there is so little genuine development, and where economic benefits are so unequally distributed.

Culture is of course an essential part of the historical context of Arab women's movements, one that has yet to receive the research attention it deserves. In her recent study of NGOs in Lebanon, Azza Beydoun asks whether Arab women bring to organization specific qualities based in their domestic roles.¹³ Bouthaina Shaaban's essay in this issue shows how deconstructing Western cultural stereotypes was a vital motive for early Arab women writers. Both these studies suggest the need for a longer, deeper look at how Arab women navigate between the resources and handicaps that their cultural identity gives them in the struggle for greater gender equality. Perhaps another critical difference between Western and Arab women's movements is Arab women's deeper embeddedness in their communities - national, local, religious, etc - which offers them choices and resources as well as elements of constraint. Another point to remember is the way their critiques of their culture (as gender-biased) is continually offset by instances of 'Occidentalism' in Western policies and medias, ranging from exploitation of the veil to symbolize 'backwardness' to the absurd and dangerous 'clash of civilizations' theory propagated by Samuel P. Huntington. Such hostile Western constructions continually force Arab women back into defensive positions vis-à-vis their culture and community. This embeddedness of women is undoubtedly one of the factors that produce fragmentation of the women's movements, fissures that reproduce not just national boundaries but also internal ideological divisions - between political or religious parties, between progressive/secular and religious fundamentalist currents, between 'feminist' and 'womanist' NGOs. Secure niches for women's public action, quasi-families, these NGO spaces also explain why the multiplication of 'women in public' and high levels of activism have not yet produced a strong, autonomous women's movement in any Arab country. Though written about Algeria, Saliha Boudeffa's words have a wider application: "...the feminine movement has broken up into pressure groups and associations with limited objectives; there is no powerful unifying organization; the female electorate has no autonomy, but faithfully reflects the main ideological tendencies of the country".¹⁴

If the history of the Arab women's movements present-

ed us with the difficulty of not yet having attracted many historians, the need for evaluations of the present situation faced us with the opposite difficulty - a multiplicity of forms, goals, activities, and affiliations at the organizational level, and an expanding number of scholars, administrators, and grassroots activists qualified to offer their comments and critiques. We decided to use email interviews to bring as broad a range of views as possible to bear on this subject; and selected around 20 respondents - a mix of scholars, organization activists and women's studies specialists - people with local organizing experience and/or a broad overview of the region, people whose outlook varied between secular and Muslim feminist, women at work in the region and women teaching or studying abroad. To these we presented a list of questions highlighting 15 issues which we chose after lengthy debate and consultation. These included the alleged influence of 'Western feminism' over the Arab women's movements, their affiliations, structures, leaderships and programs; what have been their achievements, and in what ways have they failed? What has been the effect on them of the UN Decade for Women? What factors have blocked their spread in most countries beyond urban educated women? What of the relationship between religion and the women's movements? Which of their prevailing characteristics most needs change?

These email interviews on "Contemporary Challenges to the Arab Women's Movements" form the second main section of the issue.

In a third section we present 'gender-sensitive' profiles of each Arab League member state. Our original hope was that we would find extensive data-bases not only in the UN and its regional agencies, but also in Arab research institutions and gender networks. UN Agency sources (ESCWA, the UNDP) are indeed data-rich, and certain websites proved very valuable; but they also tended to be repetitive, or contradictory, or undated. In comparison the data available from Arab sources, for example the Arab League, were scanty and often derivative. Another initial hope in planning the country profiles was that we would find 'anchor' people in each Arab country who would confirm, correct and supplement information obtained from international data sources. We did indeed find willing contacts in some Arab countries, but in many this attempt failed. Even where UNDP/Gender in Development people were listed, contact with them was difficult to establish or sustain. Arab women's Internet networks did not prove as productive as we had hoped. This experience highlighted two difficulties that must also exist for women's organizations and research institutes: i) the difficulty of networking over such a large area; and ii) the difficulty of obtaining reliable local information.

Frontiers between organizations as well as between states have obviously contributed to obstacles in obtaining micro-data.

Difficulties we experienced in obtaining information means that the country profiles must be taken as a research aid and pointer to sources of information rather than as an accomplished survey. Yet we feel that the endeavor has been worthwhile. It emphasized for us, first, the vast area that an Arab women's studies institute has to keep within its sights, and how little of it is yet documented. Second it emphasized the disconnections that still impede the accumulation and free circulation of knowledge about all aspects of women's situation, knowledge the women's movements in the region as a whole surely need if they are seriously to work for change.

This continuing state of disconnection is hard to explain in the face of the entry of two modern communication methodologies into the Arab region, the conference and electronic mail. The calendar of conferences and workshops for Arab women is highly charged, and organized under many different auspices, eg ESCWA, ECA, the World Bank, European cultural foundations such as the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation, and the US State department.¹⁵ Fewer such gatherings are Arab-organized: Arab women's studies institutes, or women's sections of broader Middle East study associations such as AMEWS are probably the main conveners of inter-Arab women's gatherings. There is also the annual Cairo-based annual Arab Women's Conference, and another that is Gulf-based. Studies are needed to assess the impact of these variously authored conferences on the Arab women's movements: What kinds of ideas and methods are propagated? Have there been benefits for women's organizations, whether in greater cooperation between them, whether inside country borders or across them, or in greater effectiveness? How developed is the exchange between women scholars and women activists? Is there a 'trickle down' effect from those chosen to attend conferences and rank-and-file members?

Electronic mail needs a similar assessment: what difference has it made to the organizing capacities of Arab women's organizations? How have they used it? According to Lamis Alshejini, women's use of Internet is lower in the Arab world than any other region.¹⁶ Government restrictions certainly play a role in some countries (eg Syria), but the argument of poverty is less convincing, since ownership of home computers among the urban middle classes in all Arab countries is quite high. In several Third World areas, computer connections have been used by women to carry out health or other types of service programs among rural women but, as far as we know, this hasn't happened yet in the Arab world.

Women scholars, in contrast, are using email extensively and to good effect. One example of productive use is the ListServ H-Gender/Middle East distributed by the Gender and Women Studies Institute at the American University of Cairo. Others are websites such as those of CAWTAR, 'Aman', 'Bunian', and networks such as Aysheh and NAD that offer bases of transnational communication between computer-literate women, as well as potential data sources. An example of how email connections between scholars can be creatively used is the 'thematic conversation' organized by Sharifa Zuhur and published in a recent *Al-Raida*.¹⁷

In conclusion, I want to emphasize three main points which the experience of editing this special issue have highlighted for me. One is the primary importance of the historical conjuncture in shaping the trajectory of women's movements in the Arab world – how they choose their aims, how they relate to the state and to their political environment, even their structures and methods. Given the current degree of political and economic crisis in the Arab region as a whole, we must expect that women's movements will have to pursue their struggle for 'gender democracy' in difficult conditions - external pressures and interventions, heightened political crisis, state repression or manipulation, and a growing economic inequality that can only reinforce gender conservatism, whether religious-based or not. Will new strategies emerge from within the current women's movement leadership – strategies such as closer cooperation between women's groups within the same country or across state borders, or to bridge the class gaps between elite and non-elite and minority women? Will women's movements manage to take a lead in confronting broader issues of inequality, human rights repressions, and the absence of representation; or will they stay within the (relatively) safe limits of past frameworks and formats?

Second, I am struck by the gap between the rich human and social interest of the histories of Arab women's movements, as conveyed through those fragments that have been recorded, and the paucity of historians to work through this history, to recover and analyze it. In contrast to a number of studies of 'women in Middle Eastern history' there has been strikingly little on the history of the Arab women's movements. It's as if one of the consequences of 'modernization' in the Arab world is to push people onwards and disconnect them from history. Yet this is to ignore the historic interest and richness of the early Arab women's movements, from the onset of 'modernity' with the arrival of missionaries, schools, and Western women travelers, and the beginning of a new phase in 'Arab feminism'.

Finally, I've become convinced that comparison between feminisms in the 'advanced' societies such as the US and those of the Arab region are not wholly irrelevant, culturally and historically. Globalization has had many effects that its promoters surely do not intend, for example revealing examples of religious reaction in societies that used to claim the epithets 'secular', 'tolerant', 'rational' and 'civilized'. With the neo-conservatives in the United States rolling back legislation around women's rights to choice, we see a situation that makes Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* neither futuristic nor surreal, but a likely prediction of a near future. The unfortunate conjuncture of a decline of American feminism with the emergence of neo-conservatism places women in America in a situation which, for all its surface dissimilarities, is not different to the point of non-comparability with that of women in Arab and Muslim countries. The struggle for gender equality is not having an easy time

anywhere. This should give new force to the idea of a global patriarchy, and subvert the ancient Occidental custom of assigning 'backwardness' to certain parts of the globe, particularly in association with the veil, or chador, or other body covering for women.

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ENDNOTES

1. "Women's Centers in the Arab World", *Al-Raida* vol XVII-XVIII, no 90/91, Summer/Fall 2000.
2. See Shahrzad Mojab, "Theorizing the Politics of 'Islamic Feminism'", *Feminist Review* no 69, Winter 2001.
3. See Temma Kaplan's use of 'female consciousness' in "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918", in N. Keohane, M. Rosaldo and B. Gelpi eds., *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
4. Maxine Molyneux, "Analyzing Women's Movements", reprinted in Molyneux, *Women's Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).
5. See Jean Makdisi, "The Mythology of Modernity: Women and Democracy in Lebanon" in Mai Yamani ed., *Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives* (London: Ithaca Press, 1996).
6. In the middle of civil war, women from all parts of Sudan and from refugee communities managed to hold a series of conferences in Kampala, reaffirming national unity and women's rights: see "Women's Rights in the Sudan: Agenda for the Future", Kampala March 11-15, 2002 (Kampala III).
7. See Fatima Sadiqi interview, pp. 91-92. But Saharawi women, who have been outstanding as refugee community leaders, are obviously not present among Moroccan women's organizations.
8. *Al-Raida*'s next issue will focus on non-Arab women in the Arab region.
9. When Palestinian women raised 'women's issues' within the Resistance movement male comrades would challenge them: "Have you come here to liberate Palestine or women?" (Jihan Helou, interview, Beirut, March 1982).
10. Rabea Naciri, this issue, p 22.
11. It is interesting to find women in state employment even where the political system does not allow their political participation. See country profiles of Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia.
12. For a comparative study of women's organizations across three Arab countries, see Laurie Brand, *Women, the State, and Political Liberalization: Middle Eastern and North African Experiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
13. Azza Sharara Beydoun, *Nissa' wa jami'al-lubnaniyat beyn insaf-al-dhati wa khidmat al-gheyr* (Beirut: Dar Al-Nahar, 2002). Reviewed in this issue, p 142.
14. Saliha Boudeffa, "Le Contexte de Crise et les Femmes en Algerie" paper submitted to an IWSAW workshop, July 2001, p 19.
15. In November 2002 the US State Department organized a workshop for Arab women in political campaigning: *Washington Post* Nov 4, 2002.
16. Alshejini, Lamees (1999) "Unveiling the Arab Woman's Voice through the Net" in Wendy Harcourt ed., *Women@internet: creating new cultures in cyberspace* (London: Zed Books). Reviewed in this issue, pp 145-146.
17. "Insiders/Outsiders, Emic/Etic Study of Women and Gender in the New Millennium", *Al-Raida* Vol XVII-XVIII, no 90/91, 2000, p 41.

Preparing the Way: Early Arab Women Feminist Writers

Bouthaina Shaaban*

The clear dividing line between a journalist and a writer in the West has always been blurred in the Arab world. Many Arab journals and papers were launched by writers and educators who considered journalism an extension of other forms of writing and who felt that they had an urgent social and political mission. We can consider them as precursors of the formal associations that, beginning with the Egyptian Women's Union in 1927, launched the women's movement in the Arab region.

Between 1892 and 1940, Arab women writers concentrated their efforts on printing their own journals, in which they published poetry, fiction, and criticism, as well as essays aimed at promoting women's role in society. Any assessment of Arab (or, for that matter, global) women's literature cannot be done without evaluating the Arab women's press, which was for half a century the major platform for Arab women writers. It is clear from letters of readers and correspondents that the women's press during that time constituted a central element in the Arab press. But the important role these journals have played during the first half of this century is not yet acknowledged. It is unfortunate that no proper archives

exist in the Arab world of this rich heritage, and no studies have appeared about it. It deserves introduction to Arab and Western readers alike.

In 1892, the Syrian, Hind Nawfal, started her first journal, *Al-Fatat* (*The Young Woman*), in Alexandria, Egypt, ushering in a flourishing era: there were more than 25 Arab feminist journals owned, edited, and published by women - all before the First World War. These editors stated in their editorials that their most important concern was women: women's literature, women's rights, and women's future. In her editorial to the first issue (November 20, 1892) of *Al-Fatat*, Hind Nawfal wrote: "*Al-Fatat* is the only journal for women in the East; it expresses their thoughts, discloses their inner minds, fights for their rights, searches for their literature and science, and takes pride in publishing the products of their pens." Editors of other journals urged women who are "attentive to the future and betterment of their sex to write so that their works may be read and become, in the meantime, a part of the literary heritage." These journals appeared in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and to a lesser extent, Baghdad. The editors displayed profound political knowledge, sensitivity to the sources of social problems, reliable economic sense, and sophisticated professional skills in the domains of publishing, marketing, and financial viability. To name just a few: *Anis al-Jalis*, owned, edited, and published by Alexandra Afernuh (Alexandria, 1898); *Shajarat al-Durr*, by Sa'dya Sa'd al-Din (Alexandria, 1901); *Al-Mara'a*, by Anisa Attallah (Egypt, 1901); *Al-*

Saada, by Rujina A'wad (Egypt, 1902); *Al-A'rus* by Mary A'jami (Damascus, 1910); *Al-Kitadir*, by Afifa Sa'ab (Lebanon, 1912); *Fatat al-Nil*, by Sara al-Mihaya (Cairo, 1913); and *Fatat Lubnan*, by Salima Abu Rashid (Lebanon, 1914).

Although regular coverage was given to the experience and achievements of Western women, all these journals stressed the necessity to learn from women's movements in the West without giving up what is positive in Arab culture and Muslim religion. (As far as women and Islam are concerned, studies often confirmed that there is nothing in the *Qur'an* that makes 'the veil' a required Islamic duty, and that polygamy is against the spirit and the actual wording of the *Qur'an*.)

A stream of articles that appeared in a number of these journals established an interesting link between the emergence of political movements for national independence and the awakening of a feminist consciousness in the Arab world, arguing that no country can be truly free so long as its women remain shackled (an important connection that Arab women in the next generation failed to stress). The point that feminist issues are national issues was made not only by women, but also by such prominent men as Adil Jamil Bayhani and George Niquila Baz. Women writers expressed real interest in national affairs and political issues, and gave no indication whatsoever that they were living on the periphery of political life. Suffice it to mention that the Arab Women's Union, with its clear pan-Arab vision, was formed in 1928, 17 years before the League of Arab States.

Some nationalists even started to see in the feminist writings of this era a key for national reform. The well-known nationalist lawyer Habib Faris wrote to *Fatat Lubnan* in 1914: "National reform could be achieved once the government decides to support women writers, who are the best qualified to sow the seeds of just and righteous principles among the people. The writings of women in newspapers and journals are more compelling and more effective in bringing about reform than any other force."

Yet several women writers dealt with feminist issues that we are still, almost a century later, trying to resolve. Labiba Shamti'n wrote in 1898: "I can't see how a woman writer or poet could be of any harm to her husband and children. In fact, I see the exact opposite: her knowledge and education will reflect positively on her family and children.... Neither male art nor creativity has ever been considered as a misfortune to the family, or an impediment to the love and care a father may bestow upon his children. The man who sees in a learned woman his rival is incompetent; he who believes that his knowledge is sufficient is mean, and the man who believes that

woman's creativity harms him or her is ignorant."

Articles about the position of European, American, Chinese, Indonesian, and Indian women appeared regularly in these journals, as well as biographies of great women, both European and Arab. The accounts of non-Arab women, in general, never conveyed the slightest feeling of prejudice against Western women or their style of life. Most of these articles stressed the necessity to benefit from the experiences of other women without losing sight of Arab history, culture, and religion. In addition, the journals published accurate social studies about the status of rural women, of employed women, of educated women, and of housewives. These studies often pointed to the source of social ills that kept women on the margin of life, and called for true reform. Quite a few of these articles stressed that if differences between the sexes were to be examined accurately, we would find that the results are in women's favor. They argued that women surpass men in sensitivity, kindness, sympathy, and deep thought, because women are the source of life and the origin of everything valuable in it. But most of the articles stressed that the point is not to prove the superiority of women over men (and by so doing commit the same mistake men have committed for centuries); rather, such arguments try to prove that what others used to call weakness in women's character is, in fact, true strength and a solid basis for social structure.

The journals also reported on the feminist societies that began to appear in all quarters of the Arab world, and on news of international women's conferences. Little record remains of these societies and activities, and their true history has still not been written. But we cannot doubt the closeness of the connection between women's writing and the beginnings of women's organizing. Whether the same women were involved in both, what kinds of associations were formed, what were their aims, memberships, structures and modes of operation are topics that call for research. We also know little about connections between women's charitable associations, which began to appear towards the end of the 19th century, and associations calling for women's rights.

In addition to feminist networks that were set up in Cairo, Alexandria, Damascus, Beirut, and Baghdad, women journalists corresponded with the organization 'Women and Peace', which called upon women in all corners of the globe to use their powers against the escalation of tension and the production of weapons. They argued that women are the first, and the worst, hurt by war. These journals exerted a real effort to win Arab women to the cause of peace. No less noteworthy is the fact that, even in this early period, an aim of Arab women writers was to subvert Western stereotypes of Arab

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women, within a framework of closer ties with Western feminists.

In 1893 Hana Kasbani Kurani (1870-1898) attended an international women's conference in Chicago held to exchange opinions about international women's movements. At the end of the conference she gave an address in English in which she tried to highlight some of the merits of Eastern women in opposition to inveterate stereotypes.¹ After the conference she spent three years in the United States, touring New York, Boston, and Brooklyn addressing American audiences in English while wearing the Syrian national dress in an audacious effort to help American audiences unlearn what they had learnt about Syrian women. Unfortunately she caught tuberculosis and was advised by doctors to go back to Lebanon for her treatment. As soon as she returned to Mount Lebanon she gave an address in which she explored the influence of modernity on the East. She died soon afterwards at the age of 29. Her three novels and all the lectures she gave in the US were burnt "in fear of transmitting the germs of the disease to others".

Hana Kurani was not the only Arab woman at that time engaged in a dialogue with women in the West. There was also Zaynab Fawaz (from Lebanon), who wanted to attend the 1893 conference in Chicago but was unable to send a copy of her book, *Scattered Pearls in Women's Quarters*, in which she documented the lives of 456 women from both East and West, to Berta Onori Palmer, the head of the Women's section in the Chicago exhibition. But when the conference called on women to confine their activities to 'feminine domains' Zaynab Fawaz was furious, and dispatched a letter to the conference expressing her strong objections to this call stressing that the lives of both men and women would be impoverished if women's duties were restricted to family and children. Her letters to the conference, in which she insisted that women should participate in all spheres of life, were published in *Al-Nil* newspaper in Egypt. Besides attending women's international conferences which took place in the US, London and Paris,² Arab women tried to reach an international audience and build bridges with Western women through the journals they published. In these they kept their readers well informed of the progress women were making all over the world, as well as of the obstacles which still persist in their way. American women were considered pioneers in women's liberation, and their achievements were often cited with pride to

give examples to Arab women, who were invited to take their American sisters as role models. Quite a few Arab women's journals, for example *Anis al-Jalis*, published by Alexandra Aferno, appointed correspondents in many parts of the world, to send reports on the position of women there, and publish the journal there as a way of introducing Arab women to the West. After a visit by *Anis al-Jalis*'s editor to Europe, she was invited to publish a feminist journal in French aimed at informing readers about the status of women in the East. Aferno responded, "Although many articles in the journal speak about the affairs of Eastern women, and are translated and published in European magazines, this is perhaps not enough. I have therefore decided to publish a journal which includes articles that interest both Eastern and Western people". She applauded the support of men of letters, and invited Arab writers to show the same enthusiasm for *Anis al-Jalis*. We also know that the Women's Union in Egypt began in 1936 publishing the journal *Egyptienne* which was published in French and directed towards an European audience, and carried Egyptian women's opinions on national issues.

Another early writer, Afifeh Karam, deputy editor of *Al-Huda Newspapers* in New York, took a year off in 1906 in order to write a novel in which she dwelt on the relation between Eastern and Western women. As an Arab woman living in New York she could see how many misconceptions, particularly those about women, traveled back and forth between East and West, with some people having a vested interest in such traffic. Her novel *Badia Wa Fouad*, published by the *Al-Huda* press, was perhaps the first novel in women's literature to discuss international feminism and its internal cultural variations. In Afifeh Karam's view, there was no contradiction between Eastern and Western feminism.

Yet in the context of struggle between Western hegemony over the Arab region and resistance to that hegemony, such contradictions emerged and became ever more politicized. In her *Images of Women*, Sarah Graham-Brown studies the portrayal of women

in photography in the Middle East from 1860 to 1950.³ In this study she argues that three themes are intertwined in the development of Western photographic imagery of women in the Middle East. "The first reflects the fact that the invention of photography coincided with a period of European imperialism on a global scale. The second is the particular and uneven relationship between European cultures and those of the

Middle East, embodied in what has become known as Orientalism. The third theme is the tension between the Orientalist images of women in the Middle East and changing attitudes to women's social, cultural and economic role in Europe. Underlying all themes are unequal power relationships: between colonizer and colonized, the creators of Orientalist fantasies and their subjects, male and female".⁴ But more often than not women of the Middle East were regarded as exotic sexual objects, and more often than not 'the Oriental woman' was taken "to represent the Orient itself or its essential characteristics".⁵ Graham-Brown highlights a very interesting contrast between, on the one hand, the invisibility of women in the Orient and the assumption that they are locked away behind barriers of the veil and seclusion, and on the other women's sexual exposure in another version of the Orient. In 'Orientalist' paintings and photographs, women appear naked in scenes of the harem and in the hamam (public bath).⁶ In America, however, the Orient, as Holly Edwards argues, "provided a therapeutic foil whereby America could name its accomplishments and its problems, and, in the process, construct a flattering self-image."⁷ While the United States had no imperialist agenda for the Middle East in the 19th century, Islam "represented to the founders so false a religion that it vied with Roman Catholicism as the ultimate in anti-Christianities."⁸ It is also significant to remember that in the 1780s and 1790s Americans famously warred against the Islamic Orient, and many works followed in the aftermath such as *The Algerine Spy* (1787) that recited "many of the negative stereotypes about the Islamic Oriental but also fantasized the capacity of the democratic principles to entertain the world and then to lead it to decency. The characters of these stories began as monsters but evolved through exposure to American institutions, among them the stable family, into ardent republicans. These works, published in abundance throughout the early nineteenth century, were major first steps in creating Islam's place in American culture as an icon of terror."⁹ Islam still exists in the minds of most Americans as an icon of terror and Muslim women as the icons of the oppressed and the humiliated against the image of American women, the privileged, free and equal citizens of the republic.

It is self-evident of course that neither the West nor the East, either then or today, has accorded women the status they deserve, yet both East and West claim that their

women are by far better off than women on the other side. Much of the hostile stereotyping sustained by popular media in the West rests on a false idea of Arab women's exclusion from the public sphere, itself based in an exaggeration of the boundary between 'public' and 'domestic'. To my knowledge the only woman who has challenged this impaired vision is an Arab woman from Egypt, Nabawiyya Musa, in her pioneering treatise *Al-Mara'a wa al-'Amal* (*Woman and Labour*), published in 1920 in Egypt. In this treatise she presented an exciting argument against what amounted to a cultural blackmailing of women by Farid Wagdi, who notoriously opposed her strong contention that women should go out to work. He defined woman as "a noble creature created to reproduce and multiply the human race, a function in which man cannot compete", and further justified his position by describing "scenes in America's factories that broke his heart - women working inside factories in front of huge cauldrons, sweating and toiling for their daily bread". In a brilliant response, Musa wondered how Wagdi managed to be aware of those

conditions in America while he remained blind to worse conditions in his own country. She wrote this rare and precious piece highlighting what is still being done to women today:

How did he close his eyes and never see the Egyptian woman while she suffered and groaned carrying her heavy burden of fruits and vegetables which she has to sell for a living, while she makes her way in winding lanes and is exposed to the insults of men? How can he ignore those Egyptian Muslim women who make a living washing clothes for families and for the British and Egyptian armies? These women are not only exposed to a harsh life, but they have no guarantee that their honor will be safe... Hasn't His Excellency seen the woman construction worker who climbs on scaffolds carrying a heavy load of mud and bricks? Hasn't he seen the maidservants who, aside from their arduous tasks, are subject to the lusts of foreign men? Our writer closed his eyes to all these sights, and could only see the fate of the American woman laborer... he forgot a simple fact about human nature, that people tend to be blind to what they are accustomed to.

Women are truly suffering in their toil in Egypt. We do not feel it, whereas we are sensitive to what befalls American women, who in fact suffer less, but retain our attention because it is strange to see them work in factories.

... an aim of Arab women writers was to subvert Western stereotypes of Arab women ...

... the Arab women's union, with its clear pan-Arab vision, was formed in 1928, 17 years before the League of Arab States.

The Egyptian woman is not barred from mean, arduous jobs, which proves that women are forced to work when in need to make a living because we have not trained them for more comfortable work. Women are forced to accept these physically demanding tasks, which do not require any education. In that they are equal with the American woman worker. Our women are only barred from professions that require experience and knowledge, such as management, editorial jobs, scientific institutes, medicine, high governmental positions and law. Forcing them out of these job opportunities leaves them with no other resort. Is there justice in this? Can any of those who stand in her way claim that they seek women's comfort and security?¹⁰

Eighty years after Nabawiyya Musa, the West still refers to women in the East as the ultimately oppressed and deprived of all rights, and the East refers to women in the West as victims of pornography and sexual libertinism. For women in both East and West what this argument suggests is that they should preserve their traditions because they are ultimately less oppressive than what women have to put up with in other cultures. Carrying this argument to its extreme limits results in the tragic scene of Jordanian women demonstrating against a Parliamentary draft law for striking out the article on honor killings from the Jordanian law. According to the law of honor killing a man may kill his kinswoman if suspected of adultery or disgraceful sexual behavior and get only six months imprisonment; much of the time they are not served at all. On the other hand despite all the injustices still affecting the lives of Western women, the

West presents its women to the East as free and equal, whose example can only be liberating to women in the East. This was never more clear than during the 1st Gulf War when the presence of a few American women combatants in Saudi Arabia was hailed in the American press as having a magical effect on Saudi women who led a demonstration and drove their cars in defiance of the Saudi law that prohibits them to drive. No mention was made of the fact that in all neighboring Muslim countries women have been driving their cars for years, or that the Saudi women who demonstrated were mostly university professors.

Despite all the big talk both in East and West, 70% of the poorest people in the world are women and 70% of illiterates in the world are women. Hence, women desperately need to try and change the nature of the political system which is more often than not, as author Upaddhyay said, "centered around self-evaluation rather than societal development and which encourages politicians to put their party and the selves before the state", and certainly before women.¹¹ Most significant of all, women should not be blackmailed to believe that just because they are working in the public sphere they have become equals. Needless to say that not all men working in the public sphere are equal. Women from both East and West have to ask the question: who controls the tools of producing wealth and power and who shapes events and defines them for the entire world? From the perspective of a Middle Eastern woman, the answer to these questions is the rich, the men, the West and the government.

ENDNOTES

1. See George Kallas, [Women's Intellectual Movement in the Renaissance, 1849-1928](#) (Arabic) (Dar al Jil, Beirut).
2. For example, they attended the Conference of the Italian Society for Peace convened in Paris 1902, and the Egyptian women chose princess Alexandra Khuri Aferno as their representative. They also attended the conference on Women Volunteers for Training and Education, convened at the University of Toronto, Canada and the International Women's Conference convened in Paris in 1926, with Farida Aqal representing Lebanese women's societies.
3. Sarah Graham-Brown , [Images of Women](#), (London: Quartet Books, 1988).
4. Ibid., p 4.
5. Ibid., p 7.
6. Ibid., p 10.
7. Holly Edwards "A Million and One Nights: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930" H. Edwards ed., [Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America, 1870-1930](#). (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p 20.
8. Brian T. Allen: 'The Garments of Instruction from the Wardrobe of Pleasure: American Orientalist Painting in the 1870s and 1880s" in [Noble Dreams](#), p 60.
9. Ibid. pp 60-61.
10. Mona Mikhail ed., [Images of Arab Women: Fact and Fiction](#), (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1979), pp, 32-33.
11. R. K. Upadhyay, "Women in the 21st Century, Problems and Challenges" in Upadhyay ed. [Women in the 21st Century, Problems and Challenges](#), (New Delhi: Harnam Publications, 1996), p i.

An Intelligent Man's Guide to Modern Arab Feminism

Fawwaz Traboulsi*

The following pages are an attempt at presenting a brief introduction and periodization of the modern feminist movement in the Arab world. It takes the form of a guide because in the limited space allowed it can only provide a certain number of essential personalities, events, and currents of opinion.

The Nahdah

The woman's question was central to the problematic of the Nahdah, the Arab cultural renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century. The pioneers of the Nahdah regarded women's inferior status as the basic cause for the backwardness of the Arab and Islamic societies, and were unanimous in affirming that there will be no renaissance for Arabs and Muslims without the renaissance of Arab women. Bustani, Tahtawi, Afghani, Abdu, Qasim Amin, Tahir Haddad and others shared the belief that the renaissance of women will be achieved mainly through education. This is the gist of the famous address by *Mu'allim* Butrus al-Bustani on the "Education of Women" in the 1860's. But the men of the Nahdah mostly envisaged an educated bourgeois or aristocratic woman confined to her home,

whose education was mainly invested in educating her children.

One major break from this tradition is to be found, very early on, in the writings of Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (1804-1887), a Maronite Lebanese converted to Islam. Al-Shidyaq's *Al-Saq 'Ala-l-Saq* (Paris, 1855), which has been acclaimed as a founding text in Arabic modernity, was written in praise of women and the Arabic language. More than this, the author declares that while writing his book, it was "as if I myself had become a woman". In contrast to the rest of the Nahdah pioneers, who emphasized education, al-Shidyaq considered work as the main motor of the Arab renaissance. He urged the right of women to work; attacked segregation between men and women because it treats woman as a sexual object, called for the equal right of women to divorce, and critiqued the prevalent double standards in dealing with women's infidelity. The radical novelty of al-Shidyaq resides in his vision that the repression of woman's instincts was the basis of male domination, and so defended woman's equal right to sexual pleasure. Not content with calling for formal equality between the sexes, he looked into the consequences of social inequality for women. In his moving pages of observations on the England of the Industrial Revolution, al-Shidyaq discusses prostitution not only as a moral question but also as a consequence of poverty

Qasim Amin (1863-1908) is generally credited with the first work in Arabic devoted to the liberation of women.

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In his *Tahrir al-Mar'ah* (*The Liberation of Woman*, 1899), followed a year later by *Al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah* (*The New Woman*, 1900), Amin rejected the notion of woman as an inferior, and called for measures to realize gender equality. But, in direct contrast to al-Shidyah, he was a puritan concerning relations between the sexes. Although he attacked polygamy as an impediment to the progress of women and society, he nevertheless rejected sexual pleasure, and approved of the veil (the head cover) though opposing the Niqab and the Burqu'. The anonymity imposed by the two latter forms of veiling, he argued, would encourage licentious behavior.

The Beginnings

The inter-war period was a period of gestation for modern Arab feminism in more than one sense. Great strides were made in the battle for education. As early as 1928, Egyptian Universities had opened their gates to girls. The immediate results were wider access for women to administrative posts and, with the development of industrialization during WWI and its aftermath, their increased presence in the labor force.

Equality of Rights was no more a slogan. A new era of women's militancy started. In 1920, Egyptian women workers imposed the first legislation on working hours for women. Nabawiyyah Musa (Egypt) was among the many pioneers in the struggle for working women's rights.

This same period witnessed the proliferation of a 'women's press', especially in Egypt and Lebanon: Hind Nawfal's *Al-Fatat* (November 1892), Rosa Antoun's *Majallat al-Sayyidat wa-l-Fatayat* (1903-), Mustafa 'Abd-al-Raziq's *Al-Sufur*, (1915-), Nabawiyyah Musa's *Tarqiyat al-Fatat* (1923-), and Munirah Thabit's *Al-Amal* (1925-).

But the issues that dominated the best part of that period were the veil and gender segregation. "Unveiling or death!" was the slogan launched by the Iraqi poet Ahmad Sudqi al-Zahhawi in a founding article, "Evils of the Veil" (1908), in which he accused male-female segregation of encouraging pederasty. In another article, "In Defense of Women", a year later, he argues that freedom is a gift that both men and women share, and derides the argument about man's superiority being based on his physical strength. Animals are stronger than men, should they have superior rights over them? Al-Zahhawi

opposed polygamy and called for women's equal right to divorce, based on a simple argument: if women are given the right according to *shari'a* to approve their marriage, how can they be deprived of any say in its dissolution? Al-Zahhawi goes even further in his critique, evoking the inequality inherent in the Islamic promise of Heaven, in which men are promised the famous seductive houris (700 to 70,000 of them), whereas women are promised only their husbands. AL-Zahhawi's writings on the 'woman question' provoked demonstrations against him in the streets of Baghdad, and the city's Ottoman wali ultimately dismissed the poet from his teaching post at the Law School.

Mansour Fahmi (1886-1959) dealt with the question of the veil from a totally different angle. In his doctoral thesis entitled "La condition de la femme dans la tradition et l'évolution de l'Islamisme" (Paris, 1913) he presents ample philological and historic evidence to prove that neither in pre-Islam nor in the Prophet Muhammad's time, did there exist a piece of cloth designed to hide women's faces from men. Among the evidence cited by Fahmi is that the *hijab* in *ayah* 52 of *Surat al-Ahzab* refers to a cloth partition inside the tent, while the *jilbab* in *ayah* 59 (of *Al-Ahzab* also) refers to a shawl for the body. Fahmi was bitterly attacked in his homeland Egypt, and forced to renounce his theory. His dissertation remains untranslated into Arabic.

Zaynab Fawwaz Al-'Amili (1860-1914), Lebanese author of a book relating the lives of 455 Arab women who played important roles in their societies (1893), was probably the first Arab-Muslim woman to criticize the veil. She advocated celibacy as a form of resistance to polygamy. Long before Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, Zaynab Fawwaz held women responsible for their inferior status, blaming them for "seeing themselves and their lives from the perspectives and opinions of men...so that they came to recognize themselves only through them".

Nazirah Zayn al-Din (1908-1975) was one of first Syrian-Lebanese women to unveil. She advocated complete equality between men and women, defended women's right to vote and participate in government, and called for interpretation (*ijtihad*) in matters of religion. In her book *Al-Sufur wa-l-Hijab* (Unveiling and Veiling, 1928), she argues that it is decidedly not a piece of cloth that will guarantee women's chastity. Her book came out at a time of bitter polemics raging in Syria between

Hijabiyyin and *Sufuriyyin*, and it added fuel to the fire. A whole group of women pioneers rallied to her defence: Hafni Nasif, Nazik al-'Abid, Huda Sha'rawi, Laure Thabit, Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyah, Marie 'Ajami, May Ziadeh, Ibtihaj Qaddura, Mariana Marrash, Labibah al-Hashim, Salma Sayigh, Habbuba Haddad, Hind Nawfal, and others. Many men also defended Nazirah: sheikhs 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, Tahir al-Nafsani, Abi Yusuf 'Abd al-Quddus, as well as laymen such as historians Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, the Belgian Jesuit Père Henri Lammens and Muhammad Jamil Bayhum, the poet Khalil Mutran, the writer Amin al-Rihani, the philosopher Felix Faris, and others.

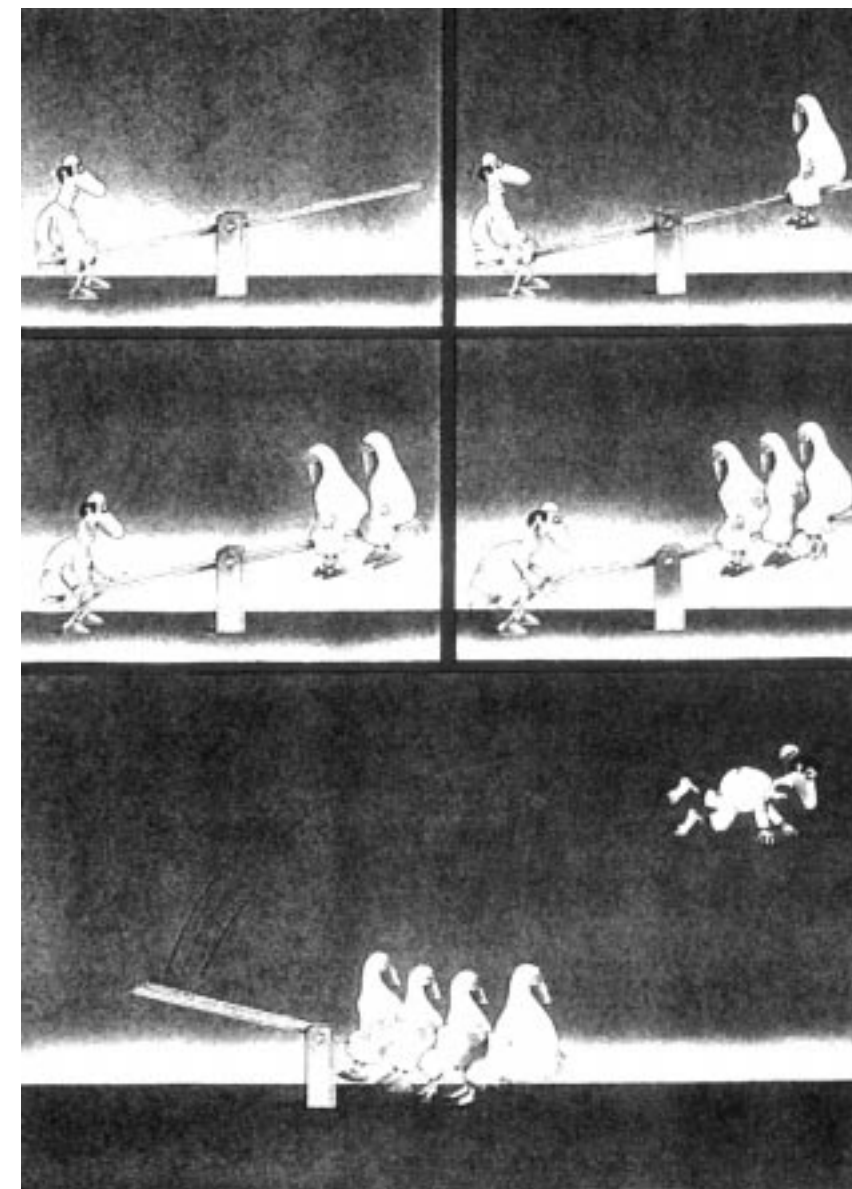
This period was also one of remarkable women in their own right. May Ziadeh, writer, animated a famous literary salon in Cairo during the years 1915-1916. She carried on an unhappy love affair with the famous writer 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad, that ultimately broke up due to al-'Aqqad's conservative position on women. Back in her native Lebanon, this rebellious, eccentric woman was unjustly accused of madness by relatives eager to put their hands on her property, and was confined to an asylum. Released after a number of years, she died alone in Egypt. Her only refuge was an obsessive correspondence and platonic love affair with Jibran Khalil Jibran, author of *The Prophet*.

Huda Sha'rawi (1879-1947) was one of the first women to unveil in Egypt, but she is mainly remembered for her work in organizing women. In 1923, she created the first woman's organization in Egypt, the Egyptian Woman's Union, which defended Arab and Muslim women's rights in international congresses. In 1940, Huda Sha'rawi created the first pan-Arab women's organization.

Arab Feminism After World War II

During this period a curious dialectic emerged between women's liberation and national liberation movements. Many women had participated in the struggle for independence from their early days. In Egypt in 1919 women

shed the veil as they joined mass demonstrations against the colonial power. In the 1930s the women of Jaffa (Palestine) appealed to the General Islamic Congress asking for the right to fight alongside men against Zionism and imperialism. After independence, many women shed the veil, now that the colonizer was gone and "we are among ourselves." Nevertheless, national liberation could not easily be harnessed to serve women's liberation; after independence priority was given to 'national goals' at women's expense. They were asked to return home and bring up their children, as in a current expression used in the Algerian case. Yet, the modernizing post-independence regimes accounted for much of the achievements for women.



Credit: Cover of Dossier 21, Women Living Under Muslim Laws

Transformations and Reforms

Large-scale progress was achieved in the access of women to education through policies designed to provide free schooling for all. At the same time, severe restrictions were imposed on the most flagrant forms of discrimination against women. Egypt which had abolished polygamy, forced marriages and repudiation as early as 1925, banned clitoridectomy in 1956. Large reforms were enacted in the personal status of women. In Algeria, the minimum age for marriage was fixed at 16 for girls and 18 for boys (1963). Iraq adopted the Ja'fari (Shi'ite) code establishing equality in inheritance between men and women. Elsewhere, courts tried to dissuade men from taking a second wife, and women frequently obtained the right of guardianship over children in cases of divorce.

Advanced secular family codes were adopted, especially in Tunisia and Democratic Yemen. In Yemen, the Family Code of 1973 abolished the financially exorbitant dowry, established monogamy, and granted women equal right to divorce.

Starting with Lebanon in 1952 and Egypt in 1956, women were granted minimum political rights, such as the right to vote and be elected to legislative bodies.

The New Feminists

A new breed of feminists grew out of the limits of post-independence achievements, and from women's disappointments with the Arab liberation movements as far as women's rights were concerned, especially after the 1967 war with Israel. New approaches now cover all aspects of the 'woman question', based on research (in medicine, psychology, law, sociology, history, anthropology...), and including topics such as clitoridectomy, prostitution, sexual aggression, the problems of 'ayb' (shame), honor and dishonor, pre-marital sex, contraception, marriage, divorce, problems of women at work, discrimination in law, domestic work, etc.

In a way, these new feminists revived al-Shidyay's problematic of the repression of women's sexuality as the basis of man's control over women. For example, Nawal Saadawi, Egyptian medical doctor, feminist and political activist, locates the 'woman question' in what she calls the patriarchal class structure. Though she relates women's liberation to the wider movement for national and social liberation, she does not believe that the victory of the latter would be a sufficient condition for women to win equal rights and equality of status. For this, she calls upon women to become a strong political force and impose their rights by themselves. In her early writings, Saadawi distinguished between the priorities of Western

feminism and those of Arab feminism, but she moved later to a radical Westernized feminist position which pitted women against men.

Fatima Mernissi, sociologist (Morocco) and well-known author¹ feminized the argument that the manipulation of the past is a means of political control, and applied it to the control exercised by men over women. She provides a feminist reading of the Islam of the Prophet Muhammad in which she reveals a struggle between God's new message of equality between all believers (including equality between men and women) and the ancient norms of tribal society based on abduction, raids and slavery. At the same time, she evokes fear of the modern world as the basis for male domination in the Arab/Muslim world, and relates the liberation of women to the problematic of democracy versus authoritarianism

A Literature of Freedom

Alongside the new feminists in the medical and social sciences, a new generation of Arab feminist writers emerged. Layla Baalbaki and Etel Adnan (Lebanon), Ghadah al-Samman (Syria), Nazik al-Mala'ikah and Daisy al-Amir (Iraq), Samirah Azzam and Fadwa Tuqan (Palestine) to name but a few. Their writings expressed not only freedom and rebellion against the old modes of literary expression, but also freedom and rebellion as an outlook on life.

Baalbaki's *Ana Ahya (I Live)*, though little talked of today, still stands as a courageous novel on the emergence of woman-as-an-individual in the Beirut of the 'golden sixties'. Ghadah al-Samman, describing the unbearable condition of Arab women and the uncertain fate she faces, transcends national boundaries to join all the oppressed of the world:

Despite my white flesh, I am a negro woman, because I am an Arab woman. Victim of the *wa'd* [buried alive] under the sands of the *jahiliyyah* desert, I am now the victim of the new *wa'd*, buried under inherited disdain. I am not looking for love, I am only looking for a lonely and suffering woman like myself, to hold her hand while both of us deliver among the thorns of the field, begetting children for the tribe, children who will soon be taught to hate us.

Etel Adnan's unique rage in *The Arab Apocalypse* (1980) announces catastrophes to come. Not surprisingly she was to be one of the first writers to take the Lebanese civil war as a literary subject (*Sitt Marie Rose*, 1978 and 1982). But, more importantly, Adnan would soon develop a style in which the act of writing itself becomes fem-

inine.² With Etel Adnan, women writers have liberated themselves of the burden of proving themselves capable of producing literature.

The Backlash

The 'eighties brought the 'woman question' back to 'square one'. Women's rights were at the center of the fundamentalist backlash against the distorted modernism of the last quarter century. The same topics evoked by the pioneers are again on the agenda: the veil, segregation, banning women from work (what a tragically absurd solution to the problem of unemployment!), the political and legal equality of women, polygamy, etc.

Tragically, women's rights were, and still are, the first concessions Arab regimes are willing to make to fundamentalist pressures. Jacques Berque said it so well when he spoke of "woman as the last vestige of man's sovereignty" in the Arab-Muslim world. This is what made them ideal scapegoats for the frustrations and problems of society. Alienated, repressed and frustrated in their national and social aspirations, troubled in their identity, facing an unknown future in an increasingly globalized world, how easy it has become for male society to take it out on women in order to reaffirm male superiority. How futile and misplaced are these symbolic acts, hopelessly designed to cover up our incapacity



to face up to the real challenges, changes and problems of the post-modern world.

More than six decades ago, Nazirah Zayn al-Din, addressed this same issue of scapegoating in her reply to her male critics:

You have not developed with time. Time has folded your flags and you have squandered your ancestors' heritage. Do you want, now, to unfurl your flags over your women's faces, taking your women as a substitute kingdom for the kingdoms you have lost?³

ENDNOTES

1. *Sex, Ideology and Islam* (1983), *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1987), *The Political Harem* (1987), *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1991), *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World* (1994).
2. *The Spring Flowers Own: and The Manifestations of the Voyage* (1990), *Of Cities and Women* (1993), *Paris, When It's Naked* (1993).
3. *Al-Fatât wa-l-Shuyûkh*, 1929, vol. 1, p. 40).

The Women's Movement in the Maghreb: with emphasis on Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria

Rabéa Naciri*

Translated from French by Lynn Maalouf.

Women in the Maghreb and the Arab world at large are usually represented as inferior, submissive and dependent, living in a male-dominated, patriarchal society. Apart from the fact that these women have in fact never been fully subservient, their experiences with patriarchal society vary according to their social background, their educational level, activities and professional status. They have always resorted to whatever means they had to resist their subordination. The feminist movement now emerging on the Maghrebi political and social scene constitutes a modern form of this resistance, and is the inheritor of an ancient tradition of opposition of Maghrebi women to all forms of oppression.

Since the independence of Morocco (1956), Tunisia (1957) and Algeria (1962), deep-seated changes have taken place in these countries, transforming their social and family structures as well as the relationship between man and woman. Resistance to change, however, remains strong, with both men and women trying to save an overvalued and mystified tradition of a past gone forever.

