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**THE EMPOWERMENT
OF ARAB WOMEN
THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION**



ABOUT IWSAW

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

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

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

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

ABOUT AL-RAIDA

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

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

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

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

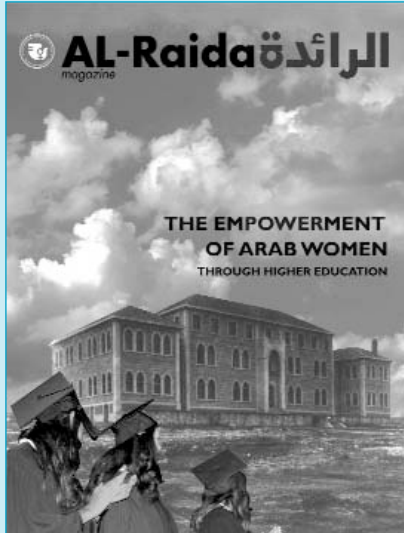
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The Empowerment of Arab Women through Higher Education

■ Jennifer Skulte-Ouais

Assistant Professor of Political Science
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Given my background in higher education and women and politics, I have long assumed that it was a fact that higher education empowered women. "Knowledge is power" was the saying that came to mind most readily. Yet this issue of *Al-Raida* has forced me to reconsider this assumption, to both positive and negative ends.

On the positive side, I was amazed by the theme of "empowerment through higher education" that runs through the speeches of many of the alumnae who spoke at a Lebanese American University Alumni forum in Dubai. Their words speak to the women with higher education who have been and continue to be "pioneers" (a term that was used repeatedly by the forum speakers) in a number of ways in the Arab world. The academic articles included in this issue largely echo this theme. Yet, despite the successes, all the speakers noted the traditional gender roles and other conservative norms that have too often kept highly educated women in the Arab world from realizing their aspirations.

The tension between the desire for self-empowerment and societal development on the one hand and the desire to retain traditions that make the Arab world unique on the other hand, comes up again and again throughout the speeches and articles, though how this tension balances out varies depending on the country of focus. What runs throughout, however, is how inescapably intertwined are the societal, economic, and political benefits of higher education with women's aspirations for themselves, their families and their societies.

Culture is another concept that is brought up continually in the speeches and the articles. The writers note that the generally conservative culture of the Middle East makes it difficult for young women to break out of traditional roles. While higher education for men and women alike is increasingly valued in the region, the region's conservative culture seems to limit the empowerment potential of higher education for both genders. This point is supported by the study by Hoteit and Debbas as well as by the young women involved in the round table discussion at LAU in winter 2006. Perhaps the strength of cultural norms explains in part why female role models are viewed as being so important to many of the women who gave speeches included in this issue. Female role models in public and private provide known paths to greater self-empowerment.

The speeches, articles and reviews that comprise this issue aim to discuss, analyze, provide personal accounts and pose questions relating to the joint themes of empowerment, women, higher education and the Arab world discussed above. The

speeches stem from a forum entitled, "The Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment and Achievements of Arab Women" organized by the Lebanese American University Alumni chapter in Dubai in December 2005. In fact, the idea of publishing the papers presented in the forum was suggested by LAU's president, Dr. Joseph Jabbara, who attended the conference and whose speech is included here. In his speech, Jabbara champions the successes of women in higher education and calls for much more to be done for women to enjoy the same rights as men in the Arab world. The speech of vice president for academic affairs, Dr. Abdallah Sfeir, echoes Dr. Jabbara's exhortations for higher education in general and LAU in particular to become even more of a force for the empowerment of women in the Arab world.

Dr. Dabbous-Sensenig, director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) and an LAU alumna, offers a very personal yet at the same time academic discussion and analysis of how women, empowerment and higher education are connected in the Arab world. Her focus on the relative lack of, despite the very real need for, female role models for young women is particularly striking.

Novelist and researcher Emily Nasrallah also pays homage to the role of LAU and its early female graduates in empowering women to work for change in their societies, particularly as "pioneers" in the development of education in the Arab world. As she notes: "No civilization can be complete without a university." Yet Nasrallah's speech also notes the challenge that women face in finding a balance between their role outside of the home, i.e., as career women, and their traditional roles as wives and mothers.

Continuing the theme of the challenges that women in the Arab world face in adding a public role to their traditional ones, Maha Kaddoura expounds on the virtues of educating women. Her speech focuses largely on the benefits societies will reap when they allow for the education and empowerment of their women.

Moving from the more personal to the public realm, Lebanon's Consul-General in Dubai, Ms. Donna Turk, notes that higher education in Lebanon has offered young people from the Arab world the opportunity "to be anchored in the cultural values and religions that are only available in [the Arab] world" while also gaining the very tangible benefits of higher education for themselves and their societies.

Similarly, Ms. Jeannette Mufti, a one-time parliamentary can-

didate in Jordan who is active in academia and charity work, gives a history of the development and subsequent role of higher education in Jordan, starting with the key role played by LAU's predecessor, the American Junior College. A particularly interesting part of her speech is how conservative traditions in Jordanian society have sometimes had to be pushed to change from above, not the least when they concern women and their roles in Jordanian society.

Dr. Hissah Al-Sabah's personal experiences as a businesswoman and her dedication to creating networks among businesswomen provides a pragmatic example of the power of role models about which Dabbous-Sensenig speaks so eloquently. Similarly, Ms. Taline Avakian, a member of LAU's Board of Trustees, blends together her personal experience in business with discussion of development — and the need for more development — in Arab societies. She, too, raises the issue of the need for female role models, particularly in high positions. "Women must be in leadership positions throughout society," Avakian says, in order for younger women to see that it is not only possible but necessary for women to be involved in all aspects of society.

This issue also includes academic articles related to the overall theme of higher education, empowerment, and women in the Arab world. The Hoteit and Debbas article included here is an abbreviated version of their longer study on women and discrimination in academia in the Arab world. Among the more notable conclusions from their study is that despite significant signs of gender discrimination in hiring and promotion in academia in the Arab world, the vast majority of female academics are happy with their careers. Additionally, class and age are important factors in whether or not female academics perceive gender discrimination in the academy. Furthermore, in countries with the most experience with democratic politics, both female and male professors say they are more aware of injustices in academia than professors in countries with more traditional politics.

Professor Abu Bakr Ahmad Ba Kader's piece focuses on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and uses a somewhat personal approach to the themes of this issue. In chronicling the development of female higher education in the kingdom, Ba Kader notes the significant tension between dominant conservative traditions and economic reality as well as individual women's aspirations. As he notes at one point: "In the past, a woman's financial contribution to her family was viewed as unwarranted by the culture but now, working women have become privileged partners that enable families to enjoy decent standards of living." While the economic benefits of higher education and female higher education are noted elsewhere, Kader's emphasis on economic reality pushing change in social norms is worth emphasizing.

In a similar vein, Professor Tim Walters describes and analyzes the development of higher education for women in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. Using detailed survey data from Zayed University, Walters is able to combine the personal and

the systemic to create a dynamic picture of the forces interacting in Abu Dhabi today and what this has meant to young women. His article is adept at describing the conflicting forces at work at the personal, familial, societal and international levels in a clear yet sympathetic way.

Through describing and critiquing women's studies and women and higher education more broadly, Professor Sherifa Zuhur seeks to define strategies and theories that will better empower Arab women through higher education. She also includes a "balance sheet" of successes and failures when it comes to women's empowerment in the region and expertly discusses topical areas, such as violence against women, as they relate to women in the Arab world.

The article by young scholar Maysa Hajj makes a significant contribution to research on the topic at hand by pooling and analyzing data that heretofore has not been accessible to non-Arabic speaking audiences as well as non-researchers. She also proposes a number of topics and questions that require further and deeper study.

It is fitting that a beautiful remembrance of higher education pioneer Rose Ghurayyib be included in this special issue. Ghurayyib died in spring 2006 after a long and productive life as a scholar and role model for women throughout the Arab world. Also included is an interview with Anita Nassar. Through her experience the reader will be able to see a tangible example, indeed a role model, of an educated and empowered Arab woman.

To conclude the issue, excerpts from the transcript of a round table convened by IWSAW in winter 2006 is included. The round table highlights in a very concrete way both the hopes for and the challenges to linking women and empowerment through higher education in the Arab world. The assembled women were of a variety of ages, ranging from undergraduate to graduate students at leading universities in Beirut. They spoke powerfully about their commitment to higher education, what higher education means to them and their future as well as how empowerment does and does not come through higher education.

What was both interesting and quite surprising to me, as well as Dabbous-Sensenig with whom I co-chaired the round table, was how seldom these young women had encountered positive female role models and, even more importantly, that for the most part, these young women were only weakly conscious of the concept of power and of their own empowerment. This was a critical revelation as these young women are studying in Lebanon — arguably the most liberal and open of the higher education systems. This forces us to then ask: Can we really even begin to ask whether higher education empowers women — especially in the Middle East? It seems, rather, that we should start by addressing power — what it is, what forms it takes, who has it, and how it can be obtained — and only then move to look anew at higher education in the Arab world and ask how it is — or is not — empowering young women and men alike.



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Empowering Women, Developing Society: Female Education in the Middle East and North Africa

■ Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Valentine M. Moghadam

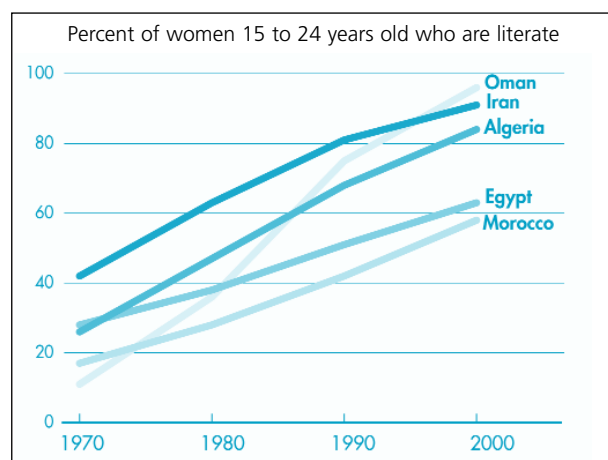
Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi is a policy analyst at the Population Reference Brief (PRB).
Valentine Moghadam is the Director of the Women's Studies Program at Purdue University.

Education is a key part of strategies to improve individuals' well-being and societies' economic and social development. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) (countries and territories included in the Middle East and North Africa as defined here are listed in Table 1), access to education has improved dramatically over the past few decades, and there have been a number of encouraging trends in girls' and women's education (see Figure 1). Primary school enrollment is high or universal in most MENA countries, and gender gaps in secondary school enrollment have already disappeared in several countries. Women in MENA countries are also more likely to enroll in universities than they were in the past.

But great challenges remain. Many people — especially girls — are still excluded from education, and many more are enrolled in school but learning too little to prepare them for 21st-century job markets. In some countries, access to the secondary and higher education that helps create a skilled and knowledgeable labor force continues to be limited; even where access is not a problem, the quality of the education provided is often low. "The most worrying aspect of the crisis in education is education's inability to provide the requirements for the development of Arab societies," according to the 2002 *Arab Human Development Report*.¹

This policy brief offers an overview of education's benefits to women, families, economies, and societies and highlights the ongoing concerns about education in

Figure 1
Literacy Rates Among Young Women in Selected Countries, 1970-2000



Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics, "Literacy Statistics" (www.uis.unesco.org, accessed March 11, 2003).

MENA countries. It also looks at education's links with fertility and employment, two important elements in women's empowerment.

