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.

The quarterly journal of the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was established in 1973 at 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.

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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

choisir
La cueu des femmes

Mme Chemali Khalaf
le 2 Mai 2000

Denise Couture
Professeure agrégée
Faculté de théologie
Université de Montréal
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 studies centers that exist in Arab countries, the data they have is still slight and hard to access. 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: could 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, Western 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, ‘Arab feminism’ — can this be accepted as such, as Heba Ezzat argues in this issue, or is it a contradiction in terms? 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.

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.’ Arabic 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-based 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 supposed ‘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.

From the beginning we aspired to a presentation that would deal with both historical and evaluative. It soon became evident that this was far too ambitious an aim for the 100th 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.

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 community. 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 at the other and 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/minority languages within the region - Berbers, Armenians, Kurds, Circassians, and other ethnic minorities. Nor should we forget political minorities such as the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, or claiming national independence. In Morocco today, Berbers enjoy increasing scope for claiming their own distinctive voice and organizations. 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

Arab Women’s Movements: Late Subject of History

Rosemary Sayigh*

* 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 the Arab women’s movement 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 Maghreb (Rabaa Naciri), and the Gulf (Sabia al-Najjar). Regrettably some countries fell through the broad meshes of this net, eg Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, etc. as well as more recent Arab League members such as Mauritania and Somalia, still not fully absorbed into the Arab 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 Isaiah Jadin 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, statal, 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 have put forward a ‘realist’ argument noting the way ‘this attraction’ is brought against women’s movements but never against national or social ones that equally could be accused of having grown out of Western models. But this is a polemic that should be shifted from ‘essentialist’ arguments about the nature of Western models. But this is a polemic that should be shifted from ‘essentialist’ arguments about the nature of Western constructions continually force Arab women to question who they are and what their role is in 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 could find experts in every Arab country for our UNDP/Gender in the Arab World project. But this attempt failed. Even where UNDP/Gender 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 scarce 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 cases the attempt failed. Even where UNDGender 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 contributed to obstacles in obtaining micro-data. Difficulties 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, e.g. ESCWA, ECA, the World Bank, European cultural foundations such as the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation, and the US State Department.1 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 movements, as conveyed through those fragments that have been recorded, and the paucity of historians to work through some of the archived material? How have they used it? How have they stayed within the (relatively) safe limits of past frameworks and formats? Finally, I have been 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 on women’s movements. One possibility is that the neo-conservatives in the US, for example, have used the rhetoric of ‘women’s rights’ to split women’s movements in the Arab region. But another is that the very strength of the modernization of the Arab world is to push people onwards and disconnect them from history. Yet this is to use the historical 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’.

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 CWART, ‘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. The electronic mail conversations between scholars can be creatively used is the ‘thematic conversation’ organized by Shafna Zuhur and published in a recent Al-Raida.1

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 and majority women? Will women’s movements manage to take a lead in confronting broader issues of inequality, human rights represisions, 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 and poor Take for a comparative study of women’s organizations across three Arab countries, see Laurie Brand, Women, the State, and Political [Legality: Middle Eastern and North African Experiences (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). 11. In the course of the 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 and majority women? Will women’s movements manage to take a lead in confronting broader issues of inequality, human rights represisions, and the absence of representation; or will they stay within the (relatively) safe limits of past frameworks and formats?

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ENDNOTES

4. ‘Aman’, ‘Bunian’, and networks such as Aysheh and NAD 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 conjunction 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 accidental 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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Heartfelt thanks for encouragement, ideas and back-up for this issue to: Muna Khalaf, Camilla el-Soht, Suad Joseph, Sondra Hale, Haona M’kaddash, Nadje Al-Ali, Martina Biever, Fatima Kasem, Jean Zakulini, Rim Sabbah, Fadia Faqir. Thanks also to those who wrote articles, answered email interviews, and corresponded with us from far-off places. Thanks also to those who did the time-consuming research for the country profiles, Myriam Stier and Abir Hamdar. Many thanks to Hazel Simons for proof-reading.

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‘diya Sa‘d al-Din (Alexandria, 1901); Al-Mara’a, by Anita Attallah (Egypt, 1901); Al-Saada, by Rujia A’Wad (Egypt, 1902); Al-Nus by Mary A‘jami (Damascus, 1910); Al-Khalid, by Afifa Sa‘ab (Lebanon, 1912); Fatat al-Nil, by Saha al-Mi’aya (Cairo, 1913); and Fatat Lubnan, by Salma 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 Jami Bayhaini and George Niqua Baz. Women writers expressed real interest in national affairs and political issues, and gave no indication whatever 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 founded in 1928, 17 years before the League of Arab States.

Some nationalists even started to see in the feminist writings an encouragement for national or reformist reform. The well-known nationalist lawyer Habib Faris wrote to Fatat Lubnan in 1914: “National reform could be achieved once the government recognizes the important role support women writers, who at 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 Sharnin 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 her 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 the committee that the 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 writing and the beginnings of women’s organizing. Whether the same women were involved in both, what kinds of associations formed, and how their activities and the women’s associations were transformed, 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 women and Politics

Bouthaina Shaaban*
women, within a framework of closer ties with Western feminisms.

In 1893 Hana Kasabri Kurani (1870-1896) 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 highlighted some of the merits of Eastern women in opposition to various stereotypes. 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 understand 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 after.

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 internationally acclaimed Pearl in Women's Quarters, in which she documented the lives of 456 women from both East and West, to Berta Oriani Palme, the head of the Women's section in the Chicago exhibition. However, 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 notion, stating that the lives of both men and women would be impoverished if women's duties were restricted to the kitchen and the living room.

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 United States and Europe, 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 a model. Much of the hostile stereotyping sustained in certain 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 traditional image of Arab women as ‘oppressed and ‘domestic’. To my knowledge the only woman who has challenged this impaired vision is an Arab woman from Egypt, Nabiawiyaa Musa, in her pioneering treatise Al-‘Amal wa al-‘Amal (Women and Labour), published in 1920 in Egypt. In this treatise she presented an exciting argument against the idea of Arab women being blackmailed by women Farid Wagdi, who notoriously opposed her strong contention that women should go out to work. He defined women 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, M-usa 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 while she was carrying the load, or the Egyptian woman while she suffered and groaned carrying her heavy burden of mud while she was carrying the load, or the Egyptian woman while she suffered and groaned carrying her heavy burden of mud while she was carrying the load? How can he ignore those contradictions emer ged and further justified his position by describing “scenes in America’s factories that broke his heart”?

**Anis al-Jalis, published by Huda Newspapers in New York, took a year off in 1906 in order to write a novel in which she dwelt on the relations between Eastern and Western women. As an Arab woman living in New York she could see how many misunderstandings there were regarding the lives of both Eastern and Western people. She applauded the support of men of 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 after.**
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 Nabawiya 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 Upadhyay 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

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 Alferno 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.
5. Ibid., p 7.
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. An Intelligent Man’s Guide to Modern Arab Feminism

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In his Tahrir al-Mar'ah (The Liberation of Woman, 1899), followed a year later by Al-Mar'ah al-Jilghah (The New Woman, 1900), Aimé rejected the notion of woman as an inferior, and called for measures to realize gender equality. But, in direct contrast to al-Shidyaq, 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 Burqa. The anonymity imposed by the latter two 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. Nabayiyyah 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 Majallat al-Sayyidat wa-l-Fatayat (1923-), Amin r ejected the notion of woman as a gift that both men and women share, and derides the 'women's press', especially in Egypt and Lebanon: Hind Nawfal in Egypt and Lebanon: Hind Nawfal (1903-), Abi Y'usuf 'Abid, Huda Sha'rawi, Laure Thabit, Julia Tu'nah Dimashqiyah, Marie 'Ajamit, May Zaydeh, Ibthah Qaddura, Mariana Marraah, Labibah al-Hashim, Saint, Sayyig, Habiba Haddad, Hind Nawfal, and others. Many men also defended Nazirah: shekhs' Ali 'Abd al-Raziq, Tahir al-Nafsan, Abi Y'usuf '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 'Izzat, the writer Amin al-Rihan, the philosopher Felix Faris, and others.

This period was also one of remarkable women in their own right. May Zaydeh, writer, animated a famous literary salon in Cairo during the years 1915-1916. She carried on an unhappy love affair with the famous writer Ahmad Muhammad 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 Jibril Khalil Jibril, 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 women'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.
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 rights 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 disappointment 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’ (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-Shidyaq’s problematic of the repressiveness 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 pit-

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 sym- bolic 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?

ENDNOTES

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 that has 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 restricted 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 with regard to 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 economic development, 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, stirring 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 Blad ash-Sham), contact with the colonizers was a shock, and among other effects, made Maghrebi intellectuals (educated in Europe or the Middle East), demand the renunciation 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 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 educational institutions. Since 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, i.e. 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 wives - 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 education...
tion as a means to accelerate national liberation, and economic 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.1

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 quite the opposite, paternalist 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 Workers (UGTT), as well as other political groups started encouraging women to join their ranks. To this end, awareness of the necessity 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 Haddad2 and shesh 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 nationals 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 the 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 were the neutral mask of universal progress in order to subjugate the people, thereby maintaining a confusion between modernity, colonialism and domination.”3 Indeed, as Yusuf 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.”4

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 halat, stating that Algerian women would not be liberated at the invitation of France”.5

To sum up in the words of Zakia Daoud, “Every question of the status quo was judged as conforming to the colonial power’s integratorist policy, and condemned as a project of destruction of identity.”6

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. In Tunisia, 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.7

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 process of independence, and the tendency to discredit claims made by the women’s movement by appealing to anti-colonial feelings and to reflexes of community and identity that 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 opened to women from the elites, and within an Islamic system of reference, opted for an emancipating legislation; Moroccos’ethnicity, a 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”.8 Put simply, the Tunisian state, headed by President Bourguiba, took a number of measures to revalue 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’,9 rooted in a feminist 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.10

As in Morocco, the griot in Algeria created the Union of Algerian Women (UJA) in 1943, made up predominantly of European women. From 1945, as the independence struggle grew fiercer, the nationalist parties...
was appointed by King Mohammed V in 1957/58 to rapidly produce a text constituted the keystone used by the 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 stop performing small political tricks, 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 more selective, and the negative aspects of tradition used to pacify the most conservative ulemas and most function of permanently fixing the status of women, communitarian boundaries continued long after the de-representation continuity, because such was the interest of this enclosure of women within anti-colonialist 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 benefit of male heirs, disinheriting the female heirs; 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 fallacious interpretation of the Qur’an and the Hadiths are the origin of the inferior juridical status of women in Morocco today. Personal Status codes, 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. The 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 age of consent, and there is fear for “the morals or reputation of the girl”. The obligation of marital tutelage for women (al-khul’a) 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, 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 rapid as 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 consensual permission to agree (al-khu’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 ‘rida’. 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. 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 remarry 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. 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. 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 habus or waf’ allows the children to be deprived of 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 benefit of male heirs, disinheriting the female heirs; 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.

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 career, a new generation of women who had not participated in the struggle for independence, joined political and union organizations. Despite a certain ambiguity, some women managed to compete with the ‘authorities’. Among the countries of the Maghreb, Morocco devoted more success to religious education (1977), with a rigid and retrograde Islamic content, reduced to glorification of the past and to memorize pious sayings. The beginning of prayers in schools in the 1980s, the introduction of contents of schoolbooks, 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, 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.