While in the wake of independence the number of educated women in the Maghreb was slight, women now make up 4 out of 10 university students in all three

countries. Despite differences between these three countries, education is everywhere strongly valorized by professional activity, whether at the level of the importance of women's activity or with regard to the fields of their employment. The spectacular recent increase in women's demand for work highlights the magnitude of the ongoing changes.

In all three countries, the average age of women at first marriage is currently 26 in Morocco, 27 in Algeria and 29 in Tunisia. Moreover, a woman's permanent celibacy is no longer perceived as abnormal or shameful. Women in executive positions live on their own and are perfectly integrated socially, even though marriage remains a quasi-universal practice and widely valued institution.

Women also have fewer children than in the past. The use of contraceptives is expanding even in the countryside, and the ideal family model is no longer the patriarchal 'extended' family, but a smaller 'nuclear' family centered on the couple and their children.

These changes slowly introduced others in social and family practices: for example, when a baby girl is born, it is no longer perceived as a catastrophe, and families tend to treat daughters and sons equally, whether as to education or as to leisure occupations. Several studies conducted in Morocco have shown that where there are constraints such as extreme poverty, or remoteness from educational institutions, parents may give priority to

sons, but in the absence of such constraints they usually treat their children equally.

The Maghrebi states have not acknowledged these social and economic changes however. Since their respective independences, political leaders have generally adopted policies that seek to transform their societies through education and women's activism. But at the same time, they have done all they can to curb the impact of these changes. The strategies developed differ, but they generally tend to maintain male privilege and traditional family structures.

Among the means used to this end, family law has resisted social changes and the women's movements, both in Morocco and in Algeria. The situation in Tunisia is quite exceptional: the Tunisian personal status code is one of the most egalitarian in the region, or in the Arab world.

This tendency to curb ongoing transformations by not legitimizing them, and by resorting almost systematically to religion and forms of social and political control, has combined with dire economic conditions to deepen the crisis all three countries are suffering from.

It was in this context that the current movement of Maghrebi women emerged, simultaneously in the three countries, around the mid-1980s. This movement is the combined result of: i) social disruptions that impacted women's social-economic status; ii) women's reaction to the incoherencies and contradictions of public policies, and to the inferior status they are locked into within their families and at the lower end of the professional scale; and iii) their exclusion from the spheres of public and political decision-making.

A growing awareness of women's contribution to economy and society, the dissemination of feminist values at the international level, through the Women's International Year (1975), and the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), favored the emergence of this movement as organized groups in all three countries.

But this birth is also the result of a long maturation, started well before independence, that gradually consolidated itself to become the privileged product of social and political changes. The Maghrebi feminist movement is a new actor, with a political and social project that is coherent and ambitious, aiming to reestablish women's rights and dignity, and thereby bring about profound changes in their respective societies. Women's struggle for their emancipation has accompanied the main political and social changes that have taken place in the region since the beginning of the 20th century. They bear witness to the changes of the past few decades,

despite the appearance of stagnation that these three countries may currently give.

I. Women, Colonialism and Liberation Movements

One of the commonalities between the three countries of the central Maghreb (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) is that all three were colonized by France. Algeria's occupation lasted longest and was the most painful. French colonization had multiple and profound effects, albeit in different degrees, on the three countries and on the status of women.

The An-Nahda Movement

As in the Middle East (especially Egypt and Bilad ash-Sham), contact with the colonizers was a shock that, among other effects, made Maghrebi intellectuals (educated in Europe or the Middle East), demand the renovation of Islamic thought and the reform of society. Women's status was part of a debate that started in the 1830s and 1840s. Indeed, several An-Nahda thinkers in the Maghreb, influenced by the reformist ideology of the Middle East, started calling for the education of girls.

The 'Ulamas opposed this reformist trend, claiming that French education in North Africa was contrary to Islam and would lead to a loss of identity through acculturation. According to them, this education was against God and the Nation,¹ and it was this that motivated 'Ulamas such as Ben Badis in Algeria, Allal El-Fassi in Morocco, and Tahar Haddad in Tunisia, as well as nationalists, to establish free Islamic education. At these free schools, they had no choice but to set a good example and send their daughters; but this education had to take place in an Arabic and Islamic framework, and had to take care not to misdirect girls away from their 'natural' vocation, ie. fulfilling their reproductive and family role.

Having experienced another vision of the world, educated young men belonging to the better-off urban strata and the bourgeoisie, started calling for the right of girls - their future wives² - to education. The marriage market forced parents to adapt to this new situation, and the ignorance of women started being perceived as dangerous, since intellectuals were marrying educated foreign women.

The mobilization of certain 'Ulamas in favor of education for girls, its adoption by the nationalist movements in all three countries, and the pressure from intellectuals, removed the last resistance to girls' education. Well before independence, the three countries bet on educa-

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tion as a means to accelerate national liberation, and economic and social development. Priority was given to the education of boys, but the education of girls, despite some resistance (especially strong in Morocco), was adopted by the three nationalist movements.³

The Limits of Masculine Reformism

The history of the Maghreb countries teaches us that women chose their communal identity to fight colonialism, even though they had to suffer heightened control over their freedom of movement. Veiled and hidden from the eyes of Christian colonizers, to whom the 'Muslim woman' was an object of curiosity and fantasy, Maghrebi women played both direct and indirect roles in their countries' independence struggles. They had to live the conflict between the identity of colonized people and that of subordinate women, in the hope that independence would be as beneficial to them as to men.

The reformists' commitment to education for girls soon showed its limits. Indeed, according to them, education had to give priority to women's domestic role, and the main aim of education was to improve this role. But even though quantitatively and qualitatively limited, the education of women started having effects that went beyond the strict limits set by the patriarchal reformists. Women of the urban elites wanted to make their voices heard, and quit the protective, paternalistic isolation in which the male reformists wanted to keep them. These dissident voices were those of women who had the same cultural resources as men but, because they were women, had become aware of the conditions of women in their countries. Isolated in the beginning, these voices grew more confident as they turned to new resources, and particularly as they had made an active contribution to their countries' national liberation movements.

In Morocco, the women's section of the Istiqlal party (the main party calling for independence), the Union of Moroccan Women (formed by the Communist party in 1944), and the Association of the Sisters of Purity (*Jam'iyyat Ikhawat al-Safa*), belonging to the Party of Democracy and Independence (PDI, 1946), were the first forms of women's organization in that period, marked by the rise of calls for independence. These organizations all gave a priority to the national struggle, or to charity. The Sisters of Purity were an exception, since they raised problems related to the personal status code, such as early marriage, dowry, divorce and polygamy.

As in Morocco, the Communist party in Algeria created the Union of Algerian Women (UFA) in 1943, made up predominantly of European women. From 1945, as the independence struggle got fiercer, the nationalist parties

started encouraging women to join their ranks. To this end, awareness cells were created for the sole purpose of mobilizing women for the struggle against colonialism. This mobilization appealed to women as holding their countries' future in their hands, but the question of their status was never raised.

In Tunisia, thanks to the powerful reformist movement led by Tahar Haddad⁴ and sheikh Ben Achour, the status of women was raised very early on (in the 1930s) as a necessary condition for the modernization of the country. The first attempts to organize women belonging to the Tunisian urban bourgeoisie took the form of social and charitable commitment towards poorer women. But this movement very quickly engaged in the struggle against French colonization under the banner of the Neo-Destour party (formed in 1934). As in the other two countries, the Tunisian Communist party created two women's organizations affiliated to it (the Union of Women in Tunisia and the Union of Tunisian Young Women, 1944). Women also joined the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT), as well as other political groups.

During this period, in all the Maghreb countries, priority was given to issues related to the ideological and political orientations of the different formations. The issue of women's rights had no place except as a political issue between nationalists and colonizers, and between conservatives and reformists. Women were mobilized around these issues without ever having the opportunity to express their specific demands and aspirations.

Patriarchy and Colonization

The arrival of Western colonizers in the Maghreb, with an ideology, practices and a discourse of "I bring civilization and development to the indigenous people" created an identity tension among the population that crystallized around women, family and religion. The latter constituted the most powerful tool to resist the colonizers and their values; this well-known and well-analyzed process placed Arab and Muslim women at the intersection between two identities: that of an oppressed community and that of subordinated women.

The colonial heritage also held a very important place in representations of Islam, which functioned as a resistance force against conquest and assimilation, and which was used by the nationalists of the colonized countries as a mobilizing weapon.

For years "...colonialism wore the neutral mask of universal progress in order to subjugate the people, thereby

maintaining a confusion between modernity, colonialism and domination."⁵ Indeed, as Yussuf Bangura notes, "...for several Third World countries, access to modernity consists of nothing more nor less than in breaking with the boundaries of ethnicity, embracing the secular identity of the nation-state, developing a rational and scientific view of development, and treating individuals as autonomous beings."⁶

In Algeria, colonizers and anti-colonizers used the status of women as a political card. In 1958, France called upon women to burn their veils in a major public square in Algiers, while shouting "French Algeria". This move served to "falsify the problem, because spontaneously, without any orders, Algerian women who had been for a long time unveiled, re-adopted the haik, stating that Algerian women would not be liberated at the invitation of France".⁷

To sum up in the words of Zakia Daoud, "Every questioning of the status quo was judged as conforming to the colonial power's integrationist policy, and condemned as a project of destruction of identity."⁸

II. Maghrebi Women in the Post-Colonial Period

As soon as these countries achieved their independence, they all chose education as a cornerstone of their development programs, despite their different political orientations. The need to ensure the take-over from the colonial powers, added to the desire to speed up the modernization process, gave education a primordial importance. The efforts made in this respect, especially before the 1972 economic crisis, are notable considering the limited resources. Moreover, a pressing social demand that began among the intellectual elite well before independence, spread to other social classes, which saw education as the means to improve their economic and social conditions.

The Limits of National Development Policies

The post-colonial Maghrebi states adopted different means to the common aim of modernizing their societies while safeguarding patriarchy, so as to secure the loyalty of pre-modern forces and leaderships. The development strategy they adopted conformed to the needs of the industrialized countries, and consisted in a modernization process involving factors and tools of production, without changing relations of production or gender relations within the patriarchal family.

The best illustration is the post-independence position of

all three states regarding codification of the status of women and family relations. Tunisia, under the voluntarist and modernizing policy of President Bourguiba, and within an Islamic system of reference, opted for an emancipating legislation; Morocco hurried to promulgate an inequitable and retrograde *mudawwana* (1957/58); and Algeria, after 20 years of hesitations and aborted efforts, ended in 1984 by promulgating a personal status code (PSC) almost identical to that of Morocco.

The situation in Tunisia differs from the other Maghreb states to the extent that state intervention in the process of modernizing family and social structures placed women's status in the context of "contradictory relations between a developmental, modernist ideology and a sexist identity ideology"⁹. Put more simply, the Tunisian state, headed by President Bourguiba, took a number of measures to revise the PSC (*majella*), which could be considered as revolutionary in the Arab context, among them the banning of polygamy, judicial divorce, maternal guardianship, etc. These reforms continued under President Ben Ali (1987), so that the state's commitment to the liberation of women became a permanent characteristic of Tunisia. But this 'state feminism' was above all a 'masculine feminism',¹⁰ rooted in a reformist political movement that raised the issue of women's liberation as necessary condition to an Arab renaissance. It is a 'masculine feminism' because it does not aim at transforming women's traditional roles, but at making them more efficient within a patriarchal family structure.

In Algeria, where women's participation in the national liberation struggle is a historically established fact, the ruling National Liberation Front (NLF) tried to establish the idea that from the mere fact of their participation in the independence struggle, women had gained their full dignity as citizens and automatically acquired all their rights.¹¹

So much so that when in 1984 Algerian feminists called for revision or abrogation of the PSC, conservatives and Islamists accused them of being 'daughters of France', and 'westernized', forgetting or pretending to forget the role of women in the struggle for independence. This tendency to discredit claims made by the women's movement by appealing to anti-colonial feelings and to reflexes of community and identity had not ceased to function several decades after independence. The Algerian state resorted to this method several times, well before the emergence of Islamism.

In Morocco, in the euphoria of independence, the doors of education and work were opened to women. Allal Fassi, one of the great reformist thinkers of the time,

was appointed by King Mohammed V in 1957/58 to head the Commission charged with codifying customary Islamic law. Contrary to expectations, this Commission rapidly produced a *mudawwana* that consecrated and institutionalized patriarchy and the subordination of women. This text constituted the keystone used by the state to establish the juridical, political and economic foundations of independent Morocco, and as basis of its authority and power. This subordination of women was used to pacify the most conservative ulemas and most traditional milieux, just as one throws crumbs to the poor, so they would accept other secular texts leaving all serious political business in the hands of the state.

In Morocco first, and then in Algeria, the PSC, simple legal texts, were increasingly sacralized and given the function of permanently fixing the status of women, whereas all other laws were able to evolve freely in a modernity accepted as temporal. One cannot explain what happened simply as a desire to respect the *Shari'a* or/and by the weight of tradition. The *Shari'a* is much more selective, and the negative aspects of tradition have been denounced by the most fervent respecters of the *Shari'a*. The latter has been dismissed without hesitation in favor of a secular juridical system of colonial inspiration, with the exception of the PSC, treated as an exception.

This enclosure of women within anti-colonialist and communitarian boundaries continued long after the decolonization of the Maghreb. Maghrebi women have been held back in a specificity that isolates them. Anything could change, but women were called on to represent continuity, because such was the interest of men, who after independence controlled all power through sending women back to their domestic and reproductive roles. The state had contributed to destabilizing the old order by secularizing the law, through education, and through the massive employment of women, which resulted in making the small nuclear family the norm. But it also tried with great success to limit the impact of transformations these policies might have caused, by investing in the symbolic domain, by the Islamisation of political discourse, and through the Family Code and other legal provisions. To build an independent state, it was above all question of safeguarding the ancient family, religious and tribal allegiances, within an authoritarian and hierarchical framework.

One of the chief characteristics of the post-independence period was the occupation of the religious domain by states to consolidate their power and establish their legitimacy. Islam was immediately proclaimed as official religion (even by Algeria, which claimed to be socialist). The systematic recourse to religious discourse, used for

multiple ends in the name of cultural and religious specificity, was given common currency and integrated as a factor of political legitimization by all political actors who sought to compete with the 'authorities'. Among the countries of the Maghreb, Morocco devoted most hours to religious education (1977), with a rigid and retrograde Islamic content, reduced to glorification of the past and to memorize pious sayings.¹² The beginning of prayers in schools in the 1960s, the intolerant and discriminatory contents of schoolbooks,¹³ religious programs on television, superficial Arabization, were all contributing elements in the orientation of the Maghreb states (especially Morocco and Algeria).

Algeria and Morocco took care to protect the model of the judicial family model,¹⁴ and the ideology conveyed by family law. Other texts, such as the penal code, the code of penal procedure, the code of public liberties, the code of nationality, all strengthened patriarchal ideology through the absolute power given to father and husband in family and social relations. The introduction into secular texts of discriminatory provisions, supposed to make them conform with the *Shari'a*, can only be explained by the will of legislators to reinforce patriarchal ideology.

Thus, with the exception of Tunisia, Personal Status Codes inspired by Islamic law and based on a fallible interpretation of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* are the origin of the inferior juridical status of women in the Maghreb today. Their discriminatory provisions, as well as the identity and political crystallizations around these codes, represent a blow to women's rights and freedom, even though these are guaranteed by these countries' constitutions,¹⁵ and a main obstacle to women's participation in economic, political and public life.¹⁶

Family law allows over-early marriage for women (15 years in Morocco, whereas for men it is 18 years). The judge may decide to authorize a marriage even before the legal age, if there is fear for "the morals or reputation of the girl".

The obligation of matrimonial tutelage for women (*wilaya*) is another provision that has been resumed in the PSCs of Algeria and Morocco. The duty of upkeep in exchange for the duty of obedience constitutes the basis for gender discrimination in the region today. With a few exceptions,¹⁷ women owe obedience to their husbands and respect to his family. Because of this, a husband can stop his wife from visiting her family, and can stop her from working outside the house, or simply going out. Except in Tunisia, polygamy is authorized, even though it is becoming rare. Everywhere the family head is always the husband, including in Tunisia, even though it has the

most liberal family code in the region. Husbands have the right of repudiation (unilateral rupture of a marriage), without having to give a reason, whereas women themselves can never divorce, except by going before a court, or by giving their husbands compensation to agree (*al-khul'a*). To sum up, a husband divorces freely, but a wife must ask a judge's authorization for divorce which is only given in restricted cases.

Moreover, the law provides nothing for divorced women, who have right to support only for the brief period called *'idda*. The mother is considered, despite minor changes introduced in Tunisia for example, as child-carer and never as the legal guardian, except in the case of the father's death or other restricted cases.¹⁸ Moreover, a divorced mother and guardian of minor children does not have the right to keep the marital house except in rare cases, and cannot remarry¹⁹ without losing the right to look after her children, whereas a father's remarriage does not entail the same effects.

The law of inheritance has adopted the rule of inequality between men and women.²⁰ With the exception of Tunisia, the principle of *ta'sib* means that in the absence of a male heir, the collaterals of the deceased compete for the inheritance with female children.²¹ Furthermore, in all three countries, a non-Muslim woman has no right to inherit from her Muslim husband.

Other subterfuges have been used to stop women from inheritance: in Morocco, the *habous* or *waqf* allows the circumvention of the unequal inheritance law for the benefit of male heirs, disinheriting the female heirs; the obligatory legacy (*wassiya wajiba*) gives the right to grandchildren born of a pre-deceased son to benefit from an inheritance while depriving the children of a pre-deceased daughter of the same rights.

Since independence, state interventions have mainly aimed at preserving the status quo, controlling claims, and neutralizing social and political forces in opposition. If today the societies of the Maghreb confront a political Islam, one has to admit that the latter has managed to gain ground so rapidly because it found a favorable political, economic and social terrain.

Women's Voices: the Post-Independence Generation

Soon after independence, women who had participated in political action and resistance returned to their homes to carry out the 'noble task' assigned by their past companions, namely educating future citizens. Those who decided to continue in spite of this, invested their efforts in social work and charity.

But very quickly, thanks to the spread of education and salaried professional work, especially in cities, a new generation of women who had not participated in the struggle for independence, joined political and union organizations. Despite a difficult political and social conjuncture, and repression, some women struggled within these organizations, which had always given priority to establishing socialism, social justice, and democracy, never to claims for gender equality.

Starting from the mid-1970s, a new stage in the history of Morocco began, one of relative political openness and greater freedom of speech. This allowed opposition parties to resume their activities, including women, who started organizing themselves in women's sections within their respective parties. This period of political openness in Morocco coincided with the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), as well as the promulgation of the Convention against discrimination against women (CEDAW) in 1979. These events offered opportunities for women to intensify the debate within party structures on their positions and commitments to women's issues, and more specifically to the issue of revising the *mudawwana* (PSC).

The implicit aim of these women's sections was to increase the audience for their own parties among the ranks of women. Initially social action and consciousness-raising with women were privileged. But very quickly the issues of liberating women, their judicial status, and their representation at decision-making levels were raised. Differences between the demands made by these women's sections need to be noted. Whereas there was unanimity around the issues of education, political participation and women's activities, the question of revising the *mudawwana* was treated in a different and ambiguous manner, depending on the degree of autonomy and combativity of women activists within their respective parties. Indeed, two trends had long coexisted among political and union women activists, and still do today: one follows strictly the orientation of their organization, while the other manages the contradictions between their partisan and feminist identities.

In the mid-'80s the first feminist association was created, the Democratic Association of Women in Morocco (ADFM, 1985), followed two years later by the Union d'Action Feminine (UAF). From then on, several other feminist organizations were created, contributing to the plurality and diversity of the movement, specialization in field of intervention, to a better geographical spread, and to its autonomy. Underlying the emergence of a feminist movement in Morocco is the aspiration of women activists to an autonomy of claims, speech and organization, independent from their male counterparts

in parties, and from women's sections of political and union organizations in which their specific demands as women had always been confined. It was a break with years of compromise and waiting.

In Tunisia, the first initiative of women's organizing was in the Tahar Haddad Club (1977-1987) which brought together political, union and intellectual activists who wanted to think outside the official ideology, autonomously, about the condition of women in a society in crisis. Tunisia experienced political Islam earlier than the other two Maghrebi countries (though strongly suppressed, it is still latent there). Because of this, the women's movement is partly structured by their will to defend women's achievements in regard to their juridical status, since the first demand of political Islam in Tunisia was to cancel these achievements.

This feminist autonomy constituted a rupture with the existing 'masculine feminism' represented by the authorities in place. It was also a break, as in the case of Morocco, with the leftist political and union organizations which were the ideological 'family' of Tunisian feminists, but which refused to take account of their specific demands and aspirations, perceiving feminism as 'out of place' and 'improper'.²²

This period of self-discovery and attempts to group a plurality of expressions into a unique and autonomous movement was very rich in debates, seminars and publications, notably the magazine *Nissa'*. Two autonomous feminist organizations were created after the mid-1980s: l'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD) (licensed in 1989), and the l'Association des Femmes Tunisiennes pour la Recherche et le Développement (AFTURD) (formed in 1985, licensed in 1988). Within the Tunisian political context, these two associations increasingly positioned themselves towards more political claims, such as demands for democracy and respect for human rights. Both in Tunisia and Algeria, it was the women's movement that mobilized earliest and most strongly to defend their societies against the totalitarian threats emanating from political Islam, or the political regimes in place.

In Algeria, as in Morocco, it was mainly the PSC issue that mobilized women to stand up as organized groups in defense of their interests. Indeed, after several hesitations and aborted attempts destined to promulgate a PSC, notably in 1981, when it was withdrawn after the mobilization of women's organizations, this was finally established in 1984. In the words of one writer, "the Algerian authorities spent 22 years to put an end to shaky compromises, and return to the Shariaa, the time needed to wear down its opponents and exhaust

women's resistance."²³ This event was extremely important, because it incited several feminist groups to reassemble, and to elaborate a common platform to demand the revision of the Code.

The Women's Movement Today

The struggles of the Maghrebi women's movement to reform personal status law had the merit of highlighting one of the paradoxes of modernity, which is that of trying to fix the status of women according to religion, while other social practices fell increasingly into religious confusion. Indeed, the long-lasting centrality of women's status was 'hollow' in the sense that their fate was discussed and decided in their absence.²⁴ This absence/presence started to be broken down by the emergence and reinforcement of the women's movement as a pressure group, starting from the mid-1980s, demanding change in laws, role and male/female relations.

In order to bring out the issue of the condition of women from the trap of private life, the Maghrebi women's movement transformed into a political and public issue the whole discussion about practices considered until then as trivial or related to private life, such as the juridical status of women, the sexual division of household labor, conjugal violence, etc.

The women's movement understood from the beginning that the 'private domain' had to be opened up, submitted to analysis, put into question and politicized. The struggle to reform personal status law and establish a family code based on more egalitarian conjugal and familial relations was as painful as resistance was lively. This resistance was supported, not by a stagnating traditionalism, as much as by the will to maintain the distinction between private space, ruled by Islamic law and proclaimed as sacred, and public space, ruled by secular laws and institutions.

Autonomous associations for equality between men and women constitute a new social and political phenomenon in the region's political arena. The history and current evolution of this movement vary according to their political and economic contexts, and according to the freedom of expression and association existing in each of the three countries.

Most non-governmental organizations in the region face several challenges to their work, due to the direct or indirect control of states over their activities, and to lack of resources, training and professionalism. Despite these difficulties, priority has been given by the women's movement as a body to the changing of laws, to the struggle against institutional, social and marital violence

towards women, and for a more effective and free participation of women in building states that are democratic and respect women's human rights.

Conclusion: An Emerging Feminist Identity

As elsewhere feminist ideas in the Maghreb, because they are dangerous to the patriarchal order, are systematically demonized, rejected, ridiculed, or suspected of developing hatred towards men, traditions, values, religion, etc. This is probably the reason why some associations continue to describe their movement as 'feminine'. This defensive attitude appears clearly in the way certain activists are obliged to justify and explain what feminism is for them, and what it is in countries like theirs.

In fact, in all three countries, women's movements were described as 'feminine', from their formation in the '80s until the '90s. But today the tendency is fully to assume the feminist identity, which is not innate but chosen and claimed as a stance with a vision, as well as a discourse and practice. It is a way of seeing the world through the 'eyes of women's strategic interests', with a particular and open vision towards society, including its most deprived sectors. In this way, the issue of democracy is integrated in it as well as the social question in all its dimensions. Feminism is definitely perceived as political project. Traditional politics and the political arena are defined by this new, large conception that integrates all the dimensions of social intervention, because feminism's fundamental aspect is refusal of separation between politics and the social, the public and the private.

This feminist identity that transcends the national sphere to inscribe itself in an international identity is accused of being imported and foreign. But the feminists of the Maghreb know that they bring their own contribution to developing this universal identity in process of construction. They do this just as the feminists of Asia and Africa have done, whose contribution was decisive to reflection on the economic, on poverty, on the intersection of identities, and on other issues.

Living in societies more and more mobilized along cultural and religious lines, feminists of the Maghreb are often confronted with a dilemma: to choose between two identities, the universal one that is closer to their aspirations and their interests as women, and the 'Arab-Muslim' identity presented as being exclusive by conservative and extremist currents in a context of absence of freedom of expression. This identity is often experienced as an eternal warning about frontiers that cannot be crossed: that of religious precepts as defined by men, that of tradition and culture built upon sacred and unchangeable principles.²⁵

These tensions explain why many feminists reclaim the specificity and diversity of Maghreb women's belonging, at the crossroads of many identities — Arab, Berber, Muslim, Maghrebi. Indeed their awareness of the use made by the Islamists of the concept of specificity to isolate women prompts them to emphasize the fact that this Maghreb specificity is not linked to the identity question but rather to the political context in which feminist action unfolds, ie. the absence of democracy, high levels of illiteracy, etc. Feminism is the same as elsewhere but, developed in a different context, its expression is necessarily slightly different. Feminism in the Maghreb is specific in the sense that feminists take hold of their history with their own reading, since the special character of feminist theory is to have demonstrated the lack of neutrality of analytical categories, which until then were held as obvious.²⁶

The fragility of this emerging feminist identity comes to the surface during major political events, such as the first Gulf war. In a climate of over-heated Arab nationalism, it was difficult for them not to fall into the traps of nationalist, pan-Arab and communitarian injunctions, brandished as the cement of resistance facing imperialist ambitions by the Arab left, and threats against Muslim countries by conservative and Islamic currents. Not to rally to these positions is considered as treason. Several identities came into conflict between the partisan or nationalist positions and feminist positions.

Ever since the issue of women's status and condition has been posed, it was in terms of duality and of priority. The alternatives have always been set in the following way:

- The struggle against colonization required women to repress their aspirations while waiting for independence. This was supposed to solve all their problems and make men and women equal citizens;
- Once independence was gained, despite the involvement of many women in the liberation struggles, their aspirations had to cede priority to building the Nation. Their status on the other hand acquired a position of symbol: that of their country's attachment to the Arab-Muslim community;
- Eager to build a democratic nation, women joined parties of the left. But in this context too they were obliged to wait the coming of a socialist society in which the exploitation of man by man would be abolished, and by the same token men's and women's rights would be re-established. Women's claim of equality is judged to be the demand of a minority of bourgeois women. The example to follow was that of the socialist countries which had liberated women by liberating men;
- More recently, the request for equality was deferred

again under the pretext of social conservatism. This discourse presents the claim for equality as illegitimate because society is not ready for it yet. One has to change mentalities for the issue of equality to be accepted. The still high illiteracy of women, especially in Morocco and Algeria, is taken as pretext to dismiss women's claims. Under the pretext that the vast majority of women are illiterate, it is said that they need education more than rights, because they would not know what to do with them; - Finally, with the rise of political Islam, women, always in the midst of such interrogations and tensions, are accused this time of weakening the struggle, defined as an existential priority, of political Islam.

The Maghrebi feminists' struggle against violence and discrimination, and to reform personal status and establish a family code based on more egalitarian marital and family relations, has been the more painful in that resistance is still strong. This is one of the paradoxes of

modernity in the countries of the region, to want to fix the status of women in tradition and culture, while all other aspects of political and economic life are plunged in a confusion between religion and modernity.

Less than five decades after independence, these three Maghrebi countries have gone through major social upheavals, and are still today in a vortex of change, the rapidity and complexity of which prevent any certainty as to their future. But women in the Maghreb do not want to wait any longer. They needed several years to learn to develop independent survival strategies, to develop a clear and shared vision of the orientation to give their movement so as to maintain the issue of women's rights and equality on the public stage. Finally they have built an autonomous movement, and have the ambition to 'make time move faster' so that women's subordination will be acknowledged as a priority on the same level as development, democracy and social justice.

The Feminist Movement in the Gulf

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Translated from Arabic by Nadine al-Khoury

Introduction

The feminist movement in the Gulf appeared long after its Egyptian or Bilad al-Sham counterparts. This was due to the weight of social traditions, which denied women presence and participation in public life, and to the delay in starting girls' education compared to the education of boys. Gulf states did not begin educating girls until after the oil surge, which helped them set the pillars for modern states. The first state school for girls in Bahrain was inaugurated in 1938, over a quarter of a century after the inauguration of the first boys' school. It was not until the early '70s of the past century that girls' schools were inaugurated or spread in the Sultanate of Oman and some emirates on the Omani Coast (the United Arab Emirates today).

The beginnings of the feminist movement in the Gulf, particularly in Bahrain and Kuwait, were influenced by the cultural movement in Egypt and Bilad al-Sham, and by the writings of intellectuals who tackled women's issues such as Rifaat al-Tahtawi, Qasim Amin, and others. The movement was also influenced by the pioneers of the Arab feminist movement such as Hoda Sha'rawi. The '40s of the past century witnessed the emergence of some

male and female writers who called upon women to participate in the Renaissance movement (*An-Nahda*), and for their emancipation from the constraints of obsolete traditions.

In this article, we will attempt to study the history of the feminist movement in the six Gulf Cooperation Council states, i.e. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

I. The Feminist Movement in Bahrain

Education played an important role in the emergence of the feminist movement, whose beginnings can be summarized as an increase in women's self-awareness, and their attempt to overcome the situation imposed upon them by traditions and customs. The press also played a major role in bringing new issues to the Gulf scene, for example the necessity to educate females, the call to unveil, and the opening to women of different work opportunities. On another level, professionals from other Arab countries, many of whom worked as teachers in girls schools, played a prominent and essential role in increasing women's awareness and encouraging them to create their own associations. Female teachers returning from abroad, who taught in al-Hadaya al-Khalifiya School for Girls (currently known as Khadija's Great School), founded the Help Orphans Association. Some daughters of rich families later joined this small group.

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ENDNOTES

1. *Femmes diplômées du supérieur au Maghreb, pratiques novatrices*, IREP/FNUAP, Tunis, 1994.
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3. Bessis, S., Belhassen, S., *Les femmes du Maghreb, l'enjeu* (Paris : J-C.Lattes, 1992).
4. Reformist Tahar Haddad published a book in 1930 entitled *Notre femmes dans la Shariaa et la société*, in which he denounced the subservience of women, and called for renewed efforts to interpret the Qur'an (*ijtihad*). This book has remained incontestably 'modern', an authoritative reference for the whole Maghrebi feminist movement .
5. Brigitte Firk, "Entre le repli et l'assimilation: six jeunes maghrébines témoignent" *Cahiers du féminisme*, Paris, Spring 1986.
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7. Daoud, Z., *Féminisme et politique au Maghreb, Soixante ans de lutte* (Casablanca: Ed. Eddif, 1993).
8. Idem.
9. Ferchiou S., "Femmes tunisiennes entre 'féminisme d'Etat' et résistance", in *Femmes de Méditerranée, politique, religion, travail*, Andrée Dore-Audibert and Sophie Bessis eds., (Paris: Karthala , 1995).
10. Ibid.
11. Daoud, Z., op.cit.
12. Moulay Rchid, A., « La Moudawana en question », In *Femmes, culture et société au Maghreb, Tome II, Femmes. Pouvoir politique et développement*, R. Bourqia, M. Cherrad, N. Gallagher eds., (Afrique Orient, 2000).
13. Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc, *Etude de l'état de l'égalité dans le système éducatif marocain*. Rapport ronéotypé, Rabat September, 2001.
14. Moulay Rchid, A., op.cit.
15. The constitutions of the Maghreb countries state the principle of equality of all citizens before the law.
16. Nadia Hijab, *Laws, Regulation and Practices Impeding Women's Economic Participation in the MENA Region*, xeroxed report submitted to the World Bank, April, 2001.
17. Tunisia has just abolished the duty of obedience, replacing it with the duty of mutual respect.
18. Judicial incapacity of the father, stateless father, unknown father, etc.
19. Except if the man is related to the children in a prohibited degree.
20. With the exception of the grandparents, who inherit equal shares.
21. If the deceased person has an only daughter, her share is half the inheritance; if he has more than one daughter, their share will amount to two thirds.
22. Zakia Daoud, op.cit.
23. Ibid.
24. Juliette Minces, *Le Coran et les femmes* (Ed. Pluriel, 1996).
25. Naciri, R., *Les femmes arabes et l'intersection entre patriarcat, racismes et intolérance*. Communication to a UNIFEM Panel, World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance, Durban, South Africa, Sept 2001.
26. Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité, *Auto-portrait d'un mouvement*, Ed. Al-Maarif, Rabat, Jan 2003.

In 1953, the Bahrain Women's Society was founded, presided over by the British Chancellor's wife, Lady Belgrave, with the help of relatively well educated upper-class women such as "Al-Fadila" Aysha Yatim (secretary), and Ms. Salwa Al-Omran (member of the Board). The Society was aimed at organizing charity events, helping the poor and the needy as well as teaching women skills such as cooking and sewing.¹ The Society was harshly criticized in certain newspapers and mosques as an abomination and a violation of traditions and custom. A group calling itself Call for Islam (*Al-Da'wa ila al-Islam*) issued a statement which included the following excerpt: "Boycott this abomination and declare an all-out war on its organizers, men and women alike. Kill it in its cradle before it sees the light, otherwise woe unto us all for it will be the end of us."²

On the political scene, this period witnessed the creation of the National Union Society, which led all national actions, particularly the 1945-1965 movement. Historians consider this society to be the first political party in the Gulf area.³ Researchers link the beginning of the feminist movement to the emergence of the National Union, and particularly underline the two sisters Shahla and Badria Khalfan's role in urging women to participate in anti-colonial demonstrations, and the speech one of them made to a gathering of thousands of protestors in which she demanded that women be granted their rights, and called for their unveiling. This call struck a powerful chord among young educated men who began urging their wives to follow this woman's footsteps. Nonetheless, its influence was transient and came as a result of the political movement's influence at the time, as well as the support and enthusiasm expressed by women. The Khalfan sisters soon disappeared from the scene, and the national movement was also dealt a heavy blow, and its leaders placed under arrest.

The press took a special interest in women's rights, offering Arab and Bahraini writers the opportunity to write in its columns. In this regard, the late Aziza Al-Bassam says that the Lebanese writer Rose Ghorayeb wrote in the *Voice of Bahrain* magazine, and played a role in introducing several modern social opinions. The press also underlined the necessity for women to join the workforce and hold government posts. Some newspapers tackled the issue of unveiling, and demanded that women be granted their rights. This was also the period when the term 'feminist movement' was used for the first time, and there was a call to link the Bahraini feminist movement to similar feminist movements in the Arab nation and the world.⁴

In spite of this, the weight of traditions and custom was stronger than these calls, which were not properly used so

that women could become part of the framework of a female advocacy movement. At the same time, the leaders of the national movement expressed their discontent with the Women's Society not only because societies were considered the preserve of men, but also because the Society was led by the wife of the British Chancellor, the symbol of British colonialism in Bahrain. Consequently, Abdul Rahman Al-Baker, one of the most prominent leaders of the 1945 – 1956 movement, called for the creation of a feminist association akin to those in Egypt and Bilad-El-Sham to replace the Bahrain Women's Society. Many merchants associated with the National Union were compelled to forbid their daughters to participate in the society.⁵ The women in charge of the Society thought that the best way out of this predicament was to establish a women's charity, known as Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society, which opened in 1955, and became the first women's organization in the Gulf.⁶

Much as in Egypt and Bilad-El-Sham, where feminist movements were led by elite women able to acquire an education and be in contact with the outside world, the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society attracted mostly the educated daughters of big merchant families. For example the Society's president, Ms. Aysha Yatim, held a degree from a British university, while two other members had studied nursing in Iraq, and others had been taught in Bahrain by teachers from Lebanon and received a degree in primary education or its equivalent.

In 1960, the Child and Mothers' Welfare Society (*Jamiyyat Ri'ayat al-Tifl wal-'Umuma*), was founded.⁷ During its inception phase, members belonged to the ruling family, and the families of rich merchants and high-ranking public servants. The two associations concentrated their efforts on charitable and social activities. The Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society opened the first-ever women's literacy class in Bahrain. Then the associations expanded their welfare services and inaugurated a kindergarten. The Child and Mothers' Welfare Society opened a center for handicapped children and a children's cultural center. In the '80s, the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society included girls who had gone to university outside Bahrain, mainly in Kuwait, Cairo, and Beirut. These young women had worked in students' movements and were influenced by the political movements of the period. Consequently, their membership had a great impact on the Society's orientation, and on its concern for women's rights and demands.

Although the Awal Women's Society (*Jam'iyyat A'wal al-Nisa'iyya*) (AWS), was founded following the June 1967 debacle, it was not officially registered until 1970, almost ten years after the registration of the Children and Mothers Welfare Society. Members of this Society

belonged to the middle class and most of them were teachers or employees. Active in this Society were girls who had studied abroad and had participated in student activities and political movements. Some of them had taken part in national political organizations such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, which conducted armed operations from the Zafar province in the Sultanate of Oman; the National Liberation Front, which is the Bahraini wing of the Communist Party; and the Socialist Arab Baath Party. The political background of the AWS's constituent body had the greatest impact on the Society's orientations, making it reject the kind of charitable and welfare work prevalent until then, and concentrate its efforts on advocating women's rights and demands.⁸

The same year, 1970, the Al-Rifa' Cultural and Charitable Society was founded. Its members were employees, particularly teachers. Its early orientations were somewhat similar to those of the AWS, particularly in regard to advocating women's rights as regard the personal status code, as well as political rights. Nonetheless, it was forced to shift to charity, particularly after the National Assembly was dissolved and the state security law was promulgated whereby every movement calling for women's rights was deemed political. In 1974, the Women's International Association was founded by women belonging to the richer merchant class, the wives of diplomats, managers and foreign businessmen.

Women Political Rights

As mentioned before, women in Bahrain were influenced by the 1945 -1956 movement, but their role was limited at that time. As mentioned before, they were also influenced by national movements in the Arab world. Clandestine organizations operating in Bahrain, connected to Arab or communist organizations, attempted to organize their female members, but they gave little attention to women's issues. Women were also influenced by the 1965 movement, which lasted in Bahrain for almost six months. Female students participated in demonstrations all over the country, giving them an opportunity to leave the confines of home and school, and call once again for the emancipation of women.⁹ Bahraini instructors recently graduated from Arab universities played a significant role in this regard, steering female students towards politics, increasing their critical and progressive awareness.¹⁰ Their role came to an end, however, after the 1965 movement was struck down. From then on they ceased to influence the feminist movement.

The AWS played a prominent role in asserting women's right to vote and run for office, aided by the Al-Rifa'

Cultural and Charitable Society and the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society. They launched an awareness campaign amongst women to assert their political rights and, with the help of members of political pro-women movements, they organized seminars and meetings in clubs. They also sent a signed petition to the President of the National Assembly and the Emir. This petition was signed by most women's societies, with the exception of the Child and Mothers' Welfare Society. Emile Nakhleh believes that the latter's abstention was due to its members' family origins, for they stood to gain most from the status quo, hence were more understanding of the government's denial of women's political rights.¹¹

At that time, in 1973 to be precise, the AWS, the Al-Rifa' Cultural and Charitable Society and the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society fought proposals by MPs from the religious bloc to stop mixed reunions in all public places (including work places), to stop women from teaching boys in elementary schools and kindergartens, and female nurses and physicians from treating male patients. The women's societies regarded this proposal as a "suspicious attempt aimed at undermining the citizen's personal freedoms, using women as a means to exploit slogans and outbidding."¹²

The short-lived National Assembly did not give women's societies the opportunity to develop their experience. With the dissolution of the National Assembly and the promulgation of the state security law, women's activism regressed, stifling the hope of creating an effective feminist movement. Nonetheless, we must note some shortcomings in women's activities at the time:

1. The societies' incapacity to communicate effectively with the mass of women in cities and villages.
2. Delay in taking action until only days before the promulgation of the election law which denied women their political rights.
3. Failure to address certain women who played a prominent role in women's activities, or to appeal to the country's most powerful leaders.
4. Failure to keep up action during the formation of the National Assembly at the same pace as when operating parallel to the Constituent Assembly, which drafted the Constitution.

The Rights of Working Women

Advocating working women's rights is an essential objective in the charters of the AWS and the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society (following the amendment of the Society's first constitution). Nonetheless, they failed to translate this objective into clear plans and strategies. Their actions were mainly an immediate reaction to prob-

lems faced by women in the workplace, and had no follow-up.¹³

The Personal Status Code

Women's societies and other concerned organizations, as well as some individuals, multiplied their efforts for the passing of a personal status code. A Personal Status Committee was formed to launch awareness campaigns among women and in newspapers. These efforts failed until recently, when committees were formed to discuss the draft family law before it is submitted to the National Assembly. The Personal Status Committee did succeed in suspending the rule of obedience enacted by the police, and in restricting arbitrary divorce. Now divorce is only legal before a judge.¹⁴

Moreover, the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society and the AWS each established a center for legal and family consultancy, which constitutes a pioneering step in improving women's status. The Child and Mothers' Welfare Society also created a center for studies of women and children, which includes a specialized library. However this center still lacks specialized researchers and sufficient human and financial resources.

The Feminist Movement in Bahrain since the 1990s

Interacting with the events that took place between 1994 and 1999, the women's intellectual elite signed a petition to the Emir, Sheikh 'Issa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, calling upon him to answer the population's claims for democracy and the creation of a parliament. The government fought this movement and threatened the signatories with dismissal should they refuse to apologize and retract. Indeed, two women were dismissed, Hossa al-Khoumayri and the late Aziza al-Bassam, while Dr Mounira Fakhro, a professor at Bahrain University, was suspended from her duties, and not reinstated until after the political reforms of 2001.

Women also joined the Shi'ite opposition movement in the 1990s, and some of them were arrested and tortured in detention camps. One of them was killed; others were exiled. However, the movement's religious aspect and its restriction to one confession did not give way to a clearly defined female advocacy movement. On the contrary, the focus of attention was women's inferior status, and Shi'ite women were not regarded as partners in the national struggle but as subservient to Shi'ite men.

Following the political reforms of late 2000, including the return of the exiled, the freeing of political prisoners, and greater public freedoms, associations of all kinds - politi-

cal, social and religious - proliferated. Women joined the new political formations, but failed to recognize the necessity of asserting their own rights and issues, and to convince these groupings to put women's issues at the core of their concern. Add to this the turmoil of accelerating events, which prevented the associations from organizing their internal affairs, and setting their priorities.

At the same time, several women's branches of political associations were founded. Their work pattern was not any different from that of other women societies: visiting the elderly, and organizing seminars restricted to the female elite. Religiously-oriented women's societies or committees affiliated to religious associations enjoy a wider popular base; but they remain prisoners of the parent association, and cannot break free, particularly in issues such as gender equality, the unified personal status code for Sunnis and Shi'ites, and mixed gatherings.¹⁵

II. The Feminist Movement in Kuwait

The beginnings of the feminist movement in Kuwait date back to the 1940s when the education of girls spread in spite of constraints imposed by opposing conservative forces. In late 1948 some women writers emerged calling women to participate in public life. Some male figures also wrote articles supporting women's right to freedom. In 1953, a group of young women advocated unveiling, calling their meeting "The Conference on the Veil". This group gave rise to several supporting and opposing reactions, but its activities were restricted to meetings and newspaper articles. It did, nonetheless, incite women to consider founding their own societies, modeled after other Arab associations.¹⁶

Women's societies in Kuwait were founded years after the establishment of their counterparts in Bahrain. This was due to the absence of a powerful political movement in Kuwait and to economic prosperity, as well as the weight of custom which made women reluctant to take such a step or to remove the veil, even though returning graduates regarded it as oppressive and a symbol of the society's backwardness. This feeling was expressed by a woman writer: "In a country where people are still firmly attached to ancient traditions and where the older generation still watches every woman who moves to break the shackles of traditions... (t)his obstacle has such a great impact that it compels us to wait and ponder, once again, whether to remove the veil."¹⁷

In the early 1960s, returning women graduates attempted to create a women's association called the Kuwaiti Women's Society. Ms Lulwa Al-Qatami, a leading women's rights activist, says the Society's aim is "to organize efforts through a legal and social entity which can

achieve their [women's] aspirations in bringing about social and cultural changes that embrace Kuwaiti principles and values, favor the majority of the country's women, and can help empower them to play their proper role as citizens, mothers and wives."¹⁸

However, the authorities refused to allow them to work, due to traditions which opposed the idea of a women's society. The group consequently resubmitted its application to found a women's association under the name the Women's Cultural Social Society, which was officially registered on February 10, 1963. A few days before, on January 17, the *An-Nahda al-'Arabiyya al-Nisa'iyya* Society, which had changed its name to an-Nahda al-Ousariya Society, was given permission to operate.¹⁹

The Cultural Society focused on women's rights such as constitutional rights, and on raising women's awareness of their legitimate rights, while seeking to change statutory laws and social customs that violate women's rights. It did not neglect charitable work but this was not its main concern.²⁰ The objectives of the *An-Nahda al-'Usariyya* Society, on the other hand, were more general and included helping young Kuwaiti women by raising cultural and scientific awareness, advocating their rights, treating social problems, increasing awareness of the importance of families, and being informed about women's renaissance movements (*An-Nahda*) in the other Arab countries. Charitable work was not among its objectives due to Kuwait's higher income levels, and welfare services to the poor.

The two associations both provided social welfare and awareness services. They created kindergartens, launched cleanliness and health awareness campaigns in the rural areas of Kuwait, initiated literacy classes, and organized conferences and seminars to raise family and social awareness. Their charitable work was mainly outside Kuwait, and included building the Hanan Villages for orphans in Sudan, and supporting Arab efforts to liberate Palestine. The two associations also participated in Arab women's movement meetings, with *An-Nahda al-'Usariyya* Society representing Kuwait in the Arab Women's Federation. They also helped form a Women's Action Committee for the Gulf and the Peninsula, to create a regional women's network. However, the Committee's activities were restricted to holding conferences, and it came to an end following the Iraqi-Kuwaiti crisis.

In 1974, the two societies tried to form a women's union to integrate Kuwaiti women's activities into a single framework and further their demands. But the Union was short-lived, dissolved by order of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in 1977, following the Cultural Society's withdrawal. Between 1981 and 1990, a period

which witnessed a surge of Muslim associations, two such societies were formed in Kuwait: the *Bayader al-Salam* Society and the Islamic Welfare Society. The Kuwaiti Women's Society for Voluntary Work was founded following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The first two of these societies do not focus on women's political rights or their participation in parliament, but are mainly concerned with raising Islamic awareness, memorizing the Qur'an, organizing charitable work and crafts training for girls, and establishing kindergartens. The Kuwaiti Women's Society for Voluntary Work tries to raise women's awareness of the importance of voluntary work, care for children and mothers, charitable work, and to strengthen feelings of loyalty to the country.