Education: A Social Right and a Development Imperative

Education's importance has been emphasized by a number of international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.² The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, recognized that women's literacy is key to empowering women's participation in decisionmaking in society and to improving families' well-being.³ In addition, the United Nations has articulated the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include goals for improved education, gender equality, and women's empowerment (see Box 1). The MDGs emphasize education's essential role in building democratic societies and creating a foundation for sustained economic growth.⁴

Education contributes directly to the growth of national income by improving the productive capacities of the labor force. A recent study of 19 developing countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, concluded that a country's long-term economic growth increases by 3.7 percent for every year the adult population's average level of schooling rises.⁵ Thus, education is a key strategy for reducing poverty, especially in the MENA region, where poverty is not as deep as in other developing regions.⁶ According to the United Nations Population Fund, countries that have made social investments in

health, family planning, and education have slower population growth and faster economic growth than countries that have not made such investments.⁷

In the increasingly open global economy, countries with high rates of illiteracy and gender gaps in educational attainment tend to be less competitive, because foreign investors seek labor that is skilled as well as inexpensive. Various global trends pose special challenges to women who are illiterate or have limited education. Economies' export orientation and the growing importance of small and medium-sized enterprises create opportunities for women, but women need the appropriate education and training to take full advantage of these opportunities.

In addition, the benefits of female education for women's empowerment and gender equality are broadly recognized:

- As female education rises, fertility, population growth, and infant and child mortality fall and family health improves.
- Increases in girls' secondary school enrollment are associated with increases in women's participation in the labor force and their contributions to household and national income.
- Women's increased earning capacity, in turn, has a positive effect on child nutrition.⁸
- Children — especially daughters — of educated mothers are more likely to be enrolled in school and to have higher levels of educational attainment.
- Educated women are more politically active and better informed about their legal rights and how to exercise them.

Box 1 The Millennium Development Goals and Female Education

The U.N. Millennium Summit, held in September 2000, produced a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) covering a range of development issues, including reducing child mortality, fighting various infectious diseases, eradicating illiteracy, and empowering women. The MDGs and their associated targets and indicators were designed as benchmarks for monitoring progress in developing countries and to provide a framework for sustaining development and eliminating poverty. The international community recognizes that unless girls' education improves, few of the MDGs will be achieved. Two of the goals deal specifically with female education and women's empowerment.

- Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education. Target: Ensure that, by 2015, all children, boys and girls alike, will have access to a full course of primary education. Indicators for this goal: the net enrollment ratio in primary education; the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5; and the literacy rate of 15-to-24-year-olds.
- Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women. Target: Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015. Indicators for this goal: the ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education; the ratio of literate females to males among 15-to-24-year-olds; the share of women in wage employment in the nonagricultural sector; and the proportion of seats in national parliament held by women.

Source: United Nations, "About the Goals" (www.developmentgoals.org/About_the_goals.htm, accessed April 1, 2003).



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Cultural and Economic Factors that Reinforce the Gender Gap

MENA countries generally have lower levels of women's education and labor force participation than other regions with similar income levels. The interaction between the region's economic structure and its conservative culture, in which traditional gender roles are strongly enforced, is largely responsible.⁹ Men in the MENA region are more likely to have direct access to wage employment and control over wealth, while women are largely economically dependent upon male family members.

The region's oil-based economy, which produced tremendous wealth in some MENA countries, reinforces the region's gender roles. In a number of MENA countries, the use of capital-intensive technologies that require few workers, along with relatively high wages for men, have precluded women's greater involvement in the labor force.¹⁰ Women's employment options have been limited to a small number of socially acceptable occupations and professions, such as teaching and medicine. In the Gulf states, jobs not considered appropriate for MENA women, such as waitressing, are often filled by imported female laborers from South and East Asia.

Gender discrimination in the MENA region is sometimes codified in law, frequently in family laws or civil codes. In many countries in the region, women must obtain permission from a male relative, usually a husband or father, before seeking employment, requesting a loan, starting a business, or traveling. Such laws often grant women a smaller share of inherited family wealth. As a result, families tend to make greater investments in education for boys than for girls.

The results of Egypt's 2000 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) provide insights into families' preferences for investing in their children's education. Women with children ages 6 to 15 were asked, "If parents have one son and one daughter and can send only one child to the university, which child should they send?" While 53 percent of the women said that the decision should depend on the children's capabilities, 39 percent said that the son should go to the university, compared with only 8 percent who said that the daughter should go. The survey also found that mothers of children who had never attended school were more likely to cite the cost of education as a reason for not educating their daughters than for not educating their sons.¹¹

However, the situation in the region is slowly changing. Women activists, who generally come from the educated segments of society, are challenging the status quo; demanding equality in the family and society; and calling

for women's economic, political, and social empowerment. The trend's intensity varies by country but is visible even in relatively conservative nations. In addition to facing political pressure for reform, countries are dealing with economic changes that are creating an impetus for women to become more active outside the home. As the region's cost of living rises rapidly, families are increasingly forced to depend on the additional income that female family members can provide.

Education's Effects on Reproductive Choices and Employment

Education helps women take advantage of opportunities that could benefit them and their families, preparing women for the labor force and helping them understand their legal and reproductive rights.

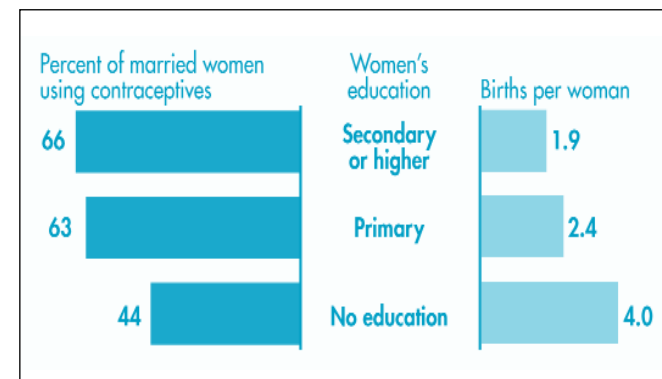
Fertility

Education is the single most important determinant of both age at marriage and age at first birth in MENA countries, since women in the region tend to give birth soon after marriage. Among married Egyptian women ages 25 to 29, for instance, those with no education had married at age 18, on average, and had their first child by age 20; those with a secondary or higher education married at an average age of 23 and had their first child by age 25.¹² Turkey's 1998 DHS showed that 22 percent of girls 15 to 19 years old who had no education or who had not completed primary school were already mothers or pregnant, compared with only 2 percent of girls who had completed secondary or higher education.¹³

Educated women generally want smaller families and make better use of reproductive health and family planning information and services in achieving their desired family size; Moroccan women with at least some secondary education had, on average, half as many children as women with no education (see Figure 2). Women with more education also tend to have healthier families. In Egypt, for example, children born to mothers with no formal education were more than twice as likely to die as those born to mothers who had completed secondary school (see Figure 3). According to the 2000 DHS, Egyptian women with less education were less likely to receive antenatal care: Only 34 percent of Egyptian mothers with no education received antenatal care, compared with 75 percent of those with a high school or college degree.¹⁴

Most women in the MENA region know something about modern contraception, but more-educated women tend to know about a wider range of available methods and where to get them. In Egypt, 69 percent of married women ages 15 to 49 who had completed secondary school reported seeing family planning messages in

Figure 2
Contraceptive Use and Fertility in Morocco, by Women's Education, 1995



Source: ORC Macro, Morocco DHS, 1995.

newspapers or magazines, compared with 32 percent of those who had completed only primary school.¹⁵ Women with more education are also more likely to discuss family planning issues with their husbands.

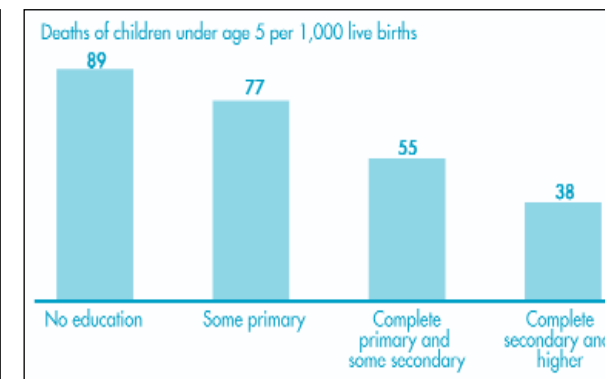
Women's ability to choose the number and timing of their births is key to empowering women as individuals, mothers, and citizens, but women's rights go beyond those dealing with their reproductive roles. Women should be able to fulfill their aspirations outside the home, to the benefit of themselves, their families, and their countries. Opening economic opportunities to women has far-reaching effects, but those benefits can be reaped only if women receive at least a basic education.

Employment

As women's educational attainment in MENA countries has increased, more women have moved into the job market. But women's participation in the labor force is still low: Only 20 percent of women ages 15 and older in MENA countries are in the labor force — the lowest level of any world region. The highest levels of native female labor force participation in MENA countries are found in Lebanon, Morocco, Turkey, and Yemen, where women constitute more than 25 percent of the labor force. But those rates are lower than rates found outside the region. In France, for example, women make up 45 percent of the labor force; in Indonesia, which is home to the world's largest Muslim population, women make up 38 percent of the labor force.¹⁶ The lowest rates of labor force participation are seen among women native to the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a group of six conservative monarchies; reported national rates are inflated by the large number of foreign female laborers in those countries.

Women who live in countries with a large agricultural

Figure 3
Child Mortality Rate in Egypt, by Mother's Level of Education



Source: ORC Macro, Egypt DHS, 2000.

sector, such as Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Yemen, tend to work mainly in that sector, although some MENA countries have been more successful in getting women into nonagricultural occupations. Morocco, Tunisia, and Turkey, for example, have been able to engage women in the countries' export-manufacturing sectors.

Most of the MENA women who work outside the agricultural sector are college-educated professionals employed mainly in government (except in Lebanon, where the majority of the female labor force is found in the private sector).¹⁷ A smaller share of women work in factories, but many lack the educational qualifications of factory workers in countries such as China, Vietnam, and the nations of the former Soviet bloc.

The current high unemployment rates among men in MENA countries make it harder for women to compete in male-dominated job markets, and women's unemployment rates are higher than those of men in the region. In Saudi Arabia, where Saudi women account for only 7 percent of the labor force, the unemployment rate for women in 1999 was 16 percent, more than double the unemployment rate for men.¹⁸ In 2000, the unemployment rate among urban Iranian women was 25 percent, compared with 16 percent for men; in rural areas of the country, women's unemployment reached 20 percent, versus 17 percent for men.¹⁹ Improving the quality of education, providing more vocational training, developing job-creating programs, and removing obstacles to women's entrepreneurship can help alleviate the high rates of female unemployment.

Ongoing Concerns

MENA countries have made significant strides in making education available over the past few decades, but chal-



Table 1
Selected Socioeconomic Indicators in the Middle East and North Africa

	Percent of Population over age 15 who are illiterate, 2000		Number of People over age 15 who are illiterate (thousands), 2000		Percent of Population ages 15 to 24 who are illiterate, 2000		Number of People ages 15 to 24 who are illiterate (thousands), 2000	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Middle East and North Africa	42	22	50,057	26,671	23	11	8,585	4,573
Algeria	43	24	4,211	2,360	16	7	530	227
Bahrain	17	9	32	25	1	2	1	1
Egypt	56	33	12,253	7,374	37	24	2,500	1,678
Iran	31	17	6,696	3,819	9	4	655	296
Iraq	77	45	5,070	3,057	71	41	1,593	962
Jordan	16	5	220	78	1	1	3	5
Kuwait	20	16	103	130	7	8	15	19
Lebanon	20	8	246	91	7	3	23	9
Libya	32	9	533	168	7	0.5	43	1
Morocco	64	38	6,286	3,702	42	24	1,265	750
Oman	38	20	246	155	4	0.5	9	1
Palestine	16	6	136	48	—	—	—	—
Qatar	17	20	21	57	3	7	1	3
Saudi Arabia	33	17	1,723	1,092	10	5	187	101
Syria	40	12	1,879	566	21	5	376	85
Tunisia	39	19	1,307	621	11	3	106	27
Turkey	24	7	5,453	1,539	6	1	392	81
United Arab Emirates	21	25	117	345	6	13	10	29
Yemen	75	33	3,525	1,444	54	17	874	292

— = Data not available.
 (a). Gross enrollment ratio is the number of students, regardless of age, enrolled in school, divided by the total number of people in the appropriate age range for that level of schooling.
 (b). Data on labor force participation may include foreign workers.
 (c). Data shown in this column might be different from those given in previous MENA policy briefs because new data have become available or different sources have been used.
 (d). Palestine includes the Arab population of the West Bank and Gaza.