One of the chief characteristics of the post-independence period was the occupant 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 more success to religious education (1977), with a rigid and retrograde Islamic content, reduced to glorification of the past and to memorize pious sayings. The beginning of prayers in schools in the 1980s, the introduction of contents of schoolbooks, religious programs on television, superficial Arabization, were all contributing elements in the orientation of the Maghreb states (especially Morocco and Algeria).
in parties, and from women's sections of political and union organizations. 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 authors 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'.

This period of self-discovery and attempts to group a plurality of expressions into a unique and autonomous 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 centralization of women's status was 'hollow' in the sense that their fate was discussed and decided in their absence. 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 malefemale 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. The distance between the subject supported, not repressed, the incorporation of the feminist movement into the political and social, and public space, ruled by secular institutions, 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 association and the existence of 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 constraints of 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 political mobilization. These feminist groups have been able to build structures 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 denied, rejected, ridiculed, and are often confronted with 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 1970s 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 be inscribed itself in an international identity is not meant to be imported and foreign. But the feminists of the Maghreb know that they bring their own contributions to debates and the social change of the process of change of identity, and make men and women equal citizens. They do this just as the feminists as Asia and Africa have done, whose contribution was decisive to reflect 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, feminicides 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. These tensions explain why many feminists reclaim the specificity and distinctiveness of their demands 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, in the absence of democracy, high levels of literacy, etc. Feminism is the same as elsewhere but developed in a different context, its expression is necessarily slightly different: it is less 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.

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, branded 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 symbolic: 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 established. Women's claim of equality is justified 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...
The Feminist Movement in the Gulf

Sabika Muhammad al-Najjar*
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's 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 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 70's that the majority of girls' schools were inaugurated or spread in the Sultanate of Oman and some emirates on the Oman 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 (Am-Nahida), 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.

ENDNOTES
2. Ibid.
4. Reformist Tahar Haddad published a book in 1930 entitled Notre femmes dans la Sharia et la société, in which he denounced the subversion of women, and called for renewed efforts to interpret the Qur'an (ijtihad). This book has remained incontestably 'mod ern', an authoritative reference for the whole Maghreb feminist movement.  
8. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
15. The constitutions of the Maghreb countries state the principle of equality of all citizens before the law.
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 Daudz, op.cit.
23. Ibid.

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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-Fadia" Aysa Yatim (secretary), and “Mothers 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. 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-Qa'a'a li-al-Islam) issued a statement expressing their resentment in 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." 

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. Researchers link the beginning of the feminist movement to the emergence of the National Union, and particularly underline the two sisters Shahla and Badria and the influence they had among young educated men who began urging their colleagues 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 stirred a powerful chord among young educated men who began urging their wives to follow this woman's footsteps. Nonetheless, its influence was limited and came as a result of the political situation in that time, with the political movement's influence at its maximum, as well as the support and enthusiasm expressed by women. The Khalfan brotherhood's disappearance, and the nationalist movement was also dealt a heavy blow, and its leaders were compelled to forbid their daughters to participate in the society. 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.

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, M. A. Aysa 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 (Jamiiyat Ri'ayat Al-Tifl wal-Umuma), was founded. During its inception phase, members belonged to the ruling family, and the families of rich merchants and high-ranking public servants. As membership increased, and the nationalist movement was dealt a heavy blow, and its leaders were compelled to forbid their daughters to participate in the society. 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.

As mentioned before, women in Bahrain were influenced by the 1945-1956 movement, but their role was limited and often associated with social service and educational 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 was 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. 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 advocating women's rights as regards 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 rich 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 and often associated with social service and educational activities and political movements. 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lens faced by women in the workplace, and had no follow-up.

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 laws and 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.16

Moreover, the Nahdat Fatat al-Bahrain Society and the AWS each established a center for legal and family consultation, which constitutes a pioneering step in improving women's status. The Child and Mothers' Welfare Societies also formed to discuss 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 Isa bin Salman Al-Khalifa, calling him to answer to 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. Muna al-Khalifa was suspended following the rule of obedience enacted by the police, and in restricting arbitrary divorce. Now divorce is only legal before a judge.16

The terms of reference for the Personal Status Code are very similar to those of the personal status laws in some Arab countries. It guarantees women equal rights and duties; regardless of their sex, origin, language or religion. However, the election law restricted the 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 vote and run for office, to vote and hold a cabinet position.17

As Nuriya al-Salimi writes, Egyptian women's experience from the beginning of their struggle led by Hoda Sha'aw'i was similar to that of Kuwaiti women: “Here in Kuwait, it is as if history is repeating itself after eight decades, but with a difference.” The same means that were used then are used now in Kuwait. The personal status law is still enforced by the police, and in restricting arbitrary divorce. Now divorce is only legal before a judge.16

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 women's social and cultural awareness. The same means that were used then are used now in Kuwait. The personal status law is still enforced by the police, and in restricting arbitrary divorce. Now divorce is only legal before a judge.16

The Culture Center 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. The objectives of the An-Nahda al-'Usiriya 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 Kuwaiti's higher income levels, and welfare services to the poor.

The Cultural Centre 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, resolving potential disagreements, and representing women in and outside Kuwait. The Union is supported by the Government but the Cultural Centre's refusal to join, 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 vote and run for office, to vote and hold a cabinet position.17

As Nuriya al-Salimi writes, Egyptian women's experience from the beginning of their struggle led by Hoda Sha'aw'i was similar to that of Kuwaiti women: “Here in Kuwait, it is as if history is repeating itself after eight decades, but with a difference.” The same means that were used then are used now in Kuwait. The personal status law is still enforced by the police, and in restricting arbitrary divorce. Now divorce is only legal before a judge.16

The Cultural Centre 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, resolving potential disagreements, and representing women in and outside Kuwait. The Union is supported by the Government but the Cultural Centre's refusal to join, and its disregard for women's claims, makes the Union just another society whose activities and orientations resemble those of its member societies.
June debacle in making her reconsider the activities of in 1924.” This writer underlines the effect of the 1967 throw off the shackles of charity.”

The first point in this new line of thinking is for Kuwaiti women’s societies to ping, and endless other stupidities… The first point in this

women’s journey also started with women’s associations 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. 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.

Nuria 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-Qurashya Society, one of the most important pillars in advocating women rights.
4. The limited experience of new societies such as Nadi-Falat.
5. The absence of proper planning that would have enabled the societies to become influential lobbying bodies.
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, however, makes 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 repressed, is firmly suppressed by the authorities and clerics. 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 worked through the Supreme Council of Family Affairs, presided over by the Crown Prince’s wife. Founded by a royal decree in 1996 (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 understand better the socio-cultural needs and the laws to encourage women’s right to participate in leadership roles and decision-making positions, to enhance the role of civil society and to enable it to implement women-related programs.

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 and 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.

Female candidates were greatly opposed by this conservative society, as their participation in elections was deemed too huge a leap for Qatar 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 obstacles to 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 government institutions rather than NGOs. They are mostly presided over by the ruler’s wives or relatives.

The Nahdat Al-Ma’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-No’iya Society’s footsteps in order to achieve their common goal of improving women’s situation and status.”

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 material and spiritual conditions, and at organizing 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. The activities of the Union’s departments 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 Falah, 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 Zanbar.

With the establishment of a modern state in the Sultanate 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 November 23, 1970, in the capital Muscat officially registered in 1972), and the last one was founded in 1994 in Khub (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 under-

ENDNOTES
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 the national states. In brief, they have been viewed as a new generation of NGOs in facing national crises, as in Palestine or Algeria, through the decentralization. I will argue, however, that NGOs/social movements should be seen as part of a world history of capitalism....

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through NGOs and specialist foundations, but with the rise of democracy promotion, USAID is becoming increasingly involved in such initiatives. This has given rise to concern that too many US organizations have said 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 concept 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 everyday life and thus challenging the deep-rooted codes of social interaction within civil society’ (Keane 1988:12). It is also argued that the notion of the Third World as opposed to the ‘advanced’ countries, struggles take place between two clearly demarcated camps, i.e., the ruling class and the people, obscures the multiplicity of antagonisms and identities existing in any country ‘Third World’ or not (Ladurie and Mouffe 1987:166). Such struggles over resources and identities are fought along lines of class, religion, and gender. The ‘people’ does not represent a homogeneous entity, nor does ‘domination’, since it is not significantly different in non-industrialized countries from countries that are economically and socially powerful. Among such countries, the struggle between domination and capitalist exploitation in Arab societies such as Egypt are urban margins, for instance peasants, Islamists, moderate Muslims, 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 the distribution of resources that is so central to social movements, and because actions that are in the interests of “pure” or exclusive categories but tend to shift and intersect (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 Arab world there is confusion 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 is the Organizations 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 $60 million to $1 billion at current prices (OECD 1994). The 176 international NGOs of 1909 had blossomed by 1993 into 28,000. Similarly, the numbers of NGOs in underdeveloped 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-90’s (Bishara 1996). In Palestine the number had reached 5,000 by 1996, 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 from state to social provision and social entitlements due to structural adjustment policies imposed on most Third World countries by the World Bank and the IMF (Onweid 1994:45).

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 concern 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 corrupting effect, but thanks to the impetus of foreign loans and donor support, the rigidities and limitations of state power did not impede rapid economic growth. Thus we cannot be certain of the relationship between political governance, 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 plights 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 Colombia 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 legislation and programs designed to undermine the independence of these institutions, and weaken their capacity to create the grass-roots support needed to sustain their ‘cultural’ 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 spilled out by the American Administration by its build-up of forces to bring about ‘regime change’ in Iraq. According to the US’s Administration, the current US administration views the many ill’s 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 Eastern 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 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 skepticism in Cairo. According to 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 public discourse and attempts to change and access to new trends in these movements.

The West/East binary is an old one that has been articulated by some Arab feminists who believed that what the colonizers did to the colonized cut across cultural, social and political contexts”. She adds, “It never meant that there is only one path for emancipating women - adopting Western models” (quoted in Abu-Lughod 1998:16).

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, 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 woman’s movements from the last century will shed light on new trends in these movements.

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in Egypt, Palestine and also on other Third World coun-
tries 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 lim-
its the participation of women at the local level to ‘their
organization’. ‘NGOization’ also limits the struggle for
national causes to ‘projects’ geared to priorities set by
an international discourse without diversity, and frag-
ments 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 ear-
tlier 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 member-
ships 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
cannot help but be surprised. The prevailing structure
of NGOs is formed of a board of between seven to 20
members, and a highly qualified professional and admin-
istrative staff for better communications with donors.
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
them 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 administra-
tions were asked why this was so, they answered that
they were part of this society, they knew it, and could
indeed 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 this budget is distributed. According to the legal
governance of the surveyed NGOs was “a mirror reflec-
tion of the Palestinian political system based on individ-
ual decision-making, patronage and clientelism”, and the
lack of rules organizing internal relations in the orga-
nization. In some cases a union dispute erupted, and
was settled in a “way very far away from the rule of law
(Shalabi 2001: 134).