In 1994, a new union was registered, the Kuwaiti Union of Women's Societies, led by the Crown Prince's wife, Sheikha Latifa. This Union included the three societies mentioned earlier, in addition to the *Nadi al-Fatat* Society. The *An-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* Society did not join since it considered the Union a maneuver intended to weaken and restrain its movement. As might be expected from the member societies' orientations, the Union was not active on the feminist scene, restricting itself to coordination between the three member societies,²¹ resolving potential disagreements, and representing women in and outside Kuwait. The Union is supported by the Government but the Cultural Society's refusal to join it, and its disregard for women's claims, makes the Union just another society whose activities and orientations resemble those of its member societies.

Women's Political Rights in Kuwait

In lobbying for their political rights, particularly their right to vote and run for seats in the National Assembly, Kuwaiti women referred to article 29 of the Constitution which stipulates: "All people are equal in regard to human dignity. Under the law, all people have equal rights and duties; regardless of their sex, origin, language or religion." However, the election law restricted the right to participate in the National Assembly (*Majlis al-Umma*) to male citizens, thereby denying women three basic rights: the right to run for office, to vote and hold a cabinet position.²²

As Nuriya al-Sidani writes, Egyptian women's experience from the beginning of their struggle led by Hoda Sha'rawi was similar to that of Kuwaiti women: "Here in Kuwait, it is as if history is repeating itself after eight decades have gone by. The same means that were used then are used now in Kuwait...the historical moments that Kuwaiti society witnessed from 1973 till 1982 are the same as those that Egyptian society witnessed at the beginning of this

century, with the use of the same means, from the press to the parliament... Even when it comes to women's lobbies, they are the same as the Egyptians', since Egyptian women's journey also started with women's associations in 1924." This writer underlines the effect of the 1967 June debacle in making her reconsider the activities of Kuwaiti women's societies: "The shock of 1967 made me change my lifestyle and way of thinking. The path to adopt is not holding charitable events or exhibitions, clapping, and endless other stupidities... The first point in this new line of thinking is for Kuwaiti women's societies to throw off the shackles of charity." ²³

Four years after this statement, on December 15, 1971, a general women's conference was held in Kuwait, making it the first conference in the Gulf region to raise women's real demands. Issues pertaining to women's political and social rights were discussed, and following the conference a list of seven claims of women's full political rights as well as participation in public life and personal status demands were submitted to the National Assembly. Reading these demands makes it clear how poor Kuwaiti women's situation was at the time and how much it has improved since then, at least as to participation in public life. ²⁴ Women have become lawyers and businesswomen, and they can now enjoy a personal status code.

The women behind these demands may be criticized for not really pursuing them, in spite of intermittent attempts at organizing seminars or launching awareness campaigns about women's political rights among female university students. Such campaigns failed to reach the broad-based female population in their homes, or the districts where movements opposing women rights flourished.

In February 1977, a petition signed by 395 women was submitted to the Crown Prince. This document contained several demands including women's full political rights. But the National Assembly refused to concede these rights in its January 19, 1982 session, nearly nine years after receiving the demands of the women's conference mentioned above.

Nuriya al-Sidani believes that the women's societies failed to serve women's cause by not making a move before the National Assembly session. She summarizes the reasons for the failure as follows:

1. Lack of coordination between the women's societies.
2. The disintegration of the Kuwaiti feminist movement.
3. The non-involvement of the *An-Nahda Al-Ousariya* Society, one of the most important pillars in advocating women rights.
4. The limited experience of new societies such as *Nadi al-Fatat*.
5. The absence of proper planning that would have

enabled the societies to become influential lobbying groups.

6. The societies' failure to adopt a systematic strategy for women's actions.

7. The failure to exert pressure in crucial moments, and the absence of women from the January 19 session during which women political rights were discussed.

8. The frustration felt by the Arab nation in the 1970s and 1980s.

9. The domination of religious movements opposing women's rights on the Arab scene. ²⁵

Following the Kuwaiti crisis in 1990/1, and in the absence of the National Assembly, the Kuwaiti Crown Prince issued a royal decree granting women their political rights, in appreciation of their efforts in defending Kuwait during the occupation. The re-elected National Assembly, however, ruled that the decree was illegal, and by a simple majority rejected women's political rights. Even people known for their liberalism voted against women's rights in order to remain in the political arena. ²⁶

Women tried to organize themselves and operate as a lobby, while a few of the female elite tried to register their names in voter registration centers, or to resort to the Constitutional Court to obtain their political rights. But the latter ruled that this would be unconstitutional. This suggests that Kuwaiti women's struggle for the suffrage is a lengthy road that requires women to be patient and persevering. It also calls for them to concert their efforts to raise awareness among the broad-based female population, to attempt to win the support of moderate Muslim movements, and to coordinate and cooperate with all civil society's institutions to achieve their goals.

III. The Feminist Movement in the Other Gulf States

Except for Bahrain, Kuwait and to some extent the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, there is no movement lobbying for women rights in the Gulf States. This is due to young state institutions in those countries, the delay in beginning to educate girls, the influence of the central government, and the absolute loyalty to the head of the state and the government.

Despite harsh constraints imposed by the social and political system on Saudi women, the latter are ahead of their counterparts in other Gulf States as they have founded women's societies, though these are mostly led by Saudi princesses, and their members are mainly the wives and daughters of the Kingdom's wealthier strata. The Women's Charitable Society was founded in Jeddah on February 28, 2002. Its main objective is charitable work, including aid to needy families, providing homes for the

handicapped, orphans, and the children of prisoners. The Society also tends to the welfare of children, mothers, and girls, and strives to educate girls through seminars and conferences. ²⁷

There are currently 19 women's charities throughout the Kingdom. These associations firmly adhere to the objectives stated above, to government regulations, and to social custom. Saudi women do, however, express their rejection of these constraints through literature and art. They are also active in the business sector but, in spite of their good education and high qualifications, they are still confined to 'women's professions'. Any female advocacy movement, however restrained, is firmly suppressed by the authorities and clerics. ²⁸ Although the Kingdom adhered to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, it had reservations about core items of the convention, and did not change women's legal status.

Women's associations are absent from Qatar, where women work through the Supreme Council of Family Affairs, presided over by the Crown Prince's wife. Founded by a royal decree in 1998 (no 35), the Council filled an institutional gap in the family development sector, and enhanced coordination between the ministries and various institutions concerned with social development. The Council groups a number of qualified Qatari females, particularly instructors from Qatar University. On March 5, 2000, the Committee of Women's Affairs was formed in order to handle women's rights and duties, to underline women's role in sustainable development, to ensure women's right to participate in leadership roles and decision-making positions, to enhance the role of civil society, and enable it to implement women-related programs. ²⁹

In spite of the recent nature of women's organizing in Qatar, Qatari women enjoy some support from the political leadership, as they have been granted the right to stand in elections, and to run for a seat in the central municipal council. Women's right to vote and run for office summarizes long, hard years spent trying to convince politicians of women's rights and competence to hold leadership positions, and participate in political life. ³⁰

Female candidates were greatly opposed by this conservative society, as their participation in elections was deemed too huge a leap for Qatari society to assimilate, particularly with ultra-conservative traditions that refuse changes that other Arab and Muslim societies have accepted, such as mixed gatherings and women drivers. Consequently, introducing social changes in favor of women requires the concerted efforts of conscientious men and women alike. It also requires "the elimination of

women's traditional psyche, as well as the social value system, and some of the social legacy", ³¹ not to mention the freeing of the creative forces in society and allowing the latter to form its civil organizations, providing for greater freedom of opinion and political diversity. The political leadership will not succeed in its work with the popular bases unless it is supported by a strong and efficient civil society that is truly free and democratic.

In the UAE, women's societies sprang up immediately after Independence, and the creation of the Union of the seven small emirates, the largest and richest of which is Abu Dhabi. Women's societies fulfilled the image and requirements of a modern state. They also fulfilled this young state's need to provide women with some welfare services such as education, vocational training, and raising awareness among families. Women's societies in the UAE have garnered such complete governmental endorsement that they have become akin to governmental institutions rather than NGOs. They are mostly presided over by the rulers' wives or relatives.

The *Nahdat al-Mar'a al-Zabaniya* Society (February 1973) was the first women's association in the UAE. Five others were formed which "followed the *An-Nahda al-Nisa'iyya* Society's footsteps in order to achieve their common goal of improving women's situation and status." ³²

In March 1975, the Women's Union composed of six societies was officially registered, led by the head of state's wife, Sheikha Fatima. This Union aims at improving Arab women's spiritual, social and cultural status, expanding women's activities to reach all the state's emirates, supporting the country's full national development, pursuing the establishment of good relations with other women's societies and unions in the Gulf and Arab region, and cooperating with international women associations. ³³ The activities of the Union and its member societies are mainly aimed at providing welfare services such as raising health awareness, raising religious awareness, carrying out charitable work, and vocational as well as crafts training for women.

Prior to the accession of Sultan Kabous, women's journey in the Sultanate of Oman differed from the rest of the Gulf. Omani women took part in the armed struggle led first by the Zafar Liberation Front, then by the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf. The latter included women's issues in its program, but poverty, illiteracy and the conditions of political life prevented the achievement of this program. The Popular Front concentrated on eradicating women's illiteracy. Omanis owe the achievement of this goal to the Bahraini militant, Layla Abdullah Fakhro, a member of the Popular Front who ran schools for girls in the Zafar province, south of Oman.

Many in the Sultanate still remember her efforts.

After Sultan Kabous came to power and the Popular Front was dissolved, the Sultanate evolved at a great pace and girls' schools sprang up. In modernizing its political and educational system, the Sultanate resorted to educated Omani citizens who returned to their homeland and held leadership positions. Among them were women with university degrees from Cairo, Beirut, Kuwait, Bahrain and Zanzibar.

With the establishment of a modern state in the Sultanate appeared the need to create an institution capable of communicating with women in distant, rural areas. For this purpose, 25 women's societies joined hands under the banner of the Omani Women's Society, which covered most of Oman's provinces. The first one was formed on September 23, 1970, in the capital Muscat (officially registered in 1972), and the last one was founded in 1994 in Khushb (registered officially in 1999).³⁴

Women's associations in the Sultanate of Oman today hardly differ from their counterparts in the UAE. Their objectives and activities mainly serve the welfare of children and mothers through similar programs. They underline the importance of respecting local traditions, which is why they have not done anything to fight female circumcision, a common practice in Oman, nor have they lobbied for women's rights. Much like the associations in the UAE, they completely coordinate their work with the

Directorate of the Affairs of the Woman and Child (*Mudiriyyat Shu'un al-Mar'a wal Tifl*), which is part of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

Conclusion

The feminist movement in the Gulf still has to overcome several problems, the most important of which is that the authorities control the women's societies to such a degree that they cannot undertake any action without the authorities' consent. Financial aid is dependent on the quality of a society's relationship with the authorities. Associations led by figures close to the regime benefit from financial support from the government as well as from private institutions, while other societies suffer from insufficient financial and human resources.

The other dilemma these societies face is lack of volunteers and human resources, and weak technical capacities, which makes them unable to set up modern strategies and programs. The majority of them still cannot reach women in villages and distant regions. So their activities are concentrated in the capital and restricted to the intellectual elite, which makes them the preserve of the privileged. Most Omani women's societies have failed to attract younger women as members; in consequence their leaderships have not changed (as in most Arab countries) in almost 30 years. Should this situation remain, there is fear that these societies might become extinct.

12. Unpublished papers and documents preserved by the AWS. See also Al-Banay, Fatima, "Dawr al-Jam'iyyat al-Nisa'iyya fi al-Bahrayn fi ta'ziz huquq al-Mar'a munthu 'am 1955," working paper submitted to a seminar entitled "Ru'ya li Waqi' al-Mar'a fi Qadaya al-'Ahwal al-Shakhsiyya," December 5 – 7, 1987.
13. A case in point is fixing the maternity leave for women working in the Bahrain Telecommunication Company. Associations that brought this issue to the courts were instrumental in establishing this right for working women in the private sector.
14. Al-Najjar, Sabika et al., *Jam'iyyat A'wal al-Nisa'iyya - an-Nash'a wal Injazat* - A Documentation Study (Bahrain: Arabic Institution for Printing and Publishing, March 1989), p 46.
15. New associations include: The Future Society, the women's wing of Al-Wifaq al-Islami Society (a Shi'ite political association), the Bahrain Women's Society and Fatat al-Rif, both the women's wing of the National Democratic Tribune Society (formerly known as The National Liberation Front with communist orientations); also the Bahrain Women's Society, affiliated to al-Soufara, a religious group. Sunni political organizations and charities created branches for women's action independent of the parent association. Note that the AWAL Women's Society was founded in 1970 as the women's wing of the Popular Front (Marxist), but has been independent of the Popular Front since the 1970s, following its own path, and advocating women's rights.
16. Abdullah, Muhammad Hassan, *Al-Haraka al-Adabiyya wa al-Fikriyya Fi al-Kuwayt* (Kuwait: Authors' League, 1973), p 87–93.
17. Quoted by Al-Najjar, Bakr "Al-Jam'iyyat al-Ahliyya Fi Mintaqat al-Khalij al-'Arabi – Al-Tarikh Wa al-Mujtama' ", paper submitted to the Conference on Arab Civil Organizations: Participation, Giving and Development, Cairo, October/November, 1989, p 226.
18. Al-Qatami, Lulwa, "Masirrat al-Jam'iyya al-thaqafiya al-ljtima'iyya al-Nisa'iyya – Rub' qarn min al-'ta' ,1963 – 1988," Kuwait, p 18.
19. Al-Hajji, Saad Ahmad, "Al-Jam'iyyat al-Nisa'iyya al-ljtima'iyya bi Duwal al-Majlis al-Ta'awun li Duwal al-Khalij al-'Arabiyya", Kuwait, 2000, p 782.
20. Op.cit., p 783 - 784
21. The Nadi Al-Fatat Society withdrew because it did not conform to membership conditions.
22. Article 1 of the Kuwaiti election law stipulates: "Every 21-year-old Kuwaiti male is entitled to vote." Article 125 of the Constitution stipulates: "He who holds a cabinet seat must be eligible to vote." Since women do not fulfill this condition, they cannot hold a cabinet post. See Al-Sidani, Nuriya , "Al-Masira al-Tarikhiyya li al-Huquq al-Siyasiyya lil Mar'a al-Kuwaytiyya Fi al-Fatra Ma Bayna 'Amay 1971 – 1982" Kuwait.
23. Op. cit., p17–18.
24. The demands can be summarized as follows: Women's unconditional right to vote; equality between men and women in all work fields, and the necessity to give women the opportunity to advance and hold higher administrative positions; equality between working women and men employed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the necessity to allow women to join the diplomatic corps; granting female civil servants all bonuses, including child support; requesting that Kuwaiti lawyers be also women, particularly in personal status and juvenile affairs; restricting polygamy and demanding that the second marriage be held before the court; depriving the husband of his second wife's child support in case the first spouse has born children. See Al-Sidani, Nuriya, "Tarikh al-Mar'a al-Kuwaytiyya - Min Muzakaraty Khilala Sab'at 'Ashara 'Aman wa Nisf" 1963 - 1980 part II, page 94
25. Al-Sidani, op. cit. p 99–100.
26. In a meeting between this writer and an influential figure in the Kuwaiti National Assembly, the latter justified his opposition to women's political rights by the power of religious currents in Kuwaiti politics. The same man also argued that should women be granted suffrage they would vote with clerics and against progressives, which would mean that the liberals would lose their seats in the Assembly in favor of backward-thinking movements.
27. Al-Hajji, op cit. p 331.
28. On November 6, 1990, 47 women, most of them highly qualified and working in the education sector, drove through the streets of Riyadh to ask for their right to drive, both to reduce the expense of hiring a foreign driver, and to face the possibility of war and the absence of men. But they were treated harshly, with some being dismissed and others defamed. See the Committee for Supporting Women in the Arabian Peninsula, "Women in the Peninsula: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia", *Al-Jamal Publications*, 1991, p 9–13.
29. Al-Mir, Jihane Abdullah (The Supreme Council of Family Affairs), "Al-Majlis al-A'la li Shu'un al-'Usra, Mashru' al-Stratigiya al-Wataniya li Takadom al-Mar'a fi Qatar", paper submitted for the seminar on Women and Politics and their Role in Development, April 12 – 3, 2002, Doha, p 6.
30. Al-Souwaydi, Wadha "Al-Mar'a al-Qatariyya Wa al-Tajriba al-Dimuqratiyya", paper submitted to the seminar on Women and Politics and their Role in Development, Doha, 2002.
31. Al-Najjar, Bakr, *Al-Mar'a fi al-Khalij al-'Arabi Wa Tahawulat al-Hadatha al-Asira*, Beirut: Arab Cultural Center, 2000, p 142.
32. The other associations in the UAE are: Al-Nahda al-Nisakiya Society in Dubai (1973), Al-Ittihad al-Nisakiya Society in Al-Sharja (1973), Umm al-Mukminin Society in Ajman (1974), the Women's Society in Umm al-Kouyouin (1973), Al-Nahda al-Nisakiya Society in Ras Al-Khayma (1979). See the Women's Union, "Masirat al-Mara Fi al-Imarat Fi 12 Aman Min al-Najah", p15, 125 – 144. See also Women in the United Arab Emirates, "Al-Mar'a Fi Dawlat al-Imarat al-'Arabiyya al-Mutahida" a brochure issued by the Women's Union in the United Arab Emirates.
33. Ibid. p 11.
34. Al-Hajji, op. cit. 557 – 558.

ENDNOTES

1. Al-Bassam, Khaled, *Niswan Zaman* (Beirut, 2002), p 45 – 46.
2. Al-Bassam, Khaled, *Those Days* (Bahrain, Pnoram Publishers, 1987), p 64.
3. For more information about this movement, see Al-Baker, Abdel Rahman, *From Bahrain to Exile: Saint Helen*, 2nd edition (Beirut, Al-Kounouz Publishers, 2002).
4. Al-Bassam, Aziza, "Al Mar'a al-Bahrayniyya Waqe' wa Tatallu'at Nahwa Mu'tamar Pekin fi al-Mar'a al-'Arabiyya – Al-Wade' al-qanuni wa al-ljtima'i.," Tunis, *Al-Ma'had al-'Arabi li Huquq al-Insan*, p 83.
5. Al-Najar, Sabika, "Al-Isham al-Nisa'i al-Tatawu'i", unpublished paper, AWAL Women's Society, p 3.
6. Al-Sidani, Nuriya, "Al-Haraka al-Nisa'iyya al-'Arabiyya fi al-Qarn al-'Ishrin 1917 – 1982" Kuwait, March 1982, p 35.
7. The Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society and the Child and Mothers' Welfare Society disagree on which one of them was founded first. Leaders of the second organization argue that theirs was established before Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain. After consulting contemporary documents, including publications issued by the Child and Mothers' Welfare Society itself, it became clear that the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society was founded immediately after the Women's Society was dissolved, whereas the Children and Mothers Welfare Society submitted their registration application in 1960.
8. Though the Awal Women's Society tried to downgrade charitable work and concentrate on women's rights, the authorities only allowed it to work on condition that that charity remained its fundamental and explicit objective. This was probably due to their fear of the Society's orientations, deemed revolutionary at the time.
9. Al-Najjar, Sabika, "Al-Haraka al-Nisa'iyya fi al-Bahrayn – Al-Mar'a fi Muwajahat al-'Asr", working paper submitted to a seminar Women Confront the Era, Cairo, November 17 – 20, 1995.
10. Ahmad Abdullah, Fawziya, *Al-Mar'a wa al-Musharaka al-Siyasiyya fi al-Bahrayn fi al-Haraka al-Dusturiyya - Nidal Sha'b al-Bahrayn min ajil al-Dimuqratiyya* (Bahrayn, Dar al-Wihda Al-Wataniyya, 1977 p 95.
11. Nakhleh, Emile, *Al-Tatawur al-Siyasi lil Bahrayn fi Mujtama' Hadith* (London: Lexington Books, 1976), p 53–54.

The 'NGOization' of the Arab Women's Movements

Islah Jad*

Introduction

One of the dominant trends in the evolution of the Arab women's movements is the ongoing increase in the number of women's NGOs dealing with aspects of women's lives such as health, education, legal literacy, income generation, advocacy of rights, research, and so on. This steady increase in Arab women's NGOs can be seen as a sign of decentralization of power and politics after the failure of the centralized Arab states to bring about social change and development. It is also widely viewed as a development of Arab 'civil society' to contain the authoritarian state, and as a healthy sign of real democracy in the region based on a 'bottom-up' approach. The increase in Arab NGOs in general, and of women's NGOs in particular, has unleashed a heated debate on their ties to their donors, their ideology, the utility of their roles in development and social change, and their links to their national states. In brief, they have been viewed as a new and growing form of dependency on the West, and as a tool for it to expand its hegemony. This debate is currently taking a new edge with signs that the current American administration is giving greater attention to

'democratization' and 'modernization' of Arab societies and Arab regimes, through increased funding for 'civil society' organizations. The US administration sees women's role as vital in this respect.

This article will try to trace the development of the Arab women's movements in the last two decades with special attention to what I call their 'NGOization'. To shed some lights on this trend, I shall examine the changing structures and discourses of Arab women's movements, in the context of a development discourse based in binaries such as: West/East, state/civil society, democracy/good governance, and NGOs/social movements. The growing number of Arab NGOs in general, and women's NGOs in particular, should be seen as part of a world wide trend, encouraged by many donor countries, international NGOs and many UN agencies, that views NGOs as a vital vehicle for social change and democratization through decentralization. I will argue, however, that because of the fragmentation of issues they deal with, the temporality of these issues and their resources, and with their weak social networks, NGOs cannot constitute continuous and sustained social movements, and that 'civil society' is a complex construction that cannot be reduced to a number of NGOs. Seeing this difference may be useful in revealing the limitation of the role of NGOs in facing national crises, as in Palestine or Algeria, or in introducing genuine, comprehensive and sustainable social change. This is not to say that the role of NGOs should be explained in terms of 'conspiracy theo-

ry' but rather that they should be subjected to a more historical and empirical approach that does not take for granted their equivalence with 'healthy' socio-political development. My argument is based on my own research, as well as my experience as an academic and activist in the Palestinian women's movement, my readings, and my own interactions with other Arab women's movements and NGOs.

Historical Background

The current debate on NGO proliferation is linked to global schemes for development, which in turn have their roots in the structural adjustment program implemented by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in many Third world countries (including some of the Arab countries), from the late '70s through the '80s, typically involving a variety of reforms in monetary, fiscal, trade, regulatory policies, and public sector management. These reform programs were based on the assumption that if sufficient economic incentives are provided to producers they will expand existing production and invest in new productive activities, thus providing the engine for sustained economic growth. These economic policies were in line with a pluralist definition of democracy in which the emphasis was on 'civil society' as a neutral terrain, where organized interests try to influence the state and its policy choices.

One can map out two main approaches to the concept 'civil society'. One sees civil society as a pluralistic complex, largely independent of any single economic force, with many competing interests (stemming from cultural institutions as well as from ethnic, racial and other social concerns) that challenge power-seeking states. The other line of thinking focuses on the emergence of capitalism as the dominant, formative force in history (Markovitz 1998: 27). The difficulty with the first, conventional application of the concept 'civil society' to Third World countries is that it causes us consistently to misread and understate the impact of capitalism on contemporary Third World politics. One such misreading is to see state and civil society as separate entities. The second approach contends that state and society intertwine in complex ways that do not follow any easy formula, and that are not easily predictable. According to Markovitz, "State and society do not stand apart in Africa — or anywhere else. Neither do they exist in precarious balance...Elements of the state are connected to civil society, and elements of civil society are not merely affected by the state, but are seated in the state" (Markovitz 1998:27). The many private companies directed by relatives of presidents or ministers in the Arab world show how the demarcation lines between public and private are blurred. Another illustration is the way the wives or

relatives of presidents and ministers establish their own NGOs to provide services relinquished by the state (Beydoun 2002: 101).

After all, all interests, whether of women or other social groups, seek the support of the state because it is the strongest organizational form. Sooner or later every interest seeks its aid. Markovitz notes that "the state does not suffer from 'incapacity' or 'deterioration' like a TB-infected patient or a forlorn lover. 'Constituents' do not 'relinquish' the state and 'find' new frameworks like sheep looking for greener pastures or Ph.D students seeking new models of analysis. 'Constituents' always engage in conflict with the state. They do not 'withdraw'. They suffer losses. They seek ways to recoup. Their involvement remains, although their strategies change". And he concludes, "this helps explain why state and society are never in balance, but interpenetrate" (Markovitz 1998:38). In this respect, it is important to distinguish between those elements in civil society that support the regimes in power, and those that seek to undermine, change, or control those regimes. Women's issues and interests are not suspended in air, disconnected from others groups' interests and needs. This is the vital task of a women's movement, with whom to build alliances, and how. Civil society is full of different groups with different interests; some are driven by ethnicity, religion, political factionalism; some women might like, others they might not. But the important thing for a women's group, organization, or movement, is how to analyse this and put it in context.

This is not to interpret all interests in the context of macro unifying concepts such as class or nation, but rather to note that there is always a class dimension in the development of civil society, and that it is important to see how class interacts with the state apparatus, and how this affects the development of democracy. For example, in Lebanon we need to recognize how this dimension interacts with sectarianism (Beydoun 2002:110-114), and in Algeria with fundamentalism (Lazreg 1994). In Palestine this interaction is visible in the oppression of certain groups claiming their social rights (eg. the teachers's strike in 1996), and the tolerance shown to women claiming equality from the state (Jad 2000). The interaction of women's organizations, the state and their constituencies will be elaborated later in this paper.

The worldwide promotion of the 'democracy and civil society' discourse was closely tied to anti-communism in the Regan years, but was given greater emphasis by George Bush senior, and then Clinton, with the end of the Cold War. Democracy assistance programs are designed to support electoral processes, promote judicial reform, strengthen civic associations, and enhance civic and political education. Much of this is channelled

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through NGOs and specialist foundations, but with the increase in official funding for democracy promotion, USAID is becoming increasingly involved in such initiatives. This has given rise to concern that too many US organizations are active in this field, that there is insufficient evidence of the impact of democracy assistance programs, and that programs are poorly conceived, because they fail to take into account the complexities of the democratization process (Robinson 1995:5).

These views were supported on the theoretical level by much writing on the emerging of 'new social movements'. For example, Melucci underlines, "The normal situation of today's movements is a network of small groups submerged in everyday life which require a personal involvement in experiencing and practising cultural innovation" (Melucci 1985: 800). The emphasis on cultural and symbolic aspects of social movements offers, according to Keane, some interesting and valuable insights into the micro-politics of daily life. It also shifts focus from the state as the terrain of class struggle to power as "exercised along a multiplicity of sites of domination and resistance", hence "bringing into public view the oppression embedded in every day life and thus challenging the deep-rooted codes of social interaction within civil society" (Keane 1988: 12). It is also argued that the notion that in the 'Third World' as opposed to the 'advanced' countries, struggles take place between two clearly demarcated camps, ie. the ruling class and the people, obscures the multiplicity of antagonisms and identities existing in any country 'Third World' or not (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 166). Such struggles over resources and identities are fought along lines of class, religion, and gender. The 'people' does not represent a homogenous entity, nor does 'domination', since it is not only exerted by the state but also by elements of 'civil society' that are economically and socially powerful. Among social elements that resist state domination and capitalist exploitation in Arab societies such as Egypt are urban marginals, for instance peasants, Islamists, moderate Muslims, secular-oriented women and men, feminists, Copts and many other groups that do not represent 'pure' or exclusive categories but tend to shift and intersect (Al-Ali 1998: 45).

The emphasis on cultural innovation and struggle for identity by theorists of 'new social movements' has been criticized for neglecting the struggle for survival and over distribution of resources that is so central to social movements; and because assertions of identity are also about economic gains. While traditional Marxist approaches tended to be economically deterministic, the 'new social movement' theorists seem to ignore the material bases for discontent and mobilization (Al-Ali 1998:45). The view of social movements as antithetical to domination,

as broadly democratic and progressive, has been challenged by the argument that a focus on identity is problematic, in that it might result in a 'voluntarist politics' that call for strategies that "work around, but do not challenge, state power" (Mooer and Sears 1992: 67, quoted in Al-Ali 1998: 45).

L. A. Kaufmann is even more sceptical about the progressive nature of 'new social movements', emphasizing that identity politics frequently degenerate into 'anti-politics' which mirrors the ideology of the capitalist market place through emphasis on life-style and lack of collective organization (Kaufmann 1990: 78; quoted in Al-Ali 1998: 45). In other words, 'new social movements' may have a de-politicizing effect in that their foci and praxis may not actually challenge prevailing power structures, leaving forms of domination relatively intact.

With these criticisms of 'social movement' theory in mind it is worth noting that in the Arab world there is conflation between social movements and NGOs. The notion that NGOs are the voice of the oppressed and marginalized became dominant, and led to a rapid spread of NGOs throughout the Arab world.

The spread of NGOs is a worldwide phenomenon in the 'North' as in the 'South'. The number of development NGOs registered in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries of the industrialized 'North' has grown from 1,600 in 1980 to 2,970 in 1993; over the same period the total spending of these NGOs has risen from US\$2.8 billion to US\$5.7 billion at current prices (OECD 1994). The 176 international NGOs of 1909 had blossomed by 1993 into 28,900. Similar figures have been reported in most countries in the 'South' where political conditions have been favourable, with a particularly rapid increase between 1990 and 1995. In the Arab world, it is estimated that NGOs numbered more than 70,000 by the mid-'90s (Bishara 1996). In Palestine the number had reached 926 by 2000, most of which were established after the Oslo agreement (Shalabi 2001: 111). This growing number of NGOs coincided with a weakening of the ideological political parties, and a growing retreat of states from service provision and social entitlements due to structural adjustment policies imposed on most Third World countries by the World Bank and the IMF (Omvedt 1994:35).

From Structural Adjustment to 'Good Governance'

The World Bank first pointed to the importance of 'good governance' in economic development in its 1989 study, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*. The Bank's concerns about governance arose from one

major source: the failure of its structural adjustment programs, which it attributed to the insufficiency of private investments, and to 'poor governance'. After some groping, the Bank settled on the following definition of 'governance': "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development" (World Bank 1992: 1).

While it is not the purpose of this paper to enter into the full details of the 'good governance' debate, one can quickly summarize the most important points made by critics of this new policy:

- The extension of the Bank's scope of interest to include governance raises the issue of sovereignty. The Bank and other aid donors are intruding ever more deeply into areas that have traditionally remained the sole responsibility of national governments. The Bank's focus on governance is thus part of a much broader trend in which the concept of sovereignty appears to be rapidly changing.

- It is not clear in Bank discussions and documents what sorts of political problems are critical to the success of Bank lending and which are not. Experience in Africa and elsewhere demonstrates that absence of accountability and transparency do not automatically lead to corruption and the absence of the rule of law. South Korean development in the past has been led by authoritarian regimes, lacking both in transparency and accountability to their people and not without a measure of corruption. However these problems of governance did not impede rapid economic growth. Thus we cannot be so certain of the relationship between political systems and governance theory, or political systems and development.

- The US government equates 'good governance' with democracy, and sees it as an end in itself, and not as a means to promoting economic growth. The plight of Iraq and to a certain extent of Palestine are installed under the rubric of 'imposing democracy' and removing corrupt or despotic regimes. It is clear from these instances that political interest directs US foreign aid under the 'good governance' banner.

- The US Administration has continued to provide aid to non-democratic regimes, like those of Ghana and Columbia as long as they continue to implement structural adjustment programs (Lancaster 1995:14).

- Too much aid, poorly timed, can undermine the incentives for governments to liberalize, particularly where internal pressures based on economic discontent are the prime force promoting political reform.

- Too much aid to finance new or civil institutions - for example legislatures, political parties, or NGOs - can undermine the independence of these institutions, and weaken their incentive to create the grass-roots support needed to sustain them, and ensure their sensitivity to those they are supposed to represent.

Keeping this international trend in mind, one can clearly predict the coming aggressive wave to 'democratize' the region, already spelled out by the American Administration by its build-up of forces to bring about 'regime change' in Iraq. According to a recent news item, the current US administration views the many ills in the Arab society as due to the lack of democracy, and the inferior status of Arab women. According to Elizabeth Cheney (the US vice president's daughter, who runs the Arab Reform Program at the State Department), the administration aims to nurture the fledgling program as part of its broader ambitions for opening up the region. US officials have said that a focus on democracy-building projects and a re-direction of aid money to grass-roots efforts can accomplish two things. One is to build the desire and ability to reform authoritarian governments, great and small. The other is to soften the image of the United States on the Arab street.

As part of the US Middle East Partnership Initiative (a \$25 million program to promote democracy in the Middle East announced by President Bush last summer), a complete review of assistance programs in the region is being undertaken, according to Reuters (16 November, 2002). An unnamed US State Department official told the news agency that one of the development agency's objectives is to increase the portion of assistance that supports the promotion of democracy and the rule of law. The source added that this included a range of activities intended to strengthen 'civil society' and responsible debate in Egypt.

The US's obsession with democracy in the region arouses scepticism that it is real, or that measures to implement it will ever be taken. Mustapha Kamel Al Sayyid, director of the Center for Developing Countries Studies at Cairo University, says it would not be in the US's interests to promote true democracy in Egypt, since the only viable alternative to the present government is the Islamist opposition - a group known for its dislike of American policy. "If the result of democratization is that Islamists gain more voice in politics, then no doubt the US government won't in practice do much in the way of the real promotion of democracy." (*Cairo Times*, Nov 21, 2002 circulated by 'News from Democracy Egypt').

With this scepticism in mind, the debate on the role of 'civil society' in the process of democratization, defend-

ing human rights and women's rights is seen in the Arab region with a growing distrust. This discourse adds fuel to an already burning debate in the Arab world on the role envisioned for Arab NGOs, and in particular women's NGOs, in the process of development, democratization and social change. ('Only for Women', 24/6/02, www.al-jazeera.com)

Faltering Development, External Pressures, and NGOs

In most African countries and Arab countries, the response of private sectors to economic reforms has been insignificant. Economic growth (if it has occurred at all) has been buoyed up by an increase of existing capacities and foreign aid. Structural adjustment policies have led many 'progressive' Arab countries to an almost complete withdrawal of the state from investment in the public sector and public services. This in turn has led to a severe deterioration of social and economic rights, translated in rising rates of unemployment and declining social welfare support from the state, affecting mainly youth and women (CAWTAR 2001: 15-17). This deterioration has had a strong impact on women's status, indicated by an increase in women's illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, and political marginalization, according to the *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The region has the largest proportion of young people in the world - 38% of Arabs are under 14 - and the report calculates that its population will top 400 million in 20 years' time. One in five Arabs still lives on less than \$2 a day. And, over the past 20 years, growth in income per head, at an annual rate of 0.5%, was lower than anywhere else in the world except for sub-Saharan Africa. At this rate, says the report, it will take the average Arab 140 years to double his/her income. Stagnant growth, together with rapid population rise, means vanishing jobs. Around 12 million people, or 15% of the labour force, are already unemployed, and on present trends the number could rise to 25 million by 2010.

From the mid-'70s, with visible crisis as most Arab states failed to achieve a sustainable level of development, or to absorb the increasing number of young people seeking employment, most adopted 'structural adjustment' policies. This retreat came amid major international changes that resulted from the collapse of the 'socialist/ communist bloc', formerly the main ally of Arab nationalist 'progressive' states such as Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, while the Israeli threat and unresolved issue of Palestine persisted, and the Iranian revolution put an end to the regime of the Shah, bringing an Islamist religious leadership to power.

While the Arab states were shaken by economic and social crisis during the 1980s, most Arab leaders successfully skirted the challenge of economic reform by using what Brumberg calls 'survival strategies', ie. a minimal response to pressures for economic and political change without engaging in the risky game of power sharing. This limited response to economic crisis was neither a reflection of a cultural proclivity for authoritarianism nor a manifestation of civil society's 'resurgence'. Instead, it mirrored the enduring legacies of 'populist authoritarianism', and the strategies that elites used to re-impose their hegemony without undertaking major economic or political reforms (Brumberg 1995: 230).

These 'survival strategies' are no longer working, and pressures are mounting to effectuate change. Intensifying the role of NGOs is seen by states and international agencies as the panacea. Scholars also have argued that NGOs may be less constrained in terms of their legal mandates and political considerations, hence better prepared to engage in the mobilization and organization of marginalized groups, and to establish new instruments and channels through which these groups can strengthen their participation in the economic and political sphere. Borner, Brunetti and Weder (1993, quoted in Robinson 1995) have called this an 'entitlement and empowerment' of marginalized groups. By 'entitlement' they mean: i) better access to the formal economic system, including property rights (eg. legal title to land and houses); ii) access to credit, enabling them to appropriate the returns of their investment; iii) access to the legal system; and iv) reducing bureaucratic hurdles in registering their businesses. 'Empowerment' means improving participation in the political system. Empowerment may start with organizing neighbourhood groups in the informal sector. Intermediary institutions may then provide the link through which articulation at the grassroots level affects decision-making at the local, provincial and state level (Nunnenkamp 1995:14-15). In this perspective, NGOs are viewed as better able to empower the people and enhance popular participation, since they are (or should be) more local, democratic, accountable, transparent and accessible than the state apparatus.

Thus many donor countries and UN agencies have turned to supporting NGOs, including women's NGOs. Here we must differentiate between different forms of women's organizations. Some provide services for a limited needy constituency, some are focusing on information production and research, while others advocate democracy and women's rights. The focus of this paper is on the latter category since they are the target both for funding and accusations of being part of the move to promote 'civil society', associated by many in the Arab world with World Bank and United States policies. The funding of

women's advocacy NGOs has renewed old questions, such as why is the West funding us? Why is the West interested in women in our area? One of the most vocal accusations against women's organizations is that they implement a Western agenda, which means that they are less nationalist and less 'authentic'. This is an old and fruitless debate which does not help in building alliances, or in examining the visions and programs of any group of activists in an objective way.

Women's Movements between East and West

Attacks on Arab women's NGOs usually involve the old dichotomy of West versus East: a West seen by fundamentalist groups as a power that desires to impose its cultural values: individual freedom, materialism and secularism; or by Arab nationalists and leftists as colonial and corrupting, buying the loyalties of the new political, social or economic elite ('Only for Women' 24/6/02, www.al-jazeera.com), returning to the foreground what Leila Ahmed calls 'colonial feminism' (Ahmed 1994:175-179). Others set the proliferation of NGOs in a context of ongoing expansion of neo-liberalism, and the formation of a 'globalized elite' (Hanafi and Tabar 2002:32-36), and as "mitigating class conflict, diluting class identities and culture, blurring the class borders and blunting class struggle within nations and between them" (Qassoum 2002: 44-56). A quick overview of the history of the Arab women's movements from the last century will shed light on new trends in these movements.

The East/West binary is an old one that has been articulated by some Arab feminists who believed that what the colonists sought was to undermine the local culture through 'colonial feminism' (Ahmed 1994:175-179). Like Lazreg, Ahmed is particularly disturbed by the resemblance she perceives between colonial discourse around Arab women and the discourse of some contemporary Western feminists, who "devalue local cultures by presuming that there is only one path for emancipating women - adopting Western models" (quoted in Abu-Lughod 1996:14).

Badran rejects such formulations, arguing that "attempts to discredit or to legitimize feminism on cultural grounds ... are political projects". For her, the origins of feminism cannot be found in any culturally 'pure' location: "External elements - external to class, region, country - are appropriated and woven into the fabric of the 'indigenous' or local. Egypt, for example, has historically appropriated and absorbed 'alien elements' into a highly vital indigenous culture" (Badran 1995:24-25). She implies that Egyptian feminism is part of such an indigenous (fluid and always in process) culture, underlining how women

such as Hoda Sharawi and Ceza Nabarawi were more nationalist and uncompromising regarding British colonialism than men of their class. She also shows how, in spite of meeting with European feminists, and developing their ideas in relationship to European feminist organizations, Egyptian feminists were politically independent, expressing criticism of European support for Zionism. Further, their deepest concern was for the conditions of Egyptian and Arab women. Thus Egyptian feminists were very much part of, and concerned with, their own societies and cannot be dismissed as Western (hence somehow inauthentic) agents (Badran 1995:13-15, 22-25).

In the same vein, Lila Abu-Lughod warns that "we all write in contexts, and when we come to write the history of 'the woman question' in the Middle East, we find ourselves caught: between the contemporary Egyptian or Iranian or Turkish context where Islamists denounce things Western, a label they, like many nationalist men before them, attach to feminism, and a Euroamerican context where the presumption is that only Western women could really be feminist. How to get beyond this?" Abu-Lughod further notes that "such notions of separate cultures have themselves been produced by the colonial encounter. This leads to different possibilities for analysing the politics of East and West in the debates about women, ones that do not take the form of narratives of cultural domination versus resistance, cultural loyalty versus betrayal, or cultural loss versus preservation. It also opens up the possibility of exploring, in all their specificities, the actual cultural dynamics of the colonial encounter and its aftermath" (Abu-Lughod 1998:16).

Based on her empirical study of secular Egyptian women's organizations, Al-Ali underlines, "Egyptian women activists, as varied as they might have been in their ideological inclinations, were active agents in their specific cultural, social and political contexts". She adds, "It never fails to astonish me how women activists continue to be discredited on the basis of their class affiliation and links to European culture and education, while male political activists, especially communists, do not seem to be exposed to the same degree of scrutiny concerning their class or educational background" (Al-Ali 1998:121).

What can be concluded is that, in order to avoid falling into these cultural dichotomies, it is important to study - preferably empirically - the context in which organizations are working, what are their strategies, their structure, their links to other social and political groups, to external agencies and to the state.

Based on empirical studies conducted on women NGOs

in Egypt, Palestine and also on other Third World countries in Africa and Latin America, one can observe a process of NGOization.

The 'NGOization' of the Arab Women's Movements

What 'NGOization' means is the spread of a different form of structure for women's activism, one which limits the participation of women at the local level to 'their' organisation. 'NGOization' also limits the struggle for national causes to 'projects' geared to priorities set by an international discourse without diversity, and fragments the accumulation of forces for social change. The formation of women's NGOs with particular social aims marks a very different form and structure for Arab women's activism from those that predominated in earlier periods. The first half of the twentieth century was characterized by the spread of women's literary salons mainly for highly cultured and educated upper middle class women. Urban middle and upper class women also ran charitable societies and, later, women's unions based on open membership for women. In Palestine for example, charitable societies recruited hundreds of women in their administrative bodies and general assemblies, while women's unions had large memberships extending to women in villages, and after 1948 to refugee camps.

If we compare the size of the older societies and unions with that of the constituencies of contemporary NGOs, one easily notes a decline in numbers. The prevailing structure of NGOs is formed of a board of between seven to 20 members, and a highly qualified professional and administrative staff whose number is generally small, and depends on the number and character of projects being dealt with. The power of decision is not, as it is supposed to be, in the hands of the board but usually in those of the director. The power of the latter stems from his or her ability to fund-raise, be convincing, presentable and able to deliver the well-written reports that donors require. In order to achieve these requirements, communication and English language skills become vital, besides modern communication equipment (fax, computer, mobile phones, etc). In some NGOs the director has the power to change board members, sometimes even without their knowledge.

As for the internal 'governance' of NGOs, a survey of more than 60 Palestinian NGOs found that most of their employees do not participate in decision-making due to "their passivity or their lack of competence" (Shalabi 2001:152). The 'target' groups do not participate in decision- or policy-making either. When the administrations were asked why this was so, they answered that

they were part of this society, they knew it, and could decide about its needs. (Shalabi 2001:152). In many women's NGOs, the staff has nothing to do with the general budget of their organization, and do not know how it is distributed. According to Shalabi, the internal governance of the surveyed NGOs was "a mirror reflection of the Palestinian political system based on individual decision-making, patronage and clientalism", and the lack of rules organizing internal relations in the organization. In some cases a union dispute erupted, and was settled in a "way very far away from the rule of law" (Shalabi 2001: 154).

The highly professional qualities required of administrative staff for better communications with donors may not directly affect the links between an NGO and local constituencies, but most of the time they do. Referring here to the Palestinian experience, the qualities of cadres in what were known as 'grass roots organizations' - the women's committees that were branches of political formations that sustained the first Palestinian Intifada - differed considerably from those required in NGO staff. The success of the cadres lay in organizing and mobilizing the masses, and was based in their skills in building relations with people. They succeeded in this because they had cause to defend, a mission to implement, and because they had a strong belief in the political formations they belonged to. It was important for the cadre to be known and trusted by people, to have easy access to them, to care about them, and help them when needed. The task needed daily, tiring, time-consuming effort in networking and organizing. These cadres knew their constituency on a personal level, and communication depended on face-to-face human contact. But NGOs depend mainly on modern communication methods such as media, workshops, conferences, globalized rather than local tools. These methods may not be bad in themselves but they are mainly used to 'advocate' or 'educate' a 'target group', usually defined for the period needed to implement the 'project'. Here the constituency is not a natural social group, rather it is abstract, receptive rather than interactive, and the 'targeting' is limited by the time frame of the project. This temporality of the project and the constituency makes it difficult to measure the impact of the intervention, and also jeopardizes the continuity of the issue defended.

With NGOs, the targeting policy is always limited, localized and implemented by professionals hired by the organizations to do the 'job' which makes it different from the 'mission' based on the conviction and voluntarism of cadres in the grass-roots organizations. Their structure and methods do not help NGOs to act as a mobilizing, organizing formation when working for claims to rights or change; most NGOs do not in any case set organiza-

tion or mobilization as a goal. Assessing Algerian women's defeat in changing the retrogressive family law of 1984, Lazreg attributed it to the fact that women hung by the thread of the state's moral obligation to them as fighters for Algerian independence, and added that women lacked "organization, numbers and money" (Lazreg 1994: 155).

It is important to notice these differences to help clarify the prevailing confusion between social movements and NGOs, because in order to have weight or, in political terms, power, a social movement has to have a large popular base. According to Tarrow, what constitutes social movements is that "at their base are the social networks and cultural symbols through which social relations are organized. The denser the former and the more familiar the latter, the more likely movements are to spread and be sustained" (Tarrow 1994: 2). He adds, "contentious collective action is the basis of social movements; not because movements are always violent or extreme, but because it is the main, and often the only recourse that most people possess against better-equipped opponents. Collective action is not an abstract category that can stand outside of history and apart from politics for every kind of collective endeavor - from market relations, to interest associations, to protest movements, to peasant rebellions and revolutions" (Tarrow 1994:3). The same can be said of women's movements. To put " 'women's movement[s]' into context, we have to ask first, what a 'women's movement' is and how can we distinguish it from 'women in movement'" (Rowbotham 1992, quoted in Jackson and Pearson, 1998).

To start with, there are different views as to what a women's movement is. It could be a mobilizing engine to demand female suffrage, with a leadership, a membership, and diffuse forms of political activity that qualify it as a movement, as distinct from forms of solidarity based on networks, clubs or groups. And according to Molyneux, it implies a social or political phenomenon of some significance, due both to its numerical strength and to its capacity to effect change, whether in legal, cultural, social or political terms. A women's movement does not have to have a single organizational expression and may be characterized by diversity of interests, forms of expression, and spatial location. Also, it comprises a substantial majority of women, where it is not exclusively made up of women (Molyneux in Jackson and Pearson 1998: 226).