Challenges remain. Access to education has improved, and the illiteracy rate among the region's young adults (people ages 15 to 24) is half that of the adult population (people ages 15 and up). More women are now pursuing higher education, reflecting their ability to graduate from secondary school. In some countries, such as the oil-rich Gulf states, women make up a larger share of university enrollment in part because many young men from those countries go abroad for college and graduate school.

But illiteracy remains high in some countries. There are still wide gender gaps in parts of the region, and the quality of the education is a major concern throughout the region.

Illiteracy

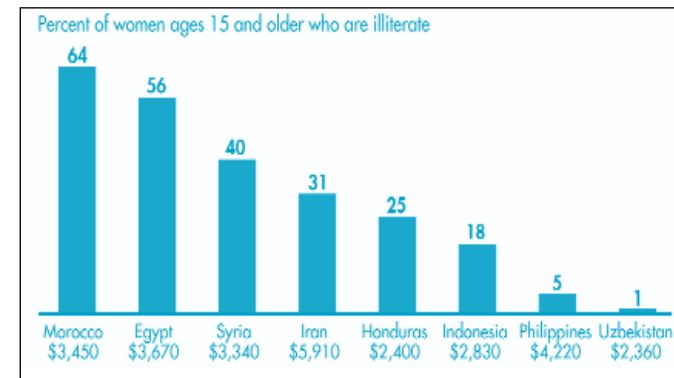
MENA countries' illiteracy rates are often higher than those of non-MENA countries with comparable or lower per capita incomes (see Figure 4). There are over 75 million illiterate adults in the region, more than half of whom live in Egypt, Iraq, and Morocco. Around 13 million young adults are illiterate; fully one-third of them live in Egypt, which has both a high illiteracy rate and a large population. As in other parts of the world, illiteracy rates in the MENA region are higher among rural than among urban populations (see Figure 5 for an example).

Although all MENA governments require that all children receive at least five years of schooling and all provide free education at least through high school, the rapid growth

Gross Enrollment Ratio (%) (a)				Women as a Share of University Enrollment (%)	Public Education as a Share of Total Government Expenditure (%)	Percent of People ages 15 and Older in Labor Force (b)		Women as Percent of Labor Force (b)	Total Fertility Rate (c)	
Primary		Secondary				Female	Male			
Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male			Female	Male	
91	100	62	71	—	—	20	73	20	3.3	Middle East and North Africa
107	116	73	68	—	16	—	—	—	2.8	Algeria
103	103	105	98	60	12	19	65	17	2.6	Bahrain
96	103	83	88	—	15	20	74	21	3.5	Egypt
85	88	75	81	47	18	11	75	12	2	Iran
91	111	29	47	34	—	17	75	18	5.4	Iraq
101	101	89	86	51	20	22	76	21	3.7	Jordan
95	93	57	55	68	14	43	83	25	4	Kuwait
97	101	79	72	52	8	27	76	28	2.4	Lebanon
117	115	—	—	48	—	23	78	21	3.7	Libya
88	101	35	44	44	25	30	79	28	2.7	Morocco
71	74	67	69	58	16	16	79	14	4.1	Oman
109	107	86	80	47	—	10	67	13	5.7	Palestine
104	105	92	86	73	—	35	92	13	3.5	Qatar
—	—	—	—	56	23	15	80	11	5.7	Saudi Arabia
105	113	41	46	—	14	21	83	20	3.8	Syria
115	120	80	76	48	20	24	73	24	2.1	Tunisia
96	105	48	67	41	15	26	72	27	2.5	Turkey
99	99	80	71	—	20	31	92	12	3	United Arab Emirates
61	96	25	69	21	22	29	82	27	7	Yemen

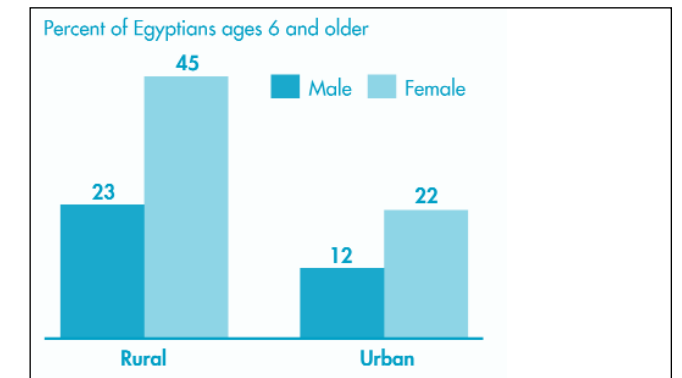
Sources: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Literacy Statistics" (www.uis.unesco.org, accessed March 11, 2003); United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2002; UN Statistics Division, The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/ww2000/table5d.htm, accessed Aug. 23, 2003); F. Roudi-Fahimi, "Women's Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa" (2003); and C. Haub, 2003 World Population Data Sheet.

Figure 4
Female Illiteracy Rates and per Capita Income in Selected Countries, 2000



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Literacy Statistics" (www.uis.unesco.org, accessed March 11, 2003); and World Bank, World Development Indicators 2002.

Figure 5
Egyptians Who Have Never Attended School, by Sex and Residence, 2000



Source: ORC Macro, Egypt DHS, 2000.



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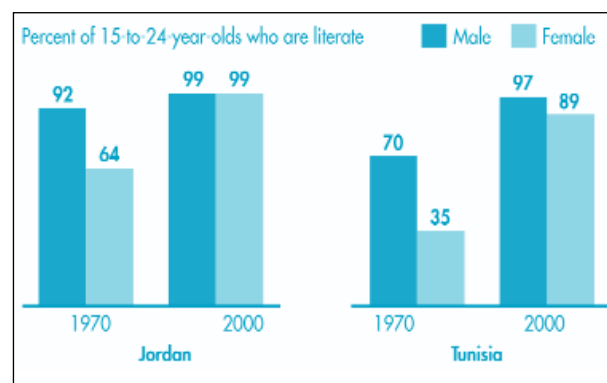
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of school-age populations in the region is posing a challenge for many governments. Between 1986 and 1996, for example, the number of Iranians between ages 5 and 19 grew by 20 percent, or nearly 4 million, straining the capacity of the country's schools.²⁰ In Egypt, despite the government's success in reducing the adult illiteracy rate from 60 percent in 1980 to 50 percent in 1995, the increase in the population's size meant that the number of illiterate Egyptians grew from 16 million to 19 million. A similar trend has been visible in Morocco.²¹

Gender Gaps

Women in MENA countries are twice as likely to be illiterate as men are and make up two-thirds of the region's illiterate adults. The gender gaps in education vary greatly across countries in the region but are generally wider in countries where overall literacy and school enrollment are lower. In Yemen, for example, the illiteracy rate among young women (54 percent) is triple that of young men (17 percent). But countries that make political and financial commitments to reducing illiteracy, as Jordan and Tunisia have, generally see significant improvements in reducing illiteracy and narrowing the gender gap (see Figure 6).²²

Figure 6
Closing the Gender Gap in Literacy in Jordan and Tunisia, 1970 and 2000



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Literacy Statistics" (www.uis.unesco.org, accessed March 11, 2003).

Gender gaps in literacy and school enrollment generally persist regardless of rural or urban location. Gender gaps in school enrollment are especially wide in Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, and Yemen. Closing gender gaps in education would benefit countries' economies. One study estimated that the region's average annual growth in per capita gross national product would have been nearly a full percentage point higher between 1960 and 1992 if MENA's gender gap in education had shrunk as quickly as East Asia's did.²³

Quality of Education

It is not enough to make education more widely avail-

able; the quality of the education also needs to be improved. Arguing that the poor quality of education in MENA countries has led to a significant mismatch between the labor market's needs and graduates' skills, the 2002 *Arab Human Development Report* points out that education in the region often fails to teach students to analyze information or think innovatively. The report also warns that education systems may split into two tiers, with high-quality private education available only to the wealthy minority and low-quality public education, the sole option for most citizens. Such a trend would turn education into a "means of perpetuating social stratification and poverty" rather than a means of increasing social equality.²⁴

Gender sensitivity is a key aspect of the quality of education. Educational systems should be sensitive to the specific needs of girls and women. Yet the curricula and teaching materials — and the media, which has a powerful role in shaping people's knowledge and opinions — in the MENA region often reinforce traditional roles that may deny women opportunities for full and equal participation in society. As radio, television, and the Internet reach more people in the region, it becomes even more important that students learn to analyze and judge the media's messages for themselves.

The Need for Action

Efforts to improve female education in MENA countries need to go beyond rhetoric and should involve policies and programs with measurable results. Governments can start by making the MDGs part of national development plans and monitoring progress toward those goals (see Box 1). Governments also need to make an extra effort to ensure that education is more accessible to low-income families and rural populations, with special attention to the quality of the education provided and the need for girls to complete school.

Richer countries both inside and outside the region are encouraged to help resource-poor countries improve their educational systems and collect data on their progress. Improving access to and the quality of education is the most rewarding investment a country can make. Investing in female education will accelerate the MENA region's economic and social development by enhancing human capital, slowing population growth, and alleviating poverty.

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Is there Discrimination against Women in Arab Universities? A Study on the Status of Female and Male Professors

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Introduction*

The challenges facing women across the world are numerous and require hard and long-term effort. Adding to this burden are the unobserved obstacles latent in the minds of many women resulting from their need to develop contemporary lifestyles and identities. These mental barriers harbored by women repress, and even block, their ability to become self-actualized and achieve empowerment. In other words, a conflict arises within modern women's psyches between the requirements innate in social progress and education on the one hand, and commitment to cultural and traditional values on the other. This study seeks to address the questions: What is the situation of the teaching staff, especially women, in Arab universities? Is there awareness about gender discrimination among faculty members of Arab universities? Moreover, if such discrimination is detected, what are its forms, aspects and degrees? By responding to these questions, the desire for a clearer understanding of women's roles in higher education, and their effects, can be fulfilled.