The highly professional qualities required of administra-
tive staff for better communications with donors may not
directly affect the links between an NGO and local con-
stituencies, 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 mobiliz-
ing the masses, and was based in their skills in building
relationships 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 forma-
tions 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 living, time-consuming effort in
networking and organizing. These cadres knew their con-
stituency on a personal level, and communication
depended on face-to-face human contact. But NGOs depend
mainly on modern communication media - 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 ‘tar-
get 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 NGO activities, and it also jeopardizes the continuity of
the issue defended.

With NGOs, the targeting policy is always localized,
literal and implemented by professionals hired by the orga-
nizations to do the ‘job’ which makes it different from the
‘mission’ based on the conviction and voluntarism of
cadres in the grassroots organizations. Their structure
and methods do not help NGOs to act as a mobilizing,
organizing formation when working for claims to rights
or changes; most NGOs do not in any case set organiza-
tion or mobilization as a goal. Assessing Algerian
women’s NGOs, El-Dine Ibrahim notes that by law
of 1984, Lazreg attributed to it the fact that women
hung by the thread of the state’s moral obligation to
their organization. Al-Shafiq-Ghanem, an independent, 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 rela-
tions 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 move-
ments; not because movements are always violent or
terme, 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 con-
text, we have to ask first, what is a ‘women’s movement’
and is how can we distinguish it from ‘women in move-
ment’ action. Issues related to political and civil
rights are usually seen as ‘more political’ than issues relat-
ed 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 necessarily independent of power and
dependency on the local and national levels. This creates a
competitive dynamic between NGO directors that makes it
difficult 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 char-
nable societies and ‘grass roots’ organizations. NGO lead-
ers, 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 neces-
sary pre-requisite for political change and economic
progress. They are also extremely sceptical about the abil-
ity and willingness of any regime truly to reform itself.
Under such conditions, the ‘top-down’ approach may sim-
larly preclude the NGOization of the Arab Women’s
Movements.
Here one should raise the question: are Arab governments willingness to introduce reforms? Do they act to defend 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 Westernized. 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.

ENDNOTES

In the middle of a recent debate in Egypt onkhul's women's rights 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?
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 point out 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 political activities permitted nor 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 ‘movement’ does not formally exist, or is not acknowledged in its various forms in Saudi Arabia, for example, although there is no ‘movement’ 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 governmental initiatives; but most of them were a response to civil demands 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.

The value of these two official decrees becomes clearer when we keep in mind 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 literacy from within the blacked-out value system of Islam was one of the movement’s 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 Mohammad, 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 that the area 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 the ideas and of certain ideal beliefs. It is 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 economic backgrounds. This cannot be done unless the movement tries faithfully to link itself with the urgent issues and real needs of women in specific Arab environments.

Despite the overwhelming trend towards global- ization, 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, yet it would be a false conclusion. It seems to me that this saying is very applicable to those who criticize the 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 the rights and duties of women. The same is true in relation to women’s right to employment.

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 the rights and duties of women. The same is true in relation to women’s right to employment.

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 false conclusion. It seems to me that 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 the ideas and of certain ideal beliefs. It is 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 economic backgrounds. This cannot be done unless the movement tries faithfully to link itself with the urgent issues and real needs of women in specific Arab environments.

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There is a whole historical passage of women’s legal status in Islam that must be revisited and re-read in relation to the contemporary needs of women.
4. This also is a controversial question. On one hand, there are those who believe 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 real 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 direc-

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spread roots at a popular level. In my opinion, if elitist, the movements are not which could 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 consider-

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 relat-

ed to the self-criticism that is badly needed within the overall movement. Unfortunately, women’s issues in non-Arabic speaking minori-

ties have been neglected for a long while as a result of political linkages between the Arab women’s movement and the political project of national liberation. In my opinion, it is time that the movement starts to realize the importance of its own independence. However this is not achievable from being left alone on a 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 ‘women question’ as a card in political manoeuvring, 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 that we have failed to address the hetero-

geneity 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

endnote


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1. The Arab women’s movements have been most successful in improving women’s roles and situations in the public sphere 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 pri-

vate sphere.

The greatest failure, in my view, has been not to build on previous achievements, and not to build effective alliances with other social groups within a spec-

cific 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 discrimina-

tion, and aside from general problems related to poverty and wars, they are facing 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 existing 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, but, in many non-western countries. Thirdly, all sorts of ideas and movements emerged in the West, ranging from the nation state to Marxism thought. What is wrong with appropriating the idealities of politics and translating them into one’s specific social, cultural, economic and political realities? The history of human beings 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, 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, and 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 antibiblical 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. 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 cooperation with women in the East as well as ‘South’. One of the most powerful arguments in countering the common accusation of ‘imitating’ western models 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 prevailing 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. 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 as 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 methodologies. 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 of their activism, but it becomes problematic if the job becomes the goal in and of itself.
dominated Sudan in 1958-64, 1969-85 and the current region, is increasingly an international world, where they are able to mobilize religious collectivities by - amongst other things - empha-
sizing 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 spe-
cific notions of ‘womanhood’ and to reproduce 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 ‘positions 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 orga-
nized around a transformative gender agenda, then that is another story.

5. There should be more struggle towards chang-
ing personal status laws but this should not con-
stitute 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. However, there are many parallels in experience between 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 useful in the context of the Arab region. I will also be indebted to an increasingly influential cur-
rent in feminism, 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 ‘offi-
cial’ 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 increas-
ingly 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 the lack of democracy and transparency in the mainstream women’s movement. In the context of the Sudanese women’s movement, the Cairo based ‘Maan’ (a women’s work group), for exam-
ple, 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 compli-
cated. It is often criticized that women’s groups in both the Arab world and in India have different levels of success in these areas depending - amongst other factors - on the dominant cultural beliefs in a society, recep-
tiveness 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.

There is always a tendency to look at various cul-

tures as if they were not part of a single entity. It is important to untie the links between elements of local cultures that are contradictory to women’s goals and reclaim 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 has already been taken 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-colo-
nial state and its attempts to impose a singular Arab and Islamic identity on a multi-ethnic, multi-
cultural society, 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 orga-
nization of women in Southern Sudan for exam-
ple, 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 marginalized 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 Gendered Issue” . Having said that, I believe that there are also many common issues on which Arab women’s groups could work together towards understanding the complicated situation in the Arab region and its location in relation to the international system.

(12. not answered.)

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 from 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 sometimes to use these very important issues to discredit feminist groups is equally important.

As is the case with other Third World women’s movements, especially human rights 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 ‘neopatriarchial’ 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

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Translated from Arabic by Lynn Malouf

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 discontinuities between specific political contexts and regimes, as well as the 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, Pakistan). 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 in the 2002 general election. In Kuwait for example, Arab women are still struggling for this right. They have also achieved changes in the judicial sphere (divorce registry code) in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco. A number of Arab women’s movements have also been active in 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 to strengthening the resistance of Palestinian women. The unifying tool, the women’s mass 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 Arab women against the expected American invasion, or Arab 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, we can also 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 women 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 situations and needs. 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.

Shiam Barghouthi
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.

2. 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 ‘women issue’ as a political and ideological factor that other social and political actors have to take into consideration, and not neglect.

3. 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.

4. 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 ever contested the Arab nationalist, socialist and unionist movements for coming under Western influence. Western feminism is for only model that Arab women have so far. They have no other identities or models in the sense of a struggle for equality and absolute liberation of women regarding their choices in daily life. There is indeed 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 basic rights (education, work, judicial and civil equality, representation, etc.), defying 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...

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In charge of courses at the University of Algiers, Faculty of Political Science and Information. A specialist in journalism, women and politics; author of several studies (see Bibliography). Translated from French by Lynn Malouf

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, i.e. 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 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 convergence within Arab women’s movements, so as to transform them into influential social movements.

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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...
1. 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. I am not a specialist in predicting the future. The Arab feminist movements have not had any future outside pluralism and democracy. This is a mirroring 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 help women to build itself a bit more, and to deepen its claims.

5. 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.

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 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 Earth, and the 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 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 revo-

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 agen-
das; 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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Munira Fakhro: PhD Columbia University (1987), in social policy plan-

ning and administration. Visiting Scholar at Columbia and Harvard Universities. Present post: Assistant Professor at the University of Bahrain. Has published three books and many articles on women in the Gulf. Mu

1. The Arab women’s movement cannot be se-

parated from political movements and social lib-

eration movements. Egypt was in the lead, hav-
ing started its movement towards moderniza-

tion in the 19th century, earlier than any other Ar-

ab 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 estab-

lished 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 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, especial-

ly 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 cul-
tural 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 start-
ed at the end of the 19th century when many religious scholars such as Jamaluddin Al-Afghani, Mohammad Abdo and Rifâ’a al-Tahtawi were exposed to Western ideas, and started question-
ing certain religious practices in what we consid-
er today as a beginning of religious reform. With

the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 war, com-
bined 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 inter-
est 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 indi-

vidual Muslim countries, and the pace of devel-

opment that each has reached. For example Turkey, a Muslim country, has recently passed a Personal Status law similar to any in Europe. M

women the most advanced personal law

Ulumin women there are ruled by the same civil code that governs all citizens. While Arab

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uslim countries, they also should have strong ties with Western women’s movements and inter-
national human rights movements, so as to adopt laws suited to modernity.

7. Women from other classes of society are seek-
ing equality too, especially when they face di-
vorce 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 ele-

ments 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 organi-

zations individuals learn how to practice democ-

racy, 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-account-

ability and authoritarianism. However, we are witnessing today an improvement in handling the relationship in most parts of the Arab world, because of a growing individual aware-

ness of international developments. Modern technologies such as Internet used by Arab organiza-

tions 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 share the same values. The dictatorship create new programs for young people, and to attract different segments of society. In addition, they should put more efforts into introd-

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 lan-

guage. 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

Women’s movements are an essential part of civil society, which is considered the pillar of democracy. 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 many of the Gulf countries still have no family law at all, except for Kuwait, which follows the Sharia 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.

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, 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 Menissi 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 parlia-

ment and reach legislative power. Being a mem-

ber of parliament is in itself an achievement, opening many doors to women leaders such as making laws that serve women and the family.

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 jihad and fish. Since India is a secular country, M

Marinu Fakhro: 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.

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gender equality into the curriculum of all schools to reach the new generation and change their attitudes and values.

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guage. 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 social reform. 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 (2000), 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 remains unchanged. 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 in 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 Arab 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.

Suad el-Gedy:
Director of the Women’s Forum for Research and Training, Taez, Yemen.

Suad el-Gedy: It is good that women are participating in social and developmental efforts but we should not identify the women’s movement with these efforts.

Translated from Arabic by Lynn Maalouf

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

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 directions 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 experiences 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 the educated women. This was 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 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 in the fight 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,
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 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 to be a woman. 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 or at least 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 concerning 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 Western 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 then anything 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 leadership that came from the upper and 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 strength 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. The 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 movement is a 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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Rana Ahmed Hussein:
Reporter for The Jordan Times English daily, and human rights activist.

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 to 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 khulâa 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 take action. This is why they fight 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 have directed donations to provide 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 aceptance of an “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 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 that 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 fundamentalism in all religions. Oppressive regimes and the media in some countries contribute to this phenomenon. It is easy, lack of training what people see, and preventing them from expressing their feelings and thoughts, or taking their own decisions. Fundamentalists 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 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 and girls 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 they have different 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 another one at another organization, or start a new organization. As I said before, this restricts diversity within organizations, and restricts opportunities and ideas to a single person. We only need to look at the situation in the Arab world, and see how far we have 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.