Thus, it seems preferable to reserve the term 'movement' for something larger and more effective than small-scale associations. The long quotations presented here are intended to highlight the elements that must be present in a movement if it is to achieve change. As I argued ear-

lier, the typical structure of NGOs debars them from serving as mobilizing or organizing agents, so that however much they proliferate they cannot sustain and expand a constituency, nor tackle issues related to social, political or economic rights on a macro- or national level. Were they to undertake these aims, they would have to stop being NGOs.¹

NGO reliance on the use of media communication for advocating national issues (eg. fraud in elections, corruption) can cross the red lines drawn by political authorities, leading to the punishment of individual leaders, and pointing to the weakening effects of lack of a broad constituency. The cases of Sa'ad el-Dine Ibrahim, an outstanding defender of Egyptian 'civil society', and Eyad Sarraj, a prominent defender of Palestinian human rights, both jailed by their governments, need to be analysed for the light they shed on the efficacy of NGO as opposed to 'movement' action. Issues related to political and civil rights are usually seen as more 'political' than issues related to women's rights. But even some social rights such as salary raises or education rights have met with violent oppression by the political authorities. Big issues need an organized constituency to carry them; otherwise raising them is like playing with fire.

Empirical observation and research have shown that it is not easy, and perhaps not feasible, to assemble a number of women's NGOs to work towards a common goal (the minimum requirement for the definition of 'women in movement'). It appears that the NGO structure creates actors with parallel powers based in their recognition at the international level, and easy access to important national and international figures. But this international recognition is not translated into recognition or legitimacy on the local and national levels. This creates a competitive dynamic between NGO directors that makes it hard to compromise or agree on common goals, since the one who compromises may be seen as the weaker among power equals. Coordination is more possible between NGOs with similar aims, but it is difficult to achieve with women's organizations as different as charitable societies and 'grass roots' organizations. NGO leaders, empowered by high levels of education, professional qualifications, and the international development 'lingo' tend to patronize the others.

These observations are supported by NGO studies in other Third World countries. As cited earlier, the proponents of a 'bottom-up' approach argue that the organization of popular pressure and participation from below is a necessary pre-requisite for political change and economic progress. They are also extremely sceptical about the ability and willingness of any regime truly to reform itself. Under such conditions, the 'top-down' approach may sim-

ply be ineffective, as official donors have to work mainly through the governments of recipient countries. However, under such conditions, the 'bottom-up' approach is also likely to fail, though for different reasons.

The potential of NGOs to foster participatory developments beyond the 'grassroots' level is fairly small; even at this level, since projects are transitory, their capacity to bring about change is dubious. The activities of NGOs are typically focused on specific projects; coordination between NGOs pursuing different aims is weak; and benefits beyond narrowly defined target groups are uncertain at best. In any case, empowering the powerless from below is a time-consuming process. Most importantly, though, it is naive to assume that participatory development at the 'grassroots' level can be significantly promoted in developing countries whose governments are notoriously unwilling to reform political and economic systems. If governments are not reform-minded, they will suppress participatory developments wherever they emerge as soon as such developments threaten to undermine the power base of the ruling elites. The experience of NGOs in various countries offer ample evidence of this. As concerns entitlement as defined above, the 'bottom-up' approach obviously relies on supportive measures by government authorities (Nunnenkamp 1995:14-15).

Here one should raise the question: are Arab governments willing to introduce reforms? Do they act to reform themselves? The evidence from Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries suggest that they are not, and do not. The appearance of the wives of presidents and rulers, princesses, and prominent women in certain women's NGOs cannot be translated as a willingness to reform, but means rather that women's rights and claims are seen as a-political and politically unthreatening, since they do not touch the political, economic and social foundations of the Arab regimes.

In this article I have tried to argue that the role attributed by UN agencies and international development organizations to Arab women's NGOs as a vehicle for democratization and participatory-based development needs to be re-assessed through empirical studies, and not pursued on a cultural basis that brings back the old dichotomies of West versus East, or vernacular versus Westernised. The Arab women's NGOs in their actual forms and structures might be able to play a role in advocating Arab rights in the international arena, provide services for certain needy groups, propose new policies and visions, generate and disseminate needed information. But, in order to achieve comprehensive, sustainable development and democratization, a different form of organization is needed with a different, locally grounded vision.



Caricature credit: Jalal Al-Rifai

ENDNOTES

In the middle of a recent debate in Egypt on *khula'* (women's right to ask for divorce), a prominent feminist activist was asked if her Centre was taking part in the debate. She replied, "We don't deal with such 'projects'".

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Introduction to Email Interviews on Current Challenges Facing the Arab Women's Movements

The idea for this section arose from the realization that the historical evaluation studies at the front of the issue needed some counterbalancing appraisal of the present. But this need presented us with many problems, among them the number and diversity of the women's movements, the small pool of specialists with a regional overview, the difficulty for grassroots activists of extricating themselves sufficiently from day-to-day activities to analyze their situation. There was also the problem of the polar differences of ideological viewpoints from which the present could be reviewed. Such differences extend from those of liberal inclination who perceive the proliferation of women's NGOs as a sign of progress, and others who see it as a symptom of fragmentation and loss of the original Arab women's movement of its momentum and unity; between those who welcome all UN and Western intervention in the 'woman question', and others who see international agency support for 'gender equality' as an attempt to undermine Arab/Islamic family values and identity; between those who see the Arab women's movements as having achieved popular acceptance of basic rights (eg. women's right to education), and those who see them as unable to overcome historical, cultural and structural limitations. For a few scholars, however carefully selected, fully to present this diversity of contemporary women's movements over such a large and heterogeneous region would be an almost impossible task.

The halfway 'solution' we reached was to maximize as far as we could the variety of viewpoints by inviting 20 scholars and grassroots activists to participate in an email interview. We tried to select respondents from as broad a regional and ideological spectrum as possible, so you will find interviewees from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Algeria, Morocco, and Sudan as well as countries with older, more studied women's movements, such as Egypt and Lebanon. Ideological viewpoints include liberal, radical and Muslim feminist.

We selected the questions through a process of Editorial Committee consultation, designing them to elicit focus on specific aspects of the women's movements that may be termed critical. Readers may find that many questions they deem more essential than ours have been omitted. If so, we invite you to send your comments, to be published in a forthcoming issue.

We asked all the interviewees to send us photos. Thanks to the three who did, but we felt that, with so few, we could not use them.

Rosemary Sayigh

Current Challenges Facing the Arab Women's Movements

The Interview Questions - (NB: AWM is an acronym for Arab women's movements.)

1. What in your view has been the greatest achievement of the AWM(s) so far? What has been its/their greatest failure?
2. Conservative forces in the region accuse the AWMs of being overly influenced by 'Western feminism'. Is this charge justified in your view? What is the best response?
3. What are the factors that account for the spread of religious fundamentalism among women and men in the Arab region? Does this religious revivalism threaten the AWMs? Can Islam (or any other religion) offer a long-term basis for struggle for women's rights?
4. Today we find the AWMs doing social work, adult literacy, research, legal counseling, and other kinds of activity. Is this pluralism good or bad in your view?
5. Do you think there should be more struggle for family law reform?
6. In the past, the AWMs mainly looked to the 'West' for models and affiliations: should they form relations with women's movements in the 'East' — Iran, Africa, India, Pakistan, etc?
7. Up to now leaders and members of the AWMs have been mainly educated urban women: what stops the spread of the struggle for women's rights to women of other classes?
8. Most AWMs are characterized by non-elected and non-accountable leaders who make decisions without consulting members. Should the AWMs adopt more democratic structures and practices?
9. Have AWM members done enough to change gender relations and practices in society, and in their own families?
10. Most Arab countries contain non-Arabic speaking minorities: what has been, and should be, the policy of AWMs towards them?
11. Should we avoid the term 'Arab feminism' as implying the existence of an 'Arab woman' and creating a false idea of Arab homogeneity?
12. What has been the impact of the UN Decade for Women and its offshoot agencies (eg UNIFEM) on the AWMs?
13. The number of women professionals and scholars in the Arab region has been rapidly expanding: what effects has this had on the AWMs?
14. What do you see as the greatest obstacles to the growth and development of the AWMs today?
15. What of the future? If you were able change one element in the present set-up of the AWMs, what would it be?

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1. In spite of the fact that I belong to a society which does not acknowledge the term 'women's movement', I guess that with some concessions regarding the political implications of the term I may be able to pinpoint some important aspects of achievement and failure of the Arab women's movements. However, to do so, we need to agree on the definition of the term. The importance of developing such a common understanding is not only to reach a 'theoretical' agreement, but also to allow us to recognize its various forms in different social environments in the Arab world. If our understanding of the term is confined to a single meaning, in which 'women's movements' is defined only as a political body of feminism, such a limited definition would exclude those Arab societies in which neither are political activities permitted nor is feminism recognized.

Yet, in contrast to this limitation, there are Arab societies where even though a 'women's movement' does not formally exist, or is not acknowledged as a feminist movement, its momentum is constantly at work. One might say that the term can have more than one definition. For beyond abstract or operational concepts, a 'women's movement' can be found when we are ready to see it in its various forms. In Saudi Arabia, for example, although there is no 'movement' to defend women's cause, we cannot miss the implications of the term in all steps that have been taken there to improve women's status. Though Saudi Arabia, unlike neighboring countries of the Gulf region, has never witnessed any kind of women's movement, yet it would be difficult to maintain that it has not felt the effect of the overall Arab women's movement. It is true that most reforms related to women were due to government initiatives; but most of them were a response to civilian requests or demands. From the first royal decree in 1960 acknowledging girls' right to education to the official recognition in 2001 of women's right to their own identity card as citizens, not only as daughters or wives, the 'Arab women's movement', though never present in Saudi society, was at the same time never absent.

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The value of these two official decrees becomes clearer when we know that both measures faced strong opposition from some factions of Saudi society. The controversial nature of all issues related to women in Saudi Arabia would have made both decisions impossible to reach without the long discussions that took place between opponents and supporters, in which support for women's rights appeared stronger. This I would call an achievement of the Arab women's movement. The achievement lies in the fact that the movement managed, however indirectly, to set up an agenda of feminist reforms that has permeated the very different societies of the Arab world at different periods of their modern history. Challenging women's illiteracy from within the blacked-out value system of Islam was one of the movement's main achievements, especially in view of the fact that women in some parts of the Arab world were prevented from learning because of a certain interpretation of Islam. The same is true in relation to women's right to employment.

The failure of the Arab women's movement can be identified as its inability to extend this kind of success to other areas of women's life without being trapped in the modern image of western women. Another point of criticism is its failure to resolve the historical conflict between men and women by building an equality of gender.

2. We have an Arabic saying, "It is a word of justice that is used for injustice". This saying was first used by the Prophet Muhammad's cousin (may Allah's peace be upon him) to mean that sometimes a word of truth is misused to lead to a false conclusion. It seems to me this saying is very applicable to those who criticize the Arab women's movement not for the sake of giving an objective opinion but only as a means of condemning the movement itself. The aim behind labeling the women's movement as a blind follower of 'Western feminism' is not one of objective criticism of certain ideas and practices, but rather to condemn the movement as a whole and to diminish its appeal to Muslim women. In my opinion, the women's movement should not take time to respond to such accusations, or allow them to divert it from its goal of empowering women. The practical response is to devote itself to its goal by rallying women from all parts of the Arab world - in urban and rural areas, among women of different educational orientations, and from different ethnic, cultural and eco-

nomie backgrounds. This cannot be done unless the movement tries faithfully and seriously to link itself with the urgent issues and real needs of women in specific Arab environments.

Despite the overwhelming trend towards globalization, it has to be realized that women's issues are not identical in every part of the world. It is true that there are commonalities, and that there should be a sense of solidarity among women internationally, but it is also true that problems cannot be imported or exported and solutions cannot be imposed.

In addition to this, another practical response is to take the issue of democracy seriously rather than using it as a slogan, which means that the Arab women's movements should democratize themselves from within. This needs taking into consideration the views and the criticisms of both women and men. The women's movements should have the courage to initiate self-criticism.

Finally, it is very urgent that the whole Arab women's movement should make a serious attempt to crystallize its thoughts and practices in the light of what the legal system of Islam says about women. I think that there is a whole historical passage of women's legal status in Islam that must be revised and re-read in relation to the contemporary needs of women and contemporary feminist issues. This reading must be done in the light of *Al-Qur'an al-Karim* and according to *al-Sunna al-Nabawiyah al-Sharifa*, and not only according to the opinions of past 'ulama. This is not to disparage their opinions, but to draw attention to the necessity for women to take responsibility in this male-dominated area. This is not a call for isolation from the international arena; rather, it is a call to the Arab women's movement to place its own fingerprint on the 'woman question', so it won't be labeled by the singular image of Western feminism.

3. There have been several academic and journalistic attempts to specify the factors that account for the spread of so-called religious fundamentalism. Here I shall refer to two academic attempts that represent opposite approaches to the issue. One of them adopts a completely Western stand by giving 'Islamic revivalism' a stereotypical image as an antagonistic form of movement that has no other goal except to stand against 'modernism'. Modernism in this approach is defined exclusively as Western mod-

There is a whole historical passage of women's legal status in Islam that must be revised and re-read in relation to the contemporary needs of women.

ernism, which allows it to label Islamic revivalism as a threat to the universal values of the West. The other approach attempts to read Islamic revivalism from within the historical context of the hegemonic relation between the West and the Islamic world (including the Arab world). It looks at this relation of hegemony as a framework that allows an exercise in power/knowledge by which the Islamic world is feared, belittled and controlled. Since this hegemony has been the framework of introducing modernism as a purely and exclusively Western product, it has consequently led to the creation of political conditions for modernism in the Islamic world. The condition was that the Islamic world could not be modernized unless it accepts to follow the Western model of modernization. This meant, in both theory and practice, erasure of identity beyond physical features, cultural heritage, and geographical boundaries.

Gita Sahgal and Yuval-Davis represent the first approach, manifested by their analysis of 'Islamic revivalism' as a form of fundamentalism identical to all forms of religious fanaticism, without giving weight to historical, socio-political, and cultural differences, based on an implicit assumption of Western universalism.¹ Such an approach labels all attempts at returning to the *Qur'an* and the *Shari'a* in issues related to women, as a retreat into tradition. This view is contested by those who see returning to the *Qur'an* and the *Shari'a* as the only way to challenge traditional interpretations by creating a contemporary and innovative re-reading of the canonical texts. The second approach does not only recognize the right of feminism in the Islamic world to have a choice of its own in the way it responds to challenges to Muslim women, it also provides a theorization for understanding the legality and not only the logic of this choice. But Leila Ahmed and Nasreen Ali among others question the validity of a single image of woman, which Elizabeth Spellman calls an 'essential woman'. They argue that this is an image whose look and mentality is Western. Bobby Sayyid takes the argument a step farther when he says, "The effect of this is that women who do not share essential woman's particularities become lesser women".² The implication is that in order to be recognized by the West as liberating movements, feminist movements have to be either Western, or at least western-oriented, a position that endorses cultural and racial hierarchies.

4. This also is a controversial question. On one hand, there are those who think that involving women's movements in such projects might lead to their 'domestication' by diverting their attention from the political arena and the public domain. On the other hand are those who believe that the only way for the women's movement to gain political credibility is by dealing with the urgent issues and the immediate needs of women of different backgrounds. I think I tend to side with the latter, for two reasons. The first is personal, related to my intuition as a poet and not only to my orientation as a sociologist, which makes me prefer the romance of working with people to being puzzled by the surrealism of political work. The second reason is the actual need of women for social work, legal counselling, etc., as a means of empowering them, which could be the only way to help them struggle for full citizenship, legal and political.

5. Oh yes, I believe very much that there is an intense struggle to be carried on in the area of family law. As I said before, there is a whole system of Islamic law that suffers silence and neglect, and which has to be re-read and re-interpreted.

6. Yes, indeed. In fact, globalization must not exclusively mean Americanization or Westernization. Globalization in the positive sense of the word means the collapse of the Berlin wall in all directions of the globe. This means an equal representation of different dimensions of the seven continents. In addition, there are rich histories of women's personal and communal struggles, of joyful and painful experiences, which ought to be globally rediscovered and shared by women and men of the world. These need to be revalued and disseminated among new generations of women, especially as the Internet today helps to demolish political boundaries as well as the very concept of censorship.

7. I am glad that you brought up this question. The causes of this limitation vary from social to political to multi-dimensional factors. Some critics of the Arab women's movements think that this situation is a result of a poor practice of democracy. Others think that this is because the movements have failed to address the heterogeneity of the Arab world, and to move outside the ivory tower of its intellectual domain. Whatever the reasons, it is a source of worry for all those who would like to see the movement

spread roots at a popular level. In my opinion, if elitism within the movements is not modified to include women of different social backgrounds and diverse cultural frame of reference, it could eventually be one of the major reasons for its future isolation and maybe elimination.

8. See my answer under 2 above.

9. We have to be modest enough to admit that individual achievements, no matter how great, can never be a full measure of the success of a public movement such as the Arab women's movement. Taking this reservation into consideration, one can say Yes, it is very likely that a number of movement members have done their best to change gender relations and practice on a personal and familial level. This is not to say that there is full achievement of gender equality in their families. Arab women's movement members live and function within a certain social environment; the only way for their personal struggle to be effective is to change the social framework that allows uneven gender relations to be an accepted pattern of social behavior.

10. This is a good question because it is related to the self-criticism that is badly needed within the overall movement. Unfortunately, women's issues in non-Arabic speaking minorities have been silenced for a long while as a result of political linkages between the Arab women's movement and the political project of nationalism in the region. I think it is time that the movement starts to realize the importance of its own independence. However this is not achievable unless it frees itself from being an echo of a dominant discourse of a ruling class, and/or political parties. This is also the only way to put an end to attempts to use the 'woman question' as a card in political maneuvering, as happened in Algeria and elsewhere in the so-called Third World during the second half of the past century. I think one of the main things to be done at this stage is to establish a mutual trust by strengthening solidarity among women of different linguistic, cultural and/or social backgrounds. This in my opinion should be done within the bound of unity of the Arab world.

11. I think that terms are not the problem in defining feminist movements in the Arab world. What really matters is the content of the

Fowziyah Abdullah Abu-Khalid:

movement, and that it does not become a duplicate of dominant modes of feminism, which may have a different agenda than that needed by women within a specific bound of time and space. Developing a form of feminism that does not deny women the right to have their own 'feminist imagination', their own choice in achieving gender equality, and the right to be proud of their cultural identity, is the real challenge of feminist movements in the Arab and Islamic world today.

12. I am sorry to say that the impact of most UN declarations in relation to women has been very limited, and so far most of them are going nowhere beyond propaganda. In my opinion, this situation will continue unless genuine and practical measures are created to protect women from national and international violations of their rights, whether these take the form of wars or domestic violence.

13. I think the growth of the number of women professionals and scholars in the Arab region is a very positive sign of a real liberation of women on a practical level. However these women should not allow themselves to be absorbed by official institutions at the expense of their feminist objectives. The increase in number of those well educated in different fields of knowledge widens their representation in social institutions, empowering them to speak and to have their voice heard.

14. The most serious obstacle that could impede the progress of the women's movement is fanaticism. In other words the Arab women's movements should not cling to their old ideas but be open to fresh ideas and new needs of younger generations of women.

15. First, I would like movement women to leave their offices and conference rooms and walk barefoot in alleys and on unpaved roads, to develop a sense of solidarity between urban and rural women of different intellectual and social backgrounds. Second, I would like it not to be ashamed of identifying itself with the Islamic feminist perspective of women's liberation (*al-tanthir al-nasawi al-mustanir*). Thirdly, I would like it to be more democratic and less exclusive and centralized. Finally, I would like it not to stop dreaming, for this is one of the best ways to renew its energy and to let fresh air replace the burned-up oxygen.

I would like movement women to leave their offices and conference rooms and walk barefoot in alleys

ENDNOTES

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1. The Arab women's movements have been most successful in improving women's roles and situations in the 'public spheres' of education, work, and political participation. Their goals in these areas often converged with male reformers who followed modernization paradigms. They have been less successful in making the link between personal lives and politics, and in addressing gender issues within the so-called private sphere.

The greatest failure, in my view, has been not to build on previous achievements, and not to build effective alliances between groups within a specific country, like Egypt for example, as well as with feminists in other Arab, Asian and African countries.

2. It does not take a western feminist to see injustice and inequalities in any part of the world. Women all over the world are facing discrimination, and aside from general problems related to poverty and war, they are confronting gender-specific problems. This is not to fall back into un-reconstituted universalizing and a patronizing "Sisterhood is global" mode, but to recognize that we need to break out of dangerous dichotomies. For some reason (well, we know the reasons), this never really came up with respect to socialist and Marxist movements and political groupings.

For a start, western feminism is not one thing, and Arab women's movements might be influ-

enced by certain strands of it, i.e liberal women's rights activism as opposed to radical feminism. Secondly, Arab women have struggled historically to gain rights and change existing gender ideologies and relations as women have in many non-western countries. Thirdly, all sorts of ideas and movements emerged in the West, ranging from the nation state to Marxist thought. What is wrong with appropriating certain ideas and/or politics and translating them into one's specific social, cultural, economic and political realities? The history of humankind is a history of encounters and exchange.

And finally: most women who are part of feminist movements in western countries are extremely critical of their own governments and their politics. This is not restricted to women's issues in the specific national context, but often extends to international politics. Living as someone of Iraqi origin in the UK, for example, I am always moved by the number of British women who have no direct connection to either Palestine or Iraq, but who are very passionate and effective in their struggle against war, against imperialism and against injustice.

3. This question is very complex and would need a very long answer. The factors accounting for the spread of religious fundamentalism range from a series of economic crises, the failure of secular governments and parties to deliver progress and affluence for all, the 1967 war and the ongoing atrocities committed by the Israeli government, anti-Western sentiments linked to Zionism and the US support of it, imperialist policies of the US and other western countries, and the corruption and oppression of existing regimes.

Religious revival in and of itself does not have to be antithetical to women's rights. However, in my view, any form of religious extremism, whether it is based on Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or Islam (or any other religion) is a threat to women and women's movements. Women are being used as markers of purity and authenticity and are generally subjected to severe restrictions in movement, appearance and behavior.

I do not think that any religion can offer a long-term basis for struggle for women's rights, but I understand that in certain situations it might be necessary or useful to evoke religion.

4. Pluralism in itself is neither good or bad. It very

much depends whether resources and energies are put to good use, or whether women's groups are wasting their efforts by working all over the place and not focusing. In my experience in Egypt, the problem was not pluralism in terms of activities, but 'reinventing the wheel' and lack of co-operation. In other words, different groups and organizations would start certain projects without building on the work done by other groups earlier. Furthermore, activities were sometimes the result of available funding rather than well-thought through needs.

Yet, ideally, Arab women's movements (again as women's movements in other parts of the world) should be able to work on many different levels and issues, as gender inequalities are pervasive in all aspects of life. In light of the severe lack of human resources (due to the relative small size of women's groups), and in some countries of funding (though not Egypt), priorities need to be made.

5. Yes, the existing family laws in most Arab countries affect women of all social classes. They are the source of much anguish, emotional and material suffering and a general symbol for unequal gender relations.

6. I do not think it is an 'either or question'. But I certainly agree that there should be more transnational links with women in the 'East' as well as 'South.' One of the most powerful arguments in countering the common accusation of "imitating the West" is to show that women in non-western countries, such as Pakistan, Nigeria and India, suffer from similar problems and engage in similar struggles.

7. To some extent, this holds true for many social movements worldwide: it is the educated middle classes that have the time and energy to change the world while the poor struggle for daily survival. However, several factors account for the fact that Arab women's movements today seem particularly to fail to mobilize women of other classes (as opposed to places like Turkey where the women's movement has been much more successful in this point on various occasions).

8. Definitely. Unfortunately many women's organizations in the Arab world follow the prevailing political culture in the region, i.e. authoritarianism and hierarchical political structures. Those women and groups that try to challenge prevail-

Nadje Al-Ali

ing forms and cultures of doing politics struggle on several fronts at the same time. They often spend more time trying to create democratic structures and processes than in fighting for women's rights. But, in the long run, these attempts are extremely important and positive.

9. One of the greatest challenges for members of Arab women's movements is to challenge existing gender ideologies and relations in our own families and amongst friends. Many of us, whether in the Arab world or the West, fail to practise what we 'preach'. It starts with our relationships at home as well as towards our sisters. We are often still complicit with the patriarchal system of divide and rule, and we treat other women as rivals rather than partners in a struggle.

10. All inequalities and injustices - whether on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. - are linked. Women's movements anywhere in the world need to have a holistic approach to the problem of gender discrimination. At the same time you can't fight the discrimination of religious or ethnic minorities, or the oppression of poor people, without addressing gender inequalities.

11. I think we should move beyond the endless debates about terminologies. The term 'Arab feminism' is as valid and as misleading as the term 'Western feminism.'

12. Initially, the UN decade for women seems to have boosted the Arab women's movement but some of the activities were not sustainable.

13. The effects have been multifold: It has led to the professionalization of women's societies which in previous decades were either based on charity and welfare work, or political militancy. On one level, this professionalization resulted in a situation where highly qualified women - doctors, lawyers, academics, etc. - became part of women's movements. They managed to combine their professional qualifications and insights with the political struggle for women's rights. I think that this has been a positive development. At the same time, the women's movements may have lost the voluntarism and militancy of earlier decades, and now sometimes run the danger of 'careerism'. I noticed in Egypt that some women made a career out of being women activists. This is not a problem if it is merely a side effect

Women's groups also played an important role in resisting the various dictatorial regimes that dominated Sudan in 1958-64, 1969-85 and the current regime.

of their activism, but it becomes problematic if the job becomes the goal in and of itself.

14. Repressive governments within the Arab world severely limit all forms of dissent and political expressions. They feel particularly threatened by women's movements that challenge the status quo. Radical Islamist movements and increased social conservatism also pose a great obstacle to the growth of the women's movement. Western imperialism, and particularly US foreign policy with respect to Palestine, Iraq and the so-called war on terrorism all increase anti-western sentiments in the region. Until Arab women manage to be less defensive towards the accusation of being too pro-Western, and show their critics that 1) the West is not one thing; 2) Western feminism is heterogeneous; and 3) most western feminists are critical of their own governments, their work will be very difficult.

15. It would be fantastic if there could be less rivalry and competition, and more solidarity and co-operation.

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1. It is very difficult to talk of a single, unified Arab women's movement. Women's groups in many parts of the Arab world have played quite an important role in anti-colonial, nationalist struggles and have been able to achieve certain advances, such as reforms in Personal Status Laws, employment laws (equal pay), etc. However, as has been argued in various feminist texts, and indeed by local activists, many of these groups have focused on reform rather than the complete transformation of 'the situation of women' in the various countries of the Arab world.

For example, the nascent women's movement in Sudan played a part in the anti-colonial struggle. Women's groups also played an important role in resisting the various dictatorial regimes that

dominated Sudan in 1958-64, 1969-85 and the current regime. However, the mainstream women's movement in Sudan has not adopted a transformative stand regarding gender issues, and although it has been more successful in addressing issues of socio-economic difference, it has failed to recognize differences between Sudanese women, particularly racial difference. However, there are new women's groups that are addressing these issues.

2. Charges of 'Westoxication' have been levied against active women's groups by both conservative and to some extent progressive forces in the region - including sections of active women's movements - but more so by conservative forces. I think the question to be asked is: why is this the case? Most of the time this happens for political reasons, mainly with the aim of undermining progressive feminist discourse. As I argue elsewhere, I have listened time and again to the first woman parliamentarian in Sudan arguing:

We are not feminists! For us, liberation does not mean '*alistirgal*' (behaving like men), nor promiscuity or moral laxity. Look at what feminism did in the West! Look at the photos of naked women you see on the walls of subway stations (in London)! Look at the spread of drugs, homelessness, and broken families! Do you know why this is the case? It is because bourgeois movements have made it a point to lead women's movements astray, and their conspiracy was successful.¹

Some of these issues are actually being challenged by feminist groups in the West. In the case of Egypt, this issue has been discussed by Nadjé Al-Ali in her excellent article "We are Not Feminists".²

It is important to mention here that one of the reasons of such a stand has been the tendency of some of the western feminist strands to homogenize women, 'Othering' Third World women in the process. In the case of conservative forces and politicized Islamic groups in the region, however, what is often criticized is usually a construct of what conservative forces see as 'Western feminism'.

3. I believe that there are both local and external factors that account for the spread of politicized Islam.³ Generally speaking, this is part of a resurgence of movements organized around religious,

ethnic or national identities. These movements find fertile ground in an increasingly globalized world, where they are able to mobilize religious collectivities by - amongst other things - emphasizing their difference from the 'West'. Given the fact that women are often considered as markers of national identity and cultural difference, they are often expected to commit themselves to specific notions of 'womanhood' and to reproducing ethnic and national boundaries, in a way that often undermines women's human rights. As such, I believe that it is difficult for any religion to offer a long-term basis for struggle for women's rights. However, I acknowledge the existence of Islamic feminist discourses and the fact that there are elements of religion and culture that can form a basis for promoting women's human rights; but they need to be approached critically. Groups like the 'Women's Memory Group' (Cairo) could play an important role in this.

4. This pluralism is not necessarily bad, but we need to be cautious about the transformational component of some of these activities. We need to look at why and how they are being undertaken. With high rates of illiteracy amongst women (and men) in countries like Sudan, literacy should be introduced as a basic right. This might contribute to changing the way women and women's roles are defined in society but it will not necessarily transform the 'position of women' in that society. If adult literacy is used as a form of pedagogy - feminist pedagogy - and if women who attend literacy classes are organized around a transformative gender agenda, then that is another story.

5. There should be more struggle towards changing personal status laws but this should not constitute the only activity of women's groups in the region.

6. Feminist theorizing has developed immensely in other parts of the Third World, mainly in Latin America and the Indian sub-continent. I think there are many parallels in experience between women from these parts of the world and women's groups in the Arab world. Struggles of women's movements in other parts of the Third World could inform, and also be informed by, the struggles and experiences of women's groups in the Arab region. Having said that, I believe that the West cannot be approached as a homogeneous entity, and there are theoretical currents that developed in Western countries that can be very

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useful in the context of the Arab region. I will always be indebted to Cynthia Nelson for introducing me to various feminist analytical currents (some of which developed in the 'West') that helped me better to understand and analyze some of the issues that face women in Sudan and Egypt.

7. This question depends on which groups are considered part of the 'women's movement' in any given country. In the case of Sudan, the 'official' women's movement has been traditionally dominated by educated, urban based, middle class and 'Northern'; but women have always organized to address their 'practical' needs, sometimes in ways that could almost be defined as anti-establishment. In the case of Sudan, I believe that experiences of conflict and exile have changed the nature of active women's groups. In my research amongst women's groups in exile and groups that address the needs of women in marginalized and war-affected areas in Southern and Eastern Sudan, I have noticed that women still attending literacy classes are organized and often leaders of women's groups (or branches of these groups), and they are adopting an increasingly transformative agenda.

8. I think that women's groups, like other political and social movements in the Arab world, need to be democratic and transparent. But I also think that in the case of Sudan there are groups that have been formed as a response to lack of democracy and transparency in the mainstream women's movement. In the context of the Sudanese exiled women's groups, the Cairo based 'Maan' (a women's work group), for example, undertake a democratic and non-hierarchical approach to decision-making. The motto of the Sudanese Women's Alliance is 'Empowering Sudanese Women in the Context of Democracy and Social Justice' and the group undertakes a decentralized approach to decision-making.

9. This is a very important question and complicated issue. The achievements of women's groups and women in various parts of the Arab world cannot be undermined. Women's groups have also had different levels of success in these areas depending - amongst other factors - on the dominant cultural beliefs in a society, receptiveness of the political establishment to ideas of change as well as the nature of the women's movement. However, there is a lot that remains to be done in terms of changing gender relations and practices in society and within the family.

Unfortunately academic feminists / women's activists are sometimes excluded by the mainstream women's movement and their concerns branded irrelevant.

There is always a tendency to look at various cultures or at 'our culture' as a single entity. It is important to untie the links between elements of local cultures that are contradictory to women's human rights, and those elements that could actually be useful in promoting women's empowerment.

10. Recognizing the fact that minority or 'Other' ethnic/cultural groups exist, and that they have distinct problems would be a good starting point. In fact this is already taking place within some groups in a number of countries including Egypt and Sudan. In the case of Sudan, given the homogenizing tendencies of the post-colonial state and its attempts to impose a singular Arab and Islamic identity on a multi-racial, multi-cultural population, and the fact that this was linked to unequal distribution of wealth and power, identity questions have been central to our political experience. Mobilization and organization of women in Southern Sudan for example, has taken place in the context of struggle against oppression, linked to cultural hegemony. In the process, they have been challenging the tendency of women's groups to construct women from marginalized regions as victims who need support rather than as activists capable of organizing themselves, and adopting transformative agendas.

11. Yes; also because the term implies that there is a single Arab feminist perspective. I have addressed this in my "Arab Cultures and Human Rights: A Gender Perspective".⁴ Having said that, I believe that there are also many common issues on which Arab women's groups could work together given the socio-economic and political situation in the Arab region and its location in relation to the international system.

(12: not answered.)

13. I am particularly interested in the fact that the number of women interested and/or trained in feminist, women's and gender studies is on the increase, and that this has resulted in a slowly expanding tendency to look critically into existing groups and structures. Unfortunately academic feminists/women's activists are sometimes excluded by the mainstream women's movement and their concerns branded irrelevant. Others feel that this movement does not reflect their beliefs. However, I hope that this will lead to the development of local theoretical perspectives

that will then inform the struggle of women's movements in the region, as has been the case in other parts of the Third World.

14. The absence of democracy and respect for human rights in many parts of the region is a problem, issues of conflict, poverty and a tendency to sometimes use these very important issues to discredit feminist groups is equally important.

As is the case with other Third World women's movements, especially progressive groups that do not identify with religious or ethnic political projects, 'challenges on the ground' are often invoked: where poverty and conflict prevail, challenging prevalent gender norms is often considered a luxury. This can sometimes become a dilemma when setting our 'agendas' and priorities. How can we address complex theoretical issues when there are women around us who simply can't find food and water? Whose children cannot go to school? Who are likely to die young through maternal mortality and through TB for example? The challenge here is to integrate a concern with these issues into local feminist agendas, and to address issues of democracy, poverty and conflict through gender lenses. In the Arab region, the issue of 'universality' versus 'cultural specificity' in relation to women's human rights is an important challenge as well.

15. No less than focusing on the transformation of the current dominant 'neopatriarchal' order, to cite Hisham Sharabi. Meanwhile, I believe that it is important that we all continually sharpen our theoretical tools as well as our tools of practice.

ENDNOTES

1. Ali, Nada M. (2001) "On Being a Third World Feminist" *Eve's Back*, Manchester, winter, no.27.
2. Al-Ali, Nadje (2000) "'We are not Feminists': Egyptian Women Activists on Feminism", in Nelson and Rouse (eds.), *Situating Globalization: Views from Egypt*. (Bielefeld: Transcript).
3. Ali, Nada M. (1995) "Women and Politicised Islam: Case of the Sudan" Paper presented at the workshop on Women's Education and Empowerment. Hamburg, UNESCO Institute for Education. An Arabic translation has been published in *Ruwaq Arabi*. CIHRS, 2001.
4. Ali, Nada M. (1995) "Arab Cultures and Human Rights: A Gender Perspective", Paper presented at the NGOs Forum, UN Fourth Women's Conference. Beijing, China.

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Translated from Arabic by Lynn Maalouf

1. I believe that Arab women do have common issues, and that there are Arab women's movements with a regional dimension that bring out both the dissimilarities between specific political contexts and regimes, as well as the social realities that Arab women live in.

In spite of the attempt by the Arab Women's Conference to unify women's efforts at the Arab national level, the conference ended up expressing the policies of ruling Arab systems with regard to the status of Arab women, instead of forming a platform for various intellectual, political and ideological trends, as well as women's mass movements.

Despite this, Arab women in general, and the women's movements, have succeeded in increasing the level of women's representation in the public sphere over the past two decades, for example with women being elected to parliament in several countries (eg. Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine). This can be considered as a step towards a stronger political participation of women. In Bahrain women succeeded in practicing their right to vote and to run as candidates for parliament. But in some countries, Kuwait for example, Arab women are still struggling for this right. They have also achieved changes in the judicial sphere (the family code) in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco. A number of Arab women's movements have also been active in a bid to influence development policies towards securing women's needs.

At the same time it is evident that an important retreat in the role of certain women's movements is taking place. For example, during the first Intifada (1987-1993), Palestinian women's organization played an outstanding role. But despite the severe suffering of Palestinian women during the second Intifada, no unified role of women's organizations has emerged. This absence weakened the role of the women's movement in resisting the invasion, which would have bolstered their role in Palestinian society, and their role in the various fields devoted

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ed to strengthening the resistance of Palestinian women. The unifying tools of the women's movement during the first Intifada, such as the Higher Women's Committee (which included members of women's movements with various political affiliations, and grouped under the PLO) was a unifying tool for all women's bodies. The loss of this unified front has weakened this role in comparison to the first Intifada. The role of women's movements has also receded in Yemen, Algeria, and Sudan. One of their flaws was that they failed to build popular and organized women's movements active in all fields, in opposing discriminatory social realities as regards marriage, or education, and in drawing up programs to eradicate poverty. The work these organizations did, despite its importance, is no alternative to building a broad women's movement with branches in all sectors and levels of the population, one able to bring about real change in the stereotyped role of women. In my opinion, the Arab women's movements have not been able up to this day to make this change. They have also failed to rally the Arab women masses to support Palestinian national resistance to the Israeli occupation, or Iraqi women against the expected American invasion, or Algerian women against ongoing civil strife and violence.

Instead of having women's movements working among women, it would be best to have civil organizations offering services to women, but without minimizing the role of women's organizations, so that they do not form an alternative to organized work but play a supportive role to the larger feminist public movement.

2. The Arab women's movements are part of international women's organizations that strive to improve women's position in all societies, as well as to struggle for peace and sustainable development, and against war and globalization. The common factors between Arab women's movements and international women's organizations are many, taking into consideration the specificities of each society in its cultural, societal and economic reality. Many international women's organizations are currently active in opposing the war in Iraq and supporting the right of the Iraqi people to control their fate. Many Arab and international women's delegations have also been coming to Palestine, in a popular campaign to protect the Palestinian people, and they have been facing violence from the occupation forces.

Many international women's organizations are currently active in opposing the war in Iraq and supporting the right of the Iraqi people to control their fate.

3. The rise of religious fundamentalism in the Arab region is due first, to the lack of democracy, second to the economic situation and its social impact, in addition to the inability of ruling bodies to offer solutions for increasing poverty, rising debt to the World Bank, and the deepening of economic inequality. A third factor is the emergence of religious political resistance groups such as Hizbollah, and its heroic victory against the Israeli occupation forces in South Lebanon; and a fourth is the cultural background of Arab societies that supports religious thought.

4. In my opinion, these activities are positive and contribute to activating the role of women in society.

5. Yes, we do need to sustain the struggle for a contemporary family code. It is also necessary to sustain the gains we have made so far in legal amendments to the family code.

6. Each women's organization starts from a given reality, and works to change reality towards a better future. Many positive examples can be found in this respect, which are well adapted to the reality of our societies. We can adopt them, whether they originate in the West or the East, as long as the vision is clear about changing women's status in our societies so as to integrate them in development as a whole, so that women's issues are no longer isolated from the general effort for development and progress, and so that women occupy their role in Arab societies through society's progress towards a better future.

7. Women's movement leaders in Egypt, Jordan, and Arab North Africa are mostly from the elite and based in cities, far from the mass of women's actual situation and problems. If we aim to form a popular Arab feminist movement, we have to mobilize women from rural and marginalized areas as well as from under-represented sectors, eg. manual and clerical workers, students, and housewives.

8. Fostering democracy in Arab women's movements would enable them to rid themselves of their flaws and to achieve more. Today, these movements must absorb democracy into their internal life so that they can have more impact on their societies, and gain the power to bring about democratic change in their societies.

9. I believe that the Arab women's movement needs to deploy intensive efforts towards changing the understanding of gender roles in our society.

(10: not answered)

11. It is hard to speak of 'the Arab women's movement' in the absence of a framework unifying women's efforts at the Arab level. I believe that all Arab women's movements are linked by a pan-Arab element, ie. a common language, common interests, a common culture.

12. International organizations that address women's issues contribute to translating the resolutions of international conferences into local structures and programs aimed at improving the situation of Arab women. I believe that these international organizations have positive effects on women's status.

13. All research related to the status of women helps in the creation of programs and plans aimed at meeting the needs of women in all sectors. They should be focused on indicators that arm every Arab women's movement, regardless of the direction it is taking. If these research institutes do not coordinate, they will not serve the interests of the women's movements, especially in regard to meeting the policies of donor countries. This will be more the case if they focus on issues that are not directly linked to the needs and concerns of the feminist movements. From here comes the fear that there are too many research institutes, and that they are being formed solely with the aim of receiving donations.

(14: not answered)

15. The main aim should be to bring change that would foster democracy within Arab women's movements, so as to transform them into influential social movements.

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1. It is hard to talk about a unified and homogeneous Arab feminist movement, since there are important differences between Arab societies (for example, between Tunisia and Saudi Arabia). There are many countries where this movement is just emerging, and other societies where this movement does not even exist. Women's gains in the Arab world are the result of a silent revolution. Through education and work, they have managed to achieve social visibility and a place in the media. In fact, the feminist movement comes as a result of these social and economic changes. The need to call for women's specific interests, to change women's conditions, and to organize in groups, results from the will of educated women to liberate themselves from the tutelage of their families. The most significant achievement of the Arab women's movement is to have produced the 'woman issue' as a political and ideological factor that other social and political actors have to take into consideration, and not neglect.

The worst failure is that the Arab feminist movement has not yet managed to become a political actor per se, with a significant bargaining power compared with other social and official forces. It does not at the present time have the power to impact decisions and laws regarding women. Algerian women activists, for example, have been struggling for nearly 20 years to bring about a change in the family code, without having achieved any results so far.

2. Until the opposite is proved, the Arab feminist movement is indeed influenced by Western feminism. But how could it be otherwise? This is not a flaw. After all, no one has ever blamed the Arab nationalist, socialist and unionist movements for coming under Western influence. Western feminism is the only model that Arab women have so far. They have no other identifications or models in the sense of a struggle for equality and absolute liberation of women regarding their choices in their daily lives. Is there a 'Third Worldist' Arab feminist movement efficacious and strong enough for other women to identify themselves with? Is this accusation justified? This is not an accusation that is applicable to feminism only, as the westernization of societies goes beyond the women's movement. It is a global process that started with colonialism. Women are not the ones who imported it. So these accusations do not stand. The best response is to go on struggling for women's

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basic rights (education, work, judicial and civil equality, contraception, etc.), by choosing the means that are best adapted to the Arab societies. If the goals of Western feminism and those of Arab feminism come together, the means and ways towards achieving these goals have to be adapted to specific societies. It is not possible only to emulate the struggle methods that succeeded in another historical context. We have to think based on the realities of the Arab world.

3. This is a complex question. Many researchers are trying to find the answer, without having so far offered convincing explanations. One can briefly list some reasons: the failure of developmental models chosen after independence (unemployment, poverty, the housing crisis, the accumulation of problems), the frustrations linked to the Palestinian problem, and the status of religion in our societies. The socio-economic situation offers favorable ground to all forms of messianism, among them Islamic fundamentalism. All this contributes to encouraging extremism among the young, who represent the majority in Arab societies.

Can religion serve as a basis for women's struggle? Frankly, I don't know, but we may suppose that women with a continually deepening understanding of Islam will be able to use it to demand certain rights contained in the Qur'an, but from which they do not benefit today (for example, inheritance in those regions where women are excluded through customary laws in contradiction with the *Shari'a*).

Women who form part of Islamic movements described as moderate are quite combative: the Movement for Society and Peace had a woman elected to the (Algerian) National Assembly, and the Al-Islah movement also has a woman who was elected to the new Assembly (2002). They are also very numerous in student organizations, and quite dynamic.

Their divergence from secular feminists mainly relates to the status of women in the family, and to the family code. Islamist women must manage the contradiction between their duty as believers (duty towards God, and fidelity to precepts concerning, for example, the veil and polygamy), and their rights as citizens in a secularizing society - not an easy matter. But if any change is to occur in religion, it will most likely come from women.

4. Yes, absolutely. It is necessary to take into

consideration the situation of rural women, as well as working women and women at home. They are the basis of the movement in the long-term. All these activities give social visibility to women's movements, and are necessary to convince women. Their problems are unfortunately sometimes ignored by the women elites.

5. More than ever! The family codes are unjust towards women, and are in contradiction with constitutions (as is the case in Algeria). Only women who have been deeply wronged by these discriminatory codes can develop the struggle for their rights.

6. Yes. Priority should be given to reinforcing relations among feminists in the Arab world, and to extending them to the rest of the Muslim world. For example, the greatest Arab feminists are not well known by generations of francophone women in North Africa: their writings are not available in French, and not found in libraries; and their struggles are not known by the women's movements. Problems are common to these societies and often differ from problems in Western societies. These societies are all dominated economically and culturally. Women would gain by knowing about the experiences of women living in Islamic societies, and by adapting their struggles to the means and conditions of these societies. The experience of feminist movements in the Western world is very rich, but it cannot be imported as it is, without discernment. After all, isn't it the same problem with development?

7. The women elites remain in spite of everything very distant from the problems and concerns of women of the 'people'. Their discourse is often one targeted towards foreign audiences, and seldom addressed to the mass of women (rural women, workers, housewives). This prevents women of the masses from identifying with these leaders. The elites are primarily concerned with their own equality, and the equality of their status with men, and not with solutions to social problems experienced by women of the masses - poverty, school failure, lack of housing. The women elites think as individuals, but the women of the 'people' think first as mothers of families. We also remember that women lack the time and freedom to struggle. Finally, the women's movements have not obtained sufficiently impressive results to serve as an example. In a situation of internal conflict

The elites are primarily concerned with their own equality, and the equality of their status with men, and not with solutions to social problems experienced by women of the masses ...

for example, women are divided along lines based in events: during the conflict in Algeria, many mothers or wives of terrorists suffered ostracism or injustices without any reaction from the women's movements. The movement of mothers of the 'disappeared' is not supported by other women's movements because it is suspected of being close to certain political movements with which these women's movements do not agree.

8. Certainly. Women's groups reproduce the hierarchies and bureaucratic forms of organization within their movements. Leadership conflicts often lead to splits. Instead of having one large unified movement (even if with autonomous structures), we find ourselves with small groups of women having no real impact, and prey to endless internal divisions.

9. It's not so much the feminist movements, it is individual women who have carried out mini-revolutions in their families from the moment when they started studying and working. This has contributed to changing family relations. Yet have these relations really changed? Many women have succeeded in having a professional life, but at the expense of their family life. They have not found either the help or the necessary understanding to lead both at the same time. Only women are submitted to these painful choices. So what has changed?

10. If feminist movements are democratic, they should favor the expression of all citizens (majority and minority), and should be ready to listen to problems of women within all social groups, since language is not a barrier between women. But movements within these minorities are often monopolized by men, and women serve as a springboard only for the global project – nationalist or regional. Women don't dare assert themselves outside the group for fear of being rejected by the community.

11. This question seems to me a bit ambiguous. On the contrary, we should keep the term 'feminism' to denote women's struggle for their rights and the defense of their interests. When we talk about Arab syndicalism, socialism or liberalism, etc, no one thinks of not using it.