The Situation in the Arab World: An Overview

Higher education institutions in Arab societies are relatively recent phenomena; their creation was motivated

by national and economic factors. In modern history, especially during the second half of the twentieth century, the Arab world has had increasing experience with more developed countries, which has strongly influenced and largely shaped the Arab vision of how their universities should be defined and later developed.¹ In 1996, the number of Arab universities reached 175, whereas in 1950 there had been about ten universities in the region. University construction started relatively slowly, but increased with each passing decade. An average of ten new universities opened each year throughout the 1990s. Subsequently, four-fifths of Arab universities were built in the last quarter of the twentieth century alone, and until the mid-eighties most universities (62 percent) had been in existence less than 15 years.² At the same time, enrollment in secondary education institutions in the Arab world increased dramatically during this period yet varied significantly among Middle Eastern countries.³

Deficiency and Modernization

Observers of higher education development note the increasing demand for "university reform" in all Arab countries, identifying that most higher education institutions are incapable of meeting current developmental

demands. Researchers most often highlight obsolete instructional methodologies, and the growing gap between the insufficient numbers of professionals with higher educational qualifications and the continuously increasing need in the workforce for such qualified individuals as the most pressing problems. The Western paradigm of higher education manifests itself in its self-acclaimed liberal arts educational requirements, setting the standard of international accreditation, and therefore mandating that other nations follow suit if they desire worldwide recognition. In emphasizing conformity to such standardizations, Arab universities have adopted the Western model without carefully regarding the different and specific cultural and societal requirements of their particular region. Consequently, under a liberal arts educational system, with an overemphasis on the humanities rather than the theoretical or applied sciences, there is a lack of graduates specializing in fields that fulfil the needs of the employment sector of the Arab world. Some believe that the causes of these deficiencies are due to how and why the universities were first established and developed. By importing ready-to-use Western higher education models and not having a comprehensive understanding of the functions and goals of higher education, the higher education system was not fully compatible with the development and cultural requirements of Arab societies from the beginning. Consequently, calls for modernization have been made. According to a document released by UNESCO, the desires for modernization are rooted in the immense cultural diversity, economic disparities and social instability that one sees throughout the Arab region. Furthermore, since the large populations of these countries are predominately young, there is a need to modernize to meet the increasing demand for higher education and assistance in developing and establishing more stability in these societies.⁴

How is modernization to be implemented? Considering the inadequacies mentioned above, the renewal of higher education in the Arab world must be a process that aims at changing its intrinsic nature based on the more relevant needs and expectations of Arab societies. More pragmatically, some observers stress the importance of modernizing teaching and learning methodologies as well as educational technologies, and of implementing the beneficial resources of information technology. On the managerial level, others believe that "nothing can allow universities to regain their vitality, impetus and ethical and practical values, except the unchaining of their administrations and their supervision from bureaucracy and politicization."⁵

However, modernization of higher educational institutions is impossible without also tackling the issue of women's positions in them. It is well-established that the status of women in a society is a fundamental indicator of its level of modernization. So what is the status of women in Arab universities? Moreover, what are women's views of their situation in this context?

Women and Higher education in Arab countries⁶

Female Enrollment

The number of women enrolling in higher education is increasing in many Arab countries, especially in the Gulf. Most of these women come from the middle or upper classes situated in urban areas. In 1995, higher education enrollment for individuals between the ages of 18 and 23 reached 24.5 percent for men and 16.3 percent for women, with significant differences between countries in the region. For instance, in Egypt, enrollment of women has decreased since 1970 from being nearly one woman to every two men to less than one woman to 10 men in 1995; whereas, in Yemen, the average woman to man enrollment ratio has remained less than two women for every 10 men.

In 1996, the number of Arab universities reached 175, whereas in 1950 there had been about ten universities in the region.

Increased enrollment in higher education is mainly due to an increase in the number of women enrolling. In recent years, the average enrollment figures for women have surpassed those for men, reaching 1.18 women for every man in Saudi Arabia, 1.35 in Kuwait, 1.87 in Bahrain, 5.12 in Qatar, and 6.08 in the United Arab Emirates. Even though these statistics can be interpreted to show that Arab countries support the issue of women attending and achieving a higher education, this support remains conditional upon women acting in culturally acceptable ways,

and maintaining their opportunities to advance socially. For example, governments have attempted to reduce the possibility of rivalry between men and women by supporting the integration of women in specific fields such as education and medicine, but not in others where men predominate. This means that despite the development of higher education and subsequent modernization in the region, existing policies largely strengthen prevailing gender and class norms and structures.

Women's Academic Specializations

Women in Arab universities, as in universities worldwide, occupy positions of a lesser importance than those of their male colleagues, and often focus on teaching



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and/or learning rather than on research. Paradoxically, in some countries of the Gulf, gender segregation on campuses contributes to the likelihood that women will enroll in universities with such policies. In 1996, women in Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia constituted 30 percent of the total number of professors on campus. However, in other countries, women comprised a significantly smaller percentage of the faculty; in Jordan (18 percent), Kuwait (19 percent), Palestine (14 percent), Sudan (13 percent), Syria (16 percent), United Arab Emirates (9 percent), and Yemen (12 percent). As for Egypt, Lebanon, Qatar, and Morocco, women's participation in academic teaching largely has stabilized at between a quarter and a third of the total since 1980. Tunisia recorded remarkable progress in the percentage of its female professors, going from 9 percent in 1980 to about 30 percent in 1996.

In general, women's academic successes have not been mirrored in the social and political arenas. While this applies to all academics, both male and female, due to the relative marginalization of the academic sector, women are subject to a double marginalization considering the prevailing gender considerations that still characterize Arab societies. A study conducted by Mohammed Sabour in 1998⁷ showed that although most of the female academics included in his study came from the upper and middle classes, their integration into the academic corps remained subject to a series of imposed male practices. In another article, he also found that the goals, power relationships and decision-making processes in Arab academia are fully fashioned to suit men and their mentality.⁸

Consequently, women's status in higher education cannot be examined apart from their status or their development in society. In Arab societies that share, despite their diversity, various cultural aspects and traditions that rule gender notions, women still suffer from inequality, and this diminishes their opportunity to contribute to the advancement of society in a qualified professional capacity.

A study conducted by Rafica Hammoud, "The Role of Women in Higher Education Management in the Arab Region,"⁹ reveals that women's participation in administrative and academic positions is limited. Hammoud links this phenomenon to traditional views and social stereotypes, as well as to: economic factors, the political situation in the Arab world, the influence of the media, and

women's self-images. This study adds credence to the widespread view that the higher educational sector as a whole, while witnessing the rapidly increasing enrollment of women on an almost equal basis with men, does not have women participating in the higher echelons of management, and suffers from continuing discriminatory practices which limit women from accessing such strata. These phenomena are also observed in the economic and political sectors of Arab societies as well.

The major question to address is: What should academia in the Arab world do to offset such prejudicial phenomena? The priority for counteracting discriminatory practices inherent in this field must first take into consideration that female academics most certainly have the cognitive capacities, and have raised their social status to the extent that they are well aware of any discrimination leveled against them. In addition, due to the current extensive recruitment of women for academic positions in Arab countries and given the recruiting costs involved, the expected responsibilities of their positions should be equal to those of their male academic colleagues. Furthermore, since social development goes hand-in-hand with an enhanced human resources pool to recruit from, with women constituting half of this pool, female academics' judgments of their current situation should play a significant role in contributing to the improvement of the current conditions, which will eventually progress towards the elimination of discrimination.

Women's status in higher education cannot be examined apart from their status in society or their development in society.

The Methodology of the Study

The Background of the Study

As stated above, Arab higher education institutions exhibit inequality in promotion to upper administrative and managerial positions among male and female academics (such as

university presidencies, deanships and department chairs), and in specialized academic fields that are supposedly open to women.¹⁰

One would expect, on a theoretical level at least, that academia, of all arenas of human endeavor, would be the most welcoming to women. This should be the case when one considers the criteria of competence and scientific knowledge used for peer evaluation in academia, as opposed to the criteria of gender, culture or political affiliation, especially since the latter are not the result of circumstances or will, while the former are a reflection of the structure of the higher education working environment. In the absence of such a welcoming spirit for the

promotion of women to more elevated levels, a university's staff and faculty would be working against their own standards of accepted academic practices. Specifically, a male university professor or staff member cannot object to the ascension of his female colleague to the position of president because she is a woman if she meets the requirements since this would oppose fundamental academic criteria, the essential foundation on which academic professions are built.

Nevertheless, the preservation of laws, rules or privileges related to the positions of the two genders in universities seems remarkably unchanged. The percentage of women in positions of leadership remains far inferior to their percentages as students and professors. It seems that hidden obstacles exist within the university structure, which hamper the promotion of women, and are not apparent in its formal laws. International research has shown that despite the appearance of non-discrimination in the Arab world, there is an invisible "glass ceiling" that female academics cannot rise above. There is also the belief that the obstacles facing Arab female academics are not only equal to, but are more than those facing women in Western universities, and that the glass ceiling in the Arab world is much lower than that in the West, considering the synergy of the more complicated and powerful factors that form this ceiling. Among these factors is the relatively recent increase of Arab women entering academic fields and their consequent lack of academic experience in comparison to male colleagues. Furthermore, customs, traditions and culture create a boundary between the two genders, burdening female academics and in turn affecting university life, as well as a low degree of awareness of university professors to the basic discrepancies between the genders.

The Questions of the Study

How are the obstacles that block the professional advancement of women in Arab universities created? What is the degree of awareness on the part of female academics of these obstacles? What are the personal factors that affect the reality of discrimination? How is discrimination manifested by male and female professors in Arab universities? Do these obstacles differ in form and type between Arab countries?

The Hypothesis

There is apparent discrimination against women in Arab universities, which is especially visible in the discrepancies

The percentage of women in positions of leadership remains far inferior to their percentages as students and professors.

in academic status, and in gender awareness among male and female academicians.

How the Study was Done

To answer these questions and test the hypothesis, the researchers prepared two surveys. One was addressed to officials in Arab universities and sought to collect statistical data related to the gender dimension of public university life: professors' and students' specializations, enrollment percentages, and the composition of academic teaching staff, union or representative committees and decision-making positions, among other issues. The second form,¹¹ addressed to male and female academics with minor differences, sought to highlight the female academic's reality compared with that of the male academic, and the major obstacles facing female academics, as well as professors' views on the issue.

UNESCO's regional office¹² in Beirut took the responsibility of distributing the surveys to Arab countries and entrusting persons through UNESCO's national committees to follow up on the collection of the surveys. However, relatively few forms were collected from various Arab countries, specifically from Egypt (where university education

is the most firmly established), making description of Arab higher education possible but with significant reservations. Failure to collect a sufficient number of surveys impedes accurate assessments of all the Arab countries, and limits the research to the few countries from which a minimum number of forms were received. Consequently, this study is for fact-finding purposes only, and is not fully comprehensive and representative of Arab male and female professors or the overall academic situation. Nevertheless, the study is useful on the cognitive level; and it lays the foundations from which subsequent

studies can form hypotheses. This is especially true in the absence of sufficient detailed studies about universities in the Arab world in general and about the status of female academicians in particular.

The Sample

The study sample consisted of 450 male and female academics. According to the sample constitution (see Table 1 of the annexes), the greatest number of responses came from Iraq,¹³ followed by Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen and Morocco, then the Emirates and Oman. As for Egypt and Syria, only 13 forms were received, whereas no forms were received from the remaining Arab countries.



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More male professors responded to the survey than female professors, except in Lebanon; whereas, in Iraq the number of responses was equal. An interesting observation is that fewer women provided information about their experiences and opinions than their male colleagues.¹⁴ The relatively high response rate of male academics is noteworthy since the survey did not deny that its goal was to glean information concerning the reality of female academics and the discriminatory injustices from which they are suffering.

The Results

To reiterate, this study is more of a fact-finding exercise than representative of the male and female professors' situation in the Arab world. Therefore, the study highlights discrimination against women in higher education. A summary of the major results collected in the study follows.

The study showed that the percentage of young and single female professors is higher than that of male professors. The data also show that the number of children for both male and female professors is low. Male and female professors have different criteria for selecting their respective spouses — female professors usually choose spouses from the higher social professional circles than their male counterparts, and most female professors require their partners to have reached a high educational level.

Although the majority of the male and female professors' mothers are homemakers, and the overwhelming majority come from big families of more than five children, the socio-economic level of female professors is higher than that of male professors. The educational level of the female professors' mothers is higher than that of the male professors' mothers, and the professional status and educational level of their fathers are higher than fathers of the male professors.