11. I believe that UN agencies, especially UNIFEM, have played a vital role in developing Arab women’s societies, exposing many of the problems and bringing them to various audiences. 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 study and help families to 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.

12. I believe that UN agencies, especially UNIFEM, have played a vital role in developing Arab women’s societies, exposing many of the problems and bringing them to various audiences. 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 study and help families to 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
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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.

2. 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 not free from the anxieties of many women, 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. With 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 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 intellectual, 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 families 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 were 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; there are many movements with different 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 and 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 returns to the movement itself. If it stays stiff 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 room for 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
be active, they would have to open up to non-Arab, Islamic women movements. This would enable them to take advantage of the latter’s experiences, and to get out of the shabby situation they find themselves in, with regards 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, it is very important to note that women’s organizations in Iran made the priority reality surrounding them, and to 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 the approach that one would take if the problems were one, and their issues are similar among the majority and the minority, whether this is the case in our own society, or any other. I believe that minorities often suffer from isolation and discrimination. I believe that if women in rural areas are conscious that they must be a whole, or if there is an amendment of the laws, 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 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 are different 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 that we adopt what emerges from international organizations, so that we should adopt it when it suits our societies and helps our women improve their status, but firmly refuse it when it contradicts our values, such as the cultural differences 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. This is very important because we need to spread the word of women’s struggle to all social classes: when a woman is under the pressure of poverty and illiteracy, she does not 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 life in their respective countries. In all parts of the world, all parties, whether loyalist or opposition-ist, have leaders who are not elected and, as such, they practice 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.

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.

Zeinab Joma’a

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1. a) Achievements always have multiple sources of input. The achievements of the Arab women’s movements have been much greater than 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 generally 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.

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.

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

Two decades have passed since the Arab women's movement first took shape and surfaced on the global political agenda along with women's rights in other parts of the world. The movement has grown in size and strength, and its key demands have been acknowledged by the international community. The Arab women's movement has justified its legitimacy and relevance on the international stage. This growth and recognition have not been without obstacles and challenges. Western feminism, which is a product of specific cultural and historical circumstances, presents a unique perspective.

First, the Arab women's movement is a product of a century-old history and has its own history, which has long been in conversation with Western feminism. 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 Western feminism developed with a gaze—a gaze on the East. For better or for worse, Western feminism, in many ways, defined itself in relation to the Third World woman as “other.” As Al-Hana'a 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. Some have asked why those same conserva-
tive 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 various kinds of work. It cannot be allowed to preempt constructive dialogue and engagements across state boundaries.

Religious fundamentalism is spreading worldwide. And worldwide, it has a political arm. And worldwide, it has made inroads into state power. One has only to look at the religious right in the United States 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. The struggle to define its enemy and naturalize it.

That said, it is important to look at the specificity 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; and the 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 femininity in 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 embraced itself, political movements religious revivalism has either compromised women’s emancipation or left many concerned about the constraints packaged with the liber-
ties. While in principle there should be room for women’s emancipation within religious frame-
works, 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 and used in terms of their familial roles (deemed sub-
ordinate), and their control by patriarchal reli-
gious institutions.

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, one superpower, those outside the arena of power have been given two options – align with the power center or align with the de-
centered. Non-alignment was an illusion, the 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. That said, it is important to look at the specificities of the rise of religious fundamentalism in the Arab region. Where it differed was in countries with aggressive state-sponsored women’s federations. In principle, there should be room for women’s emancipation within religious frameworks. They seem to adopt the illusion that technology is innocent of culture. The assertion of cultural purity is a strategy for control over various kinds of work. It cannot be allowed to preempt constructive dialogue and engagements across state boundaries.

2. First, the Arab women’s movement is a product of a century-old history and has its own history, which has long been in conversation with Western feminism. 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 for worse, Western feminism, in many ways, defined itself in relation to the Third World woman as “other.” As Al-Hana’a Ong has pointed out, no category of Third World women has figured as large in the Western feminist imagination as Arab and Muslim women.

Interviews

We live in a global and globalizing world in which ideas as well as commodities and people travel.

Suad Joseph

How the family is to be addressed in Arab soci-
eties 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 of the movement and is one of monumental importance. Law stands against these solidarities as the devolution of family law to the communities. In some countries, often creates different legal realities for women of different religious sects. It is a chal-

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/racial/gender differences between Western femi-
nists. The term feminism is a strategic insertion on behalf of a cause. As long as we do not col-
lapse all Arab women into a homogeneous cate-

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 helped Arab women gain attention and, for face-saving purposes, claim victories on behalf of women’s rights. Second, the Decade pro-
vided an arena, a set of fora for networking and developing bodies of knowledge about the con-
ditions of women. Third, the UN Decade was the backdrop for various internal debates in 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 there-

We live in a global and globalizing world in which ideas as well as commodities and people travel.
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 is that 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 more 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.

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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 liberalists, 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 unitary women's movement 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 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 democratization of the organizations.
- The sense 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.

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 that the difference 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 and 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 adapt more creative practices instead of acting like an oppressive regime.

In order to be able to improve the women's organizations/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 to bring them on board, and to create a sense of belonging to the movement amongst them. This would definitely help the movement to expand 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.

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 the tools 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

Another example of cooperation is the Sudan National Women's Congress, 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.

(Vol. 2, No. 100 Winter 2003)\n
Women at the grassroots are used as members without being consulted.
Valentine Moghadam:

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

Islamic fundamentalism is on the wane in most of the Arab region as a major oppositional political movement.

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 Tunisian feminists, and the 'social dialogue' with the state in which Moroccan feminists participated.

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 failures of economic development, and the emergence of new social groups). First, there is no evidence that the charge is justified. First, there is no evidence that the charge is justified. First, there is no evidence that the charge is justified.
In some countries, however, the women's movement has raised public awareness about women's rights and gender relations in very visible ways—e.g., 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. At the same time, there is a kind of 'Arab idiom' that is inevitable, given the region's history and culture. For example, Arab feminism is 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 movements to international feminist ideas 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 them with the 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 DAWM, WUWMEL, 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 Sanaa Talib's review of Women@Internet in this issue.

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Emily Naffa: Jordanian activist. Presently member of the Executive Board of the General Union of Voluntary Societies (Jordan).

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 shock the deep structural and cultural roots of legislative and political decision-making bodies, so as to bring about real change in the laws needed 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 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.

5. Yes. Much needs to be done to obtain progress in family legislation. Recent 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 stand 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 in order to ensure the continuity of, and for the sake of, the movement. Most of the leaders and the active members of the Arab women's movements have been victims of non-democratic measures practiced against those of the Western 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 movement is demanding the end of all discrimination and inequality. Therefore they must adopt a position against discrimination against all for equality. 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 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 women at various levels in the different social sectors, and to create the image of successful working women. It has also increased the number of women's organizations working for the advancement of women in the political, economic, and social fields.

14. Many obstacles are still in the way. 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.

Zoya Rouhana: Founder and director of the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women.

Translated from Arabic by Lynn Malouf

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 throughout 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 living their existence on society, and in crystallizing certain women's issues. As a result of this, most Arab states have admitted the necessity of redressing elements that discriminate against women in their laws by ratifying the UN Convention to remove these elements. 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 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; and 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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Zoya Rouhana: 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 subordination and domination 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 pertained to specific societies only, or that take on different aspects in different countries, such as so-called 'honour 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 changes in society, and the deterioration in living conditions, besides the military defeats the Arab world has suffered in its wars against Israel. All these have moved many Arab states to the movement of the Arab masses, while their democratic 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 regimes, but are no less repressive than them. The main problem for the women's movements is that 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 Arab societies, should be centered. It should also be a priority of Human Rights organizations, and all those calling for democratic change. How can we call for democratic institutions without establishing the bases of democracy inside the family, which constitutes the nucleus of the social system? The personal status laws in most societies 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 not been able to reach; and this is why the West became for some an example to follow. But this does not eliminate the need to open 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 women's 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, i.e. 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; they are prevalent in many NGOs, parties and associations of civil society. The weakness of democratic practices and the absence of their institutions 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 civil society, including women's associations. However, this does not excuse civil 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 ensuing 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 awareness is increasing 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 women's significant experiences of women's movements in the East, as well as in Latin America.

10. I do not think that 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 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 hope that the new researchers will tackle issues that we 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 more involved at this stage, as we still need to remove the obstacles and the absence of accountability is a problem in civil society. By engaging in this trend 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 underlining 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.

7. 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.

8. 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 to work 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 the non-Arabic 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 ‘democratising’ factor; a factor which could keep the balance between religious extremists and the state. Linguistic rights are being understood as part of other human rights, and militancy to obtain them is part of the overall democratic project in Morocco. I read this development as a continuation of the type of struggle which the women’s movements have been engaged in. However, it also problematizes the term ‘Arab’ in Morroco 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!

Camillia El-Sohl:
Socio-economist/Independent international development consultant covering a number of areas where poverty and gender are cross-cutting issues. Consultant experience in the Arab region and beyond. Authored and edited a number of books and articles on women.

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 equality 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-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 remind that Western feminism is generally opposed in the Arab region as being anti-familial. 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 ‘the other’. Whether one is Arab or not is not the issue; we need to be mainly responsible for the care of children and family. So gender/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 specifics 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 revulsion 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 on state social and welfare services (because of the impact of ‘structural adjustment’/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, region, 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 which make base affilia-tions. However, we need to remember the heterogeneous of women, their interests and agen-das.

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 male support. But then look at the difficulty of 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’ (qawijaya); 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 women (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 diverse variables involved. It is also important 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 some negative 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 agencies that I know of who have 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 accountability for gender mainstreaming among UN 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.

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 should ignore the ‘women’s movement’ which provides the terrain for any such strategy) or put in the way of such cooperation; i.e., 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.

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

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 challenge: 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: Where has X country a constitution? Does the constitution affirm equally the rights of women? Is there a national anti-discrimination code? 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. Therefore, in the present article we tried to select a number of ‘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 lots of women’s organizations. But this proved impossible, either because of their not being in many countries (e.g. Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco), or because we were unable to establish contact with some countries (e.g. 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 say how accurate our information on Gender Monitoring and Action is, but we hope our questions will help local activists to send us their corrections, as well as encourage new researchers to enter this field.

We urge 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) failed 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 a finished product, but merely 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, age average at marriage, etc., across countries yields some significant correlations as well as some surprising results.

We acknowledge our indebtedness to ESCWA’s country profiles, the Emlyc Islamic Family Law website, Macmag-Gip’s project on Nationality Laws, and UNDP’s Pogo. 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.