12. It is impossible to measure precisely. At least it has allowed us to recognize international resolutions in favor of women. This is why Algeria

ratified CEDAW (Copenhagen) in 1996. But we have to remember that eight Arab countries have not ratified this convention. Besides this, I don't really see any impact on the daily situation of women.

13. Has there been a feminist movement that was not guided by intellectuals and that succeeded? The leaders of feminist movements are often intellectuals. This new fact should contribute to increasing the research done on women's conditions and to developing knowledge of their different situations. To this effect, we should encourage the development of laboratories of research on women's issues, sociological enquiries, etc. This element of knowledge should help in gaining a better understanding of what women really want.

14. The obstacles are inherent in the societies in which women evolve and in women themselves. Our societies need democracy and freedom in order to evolve. As for women, they must overcome an age-old fear to learn to organize themselves and struggle for their rights. This is not really the case today.

15. I am not a specialist in predicting the future. The Arab feminist movements have no future outside pluralism and democracy. This is a meeting ground. The Algerian experience has proved it in the course of a decade of violence. Violence has been a powerful brake on the development of the feminist movement which really started organizing from 1989. Everything was put on hold following the events, and the women's movement drew back in its claims for women's rights. Peace and democracy are factors that would allow the movement to build itself a bit more, and to deepen its claims.

If we could change one element in this situation, it would be in the functioning of these organizations. Women's organizations must prove their rejection of the authoritarianism that is within them, and function in a democratic manner. For this to happen, one has to hope for and imagine a functioning based on the participation of the greatest number of activists, and not at the top of the hierarchy only. If organizations do not pay attention to their whole membership, then they will nurture the indifference of the majority, and become empty shells.

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Translated from Arabic by Lynn Maalouf

1. That the voice of women, their concerns and ideas are now in the forefront of the public sphere; and that the hidden potentialities of women have been discovered beyond imagination, beyond what the women's movement anticipated. Another great achievement has been that women are allowed to join the public sphere, starting with education and going on to politics.

Their greatest failure is the fact that they have not been able to find a culturally relevant discourse concerning the private sphere, and how to empower women 'within' it, not 'against' it. As a key concept for describing and understanding Arab family relations and structures of power and empowerment, 'patriarchy' is not appropriate. Yet the Arab women's movement has failed to introduce another conceptual frame of analysis.

2. My position is that this is the way the Arab women's movement has been and is portrayed. But there are other histories, and Islamist women and men were always a part of the movement. If we review history we can see this. Of course there were those who saw Islam as a challenge, but I claim they were a small minority. Even Qassem Amin is now being re-read, and the Islamic component of his ideas recovered. We should avoid the ideological classifications and over-politicization of stances that have dominated this debate for so long.

3. My answer is short and affirmative: I do not see any spread of fundamentalism in the negative sense. These trends are strong but they are NOT spreading. I see a mainstream that is re-discovering the liberational potential of Islam. And I see Islam as susceptible — like any other religion or frame of reference — to being abused at times by certain trends. But the issue for me is clear: religion is about dignity and equality, and Islam is the basis of Arab culture and women's liberation.

4. I celebrate pluralism. So I ask you, where is the problem? Women have the right to choose

We realize justice through participation, not by talking about liberation.

which avenue of participation they would like to join, and the road should be open. On the contrary I do not think putting all women on one path is useful. We realize justice through participation, not by talking about liberation.

5. Yes, but towards more Islamization; and here I mean towards greater justice. It is a must to do proper professional *ijtihad*, and this is one part of a wider movement for religious reformation that actually seeks the understanding of the holy text anew, towards a more authentic view of the Islamic *Shari'a*, one that goes beyond inherited *fiqh* without either attacking it or ignoring its social contributions throughout history. This should aim at fostering the family, not destroying it.

6. Yes. But the question is on what basis? If the basis of our approach is Western secular feminism then we would just be spreading and fostering Western feminism. I think we should build on a mutual Islamic identity; or the common potential of the progressive role of religions in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. We need to transpose our modes of thinking beyond the polarization that has dominated for the past century, and come together to appreciate our heritage, religious identity, and different ideologies, cultures and ideas. We are still very divided from other women of the East, and the new factor that has come into the picture is that states are building bridges with secular feminism, and against Islamic voices of liberation. The sad truth is that attacking religion has become their mutual objective, at the price of a withering away of democratic concerns.

7. What has stopped the spread of this struggle is precisely an alien discourse that marginalizes religion or attacks it as only a 'patriarchal' mode of culture.

8. Without doubt the Arab women's movement should adopt more democratic structures and methods. Of course. But this can only happen if they are ready for democratic change that includes the whole society, and for cooperation with mainstream Islamic movements that are sometimes more democratic than progressive voices and circles.

9. Sometimes they have destroyed them, and this is what has deprived them of credibility in many

cases. I can tell you that many Islamists are more successful in this matter, and hence are more credible even if they are not as progressive or revolutionary as the secularists. There are really many paradoxes here.

10. Here again Islam has been a unifying factor. If you put it aside you will have real problems addressing those minorities.

11. Yes.

12. More globalization, more secularization, more westernization - this is saddening. On the other hand the Islamist contributions allowed for a real silent reform on many issues, and this was a benefit

13. I cannot say, I cannot really judge.

14. The greatest obstacles to development of the Arab women's movements in my view are: political divisions; Western funding of specific agendas; and political authoritarianism.

15. Give Islam more weight, give democracy more importance, and give the silent majority of women more opportunity and attention.

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1. The Arab women's movement cannot be separated from political movements and social liberation movements. Egypt was in the lead, having started its movement towards modernization in the 19th century, earlier than any other Arab country. Then other countries followed suit. Women's development in the Gulf states, for example, started at the end of the 1920s, when the first public school for girls was established in Bahrain in 1928. However, there was no women's movement in the Gulf region until the '50s when the first women's society was established; in the '60s and '70s, women joined underground political parties in Bahrain and started their movement within their ranks.

In my view, the greatest achievement of the women's movement in all Arab countries took place in Tunisia, in 1956, when President of the Republic Habib Bourguiba granted Tunisian women the most advanced personal status law in the region. The women's movement in Tunisia was given a push forward, and women at large benefited from this law.

Their greatest failure can be linked to the failure of Arab political regimes to modernize, especially in countries where women's associations became part of the political establishment.

2. Most Arab women's movement leaders were either educated in the West, mainly in the US, France and England; or even if educated in their own countries they were influenced by Western thinking. As a consequence, they borrowed from the experience of Western women. But at the same time, Arab women never forgot their cultural background and the Islamic teachings which are part of their culture. In my opinion, borrowing from Western ideas does not harm the women's movements; on the contrary, it adds to them and enriches the experience of those who are involved in developing them, whether men or women.

3. Religious revivalism and religious reform started at the end of the 19th century when many religious scholars such as Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Mohammad Abdo and Rifa'a at-Tahtawi were exposed to Western ideas, and started questioning certain religious practices in what we consider today as a beginning of religious reform. With the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war, combined with the dictatorship of the Arab regimes, individual men and women had nowhere to go except to their own culture and roots, which in this case is Islam. Arab regimes and the West encouraged this movement. It was in the interests of the West to fight the atheists (the Soviet Union), especially in Afghanistan. To me there is no contradiction between modernity and the practice of Islamic rituals, or women wearing the *hijab*, as long as this does not keep them from attaining education and employment.

Whether or not Islam can offer a long-term basis for struggle for women's rights depends on individual Muslim countries, and the pace of development that each has reached. For example Turkey, a Muslim country, has recently passed a Personal Status law similar to any in Europe,

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whereas countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain or Yemen need to use various *hadiths* or *Qur'anic* verses to convince the people that Islam offers gender equality.

In addition, the Muslim world includes non-Arab Muslim countries such as Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. These countries have gone far in Islamic interpretation to make Islam more compatible with modernity. In the Arab world, many scholars such as Fatima Mernissi and Farida Al-Banani have written books to explain that Islamic teachings include many modern elements, and do not contradict human rights. Islam can indeed offer a long-term basis for the struggle for women's rights. We must remember that the UN charter calls for gender equality, and that all Arab and Muslim countries, as members of the UN, have to abide by its agreements, including the Prevention of Violence Against Women Agreement.

4. Arab women's movements need to undertake all these activities so as to reach all groups in society. Such activities will help them develop into grass-roots organizations. Women activists should work with such groups politically to have a wider base from which to be elected to parliament and reach legislative power. Being a member of parliament is in itself an achievement, opening many doors to women leaders such as making laws that serve women and the family.

5. Indeed yes. Women have to exert more effort to achieve modern family laws. At present this varies between countries: for example Tunisia has the most advanced family law in the Arab world, while most of the Gulf states still have no family law at all, except for Kuwait, which follows the *Shari'a* and individual judges. Many conservative elements in Arab societies are fighting back to block any reforms regarding women and the codification or reform of family law.

6. I support the idea of forming strong ties and relations with different women's movements all over the world, especially those of the Muslim world. Islam covers a vast geographical area with a population of more than one billion people. Many Muslim countries have made advances in issuing progressive family laws, eg. Turkey. In Malaysia, many women's organizations, for example the Sisters in Islam Organization, have gone further, publishing books dealing with *ijtihad* and *fiqh*. Since India is a secular country,

'Arab feminism' varies in degree, not in kind, according to the pace of development in each individual country.

Muslim women there are ruled by the same civil code that governs all citizens. While Arab women's movements should look towards other Muslim countries, they also should have strong ties with Western women's movements and international human rights movements, so as to adopt laws suited to modernity.

7. Women from other classes of society are seeking equality too, especially when they face divorce without being granted any alimony or the custody of their children. They understand equality as a part of what Islam calls for. For that reason, the Arab women's movements should go back to the essence of Islam, and find those elements that call for equality and justice.

8. Women's movements are an essential part of civil society, which is considered the pillar of democracy. Through non-governmental organizations individuals learn how to practice democracy, through the election of board members, and through the daily practice of debate and transparency. It is true that many Arab women's organizations are characterized by non-accountability and authoritarianism. However, we are witnessing today an improvement in handling the affairs of NGOs in most parts of the Arab world, because of a growing individual awareness of international developments. Modern technologies such as Internet used by Arab organizations to communicate with each other have helped to spread such values.

9. Absolutely not. The women's movements have a long way to go, they need to modernize and communicate with international organizations that have similar goals and values. They need to create new programs for young people, and to attract different segments of society. In addition, they should put more effort into introducing gender equality into the curriculum of all schools to reach the new generation and change their attitudes and values.

10. Often described as a 'cultural mosaic', the Arab world contains many groups of different ethnicity, religion, and sect. Non-Arab minorities need to preserve their own culture and language. At the same time they need to learn Arabic since they are citizens of Arab states, and exposed to Arab culture. The best solution for them is to learn both languages: their 'mother tongue' and Arabic. The Kurds in Northern Iraq are bilingual, since the Kurdish language is part

of the official school curriculum. Algerian Berbers are calling for a similar solution. Since the UN's charter upholds the rights of minorities, it may eventually pressure countries to treat minorities as equal citizens.

11. Although Arab countries are not politically unified, the term 'Arab world' is common usage everywhere. 'Arab feminism' varies in degree, not in kind, according to the pace of development in each individual country. The Arab Human Development Report (2002), published by the UNDP, stresses the fact that Arab women suffer from many kinds of discrimination, including in the field of education, with nearly 60 million women illiterate. I believe that we should not avoid the term 'Arab feminism' because, whether we like or not, the world looks at us as one entity.

12. The UN Decade for Women has helped the Arab women's movement to a great extent. International conferences have strengthened women's movements in general, starting from the first conference held in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), Beijing (1995), and Beijing+5 (New York, 2000). All those conferences have stressed gender equality. Many Arab women's organizations as well as individuals took part in these conferences. They learned a great deal from them, such as techniques of successful organization. They used UN recommendations as guidance in their local projects, and on how to lobby governments on women's issues such as reforming family law.

13. It is true that the number of women professionals and scholars in the Arab region is expanding, but the number of illiterate women is also increasing. As a consequence, Arab society is being polarized between those who are pushing for modernity and gender equality, and those who oppose any change in the status quo. This situation creates a dilemma among professionals and scholars. However they are trying to organize their efforts to represent the situation of women, and to overcome the many obstacles facing women through conducting research.

14. There are two main obstacles: the first is the authoritarian regimes that dominate the majority of Arab countries; the second is the extremist conservative movements which create more terror than the regimes. These two forces prevent Arab liberal movements from attaining any kind of reform.

15. To create a more democratic atmosphere in the women's organizations would be my first priority. Then to change some old faces who have stayed at the top of their organizations for decades, and to replace them with new, capable women. This also depends on the general situation in each individual country. As I said earlier, the authoritarian regimes will resist any change, and are apprehensive of the 'domino effect' that might occur if reform is introduced in any sector, leading to the collapse of the whole regime.

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Translated from Arabic by Lynn Maalouf

1. I believe that women's groups in the Arab world have not yet reached the point of forming a movement in its full sense; at this point, they are still local groups that do not have a unified approach, and do not agree on specific demands or even specific goals. They have not benefited from previous experiences, except in taking the name 'movement' from these formations. I believe that this is the greatest failure of the Arab women's movements so far. There are several other problems, especially with regards to the leaderships of women's groups, some of whom are members of Arab governments. These flaws will last as long as the way that Arab governments deal with their societies, including women's organizations, remains unchanged.

2. This accusation is not directed only at women's movements but at all human rights' organizations that have emerged in Arab countries, because of their great reliance on the experiences of other people, including in the West. This accusation is justified in that their concepts and methods are copied from others as is, without integrating them into the specificities of their societies' cultures. The leaders of these movements are responsible for adapting these principles to those of their societies, and for translating them into local terminology so as not to arouse fear, and so that we can achieve the results we all aim at, namely equality, justice, security, safety and democracy for all. If we cannot work with these

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methods, then these have to be adapted to each society without hindering the goals, which are the claims of all sectors of society.

3. The rise of Islamic and political fundamentalisms stems from various factors, including repression, containment, backwardness, ignorance, poverty, and non-respect for dissenting views: in other words, the lack of democracy as a way of addressing a unified society. It is no surprise that all Arab countries should suffer from a rising wave of fundamentalism, because these societies do not enjoy a real democracy. This fundamentalist rise is detrimental not only to women's organizations but affects society as a whole, threatening to have a negative impact on all those who call for rights and for a dignified life, because they do not trust dissenting opinions, whether of men or women or any social sector. As for religions in general, there are thinkers who can adapt the notions and meanings of religion to the variables of life in such a way that they do not represent an obstacle to society, including to women. But if we continue to follow antiquated notions unadapted to our age, devised by thinkers of another age, this is detrimental to society in general, and to women in particular. In Islam for example, an issue that can be debated is any related to jurisprudence. Only the basics that relate to man's relation to God are not debatable. I believe that if there are religious clerics who are knowledgeable and experienced, and who understand the demands of our age, they could introduce positive changes for human rights in general, and for women's rights. So we should interact with such people, and attract them to the cause of women's rights.

4. The variety of women's activities is a positive thing in itself. It would be a mistake, however, not to distinguish between this kind of work, and the women's movement in general. It is good that women are participating in social and developmental efforts but we should not identify the women's movement with these efforts. The women's movement should have a prominent role, based on a specific ideology, to which all women adhere, and from which they develop their demands to the local and international community, and work towards securing these demands through unified means. This is because the women's movement should aim at introducing positive change in culture, policies and direc-

tions that are detrimental to women and their rights. The women's movement cannot be limited to such activities.

5. We still need, and will continue to need, a lot of struggle to amend the family code and personal status code, as well as all laws that were drawn up in the past and do not accord with the spirit of the present age, using new methods. Whatever means and resources are available have to be used. As for those that are not available, we should work to make them available.

6. We need to learn from the experiences of the East, the West, and of other women - not import and imitate them as they are. We have to make use of the experience of those women who have moved ahead of us in their struggle to secure their rights, so that we take from their experience what we can use in our Arab society. We could thereby attract supporters, instead of opponents who take the pretext that we are imitating the West or the East. So the issue is not the source of experience. Rather the problem lies in ourselves, that we have not been able to use these experiences for the benefit of our own struggle.

7. This was one of the causes of failure of past women's movements that died without any achievements at the popular level. These movements relied on educated women, and restricted the debate on women's rights to educated circles, as if these rights that were being fought for concerned only educated women, and this is why the ideas were those of the educated class exclusively. This is why the movement never involved any women beyond the elite. I am one of those who call for the need to reach all women, especially because we in the Arab world have a majority of illiterate and rural women, and nothing prevents us from assimilating rural and non-educated women into women's movements, so that they will increase trust in their role in society, and work for equality and justice for all sectors of society.

8. Yes, this is true. We see a lot of women's organizations run by women who were elected when these organizations were first founded, and who have remained presidents for an unlimited term. This is due to the lack of awareness about the need for true democracy in the Arab countries, which has its effects on these organizations, as well as other civil society organizations. Also,

It is good that women are participating in social and developmental efforts but we should not identify the women's movement with these efforts.

these leaders do not see the need to change leaderships on a regular basis.

9. No, we don't see any real efforts for change, whether at the level of gender roles, or at the level of family or society. This is partly due to the lack of awareness and full understanding of these notions on the part of the women who lead the organizations, so that these notions remain limited to certain sectors of society, and fail to reach to a majority. It is also due to the use of a Western terminology that is not adapted to a society that from the beginning is resistant to anything Western. The leaders of women's organizations need to work on this, without altering the basics of the issue, however.

10. The minorities in the Arab world that do not use the Arabic language are subject to the culture they live in. The important thing is that those like women, who are demanding their rights and freedoms, should extend their call to all sectors of society, because what is at issue are rights that cannot be more for some than for others. I don't think that there are rights specific to Arabic-speaking individuals and others for those who don't speak Arabic, so we have to respect human rights and the call for equality and justice.

11. There is nothing wrong in having women in the Arab world create a movement of their own. There is nothing shameful in it. What would be shameful would be to work for women's interests alone, not for society as a whole. We cannot call for rights and for change for women only, without looking at society, because it is society that is responsible for this lack of freedoms and rights. The Arab women's movement needs to adopt broad social rights in their call for justice, equality, safety and security; only then can it attract supporters from all sectors of society.

12. The United Nations and its agencies have generated much positive change for women around the world, including women in the Arab world. The problem lies in the Arab governments who fail to carry out the international conventions and resolutions. There is a need to develop the United Nations' resources for greater effectiveness, and force the states that refuse to implement these conventions to respect them.

13. The increasing number of women researchers and experts in the Arab world is a natural result of the leap in education. But these researchers can

only have an impact on the women's movement if they make the same demands. These women have to be assimilated into these organizations, which can only happen if the movements adopt the demands of women in all sectors. We cannot oblige experts and researchers to work in women's movements if they feel no allegiance to them, so the question is how to create feelings of allegiance among these women.

14. We can classify the challenges and obstacles as following: First, internal obstacles within the movement such as isolation and fear of using others' experiences, and the inability of women leaders to accompany change and progress; the lack of a clear vision and goals, and consequently the lack of clarity about the work to be done. There is a confusion prevailing in the activities of organizations that call themselves a movement.

Second, external obstacles: society is not ready to accept the women's movements' demands; the lack of true democracy in Arab societies; the spread of religious fanaticism and political radicalism; and male-dominated societies that accept no relinquishing of their privileges.

15. If I were able to change one factor, I would work first on developing a clear vision and clear goals for the women's movements, so that women's demands are linked to, and unified with, the demands of society as a whole, that is justice, equality, safety and security.

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1. In my view the greatest achievement so far has been the space taken by women in the public sphere. The greatest failure has been women's lesser empowerment in the private sphere, where they continue to be socially and legally under the control of men.

2. This charge is largely justified in my view for both sides: concerning the conservatives forces because they put all their efforts into fighting radical Western feminism, and place all western women's movement in one basket; and concern-

Raufah Hassan

ing the Arab women's movements because they spend more time on defending themselves and trying to prove their independence of them. The best response should be in the recognition of similarities and differences wherever they may apply. It's important to create linkages with supporting forces inside our societies, as well as with outsiders, whether Westerners or from other parts of the world.

3. Several factors have led to the spread of religious fundamentalism in the Arab region, among them the failure of state-directed development. Equally important is the unresolved conflict in the Middle East, in addition to the support of the United States and some Arab governments for the Islamic groups during the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan. Religious revivalism does not really threaten the Arab women's movements — on the contrary, it has put back in the front line of discussion women's main objectives, equality in both public and private spheres, particularly among lower middle class women. The experience of women in Iran and Sudan make us believe that some of women's rights can be achieved through advanced understanding of the dynamics of religion interacting with other social and economic factors.

4. If the old ways did not give the desired results, new ways will do no harm. Good or bad is a value that differs according to the position one takes. In my view this fragmentation is a reflection of today's social reality in the region more than any thing else.

5. Laws have never brought solutions for women in the region. They change too easily in accordance with the mentalities of governing forces. New Arab women's movements will lead a new struggle.

6. The new Arab women's movements do not look to the West for models. The West is led now by the United States, which is not a heaven for women rights. The old women's movement is no longer a force able to play a leading role in the region. Other universal forces beyond the division West and East are emerging to take their place, and to find new ways and theories to solve their problems.

7. The new Arab women's movements are mainly lead by educated urban women from the lower classes, unlike the old movement leader-

The old women's movement is no longer a force able to play a leading role in the region.

ship that came from the upper and upper middle classes. The new movement is still in process of formation.

8. Yes, they should be more democratic in both structures and practices.

9. Very few have been able to do so.

10. The policy of the women's movement toward non-Arabic speaking minorities has been different according to the status of the minority. Minorities linked to Europe in nationality or religion have been involved in women's movements in some countries; minorities of African origin have not been involved in most cases. The old Arab women's movement cannot change its attitude in this matter, while the new movement is not clear yet.

11. Problems of terminology will continue no matter what term we are using. But the term 'feminism' is widely contested in the region and is more misleading than 'Arab women'.

12. It has helped in putting the issue of women on the political agendas of states.

13. The expansion of women professionals and scholars has not so far had a clear effect on the women's movements, but the development of the new women's movement is the direct result of this rapid expansion. Its full results will come in the near future when they find their own voice and way.

14. The greatest obstacles to the growth and development of the movement today is, first, the total confusion between old and new methods of approaching women's issues; and second, not having answers to the problems of every day life.

15. I would have them involve men in every institution possible, bring them into the movement, and not to be alone.

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1. Women's movements' achievements vary from one Arab country to the other. However, I would

say that in general there has been an increase in Arab women's awareness about their rights and issues. On many occasions, certain movements in certain countries forced governments to take action and make some change in favor of women, even though it was not always enough. One example is Egypt. Many women's groups and individuals united their efforts with the government to fight the harmful practice of female circumcision. Although government statistics show that the number of people resorting to this practice has remained unchanged since recording first began, still the issue has been brought to the surface in all its aspects, and people are talking about it. The same happened with 'crimes of honor' in Jordan. Women's groups and individuals worked hard at one point in time to press the government to take action against these killings and to change the laws that offer leniency to killers. Many changes resulted, such as open discussion of a once taboo issue, changing some laws, and a proposal to establish a women's shelter. Amendments in the Civil and Personal laws were achieved in Egypt and Jordan, guaranteeing some measure of justice to women. The *khula'* law was introduced in both countries, and ended the sufferings of women who spent countless years in courts fighting for a divorce that they could not get. In Yemen, even though the women's movement was relatively new and commanded few resources, yet they held several workshops to tackle domestic violence, and worked on rehabilitating female prisoners.

Several women's organizations have devoted their work to helping women prisoners, and exposing the violence which they allegedly suffer from prison officials. They also collect donations to provide women prisoners with basic needs lacking in prisons, and have launched several campaigns exposing violence against women, and to fight the 'house of obedience' (*beit at-ta'a*). The movement succeeded in temporarily freezing the application of the 'house of obedience' custom after winning the support of the Yemeni president. However some Yemeni deputies later managed to revive the issue and passed a law in parliament without the knowledge of the women's movement. Activists blamed this on the absence of women deputies in the Lower House.

Lebanese women's organizations have also focused much of their work on violence against women, and have succeeded in changing some

of the laws that relate to violence against women, especially honor crimes.

However, I would say that the inconsistency of the women's movement in some major issues has reflected negatively on them and on their efforts. I perceive that some women's and other organization's work is 'seasonal' and lacks persistence and continuity. Also many organizations lack the skill, or maybe the concern, to keep track of what politicians promise women and what they actually do. Politicians make glowing promises to women that they will call for gender equality, improve women's lives and fight against discrimination, but once they reach office their promises remain ink on paper. Other factors that hold back the women's movements include poverty, illiteracy and unemployment in the Arab world in general, and among women in particular. I believe that the absence or low percentage of women in Arab legislative bodies, when they exist, and women's slight presence in decision-making positions, are also factors that work against women.

2. Of course this charge is not justified. Conservatives in all Arab countries use this excuse to abort any improvement or change in favor of women, so as to perpetuate their control over women in their societies. Conservatives simply do not want to lose power, and they like exercising it over women. This is why they fight and resist change - they are afraid of losing power.

The best response is for the women's movements to close their ears, and continue with what they believe is the right thing to do.

3. I believe the factors are closely related to people's financial and social situation. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and inadequate knowledge of the true teachings of religion play a major role in spreading fundamentalisms in all religions. Oppressive regimes and the media in some countries contribute to this phenomenon by manipulating what people see, and preventing them from expressing their feelings and thoughts, or taking their own decisions. Fundamentalisms do indeed threaten the women's movement because many extremist religious leaders claim that its leaders are backed by the West, and that they are going against the teaching of religion. In some instances they issue rulings that have no connection whatsoever with what a religion really says. They manage to convince people that women's movements

Rana Ahmed Hussein:

are really working against their societies because they are adopting Western ideas.

I believe that all religions can make positive contributions to the advancement of women's status and rights if discourse is controlled by moderate religious leaders, who would not twist religion to benefit their interests instead of the general interest.

4. I believe this work is very important and needs to be carried out consistently. As I said before, these services are badly needed in some parts of the Arab world, especially in rural and impoverished areas where women need most help. I noticed that most social work is concentrated in the cities.

5. Of course, because most family laws - they have different names in different Arab countries - contain many clauses that are discriminatory, and that I feel are meant to control and restrict women. It is very important for women to continue to concentrate on this area because more equal laws would mean more freedom for women and less oppression. This would ensure women's better status, and earn them more respect in their families and communities. Without this they will always be looked at by their families as the weaker side of the family, and this is not good for women's mentality, self-image and status, whether in their family or in society at large.

6. I believe it is very important for the Arab women's movement to establish relations with women's movements worldwide, because the women of each country have a different experience, and a different way to deal with their problems. It is very important to examine stories of success and failure in different societies, and to learn from their experiences for their own future work.

7. This is a general judgment. In some countries women in urban areas are major players in their communities. The problem is, of course, lack of resources. Women who have more resources have better opportunities in life, eg. better education, and more freedom to travel and be exposed to other cultures and experiences.

8. Of course. This has been part of the problem for the Arab women's movement in general. Many leaders refuse to let go of their positions, and remain at their posts for the longest time. If they ever happen to lose a post, they shift to

Many leaders refuse to let go of their positions, and remain at their posts for the longest time.

another one at another organization, or start a new organization so as to remain in charge. As I said before, this restricts diversity within organizations, and restricts opportunities and ideas to a single person. We only need look at our situation in the Arab world, and see how far have we gone as nations, to know that this policy of non-elected and non-accountable leaders will not take us very far.

9. Women's movements have worked on this issue, but the problem is that there is so much that needs to be changed in laws and social attitudes towards women. In addition, some women's organizations had other priorities. I know of many Arab women activists and Arab families in general who paid attention to this problem, and are bringing up their daughters and sons on an equal basis. Of course the number is not large, but this is a good start.

10. The women's movements should be sensitive to all minorities within their country, because these share the same society, and may need help or assistance, but have no channel to express their demands. Any individual who lives in any society should be treated as a citizen of that society.

12. I believe that UN agencies, especially UNIFEM, have played a vital role in developing Arab women's societies, exposing many of the problems they face, and helping them in various ways. These agencies have conducted valuable research and studies, and come up with important findings that can be used to prove certain arguments. They have also conducted programs in remote areas, in Jordan, Yemen and Morocco, to empower women economically, and helped raise their legal awareness. But I believe that these organizations, with the resources they have, can contribute more to our societies, and I know that they realize this and are working towards achieving it.

13. I believe this increase has been one of the pillars of the women's movement. The visible activities and positive presence of these professionals and scholars has made many young women adopt them as role models, and encouraged them to work hard on themselves to be as successful and effective as these women are.

14. I believe poverty, illiteracy and unemployment among women are some of the main obstacles. Women's absence from the political

scene also prevents them from taking part in the decision-making process. I also feel that many women do not believe in themselves or in other women, and are blocking the path of women's development as well as their own. We also see the same faces appearing in gatherings and conferences over and over. New blood needs to be pumped into the women's movement in order for new leaders to carry the message to their communities, and to younger generations.

Another obstacle, as I see it, is that work is focused on developing women and their status. The women's groups mostly neglect to work with men and raise their awareness of the importance of women's issues, and to see women as their partners instead of their competitors.

15. Electing the leaders of women's societies and NGOs and liberating them from some of the unnecessary bureaucracies they are currently adopting.

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Translated from Arabic by Lynn Maalouf

1. We cannot talk of a homogeneous Arab women's movement, carrying out carefully planned goals and common achievements. Each Arab region has its own context, and each Arab country has its own specificities. Despite the common factors - the most important being language, religion and history - we cannot consider that women's movements in the North African countries can be compared with those in the Gulf, for example.

The women's movement as a movement with its own dynamics emerged in the early 20th century, in the countries that had close cultural interactions with the West, in particular Egypt and Bilad al-Sham, especially Lebanon. Several pioneering women deployed serious efforts towards securing the minimum of women's rights, such as the right to education, to work,

and later to vote. It is also worth noting that these women were from the aristocracy, and because they were Francophone or English - educated and were familiar with the status of European women, they felt the need to improve the status of women in their own societies, even if their efforts did not reach beyond their own social class.

As for the other Arab countries, this movement came at a later stage and often emerged from within and through political regimes, to serve the latter's goals. This was especially the case in those countries that had adopted socialist doctrines and one-party rule. As for the Gulf countries, the women's movements only emerged recently to demand the rights that other Arab women had secured decades earlier. Despite the many achievements that Kuwaiti women were able to secure in various sectors, they, along with women from other Gulf countries, failed to secure their right to vote. This is a good illustration of the relation between the development of women's movements and the political and social environment, including society's level of openness.

Thus we find numerous differences in the situations and contexts of the Arab women's movements, and as a result, differences in what they have achieved and what they have failed to achieve. In general, the common achievement, which is the basic minimum, is the right to education and to work. The greatest failure is that they have not managed to bring about the amendment of the personal status code, which would have led to improving women's legal situation, and thereby forging stability of the family and of society.

2. This question already implies a position, and asks, "What is the best answer to this accusation?" What if I agree with the conservative forces?! In any case, there is no doubt that the Arab women's movements have been influenced by the 'Western feminist movement', especially since, as I mentioned before, they emerged as a result of interaction with the West, hence the actual model for the 'liberated' woman was no other than the Western woman.

As for the extent of this influence, its scope and persistence, it differs between one movement and another, and between one society and another. It is also related to the movement's intel-

Zeinab Joma'a

lectual, political and economic affiliations. It is worth noting that the course of Western women's movements is entirely different from that of their Arab counterparts. In the West, the feminist movement emerged as a result of several factors, the most important being the industrial revolution and the ensuing socio-economic changes, the world wars with their destructive impact on family and society, as well as the intellectual and philosophical trends that surfaced in the mid-20th century, especially existentialism, which led Western women to organize themselves along a continuous course. So Western feminist movements resulted from a variety of interacting factors. Obviously, it was not a homogeneous movement, as there were various parties and trends, some moderate and some radical, and many revisions and changes were introduced (especially within the radical wing).

The Arab women's movements - just like many other things in our societies - emerged as a result of Western influence, and of what Western women had been struggling for and had achieved. But the Arab movements did not have situations comparable to the West, and we did not have a continuous drive leading to anything in particular. There was always the force of tradition, the supremacy of the Western model and the need to emulate it. So far, very few Arab women's movements have been able to overcome tradition or imitation; a lot of them still represent an extension of patriarchal, male-dominated thought that has no relation whatsoever with feminist thought.

3. The Islamic movements are not one and homogeneous, any more than women's movements are. There are various movements with differing directions, ranging from the most backward to the most open and contemporary.

The main reason, I believe, for the rise of religious movements was the failure of nationalist and socialist ideologies, and their inability to achieve their slogans and goals. In addition, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the continued bias towards Israel of the West generally and the United States in particular, has made the Arab peoples lose all trust in the West, and pushed them to turn more and more towards their past, which helps them evade a harsh reality. When the Arab individual loses all faith in life and his daily means of survival, when he loses his freedom of expression, and everything he strives to do is negated,

the only safe haven he finds is religion. The fact is that others - organizations, rulers and the new imperialist forces - have not left him anything but that margin in order to carry on his life and feel that he exists.

As to the question whether this rise of religion threatens the Arab women's movements, this reverts to the movement itself. If it stays elitist and isolates itself from the pulse of the street and people's real worries, then of course it will be isolated and fail.

But if one examines the positive aspects of this religious revival, and if you discuss with Islamic activists issues concerning women, this would yield important results, as we would understand that there are many important opportunities in Islam to guarantee women's rights. Realizing this depends on the vision and program of the party that interprets Islam, and its position on women. So this can only happen from the inside and through dialogue, not through alienation and estrangement.

4. The proliferation of activities and types of professionalism in the Arab women's movements is not negative. On the contrary, it is healthy and necessary, so that the movement will no longer be confined to the realm of words but become active on the ground, especially because women's issues interact with a number of 'sectors', and cannot be isolated as a single factor in society. Also, the reality of our Arab society is harsh and painful, and needs a lot of effort to push it forward.

5. Of course. Carrying out the necessary amendments in family and personal status codes is probably one of the Arab women's movements' priorities. But this must be done with cooperation with all sides, and without provocation. We should work in a carefully thought-out way that does not conflict with the Islamic *Shari'a*. I feel that there is no contradiction in saying this. We can achieve much without falling into a violation of Islam. We have important experiences, such as in Iran, where women were able to secure rights that Arab women could not dream of, and all this in the context of an Islamic regime. Unfortunately there is no space here to enter into the relevant details.

6. If the Arab women's movements wanted to be in harmony with their environment, and really to

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be active, they would have to open up to non-Arab Islamic women's movements. This would enable them to take advantage of the latter's experiences, and to get out of the shaky situation they find themselves in with regard to women in our Arab societies, and their failure to make any worthwhile achievements. In Pakistan, Turkey, Bangladesh and Indonesia, women have succeeded in becoming prime ministers, leaders of political parties (both loyalist and opposition), whereas until now this has not happened in any Arab country. Also, the recent important achievement in Iran in amending the personal status code - as I mentioned above - represents a model and experience that could be taken advantage of. There is no problem in using both Western and Eastern experiences, while taking into consideration the cultural specificities of our own societies as well as to be open to recent achievements in the West.

7. It is only natural that the leaders of Arab women's movements are mostly educated, urban women from the middle to upper classes. This is mainly so because the struggle can only be carried on if it is accompanied by awareness, education and intellectual openness, and these qualities are more to be found among urban educated women. In the 1970s and 1980s education for girls in Arab countries began to expand, and by the 1990s the level had reached its highest point so far, though with variations between one Arab country and another. This led to the rise of a new group of activists within the women's movements. Unfortunately however, despite the progress achieved, illiteracy is still high in the Arab world, especially among women in rural areas. As for obstacles to the spread of the women's struggle to all social classes: when a woman is under the pressure of poverty and illiteracy, she doesn't have time to think about the struggle to secure her rights. She needs - just as men do - a minimum level of decent living.

Change does not seem to be achievable in the short-term, especially in face of economic globalization and International Monetary Fund recommendations, which rule out any social guarantees, and leave citizens facing their fate on their own. One of the most dangerous results of this trend is the disappearance of the middle class, which is generally the most stable and active class, and the division of society into only two classes: the rich who do not care about what

goes on around them, and the very poor who hardly know what is going on.

8. Arab women's organizations are a reflection of political and cultural (if it exists) life in the Arab world. All parties, whether loyalist or oppositionist, have leaders who are not elected and, as such, they practise power in a dictatorial way. I do not know whether it is possible for women's organization leaders to overcome the reality surrounding them and be more democratic. Certainly if they want to be a vanguard, and more effective, they should do this.

9. I am surprised at the way so many Arab women's movements adopt the notion of gender without even debating it. I think it needs a lot of debate, especially since it originated in an entirely different culture from our own, and is the result of a post-modern stage in the West, where all the values, thoughts and paradigms have fallen one by one, so that people are left in a world devoid of values and morality. This represents a leap above our cultural specificities, and serves to heighten the isolation of Arab women's discourse.

10. I don't know what the policies of Arab women's movements are with regard to minorities. I have not monitored this issue, and have no information about it. But what should these policies be? They really should not be different from their work with the majority, because women's problems are one, and their issues are similar among the majority and the minority, whether this is religious, or racial, or national, taking into consideration that minorities often suffer from isolation and discrimination. I believe that if women's conditions improve in society as a whole, or if there is an amendment of the laws, then this will reflect positively on everyone.

11. As I said in the beginning, there is not one Arab, homogenous women's movement, but several movements. It is important to note that the expression 'Arab feminist movement' is different from 'Arab women's movement'. Feminism is a trend that originated in Europe (I talked about it earlier in answering question 2), that struggles for equality between men and women, and sometimes calls for the superiority of women over men, and 'feminizing the world'. Of course, not all women's movements in the Arab world agree with this; some do not believe in male/female equality and refuse the idea from the beginning. I do not think there is an 'Arab

Work on awareness has to be conducted with both sexes, because women's cause cannot be isolated from society as a whole.

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homogeneity' and generalization will not help us in realizing achievements. It is true that the cause of Arab women is homogeneous as far as the fundamental facts, but the approach and tools of work can differ, as well as priorities, between one Arab country and another.

12. From the beginning the impact of the UN Decade for Women was limited to official delegations, since it gave them the responsibility of representing Arab women, and of participating in the various conferences. The last of these, the Beijing conference, led to some studies and statistics. Today, the circle of influence has started to expand a little, and a few notions and issues are being activated, such as violence against women and reproductive health.

But I believe that we have to remain cautious, because the priorities of international organizations may differ from our priorities, and their approach to women's issues may also differ, since they originate mainly from Western societies. We should not repeat everything they say in parrot-fashion, nor should we adopt everything they demand without thought. The minimum level of respect for our national and cultural specificity demands a careful revision of what emerges from international organizations, so that we should adopt it only when it suits our societies and helps our women improve their status, but firmly refuse it when it contradicts our values, such as the call to legitimize adoption, or legalize homosexuality, and allow marriage between homosexuals.

13. This is a very positive development, since research and specialization are the right way to help women achieve their goals. They must themselves conduct research into different aspects of women's situation, and try to discover solutions to women's social problems. Women researchers should make more effort to coordinate their work, so as to benefit from a variety of approaches and fields of expertise, and to avoid duplication.

14. I believe that the greatest obstacle facing Arab women's movements today is the patriarchal system that runs deep in our Arab societies, and prevails among women as much as men. No one should believe that religion is responsible for this situation; rather, it is the wrong interpretation of religion and the faulty use of religious texts that serve the system, which dates back to thousands of years. This original

patriarchy and the faulty religious interpretations together form traditions and customs that are very resistant to change.

15. In light of the political, military, economic instability prevailing in most Arab countries, discussion of the future of the women's movements should foresee a difficult future. Despite this, I believe that the women's cause is making progress, even though slowly. One proof of this is that younger generations (both male and female) are much more aware of women's rights, and practise them more.

It is not enough to work on women alone; this change has to happen among both men and women. Work on awareness has to be conducted with both sexes, because women's cause cannot be isolated from society as a whole.

If I wanted to change anything in the Arab women's movements, it would be to give the opportunity to younger generations to participate and have a role. I would also try to give an enlightened role to men and cooperate with them, and rely on the practice of democracy to infuse some new blood into these movements, which are suffering from stagnation.

If I wanted to change anything in the Arab women's movements, it would be to give the opportunity to younger generations to participate and have a role.

Suad Joseph:

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1. a) Achievements always have multiple sources of input. The achievements of the Arab women's movement have been multifaceted, but among the most visible is the high development of education among women in a selected sector of Arab societies and as a result the entry of women into critical professions.

b) Failure: While the responsibility for failures cannot be attributed only to the women's movement, one must say generically the lack of equal citizenship for women in terms of suffrage, voter participation, election/appointment to high political office, and the rights of women to pass citizenship on to their children and spouses. Under this umbrella, I would put the inability to produce civil personal status laws in most Arab countries.

Parallel to this, are the problems of addressing poverty/health issues and the general education of the women not in the more advantaged sectors of society.

2. First, the Arab women's movement is over a century old and has its own history which has long been in conversation with Western feminist movements. Second, we should not overlook the influence, in complex ways, of the Arab women's movement on Western feminism. Western feminism developed with a gaze – a gaze on the East. For better or worse, Western feminism, in many ways, defined itself in relation to the Third World woman as “other”. As Aihwa Ong has pointed out, no category of Third World women has figured as large in the Western feminist imagination as Arab and Muslim women.

Third, few large movements of the past century can claim themselves to be purely culturally specific. We live in a global and globalizing world in which ideas as well as commodities and people travel. One has to ask why those same conservative forces who are concerned about Western influence in feminism seem unconcerned about Western influence on technology (if such a designation can be made for products that are developed all over the world). They seem to adopt the illusion that technology is innocent of culture. The assertion of cultural purity is a strategy for control over innovation and change. It cannot be allowed to preempt constructive dialogue and engagements across state boundaries.

3. Religious fundamentalism is spreading world wide. And world wide, it has a political arm. And world wide, it has made inroads into state power. One has only to look at the religious right in the US and in Israel. The fact that the West focuses on the rise of fundamentalism in the Arab world as if it were an exceptional situation has much to do with global politics which defines Islam globally and the Arab world in particular as the evil other. Power has the privilege of defining its enemy and naturalizing itself.

That said, it is important to look at the specificities of the rise of religious fundamentalism in the Arab region. Many scholars have offered plausible reasons for the rise of religious fundamentalism: the corruption and tyranny of Arab regimes; the corrupting uses of oil wealth; the alignment with the West of many Arab regimes, discredited by significant sectors of their own population;

the heavy-handed alignment of the West with Israel, seen as an occupying force; the economic instability, uneven social development, marginal political freedoms.

In principle, there should be room for women's emancipation within religious frameworks. The simultaneous embrace of Christianity and feminism by many Western women has not worried Western feminists as much as the simultaneous embrace of Islam and feminism by many Arab women. That in itself, is a worry. Many Muslim feminists have argued that Islam can and does offer women their rights and therefore religious revivalism should not threaten the Arab women's movement. Thus far, where it has taken power in the Arab region, or where it has comprised itself into a political movement, religious revivalism has either compromised women's emancipation or left many concerned about the constraints packaged with the liberties. While in principle there should be room for women's emancipation within religious frameworks, the path cut so far has proven difficult if not impossible to walk.

4. Pluralism is not only good, but it will happen regardless of our judgement. I would be worried about institutionalizing “activity police”. Women must work wherever they feel they can and want to. Who could possibly be the judge of the long term impact of the various kinds of work? What might appear to be simple acts can have far-reaching and important political consequences.

5. Family law must continue to be a high priority for the Arab women's movement. It is the lynch-pin, within the political arena, for most other legal constraints on women. Women's lack of full citizenship is linked to the ways in which family law defines them as subordinates to their male kin; their economic inequality is similarly rationalized in terms of their familial roles (deemed subordinate); and their control by patriarchal religious clerics is anchored in the power that religious institutions have over family law.

6. The Arab women's movement is already engaged with and networking with women's movements in the ‘East’ and ‘South’. This is important not only in the quest for alternative models and strategies for women's rights, but also for general social change. In a globalized world with one superpower, those outside the arena of power have been given two options –

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align with the power center or align with the de-centered. Non-alignment was itself a strategy for maneuvering. A bipolar world (us versus them) is not a better world. But when power centers impose those binary choices, those marginalized from power can concede power or creatively invent new alliances for power.

7. The Arab women's movement is not unlike the women's movements in most of the world which have attracted primarily women of educated classes. It is not unique in this regard. Where it differed was in countries with aggressive state - sponsored women's federations. What stops the struggle for women's rights from moving to other classes is that political struggle of all sorts may be a luxury of leisure and the privilege of certain historical moments. Other social classes are not flocking to labor movements either. To the degree they are ‘signing up’, it has been mainly the religious movements which have claimed their support. But even here, the ‘signing up’ in the sense of ‘active’ participation in a movement is not widespread. In addition, women who are struggling to feed their families and keep them alive often feel that gender issues are secondary to the issues of economic, political and health security. Even Western feminists struggle to link the economic, political, health issues with gender issues for women in less advantaged classes.

8. Sadly, as I have argued elsewhere, Arab women's movements often reproduce the hierarchical structures of their societies within their own feminist organizations.¹ To struggle for women's freedoms and rights but to not practise them within their own organizations suggests that the struggles are within the movement as well as outside of it.

9. Arab women's movement members do struggle to change relations within their societies and their families. It goes without saying that more needs to be done. I have argued elsewhere that there is a reluctance among Arab feminists to take on the family as an issue of inequality.² In some sense, literary figures have more dramatically taken on the family in the form of novels, movies and plays than has the women's movement as a ‘movement’. In part this reluctance is linked to the absence of viable alternatives to the family in Arab societies (other than religious alternatives), given the perceived distance, ineffectuality or repressiveness of many Arab states.

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How the family is to be addressed in Arab societies will have to be quite different from the way it has been addressed in Western societies by Western feminists. The specificity of that engagement is taking shape.

10. The Arab women's movement has tried to embrace ethnic and religious differences. This continues to be a task before the movement and is one of monumental importance. Law stands against these solidarities as the devolution of family law to the different religious sects in some countries often creates different legal realities for women of different religious sects. It is a challenge that must be faced.

11. Little is gained by avoiding the term feminism in the effort to avoid creating a false notion of Arab homogeneity. We use the term ‘Western feminism’ even though it is utterly the case that there are theoretical, political, and ethnic/religious/national differences among Western feminists. The term feminism is a strategic insertion on behalf of a cause. As long as we do not collapse all Arab women into a homogeneous category and as long as we are aware of the strategic use of all our terms (including the term ‘woman’ which is also homogenizing) – that is all we can do. Language cannot perfectly reflect our understanding of the world.

12. The UN Decade for women and its offshoot agencies (eg UNIFEM) have had an important impact on the Arab women's movement. First it made Arab governments pay attention and, for face saving, if nothing else, claim victories on behalf of women's rights. Second the Decade provided an arena, a set of fora for networking and developing bodies of knowledges about the conditions of women. Third, the UN Decade was the backdrop for various international conventions having to do with women's and children's rights that have provided a critical stage of activism on behalf of women. Fourth, the UN Decade made many of us aware of the similarities as well as the differences among women around the world that needed to be addressed.

13. The women's movement moves not only through the efforts of self-identified feminists, but through the efforts of all women who empower themselves. The increase of Arab women professionals will, de facto, change the gender equation in Arab societies, and is therefore most welcome.