The data show that female professors choose academia as a profession at an earlier age compared to their male colleagues, mainly because the latter, who take time out from academia to pursue other interests, stop their educational pursuits for that period of time. Furthermore, female professors have less total number of years of education than that of male professors. Although there is no significant difference between women and their male colleagues in academic performance as to the number of courses, the hours of teaching and supervi-

sion, and time dedicated to research, their percentage in higher academic ranks and in university leadership positions is inferior to that of their male colleagues. Perhaps this is due to the number of male professors who enjoy higher scientific competence and seniority due to more years of experience, as well as implicit gender discrimination.

Male and female professors are generally satisfied with their relationships with colleagues. Although female professors are less content, they do not feel a sense of rivalry with their female peers, whereas male professors complain about competition with other male colleagues.

In general, there is a remarkable level of participation by both genders in meetings, colloquia, specialized and diverse committees and seminars within university environments. However, male professors participate in such activities more often than their female peers, whereas both genders do not participate frequently in conferences and international academic associations.

In public activities, male and female professors' participation in publishing, the media, televised seminars and other such activities is limited overall. However, male professors participate more than female professors. Both genders seldom participate in local associations; perhaps due to limited time, lack of awareness of their importance and a sense of apathy towards certain causes. Participation in women's associations remains very low, even though female professors participate more than male professors.

Surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of both genders do not take part in political parties, perhaps because of the relative lack of democracy in Arab

countries, the weakness of most political parties, and an apprehension of authority. The professors could have also refrained from replying affirmatively because this would have contradicted their profession's culture.

Moreover, contending with professional and home responsibilities varied according to male and female professors, especially when juggling both work responsibilities and household tasks at the same time. Male professors resorted to self-organization, whereas female professors resorted to husbands, parents and hired help. However, both male and female professors did not feel that their household duties constituted an obstacle to their professional advancement.

Regarding awareness about discrimination against women, the results show that female professors are less concerned about the women's movement for equality than their male colleagues, and that they are less convinced about the need for equality with male professors. However, those who are more concerned are more committed to turning their convictions into practical applications than their male colleagues. Both groups often raise the issue of equality for women with their students, although they tackle it more as an intellectual issue than a struggle that requires committed action. The male and female professors did not seem to be noticeably affected by a gender perspective in their education, and both resorted equally to referring to gender issues in their courses.

Unexpectedly, female academics did not believe the educational system was unfair to the extent that their male colleagues believed. The latter believe injustice is caused by social and political considerations, while a few female professors did feel that privileges were granted more often to male professors. In general, female professors are satisfied about their profession, especially their social situation.

These are the main results related to discrimination against women in Arab universities. In summary, they highlight a reality generally acceptable to female professors despite discrepancies in status and promotion. In addition, Arab female professors consider that these discrepancies do not require overt opposition, contrary to the statements of female professors in Western universities when they have felt unsatisfied. It can be ascertained that pressure is exerted less on Arab female professors than on Western female professors, since the former can readily obtain support, and consequently can face pressure more easily than the latter.

To substantiate these findings, a comparison was made between the status of female Arab academics and their civil status to determine if marriage, procreation and management of the household are major burdens. The results showed that these burdens were not major and did not affect academic status. Married female professors did not feel any injustice or resentment toward privileges granted to their male colleagues. Furthermore, they were more expressive about gender awareness than their single female colleagues, and had more interest in the women's cause, and were more willing to participate in public affairs.

The female professors were generally positive regarding their social status because they are married to men of high educational and socio-economic levels who usually adopt less stereotyped gender behaviors. Moreover, the majority of female professors come from larger and wealthier families, enabling them to have the possibility of financial, moral and personal support, and the social value they give to academic status is high. All of these factors contribute to reducing the effects of gender discrimination.

As to the age variable, it seems to serve gender awareness. The results showed that with age professors tend to be more aware of discrimination, to care more about the women's cause, and to be more willing to participate in public affairs. Older female professors, who possibly have less household and social duties, can also participate more in public affairs.

Regarding the relationship between gender awareness and the social and political environment, the results showed that it is highest in Lebanon, Tunisia and Yemen. It is known that these countries have democratic political experience, and therefore a correlation can be drawn where

democracy may have a direct impact on gender awareness. Conversely, the weakest expression of awareness of the situation of women was recorded in Iraq, where political and social tensions and the domination of nationalism over public political awareness have marginalized the women's cause, rendering it a secondary issue. Paradoxically, discussions about the women's cause decrease at a time when debates about the situation in the country predominate.

Perhaps this weakness in Iraq regarding the lack of awareness of the Arab women's cause largely explains this

weakness throughout the Arab region. Arab political systems suffer from instability, affecting the development of society. In addition to the burden of the Palestinian cause, which is dealt with as a collective Arab responsibility, there are other heavy social burdens, such as illiteracy and poverty, which reduce the importance of, and at the same time deflect attention away from, the women's cause.

The results also show that a society that has a developed education system along with a democratic government has a high level of gender awareness. This awareness cannot be the monopoly of one gender; subsequently, awareness of the women's movement for equality in a certain society is directly linked to the level of men's

... with age professors tend to be more aware of discrimination, to care more about the women's cause, and to be more willing to participate in public affairs.

... gender awareness is not a mental issue only; it requires a social structure capable of assimilating it.



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awareness of it. Gender awareness by males — even if it is imperative to promote women's awareness — is not enough because it does not necessarily lead to change if women do not struggle for their own rights and encourage their societies to progress. Furthermore, gender awareness is not a mental issue only; it requires a social structure capable of assimilating it. This structure must support and promote education along with democratic political processes, especially regarding the development of a civil society.

The results of the study also indicate that class awareness contributes to gender awareness which leads to taking a stand and acting against gender discrimination. This is why we note that class privileges enjoyed by many female professors did not prod them to take action against discrimination despite their expression of relative gender awareness. The elitist and individual considerations and conditions that often characterize women's academic status reduce their interest in struggling against gender discrimination. Therefore, there is a need for opponents of discrimination against women to work within associations or parties including various social affiliations where interaction promotes and stimulates socially responsible action.

Interaction is not only required on the personal level, but is also required on a societal level in order to promote awareness and enlighten opinions. In this study, it is obvious that female professors who enjoy a sufficient level of gender awareness are those involved in public affairs, and who participate in conferences outside their countries. From this it can be deduced that social isolation decreases the level of gender awareness.

In conclusion, female Arab professors are committed to their academic roles and they greatly approve of their working conditions. This study highlights their strenuous efforts to prove themselves on the academic level and their yearning to participate in decision-making in their respective universities. However, there still exists a gap in equality between their academic and their social roles as compared to their male counterparts.

Translated from Arabic by Nadine El-Khoury

Reprinted with permission from UNESCO and Bahithat: Lebanese Association of Women Researchers. For space purposes, the study is included here in abbreviated form. The study first appeared in Bahithat: Vol VII: 2000-2001 The Universities in Lebanon and the Arab World.

The female professors were generally positive regarding their social status because they are married to men of high educational and socio-economic levels who usually adopt less stereotyped gender behaviors.

Annexes:

Table 1: Distribution of Responses from Professors According to Gender and Countries

Country	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Egypt	6	3	9
	3.00%	1.20%	4.2%
Iraq	48	49	97
	24.20%	19.40%	43.60%
Jordan	34	48	82
	17.20%	19.00%	36.20%
Lebanon	40	27	67
	20.20%	10.70%	30.90%
Morocco	19	21	40
	9.60%	8.30%	17.90%
Oman	4	6	10
	2.00%	2.40%	4.40%
Syria	4		4
	2.00 %		2.00 %
Tunisia	20	35	55
	10.10%	13.90%	24.00%
The Emirates	3	27	30
	1.50%	10.70%	12.20%
Yemen	20	36	56
	10.10%	14.30%	24.40%
Total	198	252	450
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 2: Distribution of Professors According to Gender and to Spouse's Profession

Profession	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Higher cadres	42	23	65
	36.20%*	10.36%	14.40%
	13	14	27
Middle cadres			
Unskilled man/woman worker or lower cadres	-	3	3
	-	1.35%	0.40%
Housewife	-	96	96
	-	43.24%	38.10%
Business-man or woman/ free profession	16	6	22
	13.79%	2.70%	4.88%
Elementary or intermediate man/woman professor	-	25	25
	-	11.26%	5.60%
Secondary man/woman professor	2	24	26
	1.72%	10.81%	5.80%
University man/woman professor	43	31	74
	37.06%	13.96%	16.40%
No answer	12	13	25
	-	5.15%	
Not concerned	70	17	87
	35.40%	6.70%	19.30%
Total	198	252	450
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

* The percentage was counted for all squares where the spouse's profession was mentioned according to the total number of married persons and only those who answered (i.e. 222 for the males and 116 for the females)

Table 3: Distribution of Professors According to Gender and Specialization

Specialization	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Education, Art, and Communication	27	34	61
	13.63%	13.49%	13.55%
Languages	33	29	62
	16.70%	11.50%	13.80%
Psychology and Philosophy	10	3	13
	5.05 %	1.19%	2.88%
Social Sciences, Political Sciences and Law	12	20	32
	6.06%	7.93%	7.11%
Economy, Commerce and Business Administration	13	22	35
	6.56%	8.73%	7.77%
History, Geography, Geology and Agriculture	18	34	52
	9.09%	13.49%	11.55%
Biology, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Environment	38	42	80
	19.19%	16.66%	17.77%
Health Sciences (Pharmacy and Medicine)	24	19	43
	12.12%	7.53%	9.55%
Religious Sciences	-	4	4
	-	1.60%	0.90 %
Architecture and Information Technology	19	37	56
	9.59%	14.68%	12.44%
Unspecified	4	8	12
	2.02%	3.17%	2.66%
Total	198	252	450
	100.00%	100.00 %	100.00%

Table 4: The Distribution of Male and Female Professors according to Academic Rank and Age

Gender	Rank	Age						Total
		24-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	+66	No answer	
Male	Head of Department	4 13.30%	22 25.00%	20 21.10%	13 37.10%		1 50.00%	60 23.80%
	Director-Assistant Dean		8 9.10%	13 13.70%	3 8.60%			24 9.50%
	Dean		5 5.70%	13 13.70%	5 14.30%			23 9.10%
	University President		2 2.30%	4 4.20%	1 2.90%			7 2.80%
	No answer	26 86.70%	51 58.00%	45 47.40%	13 37.10%	2 100.00%	1 50.00%	137 4.80%
	Total	30 100.00%	88 100.00%	95 100.00%	35 100.00%	2 100.00%	2 100.00%	252 100.00%
Female	Head of Department	5 8.30%	9 13.60%	13 28.90%	3 15.80%		4 57.10 %	34 17.20%
	Director-Assistant Dean	1 1.70%	3 4.50%	4 8.90%	2 10.50%		1 14.30%	11 5.60%
	Dean		4 6.10%	2 4.40%	3 15.80%			9 4.50%
	University President				1 5.30 %			1 0.50%
	No answer	54 90.00%	50 75.80%	26 57.80%	10 52.60%	1 100.00%	2 28.60%	143 72.20%
	Total	60 100.00%	66 100.00%	45 100.00%	19 100.00%	1 100.00%	7 100.00%	198 100.00%

Table 5: The Distribution of Male and Female Professors According to Rank and Countries

Rank	Country							Total
	Iraq	Yemen	Tunisia	Morocco	Lebanon	Jordan	Other	
Males								
Head of Department	10 20.40%	7 19.40%	8 22.90%	7 33.30%	12 44.40%	13 27.10%	3 11.10%	60 23.80 %
Dean-Assistant Director	7 14.30%	2 5.60%	2 5.70%	5 23.80%	1 3.70%	4 8.30%	3 11.10%	24 9.50 %
Dean		7 19.40%	5 14.30%	1 4.80%	4 14.80%	6 12.50%		23 9.10 %
University President	2 4.10%	1 2.80%	2 5.70%			1 2.10%	1	7 2.80 %
No answer	30 61.20%	19 52.80%	18 51.40%	8 38.10%	10 37.00%	24 50.00%	29 77.80%	138 54.80 %
Total	49 100.00%	36 100.00%	35 100.0%	21 100.00%	27 100.00%	48 100.00%	36 100.00%	252 100.00 %
Females								
Head of Department	3 6.30%	1 5.00%	5 25.00%	6 31.60%	14 35.00%	3 8.80%	2 14.10%	34 17.20 %
Dean- Assistant Director	2 4.20%	1 5.00%			2 5.00%	3 8.80%	3 21.40%	11 5.60%
Dean	1 2.10%	2 10.00%			3 7.50%	2 5.90%	1 7.10%	9 4.50%
University President					1 2.50%			1 0.50%
No answer	42 87.50%	16 80.00%	15 75.00%	13 68.40%	20 50.00%	26 76.50%	11 73.30%	143 72.20%
Total	48 100.00%	20 100.00%	20 100.00%	19 100.00%	40 100.00%	34 100.00%	15 100.00%	198 100.00%

Table 6*: Percentage of Female Membership in Higher Education, in Chosen Countries, 1980-1995

Area	1980	1985	1990	1995
Developed countries	35.6%	39.2%	49.3%	63.3%
Asia/Oceania	21.1%	21.4%	25.9%	42.6%
Arab countries	5.8%	7.2%	8.6%	10.5%
Latin America/Caribbean	12.0%	14.2%	16.2%	17.0%

* Tables 6, 7 and 8 are taken from Ferjani's study, reference mentioned.