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- 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%.
Algeria


2. Nationality law: gender discrimination? Yes.2

3. International resolutions:
   a) CEDAW: Yes (May 1996).3
   b) ILO Conventions:
      i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
      ii) Discrimination in 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

5. Political rights:
   a) Right to vote? Yes (1962).7
   b) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes (1962).8
   ii) Percentage of women in parliament: 3.4% (lower house), 5.6% (upper house).9

6. The state:
   a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.11
   b) In which sectors? Civil service, armed forces.12
   c) Heads of government departments: Yes.13
   d) Section(s) of government concerned with women’s issues: The Standing Committee of the Ministry of National Solidarity and the Family.14

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? Yes.15
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.16
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes.17
   d) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? No.18

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 57/76.2%.
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 104/114%; secondary level 67/66% (2000); tertiary level: ndf.
   c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 45% of school teachers are women. In 1995 there were 20 women university teachers for every 100 men.19

9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: 29.5%.20
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
      ii) 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): 71.0/68.1 years (2000).22
      ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 27.6 years.23
      iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 220 per 100,000 births (1985-99).24
   b) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes.25
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.26
      c) Female genital mutilation? Yes, in southern Algeria.27
      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 1996.28

11. Culture:
   a) Do women work in the media - print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes.29
   b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.30

ENDNOTES
4. Art. 2, Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 15 paragraph 1, Art. 16 and Art. 29.
8. Ibid.
10. Ig: travel: women under 19 years cannot travel abroad without father’s or husband’s permission (this law is not generally observed).
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
Bahrain

3. International Resolutions:  
a) CEDAW: Yes (18 June 2002).  
i) With reservations? Yes.  
b) ILO Conventions:  
i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No 100), 1951: No.  
4. Legal system:  
a) Women's participation:  
1) Do women sit on local councils? ndf.  
2) In mixed government councils? ndf.  
3) Heads of government departments: None.  
4) Percentage of women in parliament? No parliament.  
5) Women in the cabinet: No.  
6. The state:  
a) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.  
1) 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.  
7. Gender Monitoring and Action:  
1) Is this council independent? Yes.  
2) Is it responsible for coordinating government programs and policies to ensure the rights of women? Yes.  
b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.  
c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.  
8. Education:  
a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 82.6/90.9%.  
1) Is female literacy increasing? Yes.  
b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: at primary level 104/104%; secondary level 98/89%; tertiary level: 32/20% (2000).  
c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 73% of primary school teachers were women in 2000. 60.9% of employees in the Ministry of Education are women.  
9. The economy:  
a) Female economic activity rate: 33.5%.  
1) Are females allowed to own and manage property? Yes.  
b) Economic rights:  
1) To own property? Yes.  
2) To own and manage businesses? Yes.  
3) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own names? ndf.  
4) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.  
c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.  
10. Health:  
a) Vital statistics:  
1) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.0/71.6 years (2000).  
2) Average age of women at first marriage: 50% of women married before the age of 20 in 1991.  
3) Mortality rate in childbirth: 46 per 100,000 births.  
b) Reproductive rights:  
1) Is contraception legal? Yes.  
2) Is abortion legal? Yes.  
3) Is abortion on request legal? Yes.  
4) Do women have equal access to family planning services? Yes.  
5) Is there access to reproductive health care? Yes.  
6) Is there access to ante-natal care? Yes.  
7) Is there access to post-natal care? Yes.  
8) Is there access to emergency obstetric care? Yes.  
9) Is the right to refuse medical treatment and abortion? Yes.  
10) Is there a right to privacy? Yes.  
c) Reproductive rights for migrants: ndf.  
11. Culture:  
b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.  
c) Female genital mutilation? Not sure.  
d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.  
ENDNOTES  
3. Article 2, Article 9 paragraph 2, Article 15 paragraph 4, Article 16 and Article 29 paragraph 1: http://www.law.emory.edu/ifl/index2.html  
7. Laws vary according to Sunni or Shi’a interpretations: http://www.escwa.org/bldivision/social/profile/bahrain/main.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-Ra’ia, 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.  
14. Ibid.  
20. Ibid.  
31. Al-Safir.  
32. Ibid.  
33. Ibid.  
34. Ibid.  
35. Ibid.
Comoros


3. International resolutions
   a) CEDAW: No.
   b) ILO Conventions:
      i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes

4. Legal system
   a) Women’s participation:
      i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
      ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.
      iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women’s issues: No.
   b) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.
      i) In which sectors? ndf.
      ii) Heads of government departments: Yes.
      iii) Percentage of women in parliament? None.
      iv) Women in the cabinet? Yes.

5. Political rights:
   i) Right to vote? Yes (1956).
   ii) Stand as candidates for election? Yes.
   iii) Percentage of women in parliament? None.
   iv) Women in the cabinet? Yes.

6. The state:
   a) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? No.
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? No.
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes.

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 48.7/63.2%.
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 70/82%: secondary level 21/27%; tertiary level 1/1% (2000).
   c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 26% of primary school teachers in 2000 were women.

9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: 62.5%.
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.
      ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.
      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).
        ii) Average age of women at first marriage: less than 20 years (1990).
        iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: ndf.
    b) Reproductive rights:
        i) Is contraception legal? Yes.
        ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.
    c) Female genital mutilation? No.
    d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. Culture:
    b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES
4. Ibid.
6. 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://www.cia.gov/country-guide-study/comoros.comoros26.html
7. To save the mother’s life or preserve her health: http://www.prb.org/pdf/Comoros_Eng.pdf
9. Ibid.
11. http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm
14. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
19. WIDNET: Women in Development NetWork
21. To save the mother’s life or preserve her health: http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm
Djibouti


2. Nationality law: gender discrimination? No.2

3. International resolutions:
   a) CEDAW: Yes. (Dec. 1998).3
   b) ILO Conventions:
      i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.4
      ii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.5
      iii) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.4
      iv) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.5

4. Legal system:
   a) Women’s participation: ndf.
   b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.6
   c) Family law:
      i) Religious.7
      ii) Recent changes? ndf.

5. Political rights:
   a) Right to vote? Yes (1946).8
   b) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.9
   c) Percentage of women in parliament? None.10
   d) Women in the Cabinet? Yes.11

6. The state:
   a) Employment in the state apparatus: ndf.
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.12
   c) NGO’s that monitors women’s situation? Yes.13

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? Yes.14
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.15

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 54.4/76.2%.16
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 32/46%, secondary level 13/19% (2000); tertiary level (no universities).17
   c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 28% of primary school teachers and 22% of secondary teachers were women in 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? 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).20
        ii) Average age of women at first marriage: less than 20 years (1990).21
        iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: ndf.
    b) Reproductive rights:
        i) Is contraception legal? Yes.22
        ii) Is abortion legal? Yes in limited cases.23
    c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.24
    d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

11. Culture:
    b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES

4. Except if there is conflict with Islamic law: http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/Djibouti/gender.html
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Women are not permitted to travel without the permission of an adult male relative: http://undp-pogar.org/countries/djibouti/gender.html
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. 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/mindex.html
16. Ibid.
17. http://www.weds.org/monitoring/survey.htm
18. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
26. Only to save the life of the mother: http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world/02.htm
27. An estimated 95% of women of all ethnic groups are infibulated, though a Penal Code in 1994 outlawed FGM.
5. Political rights
   (a) Right to vote? Yes (1956).19
   (b) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.20
   (ii) Percentage of women in parliament? 2.4% (lower house).21
   (iii) Women in the Cabinet? Yes, two (2002).22

6. The state:
   (a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.23
   (b) In which sectors? Administration, municipalities, police.24
   (c) Heads of government departments: Yes.25
   (d) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The General Department of Women's Affairs of the Ministry of Social Affairs.26

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   (a) National Council of Women? The National Committee on Women.27
   (b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.28
   (c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.29

8. Education:
   (a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 43.8/66.6%.30
   (b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 96/104% (2000); secondary level 78/84% (2002); tertiary level: n/d.31
   (c) Distribution of mf 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.32

9. The economy:
   (a) Female economic activity rate: 35%.33
   (b) Economic rights:
      (i) To ownership of property? Yes.34
      (ii) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? n/d.35
      (iii) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? n/d.36
      (iv) To receive public assistance? Yes.37
   (c) Percentage of female-headed households: 22% in 1991.38

10. Health:
    (a) Vital statistics:
        (i) Life expectancy (f/m): 68.8/65.7 years (2000).39
        (ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 21.4 years (1980-90).40
    (b) Maternal mortality rate in childbirth: 170 per 100,000 births (1985-99).41
    (b) Reproductive rights:
        (i) To contraception legal? Yes.42
        (ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in special cases.43
    (c) Female genital mutilation? Yes, Estimated prevalence 97%.44
    (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.45

ENDNOTES
2. Art. 6. Ibid.
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.athor.com/Category/Women/profiles/egypt_women.htm
15. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
25. To save the life of the mother, but with further restrictions http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world2.htm
29. Ibid.
32. 2002/576/eq22.htm
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
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.
41. Ibid.
42. Art. 6: Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. The state also had a modest amount of control over women's religious and family rights. Women also had the right to work outside the home. In 1996, 6.1% of women employed in government occupational level posts, i.e. as ministers, vice ministers and parliamentary secretaries: United Nations Development Programme (2000) Human Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World: New York: Oxford University Press.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. 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.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
61. In 2002, 53% of faculty in universities were female.32
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid.
105. Ibid.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid.
7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? The National Committee of Women.\textsuperscript{11}
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.\textsuperscript{16}
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes.\textsuperscript{15}

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 43/64% (1998).\textsuperscript{16}
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 80/96%; secondary level 14/25%; tertiary level, 9/17% (2000).\textsuperscript{17}
   c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 72% of primary school teachers and 57% of secondary school teachers were women (2000).\textsuperscript{14}

9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: ndf.
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.\textsuperscript{19}
      ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{21}
      ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 22.3 years (early 1990s).\textsuperscript{22}
      iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 310 per 100,000 births.\textsuperscript{23}
   b) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes.\textsuperscript{24}
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{26}
   b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.\textsuperscript{27}

ENDNOTES


3. International resolutions:
   a) CEDAW: Yes (13 Aug. 1986).\textsuperscript{2}
      i) With reservations? Yes.\textsuperscript{3}
   b) ILO Conventions:
      i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No 100), 1951: Yes.\textsuperscript{4}
   c) Family law:
      i) Codified, religious-based? Yes.\textsuperscript{5}
      ii) Recent changes? Yes, several in 1970s.\textsuperscript{6}

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.\textsuperscript{7}
      i) Right to raise cases? Yes.\textsuperscript{8}
      ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.\textsuperscript{9}
      iii) Judges? Yes.\textsuperscript{10}
      iv) Number of women judges: ndf.
   b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.\textsuperscript{11}
   c) Family law:
      i) Codified, religious-based? Yes.\textsuperscript{12}
      ii) Recent changes? Yes, several in 1970s.\textsuperscript{13}

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 43/64% (1998).\textsuperscript{16}
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 80/96%; secondary level 14/25%; tertiary level, 9/17% (2000).\textsuperscript{17}
   c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 72% of primary school teachers and 57% of secondary school teachers were women (2000).\textsuperscript{14}

9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: ndf.
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.\textsuperscript{19}
      ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{21}
      ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 22.3 years (early 1990s).\textsuperscript{22}
      iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 310 per 100,000 births.\textsuperscript{23}
   b) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes.\textsuperscript{24}
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{26}
   b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.\textsuperscript{27}
5. Political rights:
   b) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.12
   c) Percentage of women in parliament? 1.3% (lower house); 7.5% (upper house).13
   d) Women in the Cabinet? Yes.14

6. The state:
   a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.15
   b) In which sector? The civil service, police, armed forces.16
   i) Heads of government departments? Yes.17
   ii) 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.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: 83.9/95.1%.21
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 69.68%; secondary level 61.85% (2000); tertiary level: ndf.
   c) Distribution of %f in the teaching profession: 60% 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).22