14. There are many obstacles to the growth and development of the Arab women's movement. The repressiveness of regimes leaves little room for public discourse for women or men. A fall out related to the repressiveness of regimes is that religious political movements are often the most vigorous alternative to the repressive regimes. Most of these religious political movements have brought with them further constraints on women's rights. A further related phenomenon to the repressiveness of regimes is that women often cling to family systems which are patriarchal because families provide a security from the state and a security that the state cannot provide.

15. The Arab women's movement is not a unified organization or set of institutions, so it is not possible to argue that the change of 'one' element of the movement will magically transform the movement. That said, the increased democratization of the movement from within women's organizations would be important to opening up future possibilities of growth of the movement. Leadership that invests less in its own reproduction and prioritizes the advance of the goals of the movement is critical. We can envision a future in which a primary goal of leadership is to replace themselves with others who are dedicated and empowered to act on behalf of women's rights.

ENDNOTES

1. Suad Joseph (1997) "Shopkeepers and Feminists: The Reproduction of Political Process among Women Activists in Lebanon" in Dawn Chatty and Annika Rabo eds., *Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Groups in the Middle East* (Oxford and New York: Berg).
2. Suad Joseph (2002) "Feminism and Familism", paper presented to the WOCMES conference, Mainz.

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Fatima Sbaity-Kassem:

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1. The greatest achievement has been women's acquisition of suffrage rights in many Arab countries. The greatest failure is the limited political participation of women (3.4% of parliamentary seats were occupied by women in 2000). Second, the inability to break with harmful prac-

tices (e.g. FGM) and customs, norms and traditions that limit them.

2. There is no harm in emulating good practices to consolidate the status of Arab women in society; since women are a major partner/stakeholder in the development process.

3. The main reasons are the vacuum in ideologies and disappointment with current political regimes. And Yes, religious fundamentalism could threaten the Arab women's movement if enlightened women activists do not raise gender awareness of the real status of women in Islam.

4. There is room for all types of activities to empower women. In a holistic approach, work should proceed on all fronts and at all levels.

5. Yes, by all means, legislation and laws are the backbone of the Arab women's movement. The gap is still wide between de jure legislation and the laws as they are carried out in practice.

6. Yes, we should form alliances with the West and East and "pick and choose" what is the best for us. Alliances ought to be built with women and men. Arab women should organize!

7. Ignorance, illiteracy and poverty change women's priorities and create a large difference between urban and poor rural women.

8. This is a leading question! But of course, we should push for the pursuit of a more participatory approach to development. In fact, one of the twelve critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action is related to decision-making and power sharing. Good governance is premised on transparency, accountability and responsibility.

9. Obviously more has to be done and the road is still long. Women have to practice what they preach at the domestic level, especially with their children and foreign domestic helpers.

10. Violence against women is not acceptable. Foreign domestic helpers should be treated humanely and with respect. Women should reflect on how they treat their domestic non-Arab helpers and should avoid class discrimination.

11. There are disparities among women in the Arab countries, and women's movements differ

Fatima Sbaity-Kassem

from one country to another. The short answer to your question is Yes and No. There is no one Arab woman. But there are issues and concerns that are common to all Arab women. The intensity of the problems differs from one country to another and even within the same country between rural and urban areas.

12. The UN Decade for Women (1975-1985), and the subsequent four conferences on women have been instrumental in raising awareness for women's issues and putting these issues on the global agenda. UNIFEM, INSTRAW, the regional commissions and the Division for the Advancement of Women, have played a major role in making the cause of women move forward.

13. This is true. But it may be too early to say what is the impact of this expansion on the culture and agenda of the women's movements. There is more than one women's movement in the Arab world and each has its salient features. This should be documented and explored. Overall the impact should be positive and forward looking.

14. Political instability in the region. Traditions and customs. Legal and alphabetical illiteracy among women. Poverty among women which shifts the focus of their priorities and demands. The dominance of a patriarchal society. Gender-insensitivity or -blindness in our society.

15. I believe in a holistic approach. Therefore, we need to work on all fronts: continue working and believe that you can make a difference; organize, call for solidarity among women; highlight the potential role of women in peace-making; believe in the right to choose; work on changing mentalities and laws.

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Muna Khugali:

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1. Sudanese women fought hard beside men from the 'forties for the independence of Sudan, achieved in 1956. Thus the women's movement in Sudan did not start as a movement to obtain

There is no one Arab woman. But there are issues and concerns that are common to all Arab women.

women's rights, but as a political struggle against British colonialism. After independence, women's struggle continued, making demands for Sudanese women's political and civil rights until they got these rights. The first Sudanese woman entered parliament in the 'sixties, and was followed by others. A new era in Sudanese women's lives had started. Through all the political struggles against dictatorship, Sudanese women stood beside men and strengthened the efforts for freedom and rights, which resulted in them enjoying a more advanced status than other women in the region.

The Sudanese Women's Union was the largest women's organization in Sudan, and the one that played the leading role in obtaining and defending women's rights, to the extent of being awarded an international prize in 1993. During the 'seventies, as a result of the Sudanese Women's Union's efforts, Sudanese women were able to get more rights, despite the fact that the Union was accused of being a communist movement, and was banned by the May and June regimes. The following are gains for women made by the Union:

- The right to education for all.
- The right to vote and to be elected.
- The right to employment.
- The right to equal pay for equal work.

The struggle continued for other rights, including campaigns of literacy education, training and raising awareness in many different parts of the country. As a result, more rights were obtained: to maternity leave with full pay; to a free breastfeeding hour; and for a working wife to accompany her husband abroad without losing her job. During the seventies the first Sudanese woman joined the army and the police force; and Sudan was one of the first countries in the area that had women judges in the *Sharia* courts.

But there were also failures:

- The movement seems not to have struggled for the enforcement of laws for the equality of women, though this was also due to the restrictions put by military governments on Sudanese organizations' freedom of expression.
- The movement did not fight enough against the abusive articles of the Personal Law; their fight for the abolition of the '*Bayt al-Ta'a*' (house of obedience) was frozen.
- The issue of female circumcision was not

one of the priorities of the movement.

- The political affiliation of some women's organizations (eg the SWU) with the regime and the boycotting of others, caused the alienation of the Islamists, and resulted in the government supporting their own women cadres and excluding others.

- The structure of women's organizations was and is not transparent and accountable.

- Leadership in women's organizations and their relationship with the grassroots is very weak.

- The long duration of the leadership of the women's organizations without new elections, as well as the conflict between old and new generations, has also affected the growth of the women's movement. To some extent this is due to the absence of democracy and of freedom of work under the military regimes, and the fact that they prohibit open activities, meetings, freedom of movement, and the sense of democracy.

- The belief of some organizations that a united women's movement means dissolving all organizations in one body has made many women prefer not to join the movement.

- The poverty of the women's organizations has made them unable to reach different regions and local organizations.

- They have failed to address the conditions of women in distant areas, especially in the war zones. While there is not at present an united Sudanese women's movement, some women's organizations have recently made attempts at networking, indicating a renaissance of the women's movement. For example there was a co-coordinated effort made by women's organizations, including the Islamic ones, against the Labor Act of 2000, when over 45 women's and civil society organizations sued the government.

Another example of cooperation is the Sudan National Women's Convention, which was held in Kampala, in 2002. 120 women activists representing Sudanese women's organizations and political parties attended the conference. For the first time, women from the war zones joined their sisters from the government-held areas in the conference to discuss their rights together.

There have been other initiatives bringing women's organizations together to work for peace, and one can say that, despite all the

shortcomings, women are working for a united women's movement.

(Qu 2, 3, omitted)

4. Definitely pluralism is good and essential. Women have always proved their strength in fighting for their rights and in obtaining them. Now women are occupying leading positions and have proved their success in their jobs. However, networking between the different specializations is as important as specialization. In some societies, families may refuse to allow women to receive education or other services unless delivered by women, so in these cases it is important to have qualified women to deliver these services. It is the duty of the movement to encourage women from different backgrounds to work in the different areas because pluralism of experience is needed for the advancement of the women's movements. Pluralism is important, and it should be accompanied by a widening of women's participation and the democratization of the organizations.

5. I strongly believe that women and male activists should struggle hard for the reform of family law. Women's organizations and activists, female lawyers and judges should participate in writing the laws, not only because women should always take part in making policy but also because family law mainly affects women. All Arab societies are patriarchal and men have always interpreted religion in ways that serve their interests, and in many cases laws strip women of their rights. Women's participation in writing law will limit male control, and will add justice to the spirit of laws.

6. It is important to benefit from women's experiences in different movements, in the east - Iran, Africa, India, Pakistan - as well as in the west, since the west has a long history of women's struggle. The western schools of feminism have had a profound affect on all women's struggles for rights. Listening and considering doesn't necessarily mean adopting and, given the difference in women's situation in different societies, women need to be careful when dealing with these issues. It is easy for others to accuse them of being 'western affiliated' and so damage their image and work.

7. In the case of Sudan there are many causal factors:

Muna Khugali:

- The absence of democracy that would allow women's organizations to function freely, and to move to the rural areas in order to deliver education and awareness.

- The concept of a women's movement is sometimes limited to political participation, leading to targeting women from the urban areas and neglecting the rural areas. This means lack of communication between educated and uneducated women.

- The emigration of qualified cadres from rural areas to cities.

- In the case of Sudan, the war, the centralization of services in the northern cities, and the economic and political marginalization of the rural areas, has created different classes.

- Poverty deprives women of the time or ability to think about women's rights.

- The high illiteracy in rural regions, especially among women.

- The wide gap in living standards and life style between urban and rural Sudanese women.

- The absence of the concept of women's rights in rural areas, and the prevalence of male domination.

- The extreme distances between cities and villages in Sudan, the lack of proper transport, and the poverty of women's organizations.

8. One of the main reasons for failure of the women's movement in general, is the widespread phenomenon of a few leaders controlling the organizations and ruling without democracy. In our organizations, the phenomenon of the 'life-leader' is a common fact. Women at the grassroots are used as members without being consulted. Some women's organizations are created by governments, and their leaders are appointed according to the government ideology and not according to women's needs. Some are appointed to serve certain individuals, which raises questions about the legitimacy of these organizations. In the absence of legitimacy, credibility is also absent.

There is a fear on the side of the older women leaders and doubts about the new cadres. The women's movement has enough obstacles without this. It should adopt more democratic practices instead of acting like an oppressive regime.

In order to be able to improve the women's orga-

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nizations/movement, they should evaluate themselves and other voices should be heard.

9. Women have gained a better position now in their communities because of their successful efforts to obtain their rights, and because of the active roles they have undertaken in family and society. The image of women has definitely improved in many countries. However, the road of struggle is long and the overwhelming majority of women are still far from full rights. The women's movement is a continuous process of struggle for obtaining rights, and for the enforcement of practice of these rights. This means to seek true equality in gender relations and practice.

10. The first principle in human rights is the right of minorities. In Sudan there are over 400 spoken languages, but only Arabic is officially taught and used. This means discrimination against, and marginalization of, many Sudanese citizens including women. It is important that the women's movement should use the languages of the minorities so to bring them on board, and to create a sense of belonging to the movement amongst them. This would definitely help the movement to spread more and gain strength. The movement can use the local cadres in these minority areas to train women leaders to take leading roles in their communities.

(Qu 11 omitted)

12. The UN declarations on human rights, the conventions (eg. CEDAW), and the UN international and regional conferences on women, have had a great impact. For example the conferences and seminars organized by the UN agencies have brought women from different backgrounds together and enabled them to discuss the issues affecting them. They have also helped women in setting up education and training programmes, and have provided women with opportunities to improve their positions, and to address different issues that matter to them like women's rights, poverty, political participation, etc.

13. This has added strength to the activities of the women's organizations and consequently to the advancement of women's rights. Organizations that lead the women's movement now benefit from the expertise of professionals and scholars. This has definitely improved public ideas of

women's activism and is leading the movement to a better future.

14. The political regimes prevalent in the region, and absence of democracy; leaders for life; gaps between old leaders and young ones; lack of economic resources; lack of communication between local organizations; conflict and competition for funding from donors.

15. Organizations should encourage each other's work, adopt more democracy, and widen participation and coordination in order to create a strong women's movement.

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1. Forming organizations and raising public awareness, including governmental understanding, of women and gender issues – especially as regards nationality rights, family laws, honor killings/domestic violence, and political participation – have constituted the greatest achievement thus far. Of course, women's movements have had varying degrees of success cross-nationally. The greatest failures have been the lack of coordination, cooperation, and coalition-building across the region (and sometimes even within a country), and lack of participation in transnational feminist networks.

2. The charge is not justified. First, there is no unitary 'Western feminism'; the history of feminism and women's movements in the West (first- and second-wave) has been characterized by different priorities, strategies, discourses, and ideologies (eg. socialist, liberal, radical, Marxist, post-modernist feminisms). Second, feminism is a set of ideas concerning problems facing women (oppression, inequality, discrimination, second-class citizenship) and the means to achieve equality, empowerment, an expanded rights (eg. educational attainment, paid employment, legal equality, women's organizations, political representation); these ideas are found among women in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Arab region, Europe, and North America. Third, the United Nations Decade for Women and the

Beijing Platform for Action represent an international and cross-cultural consensus on women's 'critical areas of concern' and the means and mechanisms needed to achieve women's economic, social, and political empowerment. Fourth, Arab women have developed a number of priorities, strategies, discourses, and ideologies to draw attention to problems and to attain rights, including socialist, liberal, and Islamic feminisms – all of which, in my view, are presented in a distinctly Arab idiom.

3. In my view, Islamic fundamentalism is on the wane in most of the Arab region as a major oppositional political movement (although it is rising in other regions, e.g., sub-Saharan Africa and perhaps southeast Asia). It has been shown to be very violent in countries like Algeria and Egypt (and non-Arab countries like Afghanistan); where it has been in power, it has been unable to solve any major problems (e.g., Sudan). On the other hand, there is a strong strain of religious conservatism among Arabs (in contradistinction to Iranians), and this is of course a major threat to any of the 'new' social movements, such as women's movements and human rights movements. Any form of religious conservatism, whether Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, is often antithetical to progressive social movements.

No Islamist movement has produced anything resembling a theory or practice of democracy, human rights, or women's rights. On the other hand, Islam does have egalitarian and emancipatory elements to it, as do Christianity and Judaism (the other Abrahamic religions). For this reason, women have identified themselves with their religions – thus, Christian, Jewish, and now Islamic feminisms. What is clear, however, is that no religious state or religiously-based legal frameworks can provide equality for all citizens, because religions tend to favor their own and to privilege men over women. Islam, for example, at least as far as it is currently interpreted and practiced around the world, privileges Muslims over non-Muslims and men over women; hence the inequality of non-Muslims and of women in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, etc. The same goes for Judaism, hence the inequality of non-Jews and women in Israel.

It may be that the problem of Israel was one of the factors in the emergence and spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab region (the other factors being political authoritarianism, the

Valentine Moghadam

failures of economic development, and the emergence of 'public women', considered offensive by conservative men of the petty bourgeoisie). The solution to the problems of the region, however, is not religious revivalism but a rights-based development strategy and regional cooperation.

4. I think you mean Arab women's NGOs. Social movements tend to be diffuse and diverse, with various organizations undertaking different activities – all, however, directed towards the same goal. If Arab women's organizations within the broad Arab women's movement(s) are undertaking social work, adult literacy, research, legal counseling, etc., toward the goal of enhancing women's status and promoting their empowerment, then these diverse activities complement each other and have a positive cumulative effect. If, however, these activities are carried out in a routine and bureaucratic fashion, as a substitute for social-service delivery by the state rather than as a political act to empower women, then the activities serve to foster the state rather than women's empowerment.

5. Isn't there already struggle going on around this issue? Certainly this has been the case in Algeria and Morocco – and in Palestine, as well, until the second Intifada. Reform of family law is at the forefront of Arab women's movement demands, as it should be. Different movements have used different strategies – examples are the confrontational stance of Algerian feminists, the consensus-building strategy of Egyptian feminists, and the 'social dialogue' with the state in which Moroccan feminists participated.

6. I'm not convinced that Arab women's movements have looked to the West for models and affiliations, but they should in any event form relations with women's movements elsewhere. In fact, I believe that one weakness has been the lack of formal affiliation with transnational feminist networks – that is, those organizations that unite women from three or more countries around a common agenda, whether it be a feminist critique of economic policy, or Muslim women's human rights, or women's reproductive health and rights, or peace and conflict-resolution. Feminists in Africa, India, Pakistan, and Latin America are more deeply involved in TFNs (for example, they have regional offices as well as 'movement intellectuals') than are feminists in the Arab region.¹

I believe that one weakness has been the lack of formal affiliation with transnational feminist networks.

7. Historically, women's rights/feminist movements have been middle-class movements. Working-class women are more likely to be involved in trade unions, where they try to raise feminist issues (e.g., women's equality and participation in decision-making in the unions, a better deal for women in the labor market, etc.). However, there have been alliances between feminists in women's organizations and women activists in trade unions in a number of countries (India, the US, European countries, Mexico). I believe that some cooperation in that area has occurred in Morocco and in Turkey. I believe there should be forums, meetings, or other activities to encourage dialogue between the middle-class women's organizations and the women trade unionists so that they can reach consensus on strategies for the realization of women's civil, political, and socio-economic rights.

8. Again, I believe you mean Arab women's organizations within the broader movement. I am not as familiar with decision-making processes in Arab women's NGOs as I am with other women's organizations (e.g., the TFNs that I have been studying). Certainly one of the defining features of women's organizations in the West has been their non-hierarchical structure and democratic form of decision-making. If the Arab women's organizations are personalist, and decision-making is unilateral, then that would reflect the larger society and existing political processes, wouldn't it? In any event, if the women's organizations regard themselves as part of the larger movement for democratization (as well as for women's rights) in the Arab region, then it is important that they adopt democratic structures and practices. This would help them develop theories of women's rights and democratization.

9. Change within the family is a good measure of the efficacy of the women's movement and the success of its members/activists. The extent of such change in the Arab region is an empirical question, and I don't have enough information about it to be able to comment on it. Have gender relations and practices changed in the Arab region, and is the Arab women's movement responsible for it? Certainly patriarchy is in crisis in the region, and has been for some time (hence the Islamist backlash), but that is largely the result of longer-term, structural changes such as women's educational attainment, lower fertility

rates, and their involvement in the public sphere. In some countries, however, the women's movement has raised public awareness about women's rights and gender relations in very visible ways – eg. in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco (also Iran and Turkey, among non-Arab countries).

10. One of the deficiencies has been the neglect of issues pertaining to the rights of non-Arab or non-Muslim minorities. Also, the rights of migrant workers, and especially women migrant workers, should be promoted by the Arab women's organizations.

11. I'm not sure that there is an 'Arab feminism' in the sense of a homogeneous and undifferentiated women's movement across the region. Again, consider the differences between Algerian feminism and Egyptian or Syrian feminism. Algerian feminists are much more likely to use the language of modernity and of citizenship in their public pronouncements than are women activists in Egypt or Syria; and they have engaged in 'direct action' which we have not seen in Egypt or Syria. At the same time, there is a kind of 'Arab idiom' that is inevitable, given the region's history and culture. For example, Arab feminists are more likely to cooperate with men than are feminists in some other regions; they do not regard the family as the source of oppression, even though they call for the modernization of family laws; and they are not hostile to religion (as opposed to fundamentalist movements), as feminists in some other regions have been.

12. The UN Decade for Women exposed Arab women's organizations to international feminisms and allowed them to engage in some international networking. The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in September 1994 had perhaps the greatest impact, in that it imparted to Arab women's organizations a forum and legitimacy. The Beijing Conference continued this process and provided sources of funding, additional opportunities for international networking, and a forum for the exchange of ideas and strategies for women's empowerment. UNIFEM may be regarded as a 'movement agency' in that its Executive Director comes out of the transnational women's movement and is committed to promoting women's rights across the world. European donor agencies also got involved in the UN Decade and the Beijing process, and they have been a source of

support (and funding) for women's organizations in the Arab region.

13. This can only have a positive effect, inasmuch as more women will become involved in the Arab women's movements.

14. Political obstacles: state repression and in some countries the influence of Islamist parties. Cultural obstacles: fear of being labeled 'Westernized', and the constant need to defer to religion. Economic obstacles: the fact that Arab women participate less in the paid labor force than in other regions of the world-economy means that they have not articulated the sort of economic grievances that have led feminists in other countries to develop ideas about women's socio-economic rights. Organizational obstacles: there needs to be coordination, cooperation, and coalition-building across countries, and deeper involvement in transnational feminist networks (such as DAWN, WLUM, etc.).

15. I would have a working conference of women's organizations across the region to discuss an array of issues; and I would form some arrangements with transnational feminist networks.

ENDNOTES

1 See Samia Tabari's review of [Women@Internet](#) in this issue.

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Emily Naffa:

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1. I think the greatest achievement of Arab women during the 20th century — the century of struggle for women's rights — was the attainment of the right of girls to education. This achievement has been a decisive factor in women's progress, especially in the labor market, leading to economic emancipation.

The Arab women's movement has had another great achievement, in being one of the major Arab social movements of the 20th century that brought changes in all aspects of daily life in the wake of the national liberation struggle.

Emily Naffa

On the other hand, the women's movement has failed to a shocking extent to become part of legislative and political decision-making bodies, so as to bring about real change in the laws related to women's rights, especially family law.

2. This charge is not justified since the movement for the liberation of women is international. As far back as 1910, socialist women in Copenhagen adopted March 8 as International Women's Day to commemorate the struggles and sacrifices of women all over the world for their rights. One example is working women in the United States who were burnt in a factory for demanding an 8-hour working day. It could be that the struggle for women's rights started in the industrial countries, but it has spread all over the world. We cannot ignore the effect of the struggle of the Egyptian or Algerian women on the common struggle of the international women's movement, as well as the effect of the achievements of women in the former Soviet Union, or the struggle in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The best response is to say that social progress is the fruit of all and for all, a world heritage. At a certain point in history the leading feminist activists were from the 'progressive West' not the 'conservative West'. The West is not one. It has classes, and the struggle for women's rights was led by middle class and working class women activists, and progressive forces of men and women world wide.

3. The factors that account for the spread of religious fundamentalism are mainly: poverty, backwardness, illiteracy and lack of democracy and general freedoms. Religious revivalism threatens the achievements of the Arab women's movement because it calls for re-imposing segregation of, and discrimination against, women, as was the case in Afghanistan.

4. Today, women's NGOs find themselves working among communities that are becoming more and more marginalized, especially the women in them. There is an urgent need to emphasize the importance of poverty-eradication, and the participation of women's NGOs in taking action against the feminization of poverty. Much is still needed to be done in eradication of adult literacy, legal counseling, research, and other fields, as part of the march for women's emancipation.

There is an urgent need to emphasize the importance of poverty-eradication, and the participation of women's NGOs in taking action against the feminization of poverty.

5. Yes. Much needs to be done to obtain progressive family laws. The research is done. Women know what urgent changes are needed. Struggle should be directed to decision-makers to adopt reforms in spite of the growing conservative trend in the Arab world. At the last Arab Women's Summit, a Jordanian declaration amending the Nationality law came from the head of state, after years of struggle by women activists.

6. The Arab women's movements were, and still are, affiliated to international progressive women's movements such as the International Democratic Federation of Women, which include in their ranks women's organizations from the East, eg Iran, and India. Women worldwide struggle together and exchange experiences in their endeavors to promote women's status. It is now an urgent need to build relations between women in the North and the South to face the negative impact on women of neo-liberal globalization.

7. Historically speaking, it is known that the agent of social change is the middle class. So it is normal and logical that educated upper middle class women activists have taken the leading role in the struggle up to now. But with the massive education revolution of recent years, newcomers from the lower middles and working classes are joining the movement. Therefore, change in leadership is coming.

8. The whole liberation movement in the Arab world, whether at the level of politics or of social change, has been the victim of non-democratic leaders or, in more precise analysis, from the absence of institutionalization of the movement. It is high time to impose reform on the liberation movement as a whole. It is not fair to generalize. Most of the leaders and the active members of the Arab women's movements have been victims of non-democratic measures practiced against them by the authorities and reactionary elements in society. It has always been necessary to struggle for reform in the structures of the women's NGOs.

9. All that has been achieved in this respect is not enough. Much should be done with the support of civil society organizations.

10. Principles of democratic governance should be adopted to solve the problems of minorities,

whether of language or of ethnicity. The Arab women's movements are progressive in demanding the end of all discrimination and inequality. Therefore they must adopt a position against discrimination against minorities, and for equality for all. They should support the demands of minorities to have special schools, and TV and radio programs in their own languages. Thus minority children will learn about their own culture and keep their own identity within the Arab world. Their representation in legislative bodies is also a must.

11. The content of the term is what is most important. 'Arab feminism' is broader than 'Arab women' and it cannot be replaced. Whatever term is used, we should make it clear that gender equality is our target, and that we don't struggle against men. We struggle against discrimination, and for equality and justice.

12. The UN Decade for Women, the pre- and post UN International Conferences, and the UN specialized agencies have been decisive in giving momentum to the struggle of women activists in the last quarter of the 20th century. It has helped counterbalance the extremely negative effect of Islamist fundamentalism on the women's cause. It has helped the Arab women's organizations to focus on problems that hindered the advancement of women; and to adopt their own platforms of action and long-term strategies. In addition, it has launched awareness campaigns among women, and demanded the modernization of laws that govern women's rights in society, family and work.

13. It has helped increase the representation of the Arab women's movement in the different social sectors, and to create the image of successful working women. It has also increased the number of women activists struggling for the advancement of women in the political, economic and social fields.

14. Many obstacles are still in the way, old and new. First; the absence of democracy, an old obstacle that is still blocking the way, and needs to be achieved to open better opportunities to fulfill the agenda of the women's movement at its beginnings in the last century. Second, the fundamentalist mentality is becoming a strong new obstacle that is trying to reverse all the achievements gained up to now. New strategies are needed to confront this new phenomenon, because it is difficult to face those who use the

teachings of an essentially tolerant Islam to create an intolerant atmosphere against social progress, and against women in particular. Thirdly, there is a new obstacle in threats to women's NGOs from Arab governments and conservative forces, because NGOs are seen as part of the human rights and progressive civil society movement that is building ties with the international anti-globalization movement.

15. In future, the Arab women's movements need to struggle against old and new obstacles, and to change all laws that discriminate against women, especially family law, to put an end to the multiple miseries of women at the grassroots level; and enable women to reach decision-making posts especially in parliaments.

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Translated from Arabic by Lynn Maalouf

1. It is difficult to say that there is one great achievement we can consider as primordial. Rather, there are a number of achievements that have been attained through years of work, and that have been instrumental in changing women's situation in society in general. The Arab women's movements have succeeded in imposing their existence on society, and in crystallizing certain women's issues. As a result of this, most Arab states have admitted the necessity of reducing elements that discriminate against women in their laws by ratifying the UN Convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, even though the articles of the convention have not yet been implemented.

Regarding their failure: I would rather use the term inadequacy since I see it as lying in the inability of the women's movements to put enough pressure on their governments to implement the articles of the convention and change local laws in accordance with these articles. Another inadequacy lies in the fact that most of the women's movements are not protesting against the Arab states' reservations concerning the articles of the convention that touch on personal status laws. This means that they accept

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the status quo, although these laws have to do with the core of women's issues.

2. Women in the world suffer from different problems: some are common to them all, and some differ according to the particular circumstances of each society. However, all these problems, whether they be general or particular, and regardless of differences of religion, race, country or culture, have one source, and this is the patriarchal social system which exists in all parts of the world, and which is the reason for the subjection and subordination of woman, while it has established man's almost complete authority over all areas of decision-making, whether in society, economy, law, culture, etc.

We believe that many issues unite us to women in other parts of the world, for example the problem of violence against women, a phenomenon that shows the patriarchal system at its worst. There are also problems from which women in other societies used to suffer, and which they were able to overcome, unlike women in less developed societies who still suffer from the same problems, such as laws that discriminate against women. Besides this there are some issues that pertain to specific societies only, or that take on different aspects in different countries, such as so-called 'honor crimes' or female excision.

3. There are probably several reasons for the spread of religious fundamentalism in Arab societies, the most important of which are social and economic crisis, and deterioration in living conditions, besides the military defeats the Arab world has suffered in its wars against Israel. All these factors have added to the resentment of the Arab masses, while their undemocratic rulers do not permit this resentment to be expressed. It is necessary to introduce the changes the masses consider indispensable to put an end to the crisis. If we add to this the weakness, or even the absence, of democratic and secular forces that could replace the existing regimes, the masses find no way to express their resentment other than taking refuge in religion. This is a sensitive issue but we have to tackle it. The essence of both Christianity and Islam call for social justice, respect for people and their rights, redressing corruption, and other similar reforms that in fact express the needs of the subjugated masses. Our problem is that the extremist fundamentalists have appointed themselves as replacement for the present

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regimes, but are no less repressive than them. The main problem for the women's movements when facing the fundamentalists is their mental stagnation, and their refusal to change rules and customs set hundreds of years ago.

4. To improve the situation of women in the Arab countries we might need even more diversity than we have at present, due to the enormous dimensions of women's needs. But for this diversity to yield better results, women's organizations should evaluate what are the most urgent needs of women today. Until now the Arab women's movements have not been able to reach a consensus around priorities, nor about how to develop a program that will encompass the different services, nor how to work toward clear aims with definite time schedules, and according to the priorities agreed upon.

Here we have to take note of a sensitive point, which is that the programs of some of the NGOs are subject to the donor's agenda. Indeed some of these organizations have been established according to this agenda, regardless of whether it complies with the people's needs or not.

5. We believe that family law, or personal status law, is one of the major issues, if not *the* major issue, on which the work of the women's movements in all the Arab countries should be centered. It should also be a priority of Human Rights organizations, and all those calling for democracy. How can we call for democratic institutions without establishing the bases of democracy inside the family, which constitutes the nuclear cell of society? The personal status laws are not based on equality between man and woman, or on a relationship of complete partnership between them. They are based on the man's almost complete power over his family, including his wife and female 'subjects'.

6. This description of relations between the Arab women's movements and the West is probably exaggerated. In the past there were more energetic frameworks than today encompassing the women's movements in the Arab world, and there also were universal frameworks joining women from various countries, western as well as Second and Third world countries. However, there is no doubt that women's organizations in the West have succeeded, due to their general economic and social development, in realizing

achievements that women's movements in the Arab countries have been unable to reach; and this is why the West became for some an example to follow. But this does not eliminate the need to open up to women's movements in other parts of the world, especially those working in social and cultural conditions closer to those in our Arab countries. This is important in order to exchange experiences and benefit from the very significant experiences of women's movements in the East, as well as in Latin America.

7. It is not surprising that a higher awareness of women's issues should have first crystallized among educated women, some of whom were able to raise essential issues and basic problems from which women in their societies suffer, creating an awareness among women of different social classes and backgrounds. Here we can point to the large demonstration which Moroccan women organized on March 8, 2000, coinciding with International Women's Day. The number of women and men participants was close to a million. But this does not eliminate the other side of the problem, which the question has overlooked, ie. the charitable work that women in Arab societies customarily undertake. Limited to women from the educated and well-to-do classes, such work could not be transformed into a movement calling for women's rights, or spreading awareness of women's issues among the different social classes. This limitation applies to most women's organizations either close to the ruling political elites or affiliated to them.

8. Undemocratic procedures are not restricted to women's movements alone, but are prevalent in many NGOs, parties and associations of civic society. The weakness of democratic practices and the absence of accountability is a problem in all Arab societies, and comes to the fore in the electoral system, wherever there is one. It is thus not surprising that these weaknesses should prevail in civic society in general including women's associations. However, this does not excuse civic society organizations, especially those calling for change, from setting an example of democratic procedures within their framework, and seeking to ensure an appropriate environment for the human development of their members, and raise their level of group responsibility, as well as ensuring an atmosphere appropriate for questioning, and a sense of responsibility and accountability towards the issues that are raised.

9. The use of the word gender is still relatively new in Arab societies, although its content was not completely unknown to feminist discourse in the Arab world. But this discourse has not yet been able to bring about the desired change in social relations. This is due, on the one hand, to difficulty in realizing the desired cultural change in understanding gender roles, and on the other to the fact that many of the women's societies are themselves affected by the patriarchal social system and do not call for radical change to this system. Thus their proposals only touch the superficial forms of this system and do not tackle its essential problems, such as the personal status laws, for example.

10. I do not think that the Arab women's movements have a single policy towards the minorities in their countries. These policies depend on the intellectual, cultural and political structures of these movements. It is not a secret that some of the women's movements support their governments in the repression of which the minorities are the victim. As a matter of principle one cannot deny the right of minorities to preserve their language, culture and traditions, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it is not admissible that women's movements which are supposed to defend women's human rights should deny other women these rights.

11. The meaning of this question is not clear to me.

12. The United Nations Decade for women greatly helped the Arab women's movement, especially in raising the pattern and tone of their demands for legal reforms, and in pressuring their countries to sign the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. The UN's adoption of women's issues proved that the problems from which women suffer are international, and this has had a positive effect on the role of women's organizations in their societies.

13. There is no doubt that we are in need of research either directly on women's conditions, or on the conditions affecting women indirectly, such as poverty, the economy, and health, among others. Undertaking research that is 'gender-sensitive' will contribute to giving us a clearer understanding of women's social and economic conditions as well as women's needs. We

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hope that the new researchers will tackle issues that have still not been sufficiently dealt with, such as family relations as affected by law, beliefs, traditions, etc, and their effect on women's daily lives.

14. The instability that many Arab countries face, and that has reached a peak in Occupied Palestine, as well as the possibility of a war against Iraq with all its likely repercussions on the Arab region, these are conditions that relegate women's issues to second place. But we cannot overlook the spread of the fundamentalist movements which call for our isolation from the world on the pretext of fighting the West. This is a current of which women will be the first victims.

15. What we aspire to is for the women's movements to be more down-to-earth, and to break away from theory and 'superiority discourse'. They need to be more aware of the real problems that women in the Arab world face, and thus be more capable of raising essential demands, ones that have priority, and so be able to attract larger numbers of women to their ranks.

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1. In my view, their greatest achievement is making women in the Arab world aware of their position in society and of their rights. This is most visible at the academic level: in addition to a plethora of associations dealing with women's issues and women's rights, there are two graduate units of gender/women studies which will certainly ensure continuation. There is also a great number of publications (articles, books, seminars, conferences, etc). The women's movement has indeed opened the door for women to reach positions of decision-making and public power, and this is no small step. If we consider the profile of any Moroccan women in decision-making positions today, we notice that most of them have espoused the core aims of the movement; all of them still struggle for the same aims.

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The greatest failure of the Arab women's movement is the tendency to exclude men in societies where they still lead the show.

where they still lead the show. Men should be more involved at this stage, as we still need credibility at the social level. In my view, struggle for women's rights in the Arab-Islamic world is different from this struggle in the Western world, whose literature reaches us most. I think it is too early to focus the struggle on 'women only'; focus needs to be put on women but not by excluding men, because our societies are built on the family and not the individual.

2. Yes and no. Western feminism is like Western mathematics or Western physics. We cannot simply ignore them. I think we need to make a clear distinction between studying phenomena for the sake of knowledge, and applying these phenomena to our societies. In the latter case, we have to take culture into consideration. The accusation is part of the overall international atmosphere where tension has shifted from the Cold War between two major powers (the ex-Soviet Union and the USA), to the new world order where Islam is being used by some US leaders as the indispensable 'demon' other. Because such leaders focus on gender and victimize Arab/Muslim women to legitimize their 'civilizing' mission, we need to empower women in our countries by making their voices heard.

3. International causal factors should be placed first: the 'success' of the Iranian Revolution, the fall of the Soviet Union, the increasing power of the US, wars in the Middle East, poverty and disillusionment. Religious revivalism is not a reaction to liberal feminism, it is the result of the causes mentioned above. I have no clear strategy of how to deal with it, but I certainly know that we have to find a way around it. Revivalism is backed by political power (influential men) and the Arab women's movements are not. We need to tackle this issue more seriously.

I may also add that religious fundamentalism is part of a global turn towards conservatism. The spread of extremist fundamentalism is nourished by the already poor and deteriorating economic conditions of Arab Muslim populations.

4. I think it is good. Social policies in Morocco are becoming more and more the territory of civil society, and the private sector. Women are more active in civil society. By engaging in this type of work, the women's movements will become closer to the people.

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

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!

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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Camillia Fawzi El-Solh:

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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-

Camillia El-Solh

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

Western feminism has not necessarily achieved its aims, except maybe for the economically better off women.

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

We still have not reached the stage where gender, like poverty, is the business of everyone involved in development.

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:

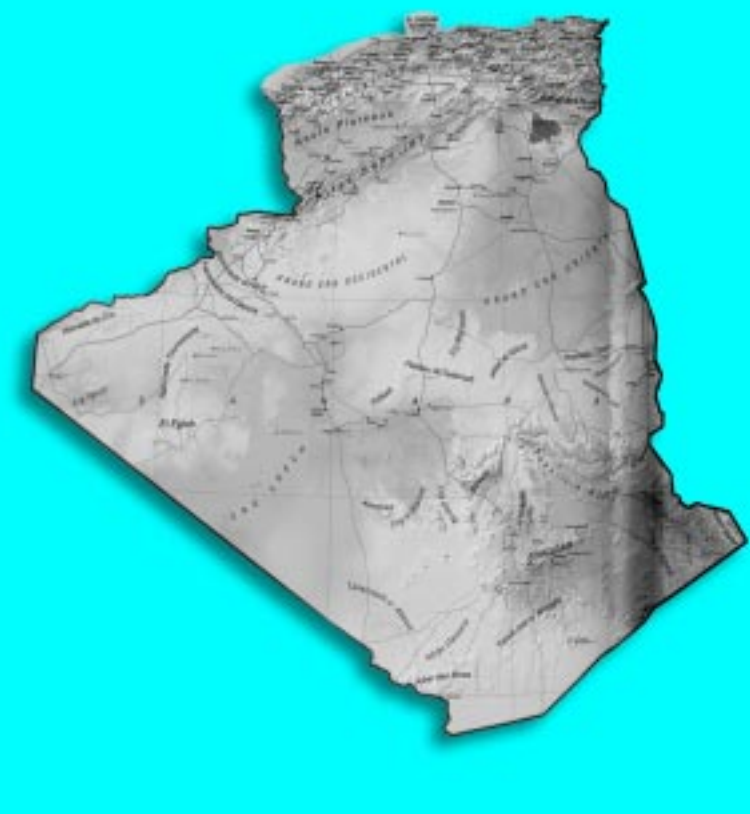
- There is a dearth of data of the kind we wanted.
- Much of the available data is non-comparable across countries.
- Most of the data available on Arab websites about Arab women is actually taken from external sources, mainly the United Nations, but also the U.S. State Department, the Bureau of Democracy, 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.

Algeria



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 28 November 1996. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes (May 1996).³
i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:
i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁶
iii) Judges? Yes.⁷

iv) Number of women judges: 547 of 2,324 practising judges in all jurisdictions were women in 1998.⁸ Recently two women were appointed as presiding judges.⁹

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.¹⁰

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious based.¹¹
ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1962).¹²
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes (1962).¹³
iii) Percentage of women in parliament: 3.4% (lower house), 5.6% (upper house).¹⁴
iv) Women in the cabinet? Yes, 11 (1982-2001).¹⁵

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹⁶
i) In which sectors? Civil service, armed forces.¹⁷
ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.¹⁸
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The Standing Committee of the Ministry of National Solidarity and the Family.¹⁹

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? Yes.²⁰

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.²¹

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²²

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 57/76.2%.²³

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 104/114%; secondary level 67/66% (2000)²⁴; tertiary level: ndf.

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 45% of school teachers are women.²⁵ In 1995 there were 20 women university teachers for every 100 men.²⁶

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 29.5%.²⁷

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁸
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁹

iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.

iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names. Yes.³⁰

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.0/68.1 years (2000).³¹
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 27.6 years.³²
iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 220 per 100,000 births (1985 -99).³³

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³⁴

ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³⁵

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes, in southern Algeria.³⁶

d) Employment in the modern health sector: 51.2% of health professionals, 36% of university hospital physicians, 46% of medical specialists, 48.6% of general practitioners, 64.4% of dental surgeons and 65.4% of pharmacists were women in 1996.³⁷

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁸

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³⁹

ENDNOTES

1. Art 29: <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/1078/econst1.htm>
2. Art. 6, Art. 32: Suad Joseph ed. (2000), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
4. Art. 2, Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 15 paragraph 4, Art. 16 and Art. 29: www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/algeria.htm
5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
6. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/algeria.htm>
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/algeria/gender.html>
10. Eg. travel: women under 19 years cannot travel abroad without father's or husband's permission (this law is not generally observed): http://www.afrol.com/categories/Women/profiles/algeria_women.htm.
11. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/Algeria.htm>
12. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Saliha Boudeffa "Le Contexte de Crise et les femmes en Algerie" paper presented to IWSAW colloquium, July 2001, p 8.
16. http://www.afrol.com/categories/Women/profiles/algeria_women.htm
17. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/algeria/gender.html>
18. In 1996, 4.8% of women in government employment occupied ministerial and sub-ministerial positions: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/percent.htm>
19. Ibid.
20. http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm
21. Ibid.
22. <http://www.euronet.nl/~fullmoon/womlist/countries>

23. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
24. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
25. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/algeria.htm>
26. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. *Women and Men in the Arab Countries: Education*. New York: United Nations.
27. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
28. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/algeria.htm>
29. http://www.afrol.com/categories/Women/profiles/algeria_women.htm
30. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/algeria.htm>
31. Ibid.
32. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). *Women and Men In Algeria: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.
33. United Nations Development Programme (2002) *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
34. 47% of women aged 15-49 use all methods of contraception: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). *Women and Men In Algeria: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.
35. Only if it is to save the life of the mother or preserve her health. <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
36. <http://www.fgmnetwork.org/intro/fgmintr.htm>
37. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/algeria.htm>
38. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). *Women and Men In Algeria: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.
39. Ibid.

Bahrain



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: February 2001. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. International Resolutions:

a) CEDAW: Yes (18 June 2002).
i) With reservations? Yes.³

b). ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No 100), 1951: No.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention No 111), 1958: No.⁴

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁵
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁶
iii) Judges? ndf.

iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁷

c) Family law

i) Religious, uncodedified.⁸
ii) Recent changes? Yes.⁹

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Limited.¹⁰
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.¹¹
iii) Percentage of women in parliament? No parliament.¹²
iv) Women in the cabinet: No.¹³

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.
i) In which sectors? ndf.
ii) Heads of government departments: None.
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.¹⁴

7. **Gender Monitoring and Action:**

a) National Council of Women? The Supreme Council for Women.¹⁵

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.¹⁶

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.¹⁷

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 82.6/90.9%.¹⁸

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: at primary level 104/104%; secondary level 98/89%; tertiary level: 32/20% (2000).¹⁹

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 73% of primary school teachers were women in 2000.²⁰ 60.9%.of employees in the Ministry of Education are women.²¹

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 33.5%.²²

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²³
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁴
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.0/71.6 years (2000).²⁵
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 50% of women married before the age of 20 in 1991.²⁶
iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 46 per 100,000 births.²⁷

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁸
ii) Is abortion legal: Yes.²⁹

c) Female genital mutilation? Not sure.³⁰

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

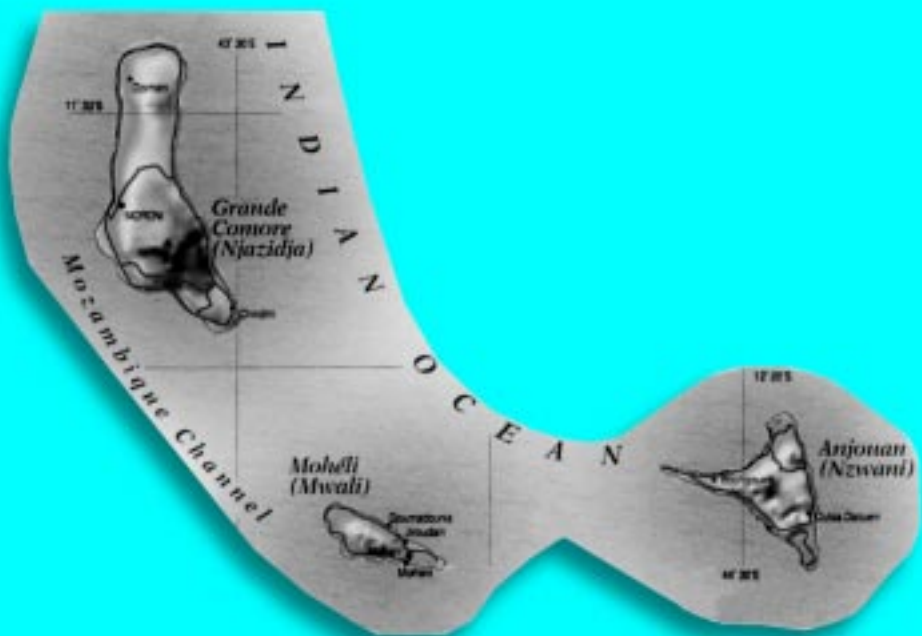
a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³¹

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³²

ENDNOTES

1. Art 2: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/bahrain/gender.html> & <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/bahrain/constitution.html>
2. Art. 27: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/ba00000_.html
3. Article 2, Article 9 paragraph 2, Article 15 paragraph 4, Article 16 and Article 29 paragraph 1: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html/>
4. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
5. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/bahrain/gender.html>
6. <http://www.feminist.org/news/newsbyte/uswirestory.asp?id=1849>
7. Laws vary according to *Sunni* or *Shi'a* interpretations: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/social/profile/bahrain/main.html>
8. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
9. The Personal Status Committee, created to launch awareness among women, has succeeded in "suspending the rule of obedience enacted by the police, and in restricting arbitrary divorce. Now divorce is only legal before a judge." : Sabika Al-Najjar, see article in *Al-Raida*, this issue.
10. Though according to the constitution all citizens are equal before the law; women were not allowed to vote in the only legislative elections held in Bahrain so far (1973). They were allowed to vote, however, in the referendum of February 2001, which approved the National Action Charter: UNDP, *Human Development Report* 2002.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/social/profile/bahrain/main.html>
14. Ibid.
15. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/bahrain/gender.html>
16. http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm
17. <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/social/profile/bahrain/main.html>
18. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
19. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check " Summary Gender Profile")
20. Ibid.
21. <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/social/profile/bahrain/main.html>
22. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
23. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/bahrain/gender.html>
24. United Nations Development Programme. *Human Development Report on the Republic of Bahrain: Achievements and Challenges*. Bahrain: University of Bahrain Press.
25. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
26. United Nations Development Programme. (1998). *Human Development Report: State of Bahrain*.
27. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
28. 54% of women used contraceptive methods in 1989: United Nations Development Programme. (1998). *Human Development Report: State of Bahrain*.
29. <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
30. http://ippfnet.ippf.org/pub/IPPF_Regions/IPPF_CountryProfile.asp
31. *Al-Safir*.
32. Ibid.

Comoros



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: December 2001. Affirms gender equality? ndf.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.

3. International resolutions

a) CEDAW: No.

b) ILO Conventions:

- i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
- ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: No.²

4. Legal system:

a) Women's participation:

- i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
- ii) Work as lawyers? ndf.
- iii) Judges? ndf.
- iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? ndf.

c) Family law:

- i) Religious.³
- ii) Recent changes? No.

5. Political rights:

- i) Right to vote? Yes (1956).⁴
- ii) Stand as candidates for election? Yes.⁵
- iii) Percentage of women in parliament? None.⁶
- iv) Women in the cabinet? Yes.⁷

6. The state:

a) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.

i) In which sectors? ndf.

ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.⁸

iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: No.⁹

7. Gender monitoring and action:

a) National Council of Women? No.

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? No.¹⁰

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.¹¹

8. Education:

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 48.7/63.2%.¹²

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 70/82%; secondary level 22/27%; tertiary level 1/1% (2000).¹³

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 26% of primary school teachers in 2000 were women.¹⁴

9. The economy:

a) Female economic activity rate: 62.5%.¹⁵

b) Economic rights:

- i) To ownership of property? Yes.¹⁶
- ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.¹⁷
- iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
- iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. Health:

a) Vital statistics:

- i) Life expectancy (f/m): 61.2/58.4 years (2000).¹⁸
- ii) Average age of women at first marriage: less than

20 years (1990).¹⁹

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: ndf.

b) Reproductive rights:

- i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁰
- ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²¹

c) Female genital mutilation? No.²²

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. Culture:

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? ndf.

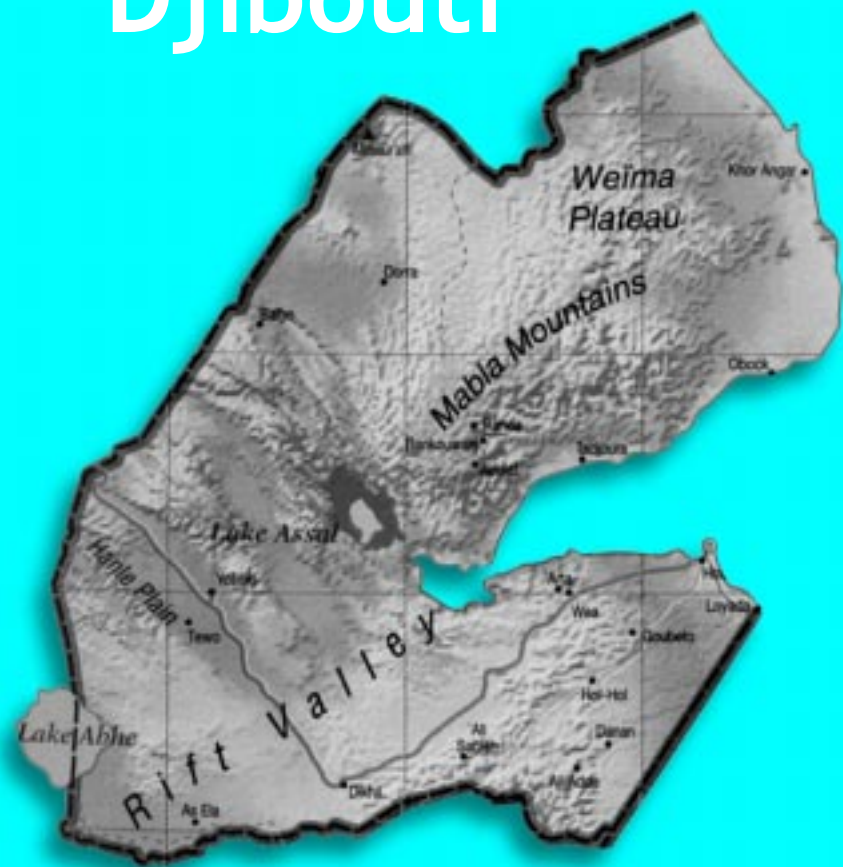
b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cn.html#govt>
2. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
3. <http://1upinfo.com/country-guide-study/comoros/comoros26.html>
4. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
5. Ibid.
6. Parliament has been dissolved for an indefinite period: United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
7. In 1990/91, two women were appointed Ministers of Social and Women's Affairs and of the Ministry of Population and Women's Affairs. The two ministries were later eliminated: Comoros: Status of Women: <http://1upinfo.com/country-guide-study/comoros/comoros26.html>
8. In 1996, 2.7% of women in the government occupied ministerial positions. <http://1upinfo.com/country-guide-study/comoros/comoros26.html>

9. Ibid.
10. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw>
11. <http://1upinfo.com/country-guide-study/comoros/comoros26.html>
12. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
13. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
14. Ibid.
15. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
16. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8316.htm>
17. Ibid.
18. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
19. WIDNET, Women in Development NETwork
20. http://www.prb.org/pdf/Comoros_Eng.pdf
21. To save the mother's life or preserve her health: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
22. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8316.htm>

Djibouti



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 4 September, 1992. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? No.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes. (Dec. 1998).³
i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:
i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁶
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷
iii) Judges? Yes.⁸
iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁹

c) Family law:

i) Religious.¹⁰
ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1946).¹¹
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.¹²
iii) Percentage of women in parliament? None.¹³
iv) Women in the Cabinet? Yes.¹⁴

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.
i) In which sectors? ndf.
ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.¹⁵
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The Ministry of Women's, Family and Social Affairs.¹⁶

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? Yes.¹⁷

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.¹⁸

c) NGO's that monitors women's situation? Yes.¹⁹

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 54.4/76.2%.²⁰

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 32/46%, secondary level 13/19% (2000); tertiary level (no universities).²¹

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 28% of primary school teachers and 22% of secondary teachers were women in 2000.²²

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: ndf.

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²³
ii) To own and manage businesses? ndf.
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 44.2/41.6 years (2000).²⁴
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: less than 20 years (1990).²⁵
iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: ndf.

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁶
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes in limited cases.²⁷

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.²⁸

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? ndf.

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

- <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/djibouti/constitution.html>
- Law No. 200/AN81 of Oct 24, 1981: <http://www.dss.mil.nf/adr/forpref/country3.htm#DJIBOUTI>
- <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
- Except if there is conflict with Islamic law: <http://undp-pogar.org/countries/djibouti/gender.html>
- Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
- http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/djibouti_women.htm
- <http://undp-pogar.org/countries/djibouti/gender.html>
- Ibid.
- Women are not permitted to travel without the permission of an adult male relative: <http://undp-pogar.org/countries/djibouti/gender.html>
- http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/djibouti_women.htm
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ibid.
- Ibid.
- The first female minister was appointed in 1999 as Minister

- of State for the Promotion of Women's, Family, and Social Affairs: <http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/msindex.htm>
- <http://undp-pogar.org/countries/djibouti/gender.html>
- Ibid.
- http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm
- Ibid.
- <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/r/ls/hrrpt/2001/af/8362.htm>
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
- Ibid.
- <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/djibouti/constitution.html>
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- <http://www.focusintl.com/statr1a1.htm>
- http://ippfnet.ippf.org/pub/IPPF_Regions/IPPF_CountryProfile.asp
- Only to save the life of the mother: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
- An estimated 95% of women of all ethnic groups are infibulated, though a Penal Code in 1994 outlawed FGM. http://ippfnet.ippf.org/pub/IPPF_CountryProfile.asp

Egypt



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 1980. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes (16 July 1980, 18 Sept. 1981).³
i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵

4. **Legal system**

a) Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁶
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷
iii) Judges? Yes.⁸
iv) Number of women judges: One.⁹

b. Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.¹⁰

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious based.¹¹
ii) Family law, recent changes? Yes, many. Latest in 2001.¹²

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1956).¹³
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.¹⁴
iii) Percentage of women in parliament? 2.4% (lower house).¹⁵
iv) Women in the Cabinet? Yes, two (2002).¹⁶

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹⁷
i) In which sectors? Administration, municipalities, police.¹⁸
ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.¹⁹
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The General Department of Women's Affairs of the Ministry of Social Affairs.²⁰

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? The National Committee on Women.²¹

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.²²

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²³

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 43.8/66.6%.²⁴

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 96/104% (2000); secondary level 78/84%(2000); tertiary level: ndf.²⁵

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 99% of nursery school teachers, 52% of primary school teachers, 42% of intermediate school teachers, and 37% of secondary school teachers were women in 1996-1997. In 2002, 53% of faculty in universities were female.²⁶

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 35%.²⁷

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁸
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁹
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own names? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 22% in 1991.³⁰

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 68.8/65.7 years (2000).³¹
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 21.4 years (1980-90).³²

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 170 per 100,000 births (1985-99).³³

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³⁴
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in special cases.³⁵

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes. Estimated prevalence 97%.³⁶

d) Employment in the modern health sector: In 1996, women

constituted 27% of the total number of those registered in the Syndicate of Physicians; 35% of those in the Syndicate of Pharmacy, and 33% of those in the Syndicate of Dentistry. Women also constituted 92% of the total number of staff in the nursing field.³⁷

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁸

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³⁹

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 8 & Art. 11. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/egypt/index.html>
2. Art. 6: Ibid.
3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
4. Art. 2, Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 16, Art. 29 paragraph 2. <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html/>
5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report: Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
6. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/Egypt/gender.html>
7. Ibid.
8. The first woman judge was appointed to the High Constitutional Court in Jan 2003: Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Unmarried women under age 21 must have their father's permission to obtain passports and to travel; married women of any age require permission from their husbands: http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/egypt_women.htm
11. http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/egypt_women.htm
12. Amendment 1 of 2001 challenges men's unilateral right to divorce for the first time: "Arab Human Development Report, 2002: Arab Women Moving Fast, But Still Far to go." <http://mobile.undp.org:8100/rbas/ahdr/PR4.pds>
13. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/576/eg22.htm>
17. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/Egypt/gender.html>
18. Ibid.
19. In 2000, 6.1% of women employed in government occupied ministerial-level posts, i.e. as ministers, vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries: United Nations Development Programme (2002) Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
20. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/Egypt/gender.html>
21. Ibid.
22. http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm
23. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/Egypt/gender.html>
24. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.

World. New York: Oxford University Press.

25. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")

26. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000) Women and Men in Egypt: A Statistical Portrait. United Nations: New York. & Al-Ahram Weekly Online, "Women of the World," Mar. 7-13, 2002. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2002/576/eg22.htm>

27. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.

28. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). Women and Men in Egypt: A Statistical Portrait. United Nations: New York.

29. Around 17% of private businesses are owned by women: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/Egypt/gender.html>

30. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). Women and Men in Egypt: A Statistical Portrait. United Nations: New York.

31. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.

32. www.unesco.org/culture/worldreport/html_eng/

33. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.

34. 52% of married women used contraception in 1997. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). Women and Men in Egypt: A Statistical Portrait. United Nations: New York.

35. To save the life of the mother, but with further restrictions: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>

36. Both Muslims and Coptic Christians practice FGM. In 1958, it was prohibited, and in 1996 all licensed health professionals were banned from performing it, but in 1997 a court overturned this ban. An appeal is still pending: http://ppfnet.ippf.org/pub/ippf_regions/ippf_countryprofile.asp

37. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). Women and Men in Egypt: A Statistical Portrait. United Nations: New York.

38. In 1996, 20% of those enrolled in the press syndicate were women: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2000). Women and Men in Egypt: A Statistical Portrait. United Nations: New York.

39. Ibid.

Iraq



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 1990 (Interim). Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes (13 Aug. 1986).²
i) With reservations? Yes.³

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No 100), 1951: Yes.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁴

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:
i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁵
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁶
iii) Judges? Yes.⁷
iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁸

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious-based.⁹
ii) Recent changes? Yes, several in 1970s.¹⁰

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? ndf.
ii) Stand as candidates for election? ndf.
iii) Number of women in parliament? ndf.
iv) Women in the Cabinet? No.

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹¹
i) In which sectors? Police, army.¹²
ii) Heads of government departments: No.
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: ndf.

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? The National Committee of Women.¹³

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.¹⁴

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.¹⁵

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 43/64% (1998).¹⁶

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 80/96%; secondary level 14/25%; tertiary level, 9/17% (2000).¹⁷

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 72% of primary school teachers and 57% of secondary school teachers were women (2000).¹⁸

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: ndf.

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.¹⁹
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁰
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.

iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households? ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 62/60 years (2000).²¹
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 22.3 years (early 1990s).²²
iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 310 per 100,000 births.²³

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁴
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²⁵

c) Female genital mutilation? No reported instances.

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.²⁶

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.²⁷

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 19. http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/iz__indx.html
2. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
3. Art. 2 paragraph [f] [g], Art. 16, and Art. 29 paragraph1. <http://www.iwrawap.org/ConvReservations.html/>
4. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
5. Personal Interview: Nadim Gargoura, *Al-Safir*.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Women are not permitted to travel outside the country unless escorted by a male relative: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8257.htm>
9. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/iraq.htm>
10. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
11. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8392.htm>
12. Ibid.
13. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/asiasum.htm>
14. http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm

15. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/iraqnap.htm>
16. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/iraq/gender.html>
17. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
18. Ibid.
19. http://ippfnet.ippf.org/pub/IPPF_Regions/IPPF_CountryProfile.asp
20. United Nations Development Program. (1995). *Iraq: Human Development Report*. Baghdad: Iraqi Economist Association.
21. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/asiasum.htm>
22. United Nations Development Program. (1995). *Iraq: Human Development Report*. Baghdad: Iraqi Economist Association.
23. http://ippfnet.ippf.org/pub/IPPF_Regions/IPPF_CountryProfile.asp
24. About 18% of married women use contraception: ibid.
25. Only if to save the mother's life or if the unborn child has defects. Restricted interpretation. <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
26. Personal Interview. Nadim Gargoura, *Al-Safir*.
27. Ibid.

Jordan



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 1984. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes (Dec. 1989, July 1992).³
i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁶
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷
iii) Judges? Yes.⁸
iv) Number of women judges: 12 (2001).⁹

b. Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.¹⁰

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious based.¹¹

ii) Recent changes? Yes, in 2002.¹²

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1974).¹³
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.¹⁴
iii) Percentage of women in parliament? 1.3% (lower house); 7.5% (upper house).¹⁵
iv) Women in the Cabinet? Yes.¹⁶

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹⁷
i) In which sectors? The civil service, police, armed forces.¹⁸
ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.¹⁹
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: ndf.

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? Yes, the Jordanian National Committee for Women.²⁰

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.²¹

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²²

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 83.9/95.1%.²³

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 69/68%; secondary level 67/65% (2000);²⁴ tertiary level: ndf.

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 100% of nursery school teachers, 60% of primary school teachers, and 47% of secondary school teachers were women in 1994-1995. 15 women taught in university for every 100 men (1995).²⁵

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 26.6%.²⁶

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁷
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁸
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households? 6.1% in 1991.²⁹

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.8/69.1 years (2000).³⁰

ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 23.7 years (1994).³¹

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 41 per 100,000 births (1985- 1999).³²

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³³
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³⁴

c) Female genital mutilation? No.³⁵

d) Employment in the modern health sector: In 1997, women constituted 12.7% of those registered in the Syndicate of Physicians, 31.1 % of those in the Syndicate of Dentistry, 42.6% in the Syndicate of Pharmacy, and 72.7% in the Syndicate of Nurses.³⁶

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁷

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³⁸

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 6. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/jordan/constitution.html> & <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/jordan/gender.html>
2. Art. 9, 10: Suad Joseph, ed. *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000).
3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
4. Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 15 paragraph 4, Art. 16 paragraph 1c, d, g: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html>
5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
6. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). *Women and Men in Jordan: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. <http://escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html>
10. The law provides for the right of citizens to travel freely abroad and within the country except in designated military areas. However, the law requires that all women, including foreign women married to citizens, obtain written permission from a male guardian—usually their father or husband—to apply for a Jordanian passport: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8266.htm>
11. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/jordan/gende.html>
12. Elinor Bray-Collins, "Muted Voices" (MA thesis, 2003. See Bibliography).
13. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Women have headed the Ministry of Social Development in 1995-96, and again in 2000-02. Also the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication (2002): Women Heads of Government and Women Ministers: <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Jordan.htm>
17. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). *Women and Men in Jordan: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.
18. Ibid.
19. In 1998, 1.6% of women employed by government occupied ministerial positions: Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab*

Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR.

20. *Al-Raida*, "Women's Centers in the Arab World", Vol xvii-xviii, No. 90-91).

21. WEDO, Global Survey on National Action Plans to Implement the Beijing Platform, Sept. 1997, http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm

22. *Al-Raida*, "Women's Centers in the Arab World", Vol xvii-xviii, No. 90-91.

23. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

24. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")

25. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. *Women and Men in the Arab Countries: Education*. New York: United Nations.

26. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

27. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). *Women and Men in Jordan: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.

28 Ibid.

29. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x0176e/x0176e04.htm>

30. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

31. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). *Women and Men in Jordan: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.

32. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

33. 52.6% of married women use contraception: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). *Women and Men in Jordan: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.

34. To save the life of the mother or preserve her health. Restricted interpretation: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>

35. One southern tribe of Egyptian origin in the village of Rahmah near Aqaba reportedly practises FGM: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8266.htm>

36. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (1999) *Women and Men in Jordan: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.

37. 5% of editors-in-chief and 12.6% of all journalists were women in 1998: ibid.

38. Ibid.

Kuwait



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 11 November, 1962. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes. (2 Sept. 1994).³
i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:
i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁶
iii) Judges? No.⁷
iv) Number of women judges: None.⁸

i) In which sectors? The Civil Service.¹⁶
ii) Heads of government departments? No.¹⁷
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: ndf.

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? Yes.¹⁸

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.¹⁹

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²⁰

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 79.7/84.0%.²¹

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 67%/no data; secondary level 58%/no data; tertiary level: 27%/no data (in 1998).²²

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 73% of

b). Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁹

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious-based.¹⁰
ii) Have there been recent changes? Yes.¹¹

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? No.¹²
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? No.¹³
iii) Percentage of women in parliament? None.¹⁴
iv) Women in the Cabinet? No.

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹⁵

primary school teachers and 56% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.²³

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 36.6%.²⁴

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁵
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁶
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 78.6/74.5 years (2000).²⁷
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 22.9 years

(1980-90).²⁸

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 5 per 100,000 births (1985-99).²⁹

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? ndf.
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³⁰

c) Female genital mutilation? No.

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³¹

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³²

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 29: Kuwait: Constitution, <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/lebanon/constitution.html>
2. Art. 27: Ibid.
3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
4. Art. 7(a), Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 16(f), Art. 29 paragraph 1: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html/>
5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
6. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8268.htm>
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Married women need their husband's signature to apply for a passport. A man may prevent his wife from leaving the country by contacting the immigration authorities and placing a 24-hour travel ban on her. After this 24-hour period, a court order is required if the husband still wishes to prevent his wife from leaving the country: Ibid.
10. State of Kuwait. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/kuwait.htm>
11. A Civil Code was promulgated in 1980, and a Personal Status Code in 1984: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/cases.html>
12. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Kuwaiti Women, <http://kuwait-info.org/women.html>
16. Ibid.
17. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human*

- Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
18. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8268.htm>
19. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/asiasum.htm>
20. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
21. Ibid.
22. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
23. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
24. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8268.htm>
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
28. http://www.unesco.org/culture/worldreport/html_eng/
29. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press
30. Legal if it is to save the life of the mother and to preserve her mental and physical health as well as if the unborn child has medical problems or birth defects. In all these cases, significant restrictions are applied: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
31. *Al-Safir* newspaper.
32. Ibid.

Lebanon



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 1990. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes. (21 Apr. 1997).³
i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁶
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷
iii) Judges? Yes.⁸
iv) Number of women judges: 55 (1998).⁹

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.¹⁰

c) Family law:

i) Religious.¹¹
ii) Recent changes? No.

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1952).¹²
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.¹³
iii) Percentage of women in parliament? 2.3%.¹⁴
iv) Women in the Cabinet? No.

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹⁵
i) In which sectors? The civil service, municipalities.¹⁶
ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.¹⁷
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Ministry of Social Affairs.¹⁸

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? Yes, the National Commission for Lebanese Women.¹⁹

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes, the Lebanese Women's National Strategy.²⁰

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²¹

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 80.3/92.1%.²²

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 77/97%; secondary level 79/109%; tertiary level: 39/102% (1998).²³

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 62.2% of the teaching profession were women (1997), with 44% working in medium level positions.²⁴

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 29.6%.²⁵

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁶
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁷
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? Yes.²⁸

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 2.5% (1997).²⁹

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 74.6/71.5 years (2000).³⁰

ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 27.5 years (1996).³¹

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 100 per 100,000 births (1985-99).³²

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³³
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³⁴

c) Female genital mutilation? No.

d) Employment in the modern health sector: In 1995, the number of women enrolled in the Syndicate of Physicians in Beirut and the North was 1, 178; 1,342 in the Syndicate of Pharmacists, and 589 in the Syndicate of Dentistry.³⁵

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁶

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³⁷

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 7: Lebanon: Constitution, <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/lebanon/constitution.html>
2. Art. 7: Ibid.
3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
4. Article 9 paragraph 2; Article 16 paragraph 1c,d,f,g; Article 29 paragraph 2[1]: <http://www.iwraw.ap.org/ConvReservations.html/>
5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
6. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibn Khaldoun Center. "Civil Society: Democratization in the Arab World" <http://www.ibnkhaldun.org/newsletter/1998/aug/indic.html>
9. Ibid.
10. Married women must obtain their husband's signatures to apply for a passport. Although a man may obtain passports for his children without his wife's approval, a women may not obtain passports for her children without the approval of her husband. Husbands may block foreign travel by their wives: U.S. Department of State. Lebanon: Country Report on Human Rights, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8270.htm>
11. <http://www.law.emory.edu/FL/legal/lebanon.htm>
12. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/lebanon/gender.html>
16. Ibid.
17. Two women occupy first rank positions in the government, one is a director general of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the other is an Ambassador. Women in second rank positions in the government mainly work as general secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
18. http://www.undp_pogar.org/countries/lebanon/gender.html
19. Ibid.
20. WEDO, Global Survey on National Action Plans to Implement the Beijing Platform. Sept. 1997: http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm
21. They include: The NGO Committee for the Follow-Up to

- Beijing, the League for Lebanese Women's Rights, and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World. Lebanon: Women in Public Life, <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/lebanon/gender.html>
22. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
23. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
24. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
25. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
26. U.S. Department of State. Lebanon: Country Report on Human Rights, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8270.htm>
27. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
28. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
29. Ibid.
30. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
31. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
32. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
33. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
34. Only to save the life of the mother: Summary of Abortion Laws Around the World, <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
35. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
36. In 1995, 32% of editors-in-chief of Lebanese journals were women. Women also constituted 35% of total employees in radio stations: ibid.
37. Ibid.

Libya



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 2 March 1977. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes. (16 May 1989).³

i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.

ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? ndf.

ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁶

iii) Judges? Yes.⁷

iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b. Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁸

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious-based. ⁹

ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1964).¹⁰

ii) Stand as candidates for election? Yes.¹¹

iii) Percentage of women in parliament? ndf.

iv) Women in the Cabinet? Yes.¹²

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹³

i) In which sectors? The civil service, armed forces.¹⁴

ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.¹⁵

iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Department of Women's Affairs (part of the General People's Congress).¹⁶

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? ndf.

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? ndf.

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.¹⁷

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 68.2/90.8%.¹⁸

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 154/152%; secondary level: 81/73%; tertiary level: 57/56% (2000).¹⁹

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: in 1999, women accounted for 80% of the primary teaching profession and 54% of secondary teaching.²⁰

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 25.5%.²¹

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²²

ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²³

iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.

iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? Yes.²⁴

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 72.8/68.8 years (2000).²⁵

ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 28.2 years (1995).²⁶

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 75 per 100,000 births (1985-99).²⁷

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁸

ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²⁹

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.³⁰

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³¹

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³²

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 5: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/libya/index.html>, http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/ly_index.html

2. "Gender & Citizenship" Campaign: Women's Right to Nationality," http://www.amanjordan.org/english/daily_news/umview.php?ArtID=73

3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>

4. Art. 2 paragraph 16[c] [d]: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html/>

5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.

6. "Women's Libya: Gaddafi and Gender Equality," <http://www.archive.independent.com.mt/2001/0308/n10.htm>

7. "Report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women," 13th Session, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/49/Plenary>

8. Women must have their husbands' permission to travel abroad: <http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/msindex.htm>

9. The Family Law Code was promulgated in 1984: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/libya.htm>

10. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

11. Ibid.

12. Between 1992 and 1994, there were two women ministers, one who was Minister of Education and one who was Minister of Youth and Sports. In March 2000, all ministries were dissolved and their functions were distributed to the local authorities: <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/libya.htm>

13. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/libya/gender.html>

14. Ibid.

15. 12.5% of women in the government occupied ministerial and sub-ministerial positions in 2000: United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

16. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/libya/gender.html>

17. <http://www.euronet.nl/~fullmoon/womlist/countries>

18. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

19. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")

20. United Nations Development Programme. 1999. *Libya: Human Development Report*.

21. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

22. [Cwr.utoronto.ca/cultural/English/libya/family.html](http://www.utoronto.ca/cultural/English/libya/family.html)

23. The Permanent Mission of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations, Statement by Dr. Salma Abdul Jabbar. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5stat/statments/libya9.htm>

24. Ibid.

25. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

26. United Nations Development Programme. (1999). *Libya: Human Development Report*.

27. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

28. 45.1% of married women used contraceptive methods in 1995: United Nations Development Programme (1999) *Libya: Human Development Report*.

29. If to save the life of the mother: <http://www.pregnant-pause.org/lex/world02.htm>

30. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8273.htm>

31. LIBYANA. www.libyana.org

32. Ibid.

Mauritania



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: September, 1996. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes. (10 May 2001).²
i) With reservations? Yes.³

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: No.⁴

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:
i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁵

ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁶
iii) Judges? Yes.⁷
iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? ndf.

c) Family law:

i) Religious.⁸
ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1961).⁹
ii) Stand as candidates for election? Yes.¹⁰
iii) Percentage of women in parliament? 3.8 % (lower house); 1.8 % (upper house).¹¹
iv) Women in the Cabinet? Yes.¹²

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹³
i) In which sectors? The civil service, police.¹⁴
ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.¹⁵
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Ministry of Women's Affairs.¹⁶

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? Yes.¹⁷
b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Draft plan.¹⁸
c) NGOs that monitors women's situation? Yes.¹⁹

9. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 30.1./50.7%.²⁰
b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 81/86%; secondary level 15/21% (2000);²¹ at tertiary level: ndf.
c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 26% of

primary school teachers and 10% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.²²

10. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 63.4%.²³

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁴
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁵
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 36.5% in the early 1990s.²⁶

11. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 53.1/49.9 years (2000).²⁷
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 19.4 years (1980-90).²⁸
iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 550 per 100,000 births.²⁹

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³⁰
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³¹

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.³²

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

12. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? ndf.

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 5 & Art. 8: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/mr_index.html
2. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
3. Except those parts in contradiction with the *shari'a*: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html/>
4. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation* Tunisia: CAWTAR.
5. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8392.htm>
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/mauretania_women.htm
9. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. The Ministries of Health, Social Solidarity and Human Service (1997-2000), and of Women's Affairs (1998) have been headed by women: <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Mauritana.htm>
13. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/af/8392.htm>
14. Ibid.
15. 13.6% of women employed by government occupied ministerial positions (2000) : United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
16. <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/mauritania.html>
17. http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm

18. <http://www.euronet.nl/~fullmoon/womlist/countries/mauritania.htm>
19. Ibid.
20. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
21. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
22. Ibid.
23. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
24. http://www.metimes.com/issue98-26/reg/mauritania_plugs_into.htm
25. Ibid.
26. http://www.fao.org/docrep/x0176e/x0176e04.htm#P305_32084
27. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
28. http://www.unesco.org/culture/worldreport/html_eng/table25.htm
29. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
30. http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_series_results.asp?rowID=732
31. Only to save the life of the mother: <http://www.pregnant-pause.org/lex/world02.htm>
32. Around 25% average; 95% among the Soninke and Halpulaar, 30% among Moor women. No law prohibits FGM: http://ippfnet.ippf.org/pub/ippf_regions/ippf_countryprofile.asp

Morocco



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: Sept. 1996. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹
2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²
3. **International Resolutions:**
 - a) CEDAW: Yes. (21 June 1993).³
 - i) With reservations: Yes.⁴
 - b) ILO Conventions:
 - i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
 - ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁵
4. **Legal system:**
 - a) Women's participation:
 - i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁶
 - ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷
 - iii) Judges? Yes.⁸

iv) Number of women judges: In 1998, there were 442 female judges.⁹

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.¹⁰

c) Family law:

- i) Codified, religious based.
- ii) Family law, recent changes? Yes, in 1993.¹¹

5. **Political rights:**

- i) Right to vote? Yes (1963).¹²
- ii) Stand as candidates for election? Yes.¹³
- iii) Percentage of women in parliament? 0.6 % (lower house); 0.4 % (upper house).¹⁴
- iv) Women in the Cabinet? Yes.¹⁵

6. **The state:**

- a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.
 - i) In which sectors? The civil service.¹⁶
 - ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.¹⁷
 - iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Ministry of Human Rights.¹⁸

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

- a) National Council of Women? ndf.
- b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.¹⁹

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²⁰

8. **Education:**

- a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 36.1/61.8%.²¹

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 87/107%; secondary level 35/44%; tertiary level 8/11%.²²

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 39% of primary school teachers and 33% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.²³ In 1998, one-quarter of university professors were women.²⁴

9. **The economy:**

- a) Female economic activity rate: 41.4.%.²⁵

b) Economic rights:

- i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁶
- ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁷
- iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
- iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 16% in 1991.²⁸

10. **Health:**

- a) Vital statistics:
 - i) Life expectancy (f/m): 69.5/49.9 years (2000).²⁹
 - ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 25.8 years (1994).³⁰
 - iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 230 per 100,000 births (1985-99).³¹

b) Reproductive rights:

- i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³²

ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³³

c) Female genital mutilation? No.

d) Employment in the modern health sector: One-third of doctors were women in 1998.³⁴

11. **Culture:**

- a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁵

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³⁶

ENDNOTES

1. Art. 5 & Art. 8: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/mo_index.html
2. Art. 6: Suad Joseph ed., *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states>
4. Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 16 and Art. 29: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html>
5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
6. <http://www.ibnkhaldun.org/newsletter/1998/aug/indic.html>
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Eg. women "must obtain the permission of the court in order to join a civil suit against their husband": Laurie Brand, *Women, the State, and Political Liberalization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, p 58.
11. Major amendments to the code's provisions relating to marriage guardianship, polygamy and divorce: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/morocco.htm>.
12. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. In 2002, there were 3 women in the cabinet: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/morocco/gender.html>
16. http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/morocco_women.htm
17. In 2000, 4.9% of women in the government occupied ministerial positions: United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
18. <http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf> (By Country)
19. http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm
20. http://www.arab.net/morocco/govt/mo_govintro.html
21. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
22. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
23. Ibid.
24. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/morocco/gender.html>
25. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
26. "Only 5000 Moroccan women lead businesses," <http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/msindex.htm>
27. Ibid.
28. http://www.fao.org/docrep/x0176e/x0176e04.htm#P305_32084.
29. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
30. Morocco: *The National Human Development Report, 1998/1999*.
31. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
32. In 1997, 58.8% of married women used contraceptive methods. *Morocco: The National Human Development Report, 1998/ 1999*.
33. Only to save the life of the mother or to preserve her mental and physical health. Abortion must take place during the first three months of pregnancy. "Summary of Abortion Laws Around the World". <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
34. www.undp-pogar.org/countries/morocco/gender.html
35. *Al-Safir*.
36. Ibid.

Oman



1. **Constitution?** Yes (Basic Law). Latest version: November 6, 1996. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: No.³

b) ILO Conventions:

- i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No.⁴
- ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: No.⁵

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:

- i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
- ii) Work as lawyers? ndf.
- iii) Judges? ndf.

iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁶

c) Family law:

- i) Uncodified, religious.⁷
- ii) Recent change? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**

- i) Right to vote? No.⁸
- ii) To stand for election (national and municipal levels)? No.⁹
- iii) Number of women in parliament? There are 2 in the Majlis Al-Shura (Consultative Council), and 5 in the State Council.¹⁰
- iv) Women in the cabinet? None.¹¹

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus? Yes.¹²

- i) In which sectors? The civil administration, armed forces, police. Approximately 20% of civil servants are women.¹³
- ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.¹⁴
- iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Vocational Training.¹⁵

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? ndf.¹⁶

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.¹⁷

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.¹⁸

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 61.6/80.1%.¹⁹

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 72/77%; secondary level 67/68%;²⁰ tertiary level: ndf.

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 52% of primary school teachers and 505 secondary school teachers were women in 2002.²¹

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 19.2%.²²

b) Economic rights:

- i) To ownership of property? Yes.²³
- ii) To own and manage businesses? ndf.
- iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? No.²⁴
- iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

- i) Life expectancy (f/m): 72.6/69.7%.²⁵
- ii) Average age of women at first marriage: ndf.
- iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 14 per 100, 000 births (1985-99).²⁶

b) Reproductive rights:

- i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁷
- ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²⁸

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.²⁹

d) Employment in the modern health sector: Women work as physicians and nurses.³⁰

11. **Culture:**

a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? ndf.

b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. Article 17: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/mu00000_.html
2. <http://www.hri.ca/fortherecord2001/vol3/omantb.htm>
3. <http://www.womenstreaty.org/facts.htm>
4. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.
5. Ibid., p 195.
6. To obtain a passport and leave the country, a woman must have authorization from her husband, father, or nearest male relative. However, a woman having a national identity card (which also must be authorized by a male relative) may travel to certain Gulf Cooperation Council countries without a passport: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18285.htm>
7. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
8. Women have the right to vote for the Consultative Council: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5stat/statments/oman8.htm> & Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 194.
9. Ibid. Also see <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5stat/statments/oman8.htm>
10. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p. 194.
11. <http://www.gulf-news.com/Articles/news.asp?ArticleID=43140>
12. <http://www.omanet.com/english/government/ministers.asp?cat=gov>
13. <http://www.rop.gov.om/searchresult.asp>
14. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/oman/gender.html> & <http://www.internationalspecialreports.com/middleeast/99/oman/18.html>
15. Ibid.
16. The first Omani woman ambassador was appointed in September 1999.
17. The ministry provides support for women's affairs through support and funding of the Oman Women's Association (OWA) and local community development centers: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8286.htm>
18. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/oman/gender.html>
19. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/omannap.htm>
20. The Coordination Committee for Women's Voluntary Work. <http://www.newsbriefsoman.info/features/omanwomen.htm>
21. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
22. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
23. Ibid.
24. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
25. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8286.htm>
26. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8286.htm>
27. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
28. http://www.overpopulation.com/faq/Population_Control/contraception/near_east.html
29. Only if it is to save the life of the mother or preserve her health: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
30. FGM is practised by a few communities in the interior. The number of cases is small and declining annually: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8286.htm>
31. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/oman/gender.html>

Palestine



The boundaries of the eventual state of Palestine have not yet been determined. On view here is the map of 1948 Palestine/Israel, the West Bank and Gaza on the eve of the 1967 war.

1. **Constitution?** Draft Basic Law. Affirms gender equality? Still under negotiation.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.

3. **International resolutions:**²

[a] CEDAW: No.³

[b] ILO Conventions:

- i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951:
- ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958]

4. **Legal system:**⁴

a) Women's participation:

- i) Right to raise cases? Yes.⁵
- ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁶

iii) Judges? Yes.⁷

iv) Percentage of women judges: 3.13% of judges in the West Bank and 5.56% of judges in Gaza were women in 1997.⁸

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to women? As in Jordan and Egypt.

c) Family law: religious-based in all areas.⁹

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes.¹⁰

ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.

iii) Percentage of women in parliament (Legislative Council): 5.7%.¹¹

iv) Women in the cabinet? None.

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus? Yes.¹²

i) In which sectors? The civil service, social services, police.¹³

ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.¹⁴

iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Yes, see above.¹⁵

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? No.¹⁶

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? No.¹⁷

c) NGOs that monitor women's affairs? Yes.¹⁸

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 86.4/95.7%.¹⁹

b) Female/male gross enrollment ratios: primary level 96.6/95.1%; secondary level 64.0/56.1%; tertiary level 23.8/24.7%.²⁰

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 17,452 teachers at schools and 569 teachers at higher education institutions were women.²¹

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 10.4%²²

b) Economic rights:

- i) To ownership of property? Yes.²³
- ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁴
- iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
- iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 11.2%.²⁵

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 73.8/70.7 (2003)²⁶

ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 20.1 years (2003)²⁷

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: ndf.

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁸

ii) Is abortion legal? No.²⁹

c) Female genital mutilation? No.³⁰

d) Employment in the modern health sector? In 2002 the number of registered female doctors in the Doctor's Union was 571 and the number of registered nurses at the Nursing Union 2562.³¹

11. **Culture:**

a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³²

b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.³³

ENDNOTES

1. The 1-year model women's parliament (1998) -- organized by a coalition of women's NGOs -- has raised reforms in family and personal status law to the National Authority: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
2. "Not yet having gained formal recognition as a state Palestine is not yet able to ratify international human rights instruments": <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
3. See endnote 2. But the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling participates with other Arab women's groups in a project to extend CEDAW, "The Exclusion of Women in the Arab World from Effective Protection of International Human Rights Law": <http://www.wclac.org/units.html>
4. Until the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was ruled by Jordanian law, Gaza by Egyptian law, East Jerusalem by Israeli law. Since Oslo, unification of the legal systems of the West Bank and Gaza has been on the agenda of the Palestinian Authority: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
5. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (1998) Women and Men In Palestine: Trends and Statistics, Ramallah: PCBS.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., p 178.
8. Ibid., p 178.
9. As with the general legal system, so with Family and Personal Status Law. Muslim Palestinians in the West Bank follow Jordanian PSL, in Gaza Egyptian PSL; in East Jerusalem, they choose between the Jordanian or Israeli shari'a courts. However, since 1994, some new regulations have been issued by the Palestinian Qadi al-Quda: Palestine/Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html> See also "Islamic Family Law and the Transition to Palestinian Statehood: Constraints and Opportunities for Legal Reform": www.law.emory.edu/IFL/cases/Palestine.htm
10. Women voted and stood as candidates in the elections for the Legislative Council in 1996. There were 25 women candidates, five of whom were elected, among them Hanan Ashrawi. A woman, Samiha al-Khalil, also competed in the presidential elections of the same year.
11. www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/delegations/
12. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (1998) Women and Men In Palestine: Trends and Statistics, Ramallah: PCBS.
13. Ibid.
14. A woman, Zahira Kamal, heads the Gender Department in

- the National Authority's Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation.
15. See endnote 14.
16. Palestinian delegations participated in the UN Decade for Women conferences, though not as representing a state.
17. The General Union of Palestinian Women held a conference in Jerusalem in August 1994, and formulated their proposals for a constitution that would embody full gender equality: <http://www.gupw.net/publications/publications.html>
18. Eg. the Women's Studies Program at Birzeit University; the Women's Action Technical Committees (WATC); the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling.
19. PCBS (2003) Labour Force Survey Database: 2002, Ramallah: PCBS (unpublished data).
20. PCBS (2002) Education Census 2001/2002 Database - Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ramallah: PCBS (unpublished data).
21. Ibid.
22. PCBS (2003) Labour Force Survey: Annual Report: 2002, Ramallah: PCBS.
23. PCBS (1999) Ownership and Access to Resources Survey, Ramallah: PCBS.
24. Ibid.
25. PCBS (2003) Labour Force Survey Database: 2002, Ramallah: PCBS (unpublished data).
26. PCBS (1999) Population in the Palestinian Territory, 1997-2025, Ramallah: PCBS (unpublished data).
27. PCBS (2003) Database of Marriages and Divorces in the Palestinian Territory, Ramallah: PCBS (unpublished data).
28. In 1996, 65.7% of married women used contraceptive methods: PCBS (1998), Women and Men In Palestine: Trends and Statistics, Ramallah: PCBS.
29. Abortion is illegal, but permitted in certain health circumstances: PCBS (2000) Health Survey - 2000: Main Findings, and PCBS (2003), Health Database - 2002 (unpublished data).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. In 1994, women made up 29% of the total 41 employees in radio stations and TV channels in the West Bank; and 17.4% of the total 133 employees in Gaza. No statistics with regard to print media: PCBS (1998), Women and Men In Palestine: Trends and Statistics, Ramallah: PCBS.
33. Ibid.

Qatar



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 29 April, 2003. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.

3. **International resolutions:**
a) CEDAW: No.²

b) ILO Conventions:
i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No.³
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁴

4. Legal system:

a. Women's participation:
i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁵
iii) Judges? ndf.
iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b. Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁶

c) Family law:
i) Uncodified, religious.⁷
ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. Political rights:

i) Right to vote? Yes.⁸
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.⁹
[iii] Number of women in parliament:
iv) Women in the cabinet? The first woman cabinet minister, Sheikha bint Ahmed Al-Mahmud, was appointed as Minister for Education and Teaching in May 2003.¹⁰

6. The state:

a) Employment in the state apparatus? Yes.
i) In which sectors? Police, health, and education (public school and university teachers).¹¹
ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.¹²
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs includes a Department for Women's Affairs.¹³

7. Gender monitoring and action:

a) National Council of Women? No.¹⁴
b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? No.
c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? No.¹⁵

8. Education:

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 83.1/80.4%.¹⁶
b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 93/98%; secondary level: 90/68%; tertiary level: 39/14%.¹⁷
c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 75% of primary school teachers and 57% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.¹⁸ There were around 50 women university lecturers for every 100 men (2000).¹⁹

9. The economy:

a) Female economic activity rate: 41.0%.²⁰
b) Economic rights:
i) To ownership of property? ndf.
ii) To own and manage businesses? ndf.
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? Yes.²¹

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. Health:

a) Vital statistics:
i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.3/68.7 years (2000).²²
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: ndf.
iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 10 per 100,000 births (1985-99).²³
b) Reproductive rights:
i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁴
ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²⁵

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.²⁶

d) Employment in the modern health sector: Of the 335 physicians employed in the government sector in 1999, 173 were female.²⁷

11. Culture:

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.²⁸
b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. On April 29, 2003 a referendum took place in which Qataris approved a written constitution recognising a woman's right to vote and run for office: <http://www.dawn.com/2003/05/07/int9.htm>
2. <http://www.womenstreaty.org/facts.htm#countries>
3. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAVTAR. p. 194.
4. *ibid.*, p. 195.
5. <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html> (Check "Gender Profiles" section)
6. To obtain a driving license, a Qatari woman must prove that her daily life requires it, and that she has a male guardian's permission to drive. Although women are legally able to travel abroad alone, social pressure causes most to travel with male escorts: <http://www.state.gov/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8292.htm>
7. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
8. <http://www.dawn.com/2003/05/07/int9.htm>
9. Women have the right to vote and run as candidates for the Central Municipal Council. The first municipal elections in which women were allowed to vote and stand as candidates were in March 1999. None were elected: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/qatar/gender.html> & <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/010310/20001031044.html>
10. The appointment followed the April 2003 referendum (see footnote1). In November 2002, the Ruler gave his sister the rank of minister, as deputy chairman of the Higher Council for Family Affairs, but without joining the cabinet: <http://www.dawn.com/2003/05/07/int9.htm>
11. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8292.htm>
12. In 1996, the Emir named a woman under-secretary of the Ministry of Education, the highest position ever held by a woman in the Qatari Government: <http://csmweb2.emcweb.com/durable/1999/03/12/text/p7s1.html>
13. The Department is divided into four sections, covering maternity and childhood, programmes, development and training for women: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html> (Check "Gender Profiles" section)

14. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8292.htm>
15. The government has not permitted the establishment of an independent women's rights organization. The Supreme Council for Family Affairs (SCFA) is working with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to set up a national strategy for women's advancement. The Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) is a regional leader with regard to gender issues and has active women's sections with a wide range of activities, and with a particular focus on welfare. The Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development has established a Family Development Centre, said to offer women counseling, protection, medical care, as well as skills development and training programmes: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/social/profile/qatar/main.html>
16. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
17. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles").
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Women and Men in the Arab Countries: Education*, ESCWA
20. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
21. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8292.htm>
22. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
23. *Ibid.*
24. <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html> (Check "Gender Profiles" section)
25. If the mother's life is in danger or to preserve her health. Also in cases where the unborn child has medical problems (restricted): <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
26. http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/corporateinformation/publications/pdfs/haw_pdf/mutilation2.PDF
27. <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html> (Check "Gender Profiles" section).
28. In 1999 there were 10 Qatari women working in the press cf. 55 men: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html> (Check "Gender Profiles" section).

Saudi Arabia



1. **Constitution?** Basic Law, March 1992. Affirms gender equality? No.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes, 7 September 2000.³

i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No.100), 1951:Yes.⁵

ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁶

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? ndf.

ii) Work as lawyers? No.⁷

iii) Judges? No.⁸

iv) Number of women judges: None.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁹

c) Family law:

i) Uncodified, religious.

ii) Recent change? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? No.¹⁰

[ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)?]

[iii) Percentage of women in parliament:]

[iv) Women in the cabinet:]

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹¹

i) In which sectors? Education, health care, and the civil service.¹²

ii) Heads of government departments? No.¹³

iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues? ndf.

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? ndf.

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? ndf.

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? None.¹⁴

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 66.9/83.1%.¹⁵

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 70/73%; secondary level: 62/70%; tertiary level: 22/17% (2000).¹⁶

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 54% of primary school teachers and 55% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.¹⁷

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 21.2%.¹⁸

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.¹⁹

ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁰

iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.

iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 73.0/ 70.5 years (2000).²¹

ii) Average age of women at first marriage: ndf.

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 23 per 100,000 live births (1995).²²

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? ndf.

ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²³

c) Female genital mutilation? Uncertain.²⁴

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? ndf.

b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. Article 26 addresses human rights and states, "The state protects human rights in accordance with the Islamic Shari'ah":

<http://www.trybunal.gov.pl/constit/constitu/constit/sarabia/sarabi-e.ht> & <http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/sa00000.html>

2. <http://csf.colorado.edu/forums/femisa/2000/msg00133.html>

3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states.htm>

4. Articles 9 (2) and 29: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html>

5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.

6. Ibid., p 195.

7. http://www.amanjordan.org/english/daily_news/wmview.php?ArtID=132

8. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/engMDE230132000>

9. Women may not drive motor vehicles and are restricted in their use of public facilities when men are present. Women must enter city buses by separate rear entrances and sit in specially designated sections. They risk arrest for riding in a vehicle driven by a male who is not an employee or a close male relative. They are not admitted to a hospital for medical treatment without the consent of a male relative. By law and custom, women may not undertake domestic or foreign travel alone. Recently the Government announced that women could obtain their own identity cards; however to receive a card required permission from their nearest male relatives. Identity cards are not mandatory for women, but in 1999 the Ministry of Interior announced plans to issue identity cards to women, a step toward giving women legal identities independent of men: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8296.htm>

10. There is no parliament in Saudi Arabia. Two women are members of the Majlis Al-Shura, a 90 member national consultative council appointed by the King: Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of

Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 194.

11. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/saudi/gender.html>

12. Ibid.

13. In the summer of 2000, a woman member of the ruling family was appointed assistant undersecretary for Education Affairs - the highest position ever held by a woman in the Saudi government. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/saudi/gender.html>

14. There are no women's rights groups in Saudi Arabia.

15. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.

16. Women are excluded from studying engineering, journalism and architecture: <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (Check "Gender Profiles" section).

17. Ibid.

18. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.

19. While *Shari'a* provides women with a basis to own and dispose of property, they are often constrained by legal and social barriers from asserting such rights: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8296.htm>

20. Most women allow male relatives to control these businesses. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/saudi/gender.html>

21. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.

22. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles").

23. Only to save the life of the mother, or to preserve her health (restricted practice): <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>

24. Some sources give evidence of FGM, eg. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8296.htm>. No national reports or other documented evidence were found regarding the practice.

Somalia



1. **Constitution?** Draft constitution. Latest version: 20 February 1995. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: No.²

b) ILO Conventions:

- i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No.³
- i) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁴

4. **Legal system:**

a. Women's participation:

- i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
- ii) Work as lawyers? ndf.
- iii) Judges? ndf.
- iv) Number of women judges: ndf.