Source: UNESCO (1998), World Statistical Outlook on Higher Education: 1980-1995; World Conference on Higher Education: Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action, Paris, 5-9 October.

Table 7: Percentage of Female Students Pursuing Higher Education in Chosen Arab and Non-Arab Countries in 1995

Country	Percentage of female students pursuing higher education (%)
Yemen	13
Mauritania	17
Korea	35
Iran	37
Egypt	38
Turkey	38
Algeria	40
Morocco	41
Syria	41
Tunisia	44
Palestine	44
Jordan	46
Djibouti	47
Oman	47
The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	48
Lebanon	49
The United States of America	56
Kuwait	56
Bahrain	58
Qatar	72
The United Arab Emirates	77

Source: UNESCO (1998), World Statistical Outlook on Higher Education: 1980-1995; World Conference on Higher Education: Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action, Paris, 5-9 October.

Table 8: Percentage of Female Students Pursuing Higher Education in Sciences in Chosen Areas of the World

Area	1985	1995
Developed countries	31%	37%
Less developed countries	18%	24%
Arab countries	29%	33%
Latin America/Caribbean	24%	39%

Source: UNESCO (1998), World Statistical Outlook on Higher Education: 1980-1995; World Conference on Higher Education: Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action, Paris, 5-9 October.

Endnotes

*This study was prepared with the support of the UNESCO regional office for education in Arab countries-Beirut. Opinions mentioned are those of the two authors and do not necessarily express the opinion of the UNESCO's office. UNESCO's regional office higher education experts Dr. Ramzi Salameh and Dr. Nakhle Wehbi participated in the supervision of the study's orientation, in the examination of the two surveys and in all procedures. Dr. Mona Fayyad participated in preparing the first version of the survey and apologized later for not being able to continue the work. Several members of the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers discussed this survey and introduced major changes to it. For the complete study, please contact UNESCO.

1. Badran, Adnan; *The Role of Higher Education and Research Centers in Preparing Arab Persons for Scientific Giving*; Preparing Arab People for Scientific Giving, Beirut, the Arab Unity Center of Studies; 1985, p. 271.

2. Nader Fergany; *Arab Higher Education and Development, An Overview*; Almishkat Center for Research, Cairo, February 2000.

3. The number of students in secondary school increased from 3 million (out of a total population estimated at 96 million) in the mid-sixties to 5.2 million (out of a total population estimated at 220 million) by the mid-seventies. There were noticeable discrepancies among countries, however: in 1995, there were 2,300 students for every 100,000 individuals in Lebanon, Jordan and Kuwait, whereas there were 450 students for the same number of individuals in Sudan, Yemen and Oman (according to statistics gathered by UNESCO).

4. UNESCO, *Higher Education and Women: Issues and Perspectives*. Paris, August 1998.

5. Hannoush, Zaki; Common Denominators of the Higher Education Administration's Problematics, *Al-Fikr Al-Arabi*, Al-Sana Al-Eshroun, issue 97, summer 1999.

6. Mazawi, Andre Elias; Gender and Higher Education in the Arab States; *International Higher Education*, Fall 1999.

7. Sabour, M'hammed; *Homo Academicus Arabicus*,



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Publications in Social Sciences, No. 11 (Joensuu, Finland: University of Joensuu, 1988). 95-98.

8. Sabour, M'hammed; Women in the Moroccan Academic Field: Respectability and Power, *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies* 1, No. 1 (1996): 82.

9. Hammoud, Rafica S; The Role of Women in Higher Education Management in the Arab Region, In *Women in Higher Education Management*, UNESCO & Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993, pp. 31-51.

10. Cf. the enclosed appendices.

11. Dr. Mona Fayyad participated in preparing the first version of the survey and apologized later for not being able to continue work. This survey was discussed by several members of the Lebanese Association of Women Researchers who introduced major changes to it.

12. UNESCO's regional office represented by higher education expert Dr. Ramzi Salameh and Dr. Nakhle Wehbi participated in the supervision of the study's orientation, in the examination of the two surveys, and in all procedures.

13. Iraqis were very enthusiastic about answering our questions. We also received many responses that included remarks and opinions of male and female professors in the margins. This left us with the impression that the former painful embargo imposed on the Iraqis created a desire to communicate with the outer world once they were able to do so.

14. We find it interesting to note that a female professor from Lebanon categorically refused to fill in the form. She said: "I apologize for not filling in the form and I do not see a justification for your focus on the issue of woman [sic]. I believe that women are fully enjoying their rights and that there are other more important issues to be raised." Undoubtedly, our colleague was an example of many female professors who refrained from filling in the form, although no one forced them to answer in a way that would contradict their opinions.

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Women, Higher Education and Society: A Gender Perspective

Case Study of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Although liberal Islamic teachings stipulate that education is a mandatory right for all Muslims regardless of gender, and encourages the pursuit of education and wisdom from the cradle to the grave, and despite what is written in the *hadith*¹ concerning the Prophet's positive attitude towards education for both genders, some scholars and rulers in the past have not given importance to education for women. Historically, education for women has been restricted to the realm of religious matters. As a "means to an end" and "in fear of causing unrest," some have endeavored to persuade Muslim communities to "deny" women the right to literacy and to discourage them from furthering their education.

According to written biographies, many women made considerable educational contributions during the time of the Prophet and the caliphs. This was also the case during the zenith of Islamic civilization when prominent writers such as Ibn Saad, the Baghdadi Speaker Al-Sakhawi and Ibn Asaker wrote about several of their contemporary Muslim women who excelled in all kinds of Arabic and Islamic sciences. However, the number of such women dwindled considerably over time. As true female intellectuals decreased in number a new kind of women emerged who were educated only to a certain extent.

They were slave girls and bondmaids who were only educated to be entertaining to their owners; they were required to be funny, witty, beautiful, and good companions as well as excellent dancers and singers.

Perhaps the slave girl, Tawaddud, mentioned in *The Arabian Nights* and popular Arabic literature is a pertinent example. Most free women were required to wear the *hijab* (veil) and were allowed to leave their homes twice in their lives; first, when they move into their husband's house and, second, when they are laid to rest. In addition, they were "deprived" of studying science and literature so that they would not be a threat to men, and they were forbidden from learning how to write so as not to use this skill dishonorably, or write about matters of the heart. However, there were rare exceptions of women who acquired a certain level of education: usually the courts and high-class leisure places called for the presence of a few educated slave girls, who knew poetry as well as music to entertain "patrons." The slave girl, or bondmaid, with such talents was regarded as "knowledgeable." Usually, her training, skills and knowledge were the reason why she was in high demand for the fine company she could provide, and for which she commanded a high price. Most of these bondmaids were



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beautiful slaves brought to the Muslim world from the outside.

The presence of these “women” — in spite of their extensive knowledge and education — was not regarded as a challenge to the hegemony of male authority in society. On the contrary, it most likely reinforced and helped extend the latter. The triumph of the slave girl, Tawaddud, in her debates with her educated rivals in a wide variety of arts and literature was not considered a threat to those scholars, but rather a means of entertainment and good company. Furthermore, Tawaddud’s knowledge was considered neither a threat nor an act of defiance to the existing rules governing the relations between males and females. In any case, it was preferable that freeborn women not play the role of “Tawaddud” for it conflicted with the prescribed roles of women that forbade them from appearing in public places, from mixing with disrespectful men, and from being the object of flirtations or compliments.

The education of slave girls, such as Tawaddud, was aimed at satisfying the male ego and asserting that a woman was a unique toy, despite her intelligence, sensitivity, and wit. Furthermore, this sort of woman upheld the patriarchal structure since, according to her training, Tawaddud aspired to please those around her and not to prove that women are capable of doing all that men can do. For if this was the case, she would “deserve” to be treated as a human being who is the equal of man and could play roles and perform functions similar to his in her family or public life. These concepts simply did not exist. Thus, in spite of being highly knowledgeable and skillful, Tawaddud was meant to be subordinate and a means to sustain - and not undermine - patriarchal authority.

However, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of a new kind of educated woman who asserted that her education should essentially allow her to enter a man’s world, playing crucial and important roles in public life. This dramatic development would inevitably bring about radical changes in the relations between the two sexes, the results of which would threaten the patriarchal system that had previously dominated Arab culture.

It is important to note that this development was not prevalent — far from it. However, a few pioneers of women’s liberation from the constraints imposed by Arab culture have become leading and renowned figures in public life, be it cultural or social. Thuraya Al-Turky and Camilia Al-Solh’s book *In My Country I Search*,² represents a way for women to stand up against such constraints and obligations. The book focuses on Arab women who specialize in the social sciences, who insist

on conducting research in their own societies despite all the obstacles and circumstances that might prevent “female researchers” from conducting such studies. As such, these women do not conform to the traditional current “reality” of society, but rebuff it and replace it with a new one that does not fundamentally conflict with customs and values, yet endows women with a new sense of worth and distinction in Arab society.

Obviously, the lives of these specialists have not been at all easy; however, their determination has allowed them to conduct their research. What is striking is that many of these women, perhaps because they defied traditional patriarchal authority, had to study or work in foreign institutes and establishments. It is apparent that the education available to women in the Arab World does not ultimately satisfy them, forcing them to accept a limited and predefined role or occupation, as was the case with “Tawaddud.” On the contrary, it has led to an emphatic demand by women to expand their boundaries and alter their relations in society. Hence, it is not unusual that most of the women written about by Al-Turky and Al-Solh were interested in the situation of women from a gender perspective. Although these examples are of significant importance, they are far from being widely acknowledged. Similarly, the transformation of society to allow gender equality and mutual respect between the two sexes has yet to be realized. However, the very existence of such women and the expected increase in their number as well as their promising acceptance both socially and culturally are positive signs pointing towards a long-awaited change.

Between “the slave girl Tawaddud” and the women of *In My Country I Search*, there have been significant key developments, one being the creation of schools for girls and women. King Faysal Bin Abdul Aziz’s initiative, undertaken in the 1960s to create governmental schools for women and girls throughout the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, ushered in a new developmental phase for women and society in this country.