9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: 26.6%.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 names? ndf.
      iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.
   c) Percentage of female-headed households: 6.1% in 1991.26

10. Health:
   a) Vital statistics:
      i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.8/69.1 years (2000).27
      ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 23.7 years (1994).28
      iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 41 per 100,000 births (1985-1999).29
   b) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes.30
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.31
   c) Female genital mutilation? No.32

ENDNOTES
4. Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 15 paragraph 4, Art. 16 paragraph 1c, d. g; http://www.ircw-ap.org/conf/Reservations.html
7. Ibd.
8. Ibid.
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/drl/hrp/2001/neara/6264.html
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. 52.6% of married women use contraception: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. (1999).
34. To save the life of the mother or preserve her health. Restricted interpretation: http://www.pregnantpause.org/index.php
37. 5% of editors-in-chief and 12.6% of all journalists were women. Women and Men in Jordan: A Statistical Portrait, New York: United Nations.
Kuwait


2. Nationality law: gender discrimination? Yes.2

3. International resolutions:
a) CEDAW: Yes. (2 Sept. 1994).3
   i) With reservations? Yes.4
   ii) Have there been recent changes? Yes.5
   b) ILO Conventions:
   a) CEDAW: Yes. (2 Sept. 1994).3
   i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No.6
   ii) Right to vote? No.7
   iii) To ownership of property? Yes.8
   iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own name? nfd.
   v) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? nfd.
   vi) To stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.9
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.10
   i) Right to ownership of property? Yes.11
   ii) To manage businesses? Yes.12
   iii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.13
   iv) To own and manage businesses? Yes.14
   v) To stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.15
   c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.16
   d) Heads of government departments? No.17
   i) In which sectors? The Civil Service.18
   ii) Heads of government departments? No.19
   iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: nfd.
   4. Legal system:
   a) Do women work in the media – print journalism? Yes.20
   b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.21
   c) Female genital mutilation? No.
   d) Employment in the modern health sector: nfd.
   ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.22
   iii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.23
   iv) Women in the Cabinet? No.
   5. Political rights:
   i) Right to vote? No.? 
   ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? No.24
   iii) Percentage of women in parliament? None.25
   iv) Women in the Cabinet? No.
   6. The state:
   a) In which sectors? The Civil Service.26
   b) Heads of government departments? No.27
   c) Family law:
   i) Codified, religious-based.28
   ii) Have there been recent changes? Yes.29
   7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? Yes.30
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.31
   c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.32
   8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 79.7/84.0%.33
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 67%/no data; secondary level 58%/no data; tertiary level: 27%/no data (in 1998).34
   c) Distribution of n/f in the teaching profession: 73% of primary school teachers and 56% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.35
   9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: 36.6%.36
   b) Economic rights:
   i) To ownership of property? Yes.37
   ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.38
   iii) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? nfd.
   iv) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? nfd.
   v) Percentage of female-headed households: nfd.
   10. Health:
   a) Vital statistics:
   i) Life expectancy (f/m): 78.6/74.5 years (2000).39
   ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 22.9 years

ENDNOTES
2. Art. 27: ibid.
4. Art. 7(a), Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 16(f), Art. 29 paragraph 1: http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html
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.
13. ibid.
14. ibid.
16. ibid.
18. 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
19. ibid.
27. http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/cases.html
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.
Country profiles

Lebanon


3. International resolutions:
a) CEDAW: Yes (21 Apr. 1997). 3

4. Legal system:

5. Political rights:
   a) Right to vote? Yes (1952). 12
   b) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes, 1992.
   c) Percentage of women in parliament? 2.3%. 11
   d) Women in the Cabinet? No.

6. The state:
a) Employment in the state apparatus? Yes. 11
   i) In which sectors? The civil service, municipalities.
   ii) Heads of government departments? Yes. 10
   iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women’s issues: Ministry of Social Affairs. 10

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? Yes, the National Commission for Lebanese Women. 18
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes, the National Commission for Lebanese Women. 19
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes. 21

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 80.3/92.1%. 22
   c) Distribution of mf in the teaching profession: 62.2% of the teaching profession were women (1997), with 44% working in medium level positions. 25

9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: 29.6%. 26
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes. 27
      ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes. 27
      iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? Yes. 27
      iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? Yes. 27
   c) Percentage of female-headed households: 2.5% (1997). 27

10. Health:
    a) Vital statistics:
        i) Life expectancy (f/m): 74.6/71.5 years (2000). 26
        ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 27.5 years (1996). 26
        iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 100 per 100,000 births (1985-99). 26
    b) Reproductive rights:
        i) Is contraception legal? Yes. 33
        ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases. 34
    c) Female genital mutilation? No.

ENDNOTES
2. Art. 7: Ibid.
3. 3. http://www.un.org/wnetwatch/dsidl/cedaw/status/Lebanon
4. Article 9 paragraph 2. Article 16 paragraph 1, etc.
5. Article 29 paragraph 211 http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/lebanon.htm
8. Ibid.
10. Maried 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
19. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
42. Radios? TV? Yes. 36
43. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.
44. 44% working in medium level positions. 25
45. Life expectancy (f/m): 74.6/71.5 years (2000). 30
46. Radio? TV? Yes. 36
47. Do women work in the media – print journalism? Radio? TV? Yes. 36
48. Adult female/male literacy rates: 80.3/92.1%. 22
Libya

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? nfd.
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes.

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 68.2/90.8%, 1985.
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 154/152%; secondary level: 81/73%; tertiary level: 57/56% (2000).18
   c) Distribution of-mf 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? nfd.
      iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? Yes.24
   c) Percentage of female-headed households: nfd.

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
   b. Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.
   c) Family law:
      i) Codified, religious-based. nfd.
      ii) Recent changes? nfd.
   d) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes.27
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.28
   e) Female genital mutilation? Yes.29
   f) Employment in the modern health sector: nfd.

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)? Yes.31

ENDNOTES
4. Art. 2 paragraph 14(c) [6]: http://www.iwnn-llp.org/ConReservations.html.
14. Ibid.
22. CW.utoronto.ca/cultural/English/libya/family.html.
24. Women must have their husbands’ permission to travel abroad: http://www.ahlol.com/Groups/Women/msindex.htm
27. 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
28. cwr.utoronto.ca/cultural/English/libya/family.html
29. If to save the life of the mother: http://www.pregnant-pause.org/libya99.htm
30. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
34. Cwr.utoronto.ca/cultural/English/libya/family.html
Mauritania

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? Yes.17
   i) In which sectors? The civil service, police.41
   ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.41
   iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women’s issues: Ministry of Women's Affairs.44

8. Education:
   a) Adult female:male literacy rates: 30.1/50.7%.20
   c) Distribution of m/f in 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%.39
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.26
      ii) To own and manage business? 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: 36.5% in the early 1990s.30

11. Health:
   a) Vital statistics:
      i) Life expectancy (f/m): 53.1/49.9 years (2000).32
      ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 19.4 years (1980-90).33
      iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 550 per 100,000 births.34
   b) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes.36
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.36
      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.
   d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.

12. Culture:
   b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.

ENDNOTES
1. Art. 5 & Art. 8: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/taw/kic/ hr_index.html
3. Except those parts in contradiction with the shari'a: http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConvReservations.html/
7. Ibid.
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.gc2womenleaders.com/mauritania.html
14. Ibid.
17. http://www.wedo.org/monitor/g_survey.htm
19. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
31. Only to save the life of the mother: http://www.pregnant- pause.org/endwell02.htm
32. Around 25% average: 95% among the Soninke and Halpulaar; 30% among Moor women. No law prohibits FGM: http://www.metimes.com/issue98-26/megmauritania plugs _into.htm

114

AL-Raida

Volume XX, No. 100 Winter 2003

115

AL-Raida

Volume XX, No. 100 Winter 2003


3. International Resolutions:
   a) CEDAW: Yes. (21 June 1993).
   i) With reservations: Yes.
   b) LD Conventions:
      i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.

4. Legal system:
   a) Women's participation:
      i) Right to raise cases? Yes.
      ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.
      iii) Judges? Yes.
   b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes.
   c) Family law:
      i) Codified, religious based.
   d) Legal system:
      i) Right to raise cases? Yes.
      ii) Judges? Yes.
      iii) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation):
          i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.
          ii) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.
      iv) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own names? Yes.
      v) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? n/d.

ENDNOTES
1. Art. 5 & Art. 8: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/ict/mo_index.html
4. Art. 9 paragraph 2, Art. 16 and Art. 29: http://www.iwraw-ap.org/CovReservation.html
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Sp 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.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
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.13
   iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's
      issues: the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labor and Vocational
      Training.13
   7. Gender monitoring and action:
      a) National Council of Women? ndf.14
      b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.15
      c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? Yes.15
   8. Education:
      a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 61.6/80.1%.16
      b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level
         72/77%; secondary level 67/68%;17 tertiary level: ndf.18
      c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 52% of
         primary school teachers and 50% secondary school teach-
         ers were women in 2002.19
   9. The economy:
      a) Female economic activity rate: 19.2%.20
      b) Economic rights:
         i) To ownership of property? Yes.21
         ii) To own and manage businesses? ndf.21
         iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own
             name? No.22
         iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own
             names? ndf.
      c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.
         a) Vital statistics:
            i) Life expectancy (f/m): 72.6/69.7%.23
            ii) Average age of women at first marriage: ndf.
            iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: ndf.
      b) Reproductive rights:
         i) Is contraception legal? Yes.25
         ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.25
      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: ndf.
         b) Reproductive rights:
            i) Is contraception legal? Yes.25
            ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.25
      11. Culture:
         a) Do women work in the media – print journalism?
         b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians,
            etc)? ndf.
   c) Female genital mutilation? Yes.26
   d) Employment in the modern health sector: Women
      work as physicians and nurses.27

ENDNOTES
1. Article 17: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/lcl/ mu000000.html
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/2001/nea/8286.htm
8. Women have the right to vote for the Consultative Council:
   ments/oman.htm & Center of Arab Women for Training and
   Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab
   Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR, p 194.
9. Ibid.; p 195
10. To own and manage businesses? ndf.
12. Ibid., p 195.
14. The Coordination Committee for Women’s Voluntary Work:
   http://www.newsbriefsoman.info/features/womanwomen.htm
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
   national/omanapap.htm
18. c) Percentage of female-headed households: ndf.
   a) Vital statistics:
      i) Life expectancy (f/m): 72.6/69.7%.19
      ii) Average age of women at first marriage: ndf.
      iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 14 per 100,000 births
         (1985-99).20
   b) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes.25
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.25
   10. The first Omani woman ambassador was appointed in
      September 1999.
15. 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
   national/omanapap.htm
18. The Coordination Committee for Women’s Voluntary Work:
   http://www.newsbriefsoman.info/features/womanwomen.htm
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
   Profiles”)
21. Ibid.
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
   number=6899
28. Only if it is to save the life of the mother or preserve her
   health: http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm
29. 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
30. Article 17: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/lcl/
   mu000000_..html
   cat=gov
   ministers.asp?cat=gov
   ments/oman.htm & Center of Arab Women for Training and
   Globalization and Gender: Economic Participation of Arab
   Women. Tunisia: CAWTAR, p 194.
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
   cat=gov
   org/omy00000.html
   number=6899
42. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8286.htm
44. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8286.htm
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
47. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8286.htm
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
49. Article 17: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/lcl/
   mu000000_..html
   cat=gov
   ministers.asp?cat=gov
54. Article 17: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/lcl/
   mu000000_.html
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
59. Article 17: http://www.oefre.unibe.ch/law/lcl/
   mu000000_.html
64. United Nations Development Programme (2002). Human
   Development Report: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented
iii) Judges? Yes.  
iv) Percentage of women judges: 3.13% of judges in the West Bank and 5.56% of judges in Gaza were women in 1997.  
b) Are there civic laws that apply only to women? Yes in Jordan and Egypt.  
c) Family law: religious-based in all areas.  