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.⁵

c) Family law:

- i) Codified (draft, 1975), religious-based.⁶
- ii) Recent change? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**⁷

- i) Right to vote? ndf.
- ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? ndf.
- iii) Number of women in parliament: ndf.
- iv) Women in the cabinet? ndf.

6. **The state:**

- a) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.
- i) In which sectors? ndf.
- ii) Heads of government departments? ndf.
- iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: ndf.

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

- a) National Council of Women? ndf.

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? ndf.

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.⁸

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: ndf.

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 7/13%; secondary level 4/8%; tertiary level 1/4 % (1995).⁹

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: ndf.

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: ndf.

b) Economic rights:

- i) To ownership of property? ndf.
- ii) To own and manage businesses? ndf.
- iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
- iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names: ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

- i) Life expectancy: ndf.
- ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 20.1 years (1980-90).¹⁰
- iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: ndf.

b) Reproductive rights:

- i) Is contraception legal? ndf.
- ii) Is abortion legal? Yes.¹¹

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.¹²

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? ndf.

b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. http://www.civicwebs.com/cwvlib/africa/somalia/1995/reunification/appendix_1.htm & <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/somalia/constitution.html>
2. <http://www.womenstreaty.org/facts.htm>
3. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.
4. Ibid., p 195.
5. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8296.htm>
6. The FLC of 1975 aimed to suppress customary law; civil courts have jurisdiction over cases arising from *shar'ia*: www.law.emory.edu etc)
7. In 2000, all of the Somali clans met in Djibouti and devised a transition government. Women were to hold 25 seats in the 245-member Transitional National Assembly. Seats in the Assembly were distributed to provide parity between competing clans. Each of the four major clans was represented by five women, while the

five remaining women were from minor clans. These women have formed a bloc to represent female interests across clan lines: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/somalia/gender.html>

8. The Voice of Somali Women for Peace, Reconciliation and Political Rights: <http://www.undppogar.org/countries/somalia/gender.html>

9. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles").

10. Cultural Context: Demography and Health, UNESCO.

11. Only to save the life of the mother: <http://www.pregnant-pause.org/lex/world02.htm>

12. FGM is a near-universal practice, estimated to reach 98%. Infibulation, the most harmful form of FGM, is practised. It was banned in 1991, and remains illegal under the Penal Code; however, the law is not enforced: http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/somalia_women.htm

Sudan



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 1 July 1998. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹
2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.
3. **International resolutions:**
 - a) CEDAW: No.²
 - b) ILO Conventions:
 - i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No.³
 - ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁴
4. **Legal system:**
 - a. Women's participation:
 - i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
 - ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁵
 - iii) Judges? Yes.⁶
 - iv) Number of women judges: 67 out of 800. Five women sit in the High Court.⁷

- b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? ndf.
- c) Family law:
 - i) Codified (1991), religious-based.⁸
 - ii) Recent change? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**
 - i) Right to vote? Yes (1964).⁹
 - ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.¹⁰
 - iii) Percentage of women in parliament 9.7% (lower house).¹¹
 - iv) Women in the cabinet? Yes.¹²

6. **The state:**
 - a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹³
 - i) In which sectors? The diplomatic corps, the civil service, senior posts in police and army.¹⁴
 - ii) Heads of government departments: 2.1% of women employed in government occupied ministerial levels (2000).¹⁵
 - iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: There is a Women's Policy Unit within the Ministry of Social Planning. Many ministries, corporations, and institutes of higher education have women's development units.¹⁶

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**
 - a) National Council of Women? ndf.¹⁷

- b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.¹⁸
- c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.¹⁹

8. **Education:**
 - a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 46.3/69.5%.²⁰
 - b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 51/60%; secondary level 28/30%; tertiary level 7/8%.²¹
 - c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 68% of primary school teachers, and 57% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.²²

9. **The economy:**
 - a) Female economic activity rate: 34.8%.²³
 - b) Economic rights:
 - i) To ownership of property? ndf.
 - ii) To own and manage businesses? ndf.

- iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
- iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

- c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**
 - a) Vital statistics:
 - i) Life expectancy (f/m): 57.4/54.6 years.²⁴
 - ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 18.7 years (1980-90).²⁵
 - iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 550 per 100, 000 births (1985- 99).²⁶

- b) Reproductive rights:
 - i) Is contraception legal? Yes.²⁷
 - ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²⁸

- c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.²⁹

- d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**
 - a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁰

- b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. Articles 15 & 2: <http://www.sudan.net/government/constitution/english.html>
2. <http://www.womenstreaty.org/facts.htm>
3. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.
4. Ibid., p 195.
5. <http://www.saveaslave.com/articles/sudanwomen.html> & <http://www.pogar.org/countries/sudan/index.html>
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Because of Sudan's religious heterogeneity, the Constitution does not proclaim Islam as state religion, but as religion of the majority of the population. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
9. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 194.
10. Ibid., p 194.
11. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
12. There have been women ministers in Sudanese governments since the early 1970s, holding portfolios such as health, social welfare, public service and manpower, and cabinet affairs: <http://www.saveaslave.com/articles/sudanwomen.html> & <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/sudan/gender.html>
13. <http://www.saveaslave.com/articles/sudanwomen.html>
14. Ibid. This source reports that there are women major-generals in the police, and women are numerous in the army.
15. An Advisor on Women's Affairs (cabinet-level) was appointed in 2000. There is also an Advisor for Women's Affairs in the Southern States' Coordinating Council: United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York:

- Oxford University Press & <http://www.saveaslave.com/articles/sudanwomen.html>
16. <http://www.saveaslave.com/articles/sudanwomen.html>
17. Ibid. The Sudanese Women's General Union is an officially recognized women's organization.
18. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/natplans.htm>
19. Eg. The Democratic Women's Alliance, and the Sudan Women's Association: <http://www.saveaslave.com/articles/sudanwomen.html>
20. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
21. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles").
22. Ibid.
23. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
24. Ibid.
25. Cultural Context: Demography and Health, UNESCO.
26. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
27. http://ippfnet.ippf.org/pub/IPPF_CountryProfile.asp
28. Only if to save the life of the mother, or if the unborn child has defects: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>
29. 89% of northern Sudanese women practise FGM. The number is much less in the south. A 1946 Penal Code prohibited infibulation, but permitted the less radical form of FGM. In 1991, the government affirmed its commitment to eradicate FGM, but the 1993 Penal Code leaves this unclear: International Planned Parenthood Federation, 1999.
30. <http://www.saveaslave.com/articles/sudanwomen.html>

Syria



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: 13 March, 1973. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes, March 28, 2003.³
i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.⁵
ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁶

4. **Legal system:**

a. Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷
iii) Judges? Yes.⁸
iv) Number of women judges: 11% of all judges (1998).⁹

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.¹⁰

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious based.¹¹
ii) Recent changes? Personal Status Law of 1953 amended in 1975.¹²

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes, 1949 – 1953.¹³
ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes, 1953.¹⁴
iii) Percentage of women in parliament: 10.4% (single house).¹⁵
iv) Women in the cabinet? Yes.¹⁶

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹⁷
i) In which sectors? The diplomatic corps, civil service, armed forces.¹⁸
ii) Heads of government departments? 11.1% of women in government occupied ministerial levels in 2000. There has been one woman ambassador.¹⁹
iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The Ministry of Social and Work Affairs; the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform has a Gender and Development Unit.²⁰

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? The National Committee of Women's Affairs.²¹

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.²²

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²³

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 60.5/88.3%.²⁴

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 99/109%; secondary level 39/44%;²⁵ tertiary level: ndf.

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: In 1998, 57% of all teachers were women.²⁶ In 2000, 65% of primary school teachers and 47% of secondary school teachers were women.²⁷ In 1998, 19% of university professors were women.²⁸

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 28.6%.²⁹

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.³⁰
ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.³¹
iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 9.3% in 1994.³²

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 72.4/70.0%.³³
ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 23.3 years (1994).³⁴
iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 110 per 100, 000 births (1985- 99).³⁵

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³⁶

ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³⁷

c) Female genital mutilation: No.

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.

b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.

ENDNOTES

- Article 44, Article 45: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/sy00000_.html
- A Syrian woman cannot grant her children Syrian nationality if she marries a foreigner even if they were born in Syria: <http://www.kamilat.org/DV/syria.htm>
- <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states.htm>
- No data found with regard to the articles containing reservations.
- Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.
- Ibid., p 195.
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). Women and Men In Syria: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations. p 118.
- Ibid., p 118.
- Ibid., p 118.
- A husband may request that his wife's travel abroad be prohibited (see Section 2.d.). Women generally are barred from traveling abroad with their children unless they are able to prove that the father has granted permission for the children to travel: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8298.htm>
- <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
- <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
- Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 194.
- Ibid., p 194.
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
- In the 1998 elections, 26 women were elected to the national parliament out of 250 total seats. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/syria/gender.html>
- Two women currently hold Cabinet positions, as Ministers of Culture and Social Affairs. (appointed in 2000): <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html> (Check "Gender Profiles" section)
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). Women and Men In Syria: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations. p 118.
- Ibid., p 118. Women comprise approximately one-fifth of all government workers, but most are employed in clerical and staff positions.

- United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
- <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html> (Check "Gender Profiles" section).
- Ibid.
- <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/syrianap.htm>
- The General Union of Syrian Women, The Syrian Arab Red Crescent, The Syrian Family Planning Association, and The Syrian Women's League to Protect Childhood and Motherhood: <http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/sdd/women.html>
- <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
- Ibid.
- <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/syria/gender.html>
- <http://genderstats.worldbank.org/genderRpt.asp?rpt=education&cty=SYR,Syrian%20Arab%20Republic&hm=home2>
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). Women and Men In Syria: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations. p 118.
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). Women and Men In Syria: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations.
- Ibid, p 106. Specific number not provided. "There is a marked discrepancy in the number of men who own businesses as opposed to women."
- Ibid., p 122.
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). Women and Men In Syria: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations. p 31.
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a fragmented World. New York: Oxford University Press.
- In 1993, 49.2% of women residing in urban areas were using family planning methods and 27.4% in rural areas. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999). Women and Men In Syria: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations. p 89.
- Only to save the life of the mother: <http://www.pregnant-pause.org/lex/world02.htm>

Tunisia



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: July 12, 1988. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? No.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes, September 20, 1985.³

i) Reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.⁵

ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁶

4. **Legal system:**

a. Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? ndf.

ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷

iii) Judges? Yes.⁸

iv) Number of women judges: 291 cf. 921 men (1998).⁹

b) Are there civil laws that apply only to men or women? ndf.

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious-based with some exceptional features.¹⁰

ii) Recent changes? PSL amended in 1959, 1964, 1981, 1993.¹¹

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes, 1957-1959.¹²

ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes, 1957-1959.¹³

iii) Percentage of women in parliament: 11.5%.¹⁴

iv) Women in the cabinet: Yes. In 2000, 10% of women in government occupied ministerial levels.¹⁵

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus? Yes.

i) In which sectors? The civil service, public health, education and social services.¹⁶

ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.¹⁷

iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues? Ministry of Women and Family Affairs, the National Women and Development Commission, and the National Council of Women and the Family.¹⁸

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

a) National Council of Women? The National Council of Women and the Family.¹⁹

b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.²⁰

c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²¹

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 60.6/81.4%.²²

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 116/123%; secondary level: 73/72%, tertiary level: 17/18%.²³

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: ndf.

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 36.8%.²⁴

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? Yes.²⁵

ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.²⁶

iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.

iv) Receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 11% (1994).²⁷

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.4%/69.0 years.²⁸

ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 25 years (1994).²⁹

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 70 per 100,000 births (1985-99).³⁰

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³¹

ii) Is abortion legal? Yes.³²

c) Female genital mutilation? No.

d) Employment in the modern health sector: In 1998, 35% of doctors, 45% of nurses, and 67-69% of pharmacists were women.³³

11. **Culture:**

a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁴

b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.

ENDNOTES

- Article 6: egora. unimuenster.de/ifp/lehrende/ smitten/bindata/tunesien_constitution.pdf
- <http://www.tunisieinfo.com/documents/options/chapter3.html>
- <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/ratifica.htm>
- Article 9, 15, 16, 29: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html>
- Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.
- Ibid., p 195.
- Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia & The Ministry of Women and Family Affairs (1999) *Women and Men In Tunisia: A Statistical Portrait*.
- Ibid.
- Ibid. Women constitute 60 percent of all judges in the capital and 24 percent of the nation's total jurists.
- The Personal Status Law of 1956 prohibits polygyny and extra-judicial divorce, and gives decision about custody of children in divorce cases to judge: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
- <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>
- Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p. 194.
- Ibid., p. 194.
- United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ibid.
- Women constitute 37% of civil service employees, primarily at the middle or lower levels in the fields of health, education, and social affairs. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8303.htm>
- Four women were made deputy governors in 2001 bringing the number to ten out of 24. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8303.htm>
- <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/tunisia/gender.html>
- Ibid.

20. <http://www.un.org/esa/gopherdata/conf/fwcw/natrep/NatActPlans/tunisia.txt>

21. Eg The National Union of Tunisian Women (UNFT), L'Association Tunisienne des Femmes Democrates, the Center for Studies, Research, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF), Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR). <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/tunisia/gender.html>

22. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

23. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")

24. Ibid.

25. 4,850 women owned private business companies. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia & The Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. (1999). *Women and Men In Tunisia: A Statistical Portrait*.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

29. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia & The Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. (1999). *Women and Men In Tunisia: A Statistical Portrait*.

30. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

31. 65% in 1998. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia & The Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. (1999). *Women and Men In Tunisia: A Statistical Portrait*.

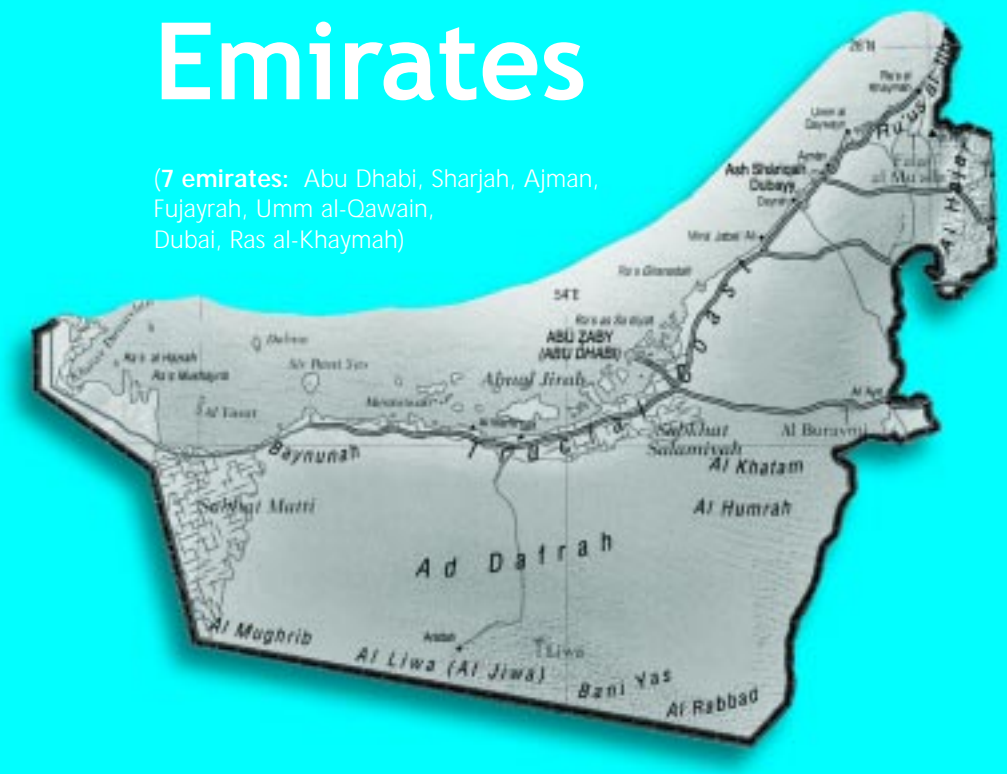
32. Only during the first three months of pregnancy: <http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm>

33. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia & The Ministry of Women and Family Affairs (1999) *Women and Men In Tunisia: A Statistical Portrait*.

34. The ratio of women to men journalists was 25:75% (in 1998), and 37% of all those working in radio and TV were women: ibid.

United Arab Emirates

(7 emirates: Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah, Umm al-Qawain, Dubai, Ras al-Khaymah)



- c) Family law:
- i) Uncodified, religious.
 - ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**
- i) Right to vote? No.⁷
 - ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? No.⁸
 - iii) Number of women in parliament: [
 - iv) Women in the cabinet: None]

6. **The state:**
- a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.⁹
 - i) In which sectors? The civil service, public education and health services, the police, and the armed forces.¹⁰
 - ii) Heads of government departments? ndf.
 - iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.¹¹
7. **Gender monitoring and action:**
- a) National Council of Women? UAE Women's Federation.¹²
 - b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? ndf.
 - c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? ndf.

8. **Education:**
- a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 79.3/75.0%.¹³

1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: December 2, 1996. Affirms gender equality? Yes.¹
2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? ndf.
3. **International resolutions:**
- a) CEDAW: No.²
 - b) ILO Conventions:
 - i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.³
 - ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: No.⁴
4. **Legal system:**
- a. Women's participation:
 - i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
 - ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁵
 - iii) Judges? ndf.
 - iv) Number of women judges: ndf.
 - b. Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? No.⁶

- b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 92/96%; secondary level 80/75%¹⁴; tertiary level ndf.

- c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 100% of nursery school teachers, 55% of primary school teachers and 65% of intermediate and secondary school teachers are women.¹⁵

9. **The economy:**
- a) Female economic activity rate: 31.7%.¹⁶

- b) Economic rights:
 - i) To ownership of property? Yes.¹⁷
 - ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.¹⁸
 - iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
 - iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

- c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.

10. **Health:**
- a) Vital statistics:

- i) Life expectancy (f/m): 78.0/73.7 years.¹⁹
- ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 19.7 years for women between 30-34 years, 21.7 years for women between 25-29 (1995).²⁰
- iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 3 per 100,000 births (1985-99).²¹

- b) Reproductive rights:
 - i) Is contraception legal? ndf.
 - ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.²²

- c) Female genital mutilation? Yes, according to some sources.²³

- d) Employment in the modern health sector: 54.3% of all employees are women and 81% of nurses are women.²⁴

11. **Culture:**
- a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.²⁵

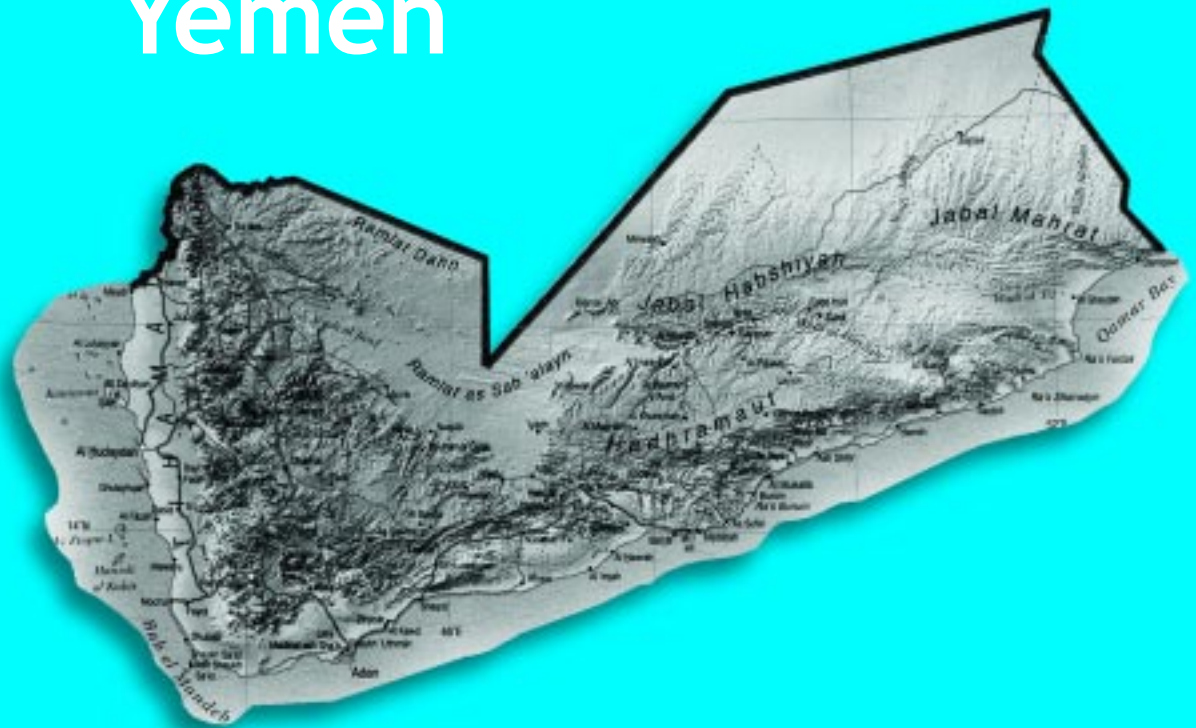
- b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. http://www.arab.net/uae/ue_womenconstitution.htm
2. <http://www.womenstreaty.org/facts.htm>
3. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.
4. Ibid., p 195.
5. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8306.htm>
6. According to custom, not law, a husband may bar his wife, minor male and female children, and adult unmarried daughters from leaving the country. A married woman may not accept employment without her husband's written consent. *ibid*.
7. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 194.
8. Ibid.
9. http://www.arab.net/uae/govt/ue_womenemploy.html
10. 40% of all government employees are women. Women constitute 4% of the military: *ibid*.
11. http://www.arab.net/uae/govt/ue_womenwelfare.html
12. http://www.arab.net/uae/govt/ue_womenfederation.html
13. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
14. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles").
15. <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/uae/gender.html>

16. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
17. There are no legal prohibitions against women owning property. However, there are restrictions. For example, women must inherit property or businesses from a father or husband, or, if unmarried, receive a grant of land from the ruling family in the emirate in which they reside. In the case of women who are married, the land must be granted to the husbands. But a woman's property remains separate from that of her husband: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8306.htm>
18. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8306.htm>
19. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
20. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
21. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
22. Only to save the life of the mother: <http://www.pregnant-pause.org/lex/world02.htm>
23. <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/intcam/femgen/fgm1.htm>. However, no national reports or other evidence were found regarding FGM.
24. http://www.arab.net/uae/govt/ue_womenemploy.html
25. Ibid.

Yemen



1. **Constitution?** Yes. Latest version: September 29, 1994. Affirms gender equality? Yes, with contradiction.¹

2. **Nationality law:** gender discrimination? Yes.²

3. **International resolutions:**

a) CEDAW: Yes (May 30, 1984).³

i) With reservations? Yes.⁴

b) ILO Conventions:

i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.⁵

ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.⁶

4. **Legal system:**

a) Women's participation:

i) Right to raise cases? ndf.

ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.⁷

iii) Judges? Yes.⁸

iv) Number of women judges: No figure available.⁹

b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.¹⁰

c) Family law:

i) Codified, religious based.¹¹

ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. **Political rights:**

i) Right to vote? Yes (1967).¹²

ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.

iii) Percentage of women in parliament: 0.7% (lower house).¹³

iv) Women in the cabinet: None.¹⁴

6. **The state:**

a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.¹⁵

i) In which sectors: The civil service and the police.¹⁶

ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.¹⁷

iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: the General Directorate for Working Women's Development, Women's Development Directorate at the National Council for Population, the Gender Unit for Projects Planning at the Social Development Fund, and Men and Women Statistics Directorate at the Central Organization of Statistics.¹⁸

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**

i) National Council of Women? The Women's National Committee (government-sponsored, semi-independent).¹⁹

ii) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.²⁰

iii) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.²¹

8. **Education:**

a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 25.2/67.5%.²²

b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 55/100%; secondary level: 24/66%; tertiary level: 5/16%.²³

c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 21% of primary school teachers and 19% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.²⁴

9. **The economy:**

a) Female economic activity rate: 30.5%.²⁵

b) Economic rights:

i) To ownership of property? No laws prohibit women from property ownership.²⁶

ii) To own and manage businesses? ndf.

iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.

iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? Women are eligible for pensions at age 55, on

condition that they have subscribed to an insurance plan for a minimum of 15 years.²⁷

c) Percentage of female-headed households: 13% in 1994.²⁸

10. **Health:**

a) Vital statistics:

i) Life expectancy (f/m): 61.6/59.4 years (2000).²⁹

ii) Average age of women at first marriage: One in four Yemeni females marries between the age of 15-19 and 69% between the age of 20-24.³⁰

iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 350 per 100,000 births (1985-99).³¹

b) Reproductive rights:

i) Is contraception legal? Yes.³²

ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.³³

c) Female genital mutilation? Yes. 20% of women mutilated (does the source use 'mutilated' or 'circumcised') before marriage, 23% after marriage (1997).³⁴

d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. **Culture:**

a. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.³⁵

b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

1. Articles 19, 34, 42: b & 43: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/icl/mu00000_.html. Women are specified in relation to rights and duties assigned by *shari'a*: <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>

2. Children of a Yemeni mother and foreign father do not have an automatic right to obtain Yemeni nationality, even if they were born and currently live in Yemen (Article 6): <http://www.yementimes.com/98/iss35/focus.htm>

3. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/ratifica.htm>

4. Article 29: <http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html>

5. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 195.

6. Ibid., p 195.

7. *Report on the Status of Women in Yemen Five Years after Beijing 1995* p 36.

http://www.arabwomenconnect.org/awc/e_regions.asp?r_id=10

8. Ibid., p 36.

9. 3% of judicial administrators were women in 1998: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). *Women and*

Men In Yemen: A Statistical Portrait. New York: United Nations. p 87.

10. Women must obtain permission from husbands or fathers to obtain a passport and to travel. They also are expected to be accompanied by male relatives, though enforcement is inconsistent. The Penal Code is lenient towards "crimes of honor". The law says that a man who murders a woman should be executed; but a husband who murders his wife and her lover is fined. According to a 1995 Interior Ministry regulation, any citizen who wishes to marry a foreigner must obtain the permission of the Ministry. A woman wishing to marry a foreigner must present proof of her parents' approval to the Interior Ministry. A foreign woman who wishes to marry a citizen man must prove to the Ministry that she is "of good conduct and behavior," and "is free from contagious disease." There are no corresponding requirements for men to demonstrate parental approval, good conduct, or freedom from contagious diseases: <http://www.state.gov/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8313.htm>

11. Unified Personal Status law promulgated in 1992. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html>

12. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR. p 194.
 13. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press. In the 1997 elections, two women won seats in the 301-member parliament: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/yemen/gender.html>
 14. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). *Women and Men In Yemen: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations. p 86.
 15. Ibid., pp 87-88.
 16. Ibid., pp 87-88.
 17. The first female undersecretary (of information) was appointed in 1997. The prime minister of Yemen announced in 1998 that each ministry must have a woman at the director-general level. In 1999, the country appointed its first female ambassador: <http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/yemen/gender.html>
 18. *Report on the Status of Women in Yemen Five Years after Beijing 1995* pp 40-41.
http://www.arabwomenconnect.org/awc/e_regions.asp?r_id=10
 19. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8313.htm>
 20. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing/national/natplans.htm>
 21. The Social Association for Productive Families, the Women and Children's Department of the Center for Future Studies, the Woman and Child Development Association, and the Yemeni Council for Motherhood and Childhood. There are many recently established women's charitable associations: *ibid.* pp 41-42.
 22. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.

23. <http://genderstats.worldbank.org> (check "Summary Gender Profiles")
 24. Ibid.
 25. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 26. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (2002). *Women and Men In Yemen: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations.
 27. Ibid., p 9.
 28. Ibid.
 29. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 30. Center of Arab Women for Training and Research. (2001). *Arab Women's Development Report. Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab Women*. Tunisia: CAWTAR.
 31. United Nations Development Programme (2002). *Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 32. In 1997-1998, 36% of women residing in urban areas were using family planning methods and 16% in rural areas. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2002) *Women and Men In Yemen: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations. p 63.
 33. Only to save the life of the mother: <http://www.pregnant-pause.org/lex/world02.htm>
 34. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2002). *Women and Men In Yemen: A Statistical Portrait*. New York: United Nations. p 66.
 35. One woman was a 'decision and policy maker' in media (1997-1998), and 7 were editors -in-chief: *ibid.*, p 88.

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Book Reviews

Contemporary Egyptian Feminist Activism

Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge:Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Reviewed by Hala Kamal



In her introduction to this outstanding study of secular feminism in Egypt, Nadje Al-Ali states that her main concern is the case of secular women's activism in post-colonial Egypt. Focusing on secular-oriented groups and individuals in this work, Al-Ali aims at balancing the increased interest in Islamist constituencies and movements as evident in much of the recent research and publications on the Middle East, for example Azza Karam's *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (Macmillan Press, 1998).

Al-Ali's theoretical framework is informed by post-colonial and cultural theories as well as feminist anthropological methodology. She therefore adopts a post-orientalist perspective revealing her awareness of the "monolithic and hegemonic discourses" as well as constructions of the 'other' related to the politics of (mis)representation. Al-Ali takes upon herself the challenge of deconstructing identities (including her own identity), perhaps strengthened by her personal experience as an 'Iraqi-German' and hence 'Arab-Western', whose identity she defines as 'hyphenated' rather than divided (p.37). In problematizing her identity, Al-Ali critically examines her positionality, acknowledging its impact on her research (pp. 39-40). Having stated the ambivalence of her identity, she moves on to the issue of Egyptian national and feminist identities. Thus, in addition to

tracing contemporary Egyptian secular women's involvement in the women's movement, based on their own oral accounts, Al-Ali attempts to explore more theoretical questions, with particular interest in the notion of identity within the framework of political struggle and nation-building. She sets out to provide "a detailed ethnographic account of the context, content and political significance of contemporary Egyptian women's activism" (p. 2). The study is based on interviews held with members of women's groups as well as individual activists, combining personal accounts with an analysis of the socio-political context of women's activism in the post-independence period, as an expression of Al-Ali's belief that "[p]ersonal narratives and biographies, just as much as statistical information, can be tools to learn

about historical events, political processes and social phenomena" (p. 89).

One of the most significant features of Al-Ali's study is her tendency to offer definitions of her terminology. She attempts to define secularism by problematizing the term 'secular', looking at it within various contexts and seeing it from different perspectives, including the interviewees' definition of the term in question. Thus the author's definition of secularism within the contemporary Egyptian context acquires a specificity of its own, meaning "the acceptance of the separation between religion and politics, but does not necessarily denote anti-religious or anti-Islamic positions"; and secular-oriented people also "do not endorse *Shari'a* (Islamic law) as the main or sole source of legislation, but they also refer to civil law and human rights conventions ... as frames of reference for their struggles" (p. 4). Al-Ali is conscious of the specificity of Egyptian secularism due to its relation to a complex history of liberalism and modernity, in addition to colonial and post-colonial experiences. It is worth noting that according to Al-Ali's definition of Egyptian secularism (derived from her interviewees' self-definitions) a secular orientation is compatible with religious observance.

The author also chooses to use the term 'women's activism' rather than 'feminism'. Again she problematizes and contextualizes her terms, differentiating between the 'feminist movement' (*al-haraka al-nissawiyya*) which is concerned with patriarchy alone as opposed to the 'women's movement' (*al-haraka al-nissa'iya*) which includes an involvement in national independence, class struggle and other social and political issues. Here I beg to differ, since there are contemporary Egyptian secular activists who do not shy away from the term 'feminist' but actually define themselves as '*nassawiyyat*', or more linguistically accurately as '*nisswiyyat*'. Feminist activism in this sense does not figure merely as a political counter-patriarchal concept, but is used in the light of feminism (*al-nisswiyya*, or *al-tawajuh al-nisswi*) as a category of analysis that includes gender, class, nation, ethnicity, etc., as well as being a frame of mind that directs one's perspective and attitude to life - in thought and practice.

Al-Ali stresses the fact that several of the interviewed women activists reject the term 'feminist' as an identity marker "for pragmatic and ideological reasons" (p. 4). Yet she claims that the "antagonism and anxiety" developed by many women towards feminism as a western concept reflects their 'internalization' of the stereotypical connotations of the term. But adopting/rejecting 'feminism' as an identity marker may reflect a more complex process. I suggest that some Egyptian women activists do not refrain from endorsing the term 'feminist' out of unconscious internalization (hence rejection), but do so strategically, aware of the connotations that the term carries in various circles in Egypt, particularly as a western concept. They reject the term with the aim of breaking terminological and conceptual barriers between them and certain Egyptian constituencies.

Al-Ali divides the secular women's movement into three main categories. First, there is women's rights activism based on the liberal and reformist model of equality. Second, there is women's socialist activism which considers women's exploitation as part of the economic and socio-political inequalities rooted in class division, capitalism and imperialism. Third, radical feminist activism focuses on forms of cultural and sexual oppression and acknowledges difference without being separatist. While the author adopts this Western paradigm of women's activism, she points to the heterogeneity of Egyptian women's activism. Al-Ali further applies Molyneux's typology of women's activism, categorizing groups in terms of 'independent', 'associational' and 'directed' (p. 7), which seems to me a more pragmatic model, applicable to groups rather than individuals. Yet as Al-Ali rightly points out, "women's organizations fluctuate in their level of autonomy or dependence" (p. 8), and are influenced by the state, their access to political and economic resources, UN organizations and foreign funding agencies.

In her second chapter, Al-Ali presents an account of the Egyptian women's movement as constructed by contemporary Egyptian activists in the interviews held with them, thus "approaching history through interpretation" (p. 55). Al-Ali focuses on the historical and politi-

cal context marking the relationship of the women's movement to the state in the post-independence period. And although Al-Ali concludes that most of the changes in favor of women's status have been achieved during moments of economic and socio-political crises, yet these developments were not 'given' as much as having resulted from long processes of women's struggle within the society and against the state.

Later (chapter 3) Al-Ali presents the life stories of nine women activists, with particular emphasis on the conjunctures between personal experiences and historical developments. She explains her selection of the life-stories in terms of 'objective' factors such as generational difference, political orientation and organizational belonging, in addition to the 'subjective' factor of "personal curiosity and interest on both sides" (p. 87). Al-Ali also explains her choice of the 'life-story' rather than 'life history' or 'biography', since the former is a more accurate term in describing the process of selecting significant quotes and excerpts rather than presenting a chronology of a person's past (footnote, p. 87). These life stories offer accounts of individual women's experiences within the Egyptian women's movement from as early as the 1930s, which was a period marked by women's activism in a context of social and welfare work. The second group represents the generation of the 1950s-1960s whose activism was born within national mobilization under Nasser's regime. And finally, the new generation of women in their twenties and thirties seems to reflect the current situation marked by personal rebellion and professionalized activism.

Reading this chapter one senses Al-Ali's admiration and respect for the older generation's pioneering efforts and activist involvement. The interviews suggest that the most politically conscious generation of women activists, however, is the one whose feminist consciousness is related to their leftist political engagement since the students' movement of the 1970s. It is worth noting here that apart from 'women's' activism which goes back to the early years of the 20th century and before, it is the representatives of the student movement that have acquired and continue to reveal a 'feminist' con-

sciousness – not just ideologically, but politically and in terms of organization; combining feminist activism with the struggle for social justice.

In the last two chapters of her book, Al-Ali discusses the goals and priorities of contemporary women's activism in Egypt – some of which address general issues such as alleviating poverty and combating illiteracy among women, as well as offering them legal assistance. Additionally, women's organizations are involved in feminist struggles with the state aimed at bringing about legal changes regarding the Nationality Law, Personal Status Law, Labor Laws, and the Law of Association. Another area of women's activism is related to consciousness-raising and a more organized involvement in recent anti-war and anti-imperialist protest. However, the more issues, the more debate! To illustrate the current debates within the women's movement, Al-Ali selects the *Markaz Dirasat Al-Mar'a Al-Gadida* (New Woman's Research Center) as a case study that shows the most pressing organizational and ideological issues. One of these is the challenge of creating independent and democratic structures, another revolves around the professionalization of activism as opposed to voluntary work. Foreign funding is another hot issue, with donors divided into 'good' and 'bad' according to their general agendas. One of the women's NGOs, *Ma'n* (the Women's Study Centre, Together), which is engaged in gender-related research from a Marxist feminist perspective, rejects foreign funding altogether.

There is also much controversy from an ideological point of view concerning for instance the cultural frame of reference for Egyptian women's activism. Similarly, much discussion is going on about women's rights in terms of their universality on the one hand and cultural specificity on the other. One of the issues that arise in those discussions is that of essentialism. Yet, it is worth noting that as much as difference can be used and misused as a marker of inequality, contemporary Egyptian activists can use essentialism as a political means to promote feminism and social justice within our own cultural context in the current historical moment.

Women and NGOs: Lebanese Women between Doing Justice to Themselves and Serving Others



Nisa' wa jami'yat:
Lubnaniyat beyn Insaf al-dhati wa khidmat al-gheyr
By Azza Sharara Baydoun, (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2002)

Reviewed by Hosn Abboud

efforts to obtain the rights to vote, to run for parliamentary election, and to serve in the ministries of social affairs, education and the fine arts.

The first chapter, "The personal and the political in women's social work: readings in the literature", is a comprehensive survey of studies on women's activities in non-governmental organizations in the United States. The choice of including American literature written by women scholars is justified by Sharara in these words: "This literature can situate this study in its proper context, and assist it with material that allows its evaluation".

In the second chapter, Sharara explains the methodology employed in her field study, which covers NGOs that were founded after 1990 in Greater Beirut. Sharara's total sample was thirty-two organizations that have different titles in Arabic (*jam'iyya*, *munazama*, *liqa'*, *tajammu'* etc), and that deal with different social fields and problems: health, education, student affairs, citizenship, human rights, the environment, women's rights, the care of orphans, missing persons, scientific research, etc.

The third chapter is the '*bayt al-qasid*' as they say in Arabic (the key verse to an ode), and covers "the dynamics of social work in Lebanese NGOs". Here Sharara points to the factors that contribute to, or hinder, development in the structure of the organization and its vital aims. For example, the issue of sectarianism (*al-ta'ifiyya*) is discussed with the leaders of the organizations, with conflicting results depending upon the type of organization and its political involvement. In organizations in which the social and the political are intertwined, for example the Assembly for Municipal and Mayoral

Elections (*Al-liqa' min ajl al-intikhabat al-baladiyya wa-al-khitarriyya*), the Social Movement (*Al-haraka al-ijtima'iyya*), the Lebanese Organization for Human Rights (*Al-jam'iyya al-lubnaniyya li-huquq al-insan*), or the Movement for People's Rights (*Harakat huquq an-nas*), Sharara confirms that their clash with sectarianism is inevitable since sectarianism has the power to distort and slow down the progress of political participation.

The fourth chapter studies "similarities and dissimilarities between men and women in their organizations", specifically their sectarian and gender awareness. The fifth chapter, "Challenging violence against women: ideologies and agendas", portrays various attitudes towards violence: from the Al-Najat Islamic Organization (*Jam'iyyat al-najat al-Islamiyya*), to the Lebanese Society for Resisting Violence Against Women (*Al-hay'a al-lubnaniyya li-munahadat al-'unf dud al-mar'a*). Sharara includes new experimental support programs and therapy groups, such as the Democratic Women's Association (*Al-tajammu' al-nisa'i al-dimocrati*), and the group that interviewed 177 women prisoners who were freed after the liberation of south Lebanon.

Chapter six offers a history and study of the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers (*Tajammu' al-bahithat al-lubnaniyyat*), a group of women researchers from different disciplines who gather for the sake of contact and intellectual communication. Sharara witnessed the beginnings of the Bahithat, and was one of its founding members. She writes, "*Al-tajammu'* does not claim for itself a great mission. From the moment of its founding, its policy was patience and waiting for the attainment of its modest objectives." The woman researcher, *al-bahitha* is, as we all know, a new entity in our societies; and she, like her male colleague, does not yet enjoy a well-defined character (social, cultural, or political). However, the coming together of the Bahithat in this organized and flexible form - through their internal activities - contributes to identifying the role of the woman researcher, *al-bahitha*, and to confirm, through their appearances on the public scene, their value for our society.

A short review of such a complex study cannot do justice to the effort which Sharara has given over four years of research. The book offers an outstanding contribution to the field of NGOs, human development, social psychology, gender studies, and others. She also offers a valuable explanation of terms related to human and social development, used every day in NGOs, from 'gender mainstreaming' to 'feminist consciousness' - hundreds of terms that she has either translated into Arabic or Arabized to make them accessible to the general reader or the specialist.

Women @ Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace

Edited by Wendy Harcourt (London, Zed Books, 2000).

Reviewed by Samia Tabari

The book pools together a group of experts, from diverse professional backgrounds and cultures, in exploring how the lives of women can be altered by the information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly the Internet. The authors reveal how the Net can provide women with an extensive venue to express their views and vocalize their concerns about issues pertaining to women's conditions and human rights.

The late 1990s witnessed the formation of the Women on the Net (WoN) project, created by the Society for International Development (SID), with UNESCO funding. WoN encourages women, from the South and the North, to use the Internet as a political tool, promoting gender perspectives and bringing people together in the shaping of a transnational women's movement. It also aims at creating a resource to be made available for the diversified women's groups, assisting them in developing their Internet usage skills as well as enhancing their benefits from using such a medium of interaction. A group of both women and men, comprising academics, activists and technical people, have joined WoN in cyberspace discussions. Their discussions, ideas, and analysis are further materialized in this book.



Women@internet comprises three parts, all dealing with the various implications that relate to the empowerment of women through the Internet. The first part examines the emergence of women's activism and networking on the Net. The authors explore the potentials that the Internet may offer to women, without ignoring the existing gender inequalities of access to the cyberworld. Arturo Escobar, professor of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, perceives grass-roots activism, particularly that which is channeled through the Internet, as eventually culminating into a form of political resistance in the real world. Gillian Youngs, a lecturer at the Center for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, speaks of 'cyberfeminism', for she sees the Internet as a magnetic arena, bringing together women from across the world to share their experiences and their visions for a better future.

The second part cites instances where women have been using ICTs for global networking as an attempt to promote their rights. Alice Mastrangelo Gittler, whose work focuses heavily on the use of ICTs as a tool for both community-based and global NGO activism, views the 4th World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995) as a main impetus in launching cyber activism amongst women. She reflects on the successes and weaknesses of the Net in connecting women's NGOs across the world. Nidhi Tandon, an economist and activist from East Africa, shares her knowledge of the work of women's groups in Africa. She provides examples of how these groups are seeking ICTs as tools for change. Edie Farwell, Peregrine Wood, Maureen James and Karen Banks are members of the Women's Networking Support Program of the Association for Progressive Communication (APC). The APC Women's Program, initiated in 1993, strives to limit gender inequities relating to access to, and use of, ICTs by women. In this chapter, the authors demonstrate the increasing usage of electronic tools by women, while highlighting the fact that women in the North use Internet tools much more extensively than women in the South and Eastern Europe. They further discuss the reasons attributed to these regional differences, stressing that they are primarily access-related rather than due to women's hesitation in embracing the new technological tools.

The book's last section projects the views of women researchers and NGO activists, presenting case studies from Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Arab World. Laura Agustin, whose work primarily focuses on sex tourism and the migration of Latin American and Caribbean women to Europe, illustrates how the new ICTs can be resourceful survival mechanisms for these women. Delivering ICTs to these groups of women may

provide them with the chance of obtaining health assistance, legal advice, as well as human contact; things that are usually inaccessible for women in their situation. Farideh Farhi, member of the editorial board of the Iranian Journal of International Affairs, argues that the West's attitude, until very recently, towards Iran has contributed to a stunted growth of communication and information networks in Iran, without disregarding Iran's wariness of cultural invasion as an additional factor. She explains that although Gulf 2000, an Internet project, offers a vital venue for information provision and dialogue exchange, prevalent circumstances, notably political in nature, deter further development of discussions or action. Farhi also urges activists, who are involved in advocating women's rights, not to underplay the power of religious governments or institutions, even with the existence of an evolving process of modernization.

In the final chapter, Lamis Alshejni, from Yemen and a volunteer for Women in Development Network at SID, stresses that Arab women must take advantage of the new information technologies in their struggle for obtaining their rights and voicing their concerns. She elaborates that although Arab women have been increasingly speaking of and advocating their rights, they "remain silent on the Net." The 'silence' is mostly linked to the fact that Arab women tend to underestimate the platform that the Net may offer them in forwarding their cause. Alshejni, like Farideh Farhi, emphasizes that women should not ignore religious discourse in their advocacy endeavors, especially as religion is inherent to Arab culture. The Net, providing a multicultural and multilingual space, could offer a freer medium for discussing the impact of religion on the status of Arab women. On another level, Alshejni brings to our attention the high illiteracy rate amongst Arab women (at 62%) as a barrier to Internet usage. Nonetheless, she portrays a more positive outlook for the future, noting the shifting literacy rates for young Arab men and women, the increasing Internet usage by Arab women NGOs, and that the Arab world has recently reflected one of the highest growth rates of Internet use in the world.

Women@internet depicts the multitude of potentials that can be realized through the use of ICTs. Obstacles, financial, technical and cultural, to acquiring and using the new information technologies do exist. Still, the Internet is a medium that could strengthen women's movements across the world, furnishing the possibilities for a positive change in the political and social spheres. This alone is a compelling incentive to overpower prevalent barriers.

Pre-publication Notices

Nisa' arabiyyat fi al-'ishriinat: hudouran wa hawiyya (Arab Women in the 1920s: Changing Patterns of Life and Identity). Papers presented at a conference in May, 2001, by the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers (Bahithat), Beirut, in co-operation with the Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, and the Center for Arab and Middle East Studies at AUB. Edited by Jean Said Makdisi, Nazek Yared, Nadia al Cheikh, Nuha Bayoumi, and Watfa Hamadi. To be published in February, 2003 by the Bahithat and the Arab Cultural Center, Beirut.

The 1920s was a pivotal decade which saw important changes in the Arab world. During this period the foundations of modernity in politics and economics, as well as in social and artistic life, were laid down. The conference examined the participation of women in the creation of this modernity. Scholars from Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Tunisia, Algeria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and of course Syria and Lebanon, as well as some who came from the United States and Europe, gave papers on theoretical, historical, literary, and social themes. The beginnings of Arab feminism, the participation of women in the various nationalist movements, the entrance of women to stage and screen, the problems of women's education, the changes in the legal status of women that took place during this period - all these and other questions were studied.

Zakirah lil-Mustaqbal, Maousou'at al-Katiba al-'Arabiyya. (Memory for the Future: an Encyclopedia of Arab Women Writers), a multi-volume work that covers the last two decades of the 19th century up to the end of the 20th century. The introduction surveys modern Arabic women's writing and raises questions concerning women's creativity. Ten essays explore women's writing in specific countries or regions. A bio-bibliography of individual writers contains 1,200 entries. There is also an anthology of poems, short stories and extracts from novels and autobiographies. Contributors include: Emad Abu Ghazi, Radwa Ashour, Yumna al-Eid, Hoda El-Sadda, Hatem al-Saqr, Soad al-Mane', Iman al-Qadi, Mohamad Barrada, Ferial Ghazoul, Sobhi Hadidi, Haidar Ibrahim, Hasna Mekdashi, Amina Rachid.

Publishers: Nour (the Arab Women's Publishing House) with the Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo. Forthcoming in summer 2003.

The Encyclopedia will also be on the Internet: www.arabwomen-nour.org

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This bibliography is not complete. It is weak in Arabic and French sources, and has nothing in other world languages.)

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