Before the 1960s women’s educational opportunities in the Kingdom were very limited, and only existed in the large metropolitan areas. Only a few traditional teachers taught girls the fundamentals of reading and the arts of embroidery and sewing. Few girls knew how to write because their parents fiercely opposed this kind of teaching. However, wealthy upper class families keen on educating their girls traveled to several Arab capitals, particularly Cairo, in order to provide their daughters with an education.

Although the government’s decision to build public schools for girls was well received in some cities, it was fiercely opposed and disputed at length by scholars and

clerics (particularly in the Hijaz region) who regarded the decision as a threat to the values and structure of society. Nevertheless, King Faysal insisted on pushing forward, but at the same time bowed to tradition by delineating certain aspects of education, particularly at the university level, that would remain closed to women.

Even though some people reluctantly and cautiously approached the issue of women’s education in the early 1960s, the education of women throughout the kingdom soon became a popular demand. Reinforced by the government’s initiative to open new schools, even in remote areas, locals ardently demanded that their daughters be afforded the opportunity to obtain a modern education. Today, Saudi citizens no longer oppose women’s education but rather persistently call for their daughters to acquire an education. The number of female students enrolled in universities reflects this clearly. In 1998, there were 138,000 female students compared to 134,000 male students. That same year, the number of female graduates reached 15,542 compared to 14,721 male graduates.³ These official statistics unmistakably show the extent of the social transformation with respect to women, particularly when it comes to university education.

Women’s pursuit of a higher education following high school is one of the most preoccupying matters for Saudi families, particularly progressive ones. While the number of high school graduates is increasing continuously, universities only accept a limited number of applicants with the highest scores, which makes these girls’ families intent on not only having their daughters graduate from high school but also have high scores that would allow them to be accepted at one of these universities. Another option is to send their daughters abroad, and, while many families find it hard to send their daughters abroad to pursue a college education, a growing number of families are following this path.

Women and University Education

University education for women in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia began in the early 1970s through the creation of programs at existing Saudi universities, led by King Saud University and King Abdul Aziz University. Out of respect for laws as well as tradition, female sections were created that were separate from males. When needed, some courses were held via videoconferencing under female supervision so that female students could continue their studies.

The statistics cited above clearly show that the number of female applicants to Saudi universities has been on the rise. Medicine, biology, business, economy, literature, social sciences, education and home economics are fields open to women, although female students are still

denied access to the disciplines of architecture and media since they are two fields deemed “unsuitable” for women. Nevertheless, Saudi women have strongly held on to their right to a university education in all available fields. A good number of them have been able to acquire master’s degrees in these fields and have taken faculty positions in universities, consequently enabling future female students to pursue higher education in the kingdom.

As expected, women’s education has affected job opportunities, public life, and development as well as the concept of the ethos, identity, role, and social standing of Saudi women. The educational field, which is non-mixed and therefore does not conflict with most traditional customs and social norms, is the main academic discipline in which Saudi women are majoring. Their hard work and willingness to contribute to the education of their female compatriots in even the most remote regions has underlined the importance of their mission. Moreover, their contribution to the workforce is a remarkable success story.⁴

Although Saudi women have had an effective and important presence in the field of education, they have not limited their activities to this field alone. Graduates from medical, nursing and paramedical schools have worked in public health and have established a strong presence in most government hospitals, particularly in big cities. It is important to note that because this field entails mixing with men, it is an issue of social and cultural contention. Furthermore, as enrollment in medical schools and institutes increases and competition among specialists intensifies, some female graduates are finding it difficult to secure positions in the field of their choice.⁵

Saudi women also have made considerable contributions to a number of other fields, such as social services. They have helped women’s philanthropic organizations increase awareness and strive to change the viewpoints of society with respect to several issues.⁶

Thanks to their educational and managerial training and skills, several Saudi women have come to occupy leading positions in business and commerce. Several women have started their own successful enterprises.⁷ Yet, in spite of these successes, the number of women in the labor market compared to the number of graduates is quite low. Women and their families are continuously asking for more job opportunities in the fields open to women instead of being restricted to what current mores dictate. Still, one should keep in mind that even many of those who ask for an increase in the female workforce strive to maintain the essence of Saudi traditions and social standards.

The success story of women’s education in the Kingdom, and the increase in its scope and quality, should not over-



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shadow the significant obstacles still inhibiting women, particularly the limited choice of specializations available in higher education. Overall, women still face basic structural obstacles, at the heart of which are institutions, values and practices that ensure the prolongation of the traditional patriarchal structure which, although it has given women the chance to pursue an education up to the highest levels, is still hesitant to share public life with them.

Impediments to Higher Education and Women

Although the number of male and female students as well as graduates is almost the same, the chances of pursuing a higher education and acquiring a master or doctoral degree are clearly in favor of males. Although many Saudi families are intent on having their daughters acquire a university education, they are more inclined to encourage their sons to aspire for a higher education than their daughters. Women's chances of accessing higher education are negligible and limited compared to those of men. Most women pursuing a higher education are restricted to studying within the Kingdom, be it in Saudi universities or joint programs with European universities.⁸ In the past, women were forbidden from studying abroad, although today this is no longer the case. However, this "openness" comes with several conditions that some girls may fail to meet, such as getting their parents' approval and being accompanied by a male guardian when they travel.

Should females pursue a higher education locally, they mostly suffer from inaccessibility to educational centers and libraries dominated by males. For example, these centers, libraries or institutes are open to males all week long, however, they may be open to females only for a limited number of hours, for instance on the weekend, which prevents them from acquiring needed information quickly. Furthermore, with the exception of medical schools, women are only allowed access to advanced institutes for a limited number of hours during specific times, which often necessitates more time to complete their assignments. Due to the existing gender segregation, the process of checking references and looking for sources of information becomes a very difficult task. Thus, women, unlike their male counterparts, are only able to conduct specific kinds of research and studies that are limited to females.

Since supervision in graduate studies is paramount and female faculty members with supervision rights (according to academic hierarchy) are scarce, many female students pursuing a higher education must accept the supervision of male professors. This would probably be easy if female students were able to meet with their supervisors face-to-face. However, traditions as well as

academic mores call for indirect supervision of female students, i.e., that they use the phone, Internet, or the post to submit their work. This is time consuming and may not help the student understand everything, as would a face-to-face conversation with the supervisor. In addition, this has caused real structural problems in the sense that female students benefited so little from such supervision, which in most cases undermined their training. Strikingly, when both the female student's family and university policies demanded indirect supervision of female students by male supervisors, a few female students become less interested in pursuing their academic studies, and even for those who remain interested in furthering their education, the supervision period is prolonged.

Once women complete their higher education, professional development within academe becomes the new challenge. Although it is officially permissible — albeit only to a certain extent — to attend and take part in practical conferences and seminars, several female professors have to be chaperoned by a *mahram* (unmarriageable male person) and must have the consent of their families, be it fathers or husbands, to take part in such events. This further confines women and prevents them from benefiting from such practical experiences, which would otherwise enable them to climb the academic ladder. This also affects academic promotions since male professors have easier access to educational centers, libraries, institutes, seminars and conferences than their female counterparts, they generally make more scholarly progress and are promoted faster. Consequently, male superiority and hegemony within the college and university communities are maintained.

Furthermore, male professors can much more easily acquire new skills by occupying positions in the private sector, or working as consultants in the public sector, despite the equal administrative opportunities available to both genders. Rarely do female faculty members or other professional women occupy consultancy positions, limiting their ability to influence their respective communities, in spite of the efforts of some pioneering women.

In general, Saudi women are torn between their traditional roles as wives, mothers, homemakers and social figures on the one hand and their new roles as career women and public figures on the other hand. Primarily, in much of Arab society, the roles women play are to be nurturing and caring wives and mothers, and failure in fulfilling these roles is considered a failure in all aspects of life.

Women's success in their traditional roles often requires them to accept "slight variations" of their role and social standing by virtue of cultural mores. Within their family

and in society, they are necessarily required to "submit" to and respect their husbands' or guardians' authority. Even though social mores may conflict or interfere with their own, women are required to respect them. More often than not, women have to "submit" to the superseding socio-cultural requirements to be able to realize some of their aspirations.

As is the case in most traditional societies, both males and females in Saudi society still do not recognize women as being knowledgeable and educated persons. Female Saudi doctors have revealed that some of their patients insist on being examined by male physicians in spite of the formers' high qualifications and noteworthy achievements. Leading women functioning in all fields sometimes face resistance from those they are trying to help.

Overall, educated women are expected to accept the socio-cultural conditions that traditionally define relations between the two sexes. It is true that the education and employment of women have led to the improvement of their family and social situations. It is also true that many women have earned independent financial incomes, which in turn have increased their decision-making abilities, at least those related to expenditures. However, women in much of the Arab world still have a long way to go before their society and culture recognize them as individuals with their own talents and experience. This requires far-reaching and radical changes within society that will lead to the improvement of the status of women and their traditional cultural identity.

Arab societies often criticize educated women because of their modern aspirations, which include having an education or a profession in such fields as medicine, education, or business, that are deemed "unnecessary" for women. Perhaps the harshest critics are the ones who claim that by clinging to such modern aspirations women neglect their "natural role" as mothers or females. Some highly educated women have told me that they have had to accept such traditional names as "dependents" (i.e., incapacitated and in need of the protection and support of a man), or they have been accused of being emotional, verbose, and courting the attention of the opposite sex. These women have become so accustomed to hearing such comments — be they from males or females — that they have acquired an ability to "ignore" and not engage in "enduring" discussions to change or correct such views or stances.

Despite the progress towards liberation and equality that some women are achieving in the Arab world, customary public perceptions continue to measure success in studies and or work as the benchmarks of excellence in male

achievements, whereas the standards for measuring female achievements are still assessed on how well a woman succeeds in the traditional female roles upheld by society. Perhaps her educational or professional success is one of the reasons she is criticized and measured in relation to the extent that she succeeds in fulfilling her traditional duties. Arab society requires a woman to preserve her honor (her hymen to be exact), not to mix with men, and to make her husband or father happy. Should she not abide by these rules, even with the consent of her family, her behavior is criticized and rejected both socially and culturally.

These views have compelled highly educated women to form their own communities, if they have enough time to interact with one another. However, when they do spend time with other women, in general, semi-traditional and customary daily concerns shared by women are often the subjects of conversation. In other words, women who have acquired a higher education have yet to become role models that will employ their newfound power to enact change in the social order. However, with time, these women may champion the cause for radical change in society.

Educated Women and Job Opportunities

Saudi women make up no more than 5% of the total workforce⁹ in the labor market in spite of the four million plus workers, most of whom are female, who work in education, fashion design, and medicine. Saudi women can work in these fields without having to interact with men, which conforms to their socio-cultural situation.

The educational and socio-economic conditions of the country require a radical reevaluation of the contribution of women to the labor market. This would identify and help fulfill the needs of Saudi women and allow them to take advantage of the available opportunities in the labor market, even if such a move would require some modifications and an adaptation to new ways of living and working. What does society stand to gain from limiting the opportunities available to half the workforce by excluding women from working in numerous fields, and wasting significant economic resources in the process? Instead of inhibiting the growth of Saudi nationals employed in the workforce by constantly counting on foreign labor, at least half of them could be utilized by affording Saudi women the opportunity to contribute to fields involving the development of their country.

The state's interest in the Saudization of positions in the public and private sectors, by encouraging both male and female Saudi nationals to enter the labor market, is one of the constants of the state's development policy which stipulates that women should no longer be marginalized from contributing to the workforce. The Saudi



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labor market nowadays is struggling to accommodate an increasing number of female graduates seeking to fill all available positions. These developments are mostly based on the aspirations of women, along with their parents, to hold down independent jobs from which they can derive incomes that will allow them to contribute positively and equally to their families' finances and subsequent lifestyles. That this is occurring in a society which, until recently, did not acknowledge women's ability to contribute in such a way, represents a tremendous improvement with respect to women playing important roles in the finances of their family, and in social life overall.