5. Political rights  
  i) Right to vote? Yes.  
  ii) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.  
  iii) Percentage of women in parliament (Legislative Council): 5.7%.  
  iv) Women in the cabinet? None.  

6. The state:  
  a) Employment in the state apparatus? Yes.  
  i) In which sectors? The civil service, social services, police.  
  ii) Heads of government departments? Yes.  
  iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women’s issues? Yes, see above.  

7. Gender monitoring and action:  
  a) National Council of Women? No.  
  b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? No.  
  c) NGOs that monitor women’s affairs? Yes.  

8. Education:  
  a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 86.4/95.7%.  
  b) Female/male gross enrollment ratios: primary level 96.6/85.1%; secondary level 64.0/56.1%; tertiary level 23.8/24.7%.  
  c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 17,452 teachers at schools and 569 teachers at higher education institutions were women.  

9. The economy:  
  a) Female economic activity rate: 10.4%  
  b) Economic rights:  
     i) To ownership of property? Yes.  
     ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.  
     iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? n.d.  
     iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own name? n.d.  
  c) Percentage of female-headed households: 11.2%.  

10. Health:  
  a) Vital statistics:  
     i) Life expectancy (f/m): 73.8/70.7 (2003)%  
     ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 20.1 years (2003)%  
     iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: n.d.  
  b) Reproductive rights:  
     i) Is contraception legal? Yes.  
     ii) Is abortion legal? No.  

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/FL/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/FL/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.wcic.org/un.htm  
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/FL/index2.html  
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 Israel 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/FL/index2.html. See also “Islamic Family Law and the Transition to Palestinian Statehood: Constraints and Opportunities for Legal Reform”, www.law.emory.edu/FL/psl/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, Samira al-Khalil, also competed in the presidential elections of the same year.  
11. www.europea.eu.int/documentations/  
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 Committee (WATC); the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling.  
21. Ibid.  
24. Ibid.  
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 film media. PCBs (1998). Women and Men in Palestine: Trends and Statistics. Ramallah.  
33. Ibid.  

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 film media. PCBs (1998). Women and Men in Palestine: Trends and Statistics. Ramallah.  
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 film media. PCBs (1998). Women and Men in Palestine: Trends and Statistics. Ramallah.
Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented

3. International resolutions:
   a) CEDAW: No. 
   b) IDLO Conventions:
      i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No. 
4. Legal system:
   a) Women's participation:
      i) Right to raise cases? ndf. 
      ii) Work as lawyers? Yes. 
      iii) Judges? ndf. 
      iv) Number of women judges: ndf. 
6. The state:
   a) Employment in the state apparatus? Yes. 
      i) In which sectors? Police, health, and education (public school and university teachers). 
      ii) Heads of government departments? Yes. 
      iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs includes a Department for Women's Affairs. 
   b) Are there civic laws that apply only to men or women? Yes. 
   c) Family law:
      i) Uncodified, religious? 
      ii) Recent changes? ndf. 
5. Political rights:
   a) Right to vote? Yes. 
   b) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes. 
   c) Number of women in parliament: 
      i) In which sectors? Police, health, and education (public school and university teachers). 
      ii) Heads of government departments? Yes. 
   d) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? No. 
7. Gender monitoring and action: 
   a) National Council of Women? No. 
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? No. 
   c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? No. 
8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 83.1/80.4%. 
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level: 93/98%; secondary level: 90/68%; tertiary level: 39/14%. 
   c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 75% of primary school teachers and 57% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000. There were around 50 women university lecturers for every 100 men. 
9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: 41.0%. 
   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. 
10. Health:
   a) Vital statistics:
      i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.3/68.7 years (2000). 
      ii) Average age of women at first marriage: ndf. 
      iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 10 per 100,000 births (1985-99). 
   b) Reproductive rights:
      i) Is contraception legal? Yes. 
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases. 
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 
18. Ibid. 
19. Women and Men in the Arab Countries: Education, ESCWA. 
23. Ibid. 
25. If the mother's life is in danger or to preserve her health. Also in cases where the unborn child has medical problems (reversed): http://www.rodac.org/pregnancy/perinatal/leed/00200.htm 
28. In 1999 there were 10 Qatari women working in the press cf. 35 men: http://www.escwa.org.lb/divisions/dd/women.html (Check “Gender Profiles” section).
**Saudi Arabia**


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

3. **International resolutions**
   a) CEDAW: Yes. 7 September 2000.
   b) With reservations? Yes.

4. **Legal system**
   a) Women's participation: Right to raise cases? ndf.
   b) Work as lawyers? No.
   c) Judges? No.
   d) Number of women judges: None.

5. **Political rights**
   a) Right to vote? Yes.
   b) Heads of government departments? No.
   c) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues? ndf.

6. **The state**
   a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.
   b) In which sectors? Education, health care, and the civil service.
   c) Heads of government departments? No.
   d) Percentage of women in parliament: [ ]
   e) Women in the cabinet: [ ]

7. **Gender monitoring and action**
   a) National Council of Women? ndf.
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? ndf.

8. **Education**
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 66.9/83.1.
   c) Distribution of n/f in the teaching profession: 54% of primary school teachers and 55% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.

9. **The economy**
   a) Female economic activity rate: 21.2%.
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.
      ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.
      iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.

10. **Health**
    a) Vital statistics:
        i) Life expectancy (f/m): 73.0/70.5 years (2000).
        ii) Average age of women at first marriage: ndf.
        iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 23 per 100,000 live births (1995).
    b) Reproductive rights:
        i) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.

11. **Cultural**
    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 Sharia:


4. Articles 9 (2) and 29: http://www.iwraw-ap.org/ConReservations.html


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 relative. 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


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.


16. Women are excluded from studying engineering, journalism and architecture: http://genderstats.worldbank.org (Check “Gender Profiles” section).

17. Ibid.


19. While Shar'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 their businesses.


23. Only to save the life of the mother, or to preserve her health.

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.

ENDNOTES
4. Ibid., p 195.
6. The FLC of 1975 aimed to suppress customary law; civil courts have jurisdiction over cases arising from shar’ia: www.law.emory.edu
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
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: http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/somalia_women.htm


3. International resolutions: a) CEDAW: No. 7
   b) ILO Conventions: i) Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: No.

4. Legal system: a) Women’s participation: b) Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? ndf.
   i) Right to raise cases? ndf.
   ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.
   iii) Judges? Yes.
   iv) Number of women judges: 67 out of 800. Five women sit in the High Court.

   b) Head of government departments: 2.1% of women employed in government occupied ministerial levels (2000).
   c) 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.

   i) In which sectors? The diplomatic corps, the civil service, senior posts in police and army.
   ii) Heads of government departments: 2.1% of women employed in government occupied ministerial levels (2000).
   iii) Percentage of women in parliament 9.7% (lower house).
   iv) Women in the cabinet? Yes.

   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes.

8. Education: a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 46.3/69.5%.
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 51.60%; secondary level 28.30%; tertiary level 17.0%.
   c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 68% of primary school teachers, and 57% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.

9. The economy: a) Female economic activity rate: 34.8%.
   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 name? ndf.

   ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 18.7 years (1980-90).
   iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 550 per 100,000 births (1985-99).

ENDNOTES
4. Ibid., p 195.
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/FL/ index2.html
10. Ibid., p 194.
12. Sudan Women’s Development Unit: http://www.saveaswan.org/articles/sudanwomen.html
14. Ibid. This source reports that there are women major generals in the police, and women are numerous in the army.
17. Ibid. The Sudanese Women’s General Union is an officially recognized women’s organization.
19. Eg. The Democratic Women’s Alliance, and the Sudan Women’s Association: http://www.saveaswan.org/articles/sudanwomen.html
22. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Cultural Context: Demography and Health, UNESCO.
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. 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.
Syria


3. International resolutions:

4. Legal system:
   a. Women’s participation: Yes.1
   b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc)? Yes.

5. Political rights:
   a) Right to vote? Yes. 1949 – 1953.13
   b) Right to own and manage businesses? Yes.31
   c) Percentage of women in parliament: 10.4% (single house).31

6. The state:
   a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.17
   b) Female economic activity rate: 28.6%.29
   c) Family law:
      i) Codified, religious based.12

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   a) National Council of Women? The National Committee of Women’s Affairs? b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.1
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes.23
   d) Percentage of female-headed households: 9.3% in 1994.32

8. Education:
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 60.5/88.3%.22
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 99/109%; secondary level 39/44%; tertiary level: ndf.
   c) Distribution of nuf in the teaching profession: In 1998, 57% of all teachers were women. In 2000, 65% of primary school teachers and 47% of secondary school teachers were women. In 1998, 19% of university professors were women.

9. The economy:
   a) Female economic activity rate: 28.6%.21
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.
      ii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? ndf.
      iii) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? ndf.
   c) Vital statistics:
      i) Mortality rate in childbirth: 110 per 100,000 births (1985-99).35
      ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.37
      iii) Number of women judges: 11% of all judges (1998).8
   d) Employment in the modern health sector: ndf.
   e) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 57% of all teachers were women. In 2000, 65% of primary school teachers and 47% of secondary school teachers were women. In 1998, 19% of university professors were women.

ENDNOTES
1. Article 44, Article 45: http://www.oefr.unibe.ch/baw/ktiy 00000.htm
2. A Syrian woman cannot grant her children Syrian nationality if the marriage is to a foreigner even if they were born in Syria: http://www. kamilat.org/DVF/syria.htm
4. No data found with regard to the articles containing reservations.

8. Ibid., p 118.
9. Ibid., p 118.
10. A husband may request that his wife’s travel abroad be prohibited (see Section 2.3). 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/dhr/hrp/2001/low/83398.htm
11. http://www.lawemeroy.eg/LFEnde2.html
12. http://www.lawemeroy.eg/LFEnde42.html
18. Ibid., p 118. Women comprise approximately one-fifth of all government workers, but most are employed in clerical and staff positions.
21. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p 106. Specific number not provided. “There is a marked discrepancy in the number of men who own businesses as opposed to women.”
32. Ibid., p 222.
36. In 1993, 49.2% of women living 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.
37. Only to save the life of the mother: http://www.pregnantpause.eu/lex/world02.htm
Country profiles

New York: Oxford University Press.

Globalization and Gender: Male/Female Perspectives. New York: Oxford University Press.


3. International resolutions:
   i) Reservations? Yes.
   b) ILO Conventions:
      ii) ILO Conventions:
         b) ILO Conventions:
            ii) Convention (No. 111), 1958: Yes.

4. Legal system:
   a. Women’s participation:
      i) Right to raise cases? Ndf.
      ii) Right to manage property? Yes.
      iii) Judges? Yes.
   b. Health:
      i) Maternity leaves:
         a) Government paid: Yes.
         b) Paid leave: 6 months.
      ii) Percentage of female judges: 29%.
   c. Percentage of female judges: 29%.

5. Political rights:
   b. Right of candidates to stand:
      ii) For national elections? Yes.

6. The state:
   a. Employment in the state apparatus? Yes.
      i) In which sectors? The civil service, public health, education and social services.
   c. 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.

7. Gender monitoring and action:
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? Yes.
   c) NGOs that monitor women’s situation? Yes.

8. Education:
   a. Adult female/male literacy rates: 60.6/81.4.
   c. Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: ndf.

9. The economy:
   a. Female economic activity rate: 35.8.
   b. Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.
      ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.
      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%.

10. Health:
    a) Vital statistics:
       i) Life expectancy (f/m): 71.4/69.0 years.
       ii) Average age of women at first marriage: 25 years.
       iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 70 per 100,000 births.
    b) Reproductive rights:
       i) Is contraception legal? Yes.

ENDNOTES

1. Article 6, esp. (a) (1998).
3. Article 9, 15, 16, 29: http://www.law.org.org/ConReservations.html
5. Ibid., p. 195.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid. Women constitute 60 percent of all judges in the capital and 24 percent of the nation’s total judges.
10. Four women were made deputy governors in 2001 bringing the number to ten out of 24. http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/index2.html
11. Only during the first three months of pregnancy: http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm
13. Ibid., p. 194.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
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 (CREDF), Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR). http://www.undp-pogar.org/countries/tunisia/gender.html
24. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
32. Only during the first three months of pregnancy: http://www.pregnantpause.org/lex/world02.htm
34. The ratio of women to men journalists was 25.75% (1998), and 37% of all those working in radio and TV were women: Ibid.

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

3. **International resolutions:**
   a) CEDAW: No.7
   b) ILO Conventions:
      1. Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), 1951: Yes.3
      2. Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111), 1958: No.7
   c) State party to International Conventions and Conferences:
      i) International resolutions on women's issues
      iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.8

4. **Legal system:**
   a. Women's participation:
      i) Right to raise cases? nfd.
      ii) Work as lawyers? Yes.4
      iii) Judges? nfd.
      iv) Number of women judges: nfd.
   b. Are there civil laws that apply only to men or women? No.16

5. **Political rights:**
   a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 79.3/75.0%.13
   b) Right to vote? No.1
   c) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? No.1
   d) Women in the cabinet: None
   e) Number of women in parliament: nfd.
   f) Women in the cabinet: nfd.

6. **The state:**
   a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.9
      i) In which sectors? Civil service, public education and health services, the police, and the armed forces.9
      iii) Section(s) of government concerned with women's issues: Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.8
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? nfd.
   c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? nfd.

7. **Gender monitoring and action:**
   a) National Council of Women? UAE Women's Federation.12
   b) National Plan of Action (post-Beijing)? nfd.
   c) NGOs that monitor women's situation? nfd.
   d) Women in the cabinet: None

8. **Education:**
   a) Adult female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 92.96%; secondary level 80.75%; tertiary level nfd.
   b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 92.96%; secondary level 80.75%; tertiary level nfd.
   c) Distribution of nfd in the teaching profession: 100% of nursery school teachers, 55% of primary school teachers and 65% of intermediate and secondary school teachers are women.24

9. **The economy:**
   a) Economic activity rate: 31.7%.12
   b) Economic rights:
      i) To ownership of property? Yes.11
      ii) To own and manage businesses? Yes.12
      iii) To open bank accounts and take loans in their own name? nfd.
      iv) To receive social security and pensions in their own names? nfd.
   c) Percentage of female-headed households: nfd.

10. **Health:**
    a) Vital statistics:
        i) Life expectancy (f/m): 78.0/73.7 years.**
        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).19
        iii) Mortality rate in childbirth: 3 per 100,000 births (1985-99).19
    b) Reproductive rights:
        i) Is contraception legal? nfd.
        ii) Is abortion legal? Yes, in limited cases.21
    c) Female genital mutilation? Yes, according to some sources.21
    d) Employment in the modern health sector: 54.3% of all employees are women and 81% of nurses are women.22

11. **Culture:**
    b. Do women perform in public (as actors, musicians, etc.)? nfd.

**ENDNOTES**

1. [http://www.arab.net/uae/uae_womenconstitution.htm](http://www.arab.net/uae/uae_womenconstitution.htm)
2. [http://www.womenstrate.org/facts.htm](http://www.womenstrate.org/facts.htm)
4. Ibid., p 195.
5. [http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8306.htm](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.
8. Ibid.
9. [http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenemployment.htm](http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenemployment.htm)
10. 40% of all government employees are women. Women constitute 4% of the military. Ibid.
11. [http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenwelfare.htm](http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenwelfare.htm)
12. [http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenconvention.htm](http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenconvention.htm)
17. There are no formal 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](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](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/nea/8306.htm)
23. [http://www.ameday.org/abilibintamfemfen/tgm1.htm](http://www.ameday.org/abilibintamfemfen/tgm1.htm)
24. [http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenemployment.htm](http://www.arab.net/uae/uae/uae_womenemployment.htm)
25. Ibid.
Yemen

2. Nationality law: gender discrimination? Yes.2
5. Political rights: a) Right to vote? Yes (1967).7 b) Stand for election (national and municipal levels)? Yes.8 c) Percentage of women in parliament: 0.7% (lower house).9 d) Women in the cabinet: None.10
6. The state: a) Employment in the state apparatus: Yes.11 b) In which sectors: The civil service and the police.12 c) Heads of government departments: Yes.13 d) 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.14
8. Education: a) Adult female/male literacy rates: 25.2/67.5%.18 b) Female/male gross enrolment ratios: primary level 55/100%; secondary level: 24/66%; tertiary level: 5/16%.19
c) Distribution of m/f in the teaching profession: 21% of primary school teachers and 19% of secondary school teachers were women in 2000.20
9. The economy: a) Female economic activity rate: 30.5%.21 b) Economic rights: i) To ownership of property? No laws prohibit women from property ownership.22 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.23 c) Percentage of female-headed households: 13% in 1994.24

ENDNOTES
3. 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/81/law30/1.focus.html.
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Contemporary Egyptian Feminist Activism


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 in more of the recent research and publications in the Middle East, for example Azza Karim’s Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminists in Egypt (Macmillan Press, 1998).

Al-Ali’s theoretical framework is infused with 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 misrepresentation. 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 “personal 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-naka’ah al-nissawiyyah) which is concerned with patriarchy alone as opposed to the ‘women’s movement’ (al-naka’ah al-niswiyyah) 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 actors who do not shy away from the term ‘feminism’ but actually define themselves as ‘nissawiyyah’, or more linguistically accurately as ‘nissawiyyah’. 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-tawfiq al-niswi) 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 “anagmatism 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 political 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.

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-Ma’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, M’a’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.

Later (chapter 3) Al-Ali presents the life stories of nine women activists, with particular emphasis on the junctures between personal experiences and historical developments. She explains her selection of the life-stories in terms of “objective” factors such as gender-related 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 1950-1960s 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 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’ consciousness—not just ideologically, but politically and in terms of organization; combining feminist activism with the struggle for social justice.
Women and NGOs:
Lebanese Women between Doing Justice to Themselves and Serving Others

By Azza Sharara Baydoun, (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 2002)

Reviewed by Hosn Abboud

"Women and NGOs" is a well thought-out field study focused on Lebanese women's contributions to civic society. The author, Azza Sharara Baydoun, seeks to answer the following question: “Given that women stayed in the 'domestic domain' for many centuries, committing themselves to the mission of domestic production and reproduction, did they when moving into the 'public domain' take with them initiatives and visions? Did they come up with specific approaches to influence the public? Did they take with them special skills to operate and change the structures of the organizations, and their tools for action?”

Sharara answers these questions in six chapters, keeping in mind the varied and sometimes-conflicting perspectives towards 'women and organizations', a subject that is becoming increasingly central with the growing involvement of non-governmental organizations in human development. The introduction covers the historical beginnings of women in social work, particularly their 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 formed after 1990 in Greater Beirut. Sharara's total sample was thirty-two organizations with 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'asq/ta'asq) 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-lq'aa min al-intikhabat al-baladiyya wa-al-khitaniyya), the Social Movement (al-harakah al-jirma'iyya), the Lebanese Organization for Human Rights (al-jam'iyya al-lubnaniyya li-lhuquq al-insani), 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 distract 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-muna-hadat 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' al-democrat), 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 forum, enabled their internal activities - conducting, 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.

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.

Reviewed by Samia Tabari

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**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 Escolar, professor of Anthropology at the University of M assachusetts, Amherst, perceives grassroots activism, particularly that which is channeled through the Internet, as a mechanism that is undergirding 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 pro mote their rights. Alice M astrangelo 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 across the world. Niki 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 their rights. In Farewell, Peregrine Wood, Maureen James and Karen Banks are members of the Women's Networking Support Program of the Association for Communication Information (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 use of electronic tools by women, while highlighting the fact that women in the North use Intern et access extensively whereas 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 these 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 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 Fathi, member of the editorial board working on 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 discounting Iran's awareness 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. Fariha also urges activists, who are involved in advocating women's rights, not to underplay the role of political rights of governments or institutions, even with the evidence that 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. ‘Silence’ is mostly linked to the fact that Arab women tend to underline these rights that the Net may offer them in forwarding their cause. Alshejni notes that Farideh Fathi, who emphasizes that women should not ignore their rights in their cyberadvocacy endeavors, especially as religion is inherent to Arab culture. The Net, providing a multicultural and multilingual space online, offers a platform that is helping in curbing the impact of religion on the status of Arab women. On another level, Alshejni brings to our attention the high rate (62%) as a barrier to Internet usage. Nonetheless, she portrays a more positive outlook for the future, noting the shifting social norms 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 overcome prevailing barriers.

**Pre-publication Notices**

**Nisr arabiyat fi al-shirinat: 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 (Bihlhat), Beirut, in cooperation with the Women and Men's Forum, Cairo, and the Center for Arab and Middle East Studies at AUB. Edited by Jean Said Makdisi, Nazek Yared, Nadia al Cheikh, Nuha Bayyumi, and Walid Hamadi. To be published in February, 2003 by the Bihlhat 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, and 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.

Zahra’I H. Mustafa’I, M. Assoouq’I al-Katiba al-Arabiyya (Memory for the Future: An Encyclopedia of Arab Women Writers). The book provides an anthology of poems, short stories and extracts from the works of individual writers contains 1,200 entries. There is also a bio-bibliography of writers from different languages, both those who wrote in Arabic and those who wrote in English. The book also contains an introduction which gives the history of Arab women in the Middle East and the various implications that relate to the empowerment of women. The encyclopedia will also be on the Internet: www.arabwomen-nour.org

**Studies About/Published by Women’s Movements in the Arab Region**

This bibliography is not complete. It is weak in Arabic and French sources, and has nothing in other world languages.)

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#68, 1995: Women and Education
#69, 1995: Arab Women and Management
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#97-98, 2002: Arab Women in Civil Society
#99, 2002-2003: Sexuality and Arab Women

* The first issue of Al-Raida was published in 1976