Female graduates have managed to meet the needs of the labor market in the field of education, and they are working on achieving that same end in the medical field, withstanding the conditions imposed by society and its culture. There are also many employment opportunities in several fields such as couture, tailoring, textiles, food processing, and computer manufacturing. In addition, there are several administrative positions where women can perform without mixing with men or being exposed to exhausting physical hazards, which conform to social and cultural mores. National policies are expected to work towards creating such opportunities, which will more expediently and efficiently ensure the integration of women into the workforce.

Recently, female jobseekers have exceeded 30,000 in the Kingdom. The Civil Service Office has failed to find available positions for them either because their specialization was not required and /or because the applicants did not want to work far from their area of residence. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a growing number of female university graduates are seeking to enter the labor market. Moreover, this applies to both the public sector and private sector as the number of Saudi women working in the private sector jumped from 8,374 employees in 1989 to 11,257 in 1993.¹⁰ The number of Saudi business-women numbered more than 20,376¹¹ in 1991. This new data illustrates how the issue of finding work for educated women is both a public matter and a social concern. Unemployment no longer only affects males and remains an urgent issue requiring an immediate solution.

Women's contributions to the employment market and their subsequent independent sources of income are an undeniable aspect of Saudi life. In the past, a woman's financial contribution to her family was viewed as unwarranted, but now, employed women have become economic partners that enable families to enjoy higher standards of living.

If there is a need to modify and improve the quality of

higher education for males so they are better equipped to enter the labor market, there is also a necessity to educate women. Many underline the importance of reevaluating and perhaps restructuring the educational curricula to meet the demands of the labor market, not to mention the development of training programs that would improve the skills and capacities of female job seekers. As a giant leap forward, Saudization programs, which encourage Saudi nationals to enter the labor force, are now involving and benefiting males and females alike.

However, it is a general requirement that women's social aspirations be contingent on the consent of their guardian (father, husband or male relative acting as legal guardian), thus strengthening existing traditional laws and values. In addition, as expected, getting the consent of the guardian, the husband to be precise, is one of the major factors women have to take into account when undertaking outside work. Often families make sacrifices to afford women better chances for education. Many husbands request a leave of absence from their jobs in order to accompany their wives for a year or more when the latter is posted to a job in a remote region. However, this requirement of a chaperone has often prevented women from achieving their aspirations. Of course, this does not apply to males, as women are required to travel with their husbands wherever the husbands' jobs may be located.

If the job involves a lot of stress, women have to leave these work related problems at the door when returning home to be able to "absorb" the problems and concerns of the husband and children; however, this does not happen very often. That is why some husbands resent the idea of their wives' work competing with the requirements of their marital life when all they want to find when they come home from work is tranquility and calm. Some even claim that employed women come home tired, which makes them incapable of attending to their husbands and children. This assumes that women cannot ask their husbands to help them ease their troubles after a long day's work. Under current traditional domestic roles, juggling work, social, and family responsibilities generally means employed women will be burdened with more difficulties than men will. The traditional concept of roles that relegates all domestic matters to the care of women has to be changed and replaced by new values and mores that underline the necessity of contribution and cooperation between all members of the family in all aspects of family life. Certainly, the abundant availability of foreign domestic workers has seriously delayed raising and addressing this issue; however, it will surely emerge as a contentious topic at a later stage.

Educated Women in Family Life

Some believe that because women contribute to the family budget they are able to play roles that are more active in the family's decisions regarding matters of expenditures and lifestyle. Some may even assert that women have come to ask for a higher standing and role in the lives of their families. The spread of the independent nuclear family has helped them acquire an improved social standing, which has caused them to expect that their husbands treat them equally on the one hand, and support them in their public and professional lives on the other.

However, views vary concerning how educated women should in turn educate and raise their children. Some studies say that women have become more responsible in managing their time, and more committed to educating and raising their children. Learning from their own educational experiences, these women tend to raise and educate their children systematically. Additionally, because they command an independent income, they can better care for and educate their children by: introducing more lessons, encouraging children to attend special courses, applying to clubs and choosing useful hobbies, and helping expand their knowledge by traveling or introducing them to other educated families. That is why educated women have become the brides of choice for eligible bachelors intent on getting married.¹²

Educated and employed women tend to organize their time more reasonably. They use their free time to visit and attend parties of other female friends, provided they do not do so at the expense of their family time. Educated women also attend voluntary lectures and seminars instead of only going to traditional women-only visits and parties, and some even create their own unique social world. Coworkers are more often than not friends outside of work, which leads to the emergence of lifestyles linked to educational levels and employment positions.

The Cost of Higher Education for Women

Should women decide to pursue higher education and specialization, more often than not they find themselves forced to make very important decisions: to delay or forego marriage. It is common knowledge that the pursuit of higher education requires delaying marriage. Nowadays, the ideal marriage age for most members of society is either when a woman graduates from college or when she acquires a certain educational level that allows her to find employment. Perhaps the prerequisite of education and employment upheld by most modern families in marriage contracts¹³ is a confirmation of the necessity for the husband to provide his wife the opportunity to pursue a higher education and secure employ-

ment that would provide her with some financial independence.

However, most women who desire to pursue higher education and specialization might often postpone marriage, sometimes for a very long period, which may lead to "spinsterhood" (a woman who remains single all her life). This issue has become a social phenomenon in some fields, namely medicine, or similar higher studies that require many years of education, because those who pursue such fields must continue studying, and they postpone marriage indefinitely.

This raises the issue of marriageability in the sense that education and the desire to climb the professional ladder might stand in the way of committing to the establishment of marriage for males and females alike. However, while males can count on the support from their wives caring and serving them while the latter strive for a higher degree, females hardly get the same kind of support from their husbands. It is rarely accepted that a man makes sacrifices for a woman who pursues an education. The results of such a decision are not benign as they cause an unwanted disparity between the wife's educational and social level and that of the husband's. The marriages where such a disparity appears are considered "marriages of convenience" whereby someone of very limited education marries a woman of higher social standing, which is often unacceptable socially as many men prefer that they have higher social standing than their wives.

Some men hesitate to allow their wives to keep their careers after marriage, which may lead to family problems or even divorce because of the field in which the wife works. In medicine, for example, the nature of the job requires a certain amount of limited gender mixing, which is still problematic, particularly if the wife is extremely good at what she does. Professional scheming and begrudging may affect her family life, causing a great deal of trouble. Many women with higher education believe they must be excessively traditional and uphold society's cultural constraints and mores in order to avoid any misunderstanding or improper treatment. Thus, educated women can fail to become pioneers and leaders affecting social change because they are conservative women who believe in the continuation of patriarchal authority, although paradoxically their very existence challenges this authority.

Over the course of this brief examination, we have determined that today's educated women are not the embodiment of the "slave girl, Tawaddud." Rather, they are employed women who are realistically involved with their society, and whose efforts contribute to the development of their community, not solely for the benefit and plea-



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sure of the male ego. Even so, educated women in Saudi Arabia are rarely publicly critical of the existing patriarchal society, and rarely do they publicly endeavor to abolish and replace such societal relations in order to achieve and guarantee women a standing on par with men. The new wave of educated and employed women represents a

transitional transformation. It may gradually bring about changes to the essence and basis of the patriarchal authority and, who knows, may eventually lead to the latter's demise.

Translated from Arabic by Nadine El-Khoury

Endnotes

1. A written record of Prophet Mohammad's sayings, within which education is considered one of the important religious duties of both men and women alike.
2. See Al-Turky, Thuraya and Al-Solh, Camilia. (1993). *In My Country I Search*. Beirut: Center of Studies of Arab Unity.
3. Achievements of Development Plans, 1998, p. 308-320.
4. Saudi women who undertake to teach in remote rural regions and the problems they face makes for one of the hottest topics in the Saudi press, and it confirms Saudi women's determination to retain their right to work.
5. However, this has not stopped them or their husbands from calling for their right to continue working.
6. See, for example, Al-Hajji, Assaad Ahmad. (2000). *Women's Social Associations in the GCC Countries: A Documented Study*. Kuwait: Published by the Author.
7. Some have risen to high positions within the United Nations and other fields; however, they are far from being role models for employed Saudi women.
8. In other words, they enrol and participate in doctoral programs offered at some British universities while staying in Saudi Arabia.
9. Sixth Development Plan, 1995.
10. Al-Hazmi, Hussein: "The Reality and Future of Women Working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." Seminar of the Reality and Future of Women Working in the Kingdom, 1997.
11. Al-Husseini, Aysha. (1991). *Job Opportunities for Women in the Saudi Private Sector*. Riyadh: Gulf Publishing Center. Al Husseini, Aysha. (1993). *Assessing the Contribution of Saudi Women to the Labor Market*. CITY: Educational Publishing Center, King Abdul Aziz University.
12. Ba Kader, Abu Bakr. "Marriage Trends in Jeddah in Light of Marriage Contracts" in *Faculty of Letters and Humanities Magazine*, 1985.
13. Op cit, pp. 206-223.

Forthcoming:

Arab Diaspora Women

Gen Zeds: Towards a Culture of Merit

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The “Gen Zeds” of the title are female Emirati students in their early twenties at Zayed University who have one foot in the traditional Islamic culture of their families and another in a world that expects them to revolutionize economic and social life. Gen Zeds represent today’s generation of Emirati students. Though they are from Zayed University, they could just as easily have been from UAE University or the Higher Colleges of Technology because their education has been the result of a big push for opportunity by the country’s founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi. These students (the Gen Zeds) are highly educated, media literate, and intense users of the internet. Upon graduation, they are expected to assume leadership positions in the United Arab Emirates despite living in a society that until recently has not permitted women roles beyond motherhood and homemaking. This paper considers whether the lessons and experiences they encounter at university will equip them for life in a society radically different from that of their mothers’.

Introduction

The students who walk the manicured paths of Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) speak with the still small voices that others of their gender do in soci-

ety at large. Largely unrepresented in the halls of power and nearly invisible on the pages of print media, women remain unequal partners with men in society. Nonetheless, Zayed University students and their sisters at educational institutions across the country belong to a generation unlike any other. These “girls” who must become women are expected to become leaders of their nation.

In the last half century, the UAE has undergone a remarkable transformation. As late as 1950, Dubai was a city of huts lining unpaved streets. As late as 1970, literacy rates in the UAE hovered just above 20%. Only a fraction of the mothers of today’s students graduated from high school. Only a fraction more of their fathers did too. Today, pressures on the cultural landscape are mounting as the country develops into a more diverse and modern economy with more educated citizens.

This movement toward integration into the global economy has not been happenstance. It has reflected the clear national priorities of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, who was President of the country from its formation in 1971 until his death in 2004. Fulfillment of his priorities has produced change on many fronts,



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particularly with respect to technology and its widespread adaptation in far-flung corners of society.

To meet the needs of this vision, Zayed University, with campuses in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, was founded in 1998 to prepare female leaders to help mold the UAE's future. Total enrollment in this all-female university is about 2,500. Its students are being groomed to confront a rapidly changing information- and technology-driven world. The Zayed University home page notes that the university was founded to prepare leaders who could foresee possibilities and capture the opportunities that would "create the future of the United Arab Emirates.... They will confront a rapidly changing, information- and technology-driven world that will defy certain prediction."

The country needs university graduates. While it is small, the UAE is a unique place of perhaps 4.3 million that is unlike many other contemporary societies and even unlike many other Arab/Islamic states. Not only does it have one of the world's highest economic growth rates (12% GDP growth in 2003, 7.4% in 2004, and 6.6% estimated for 2005 before the oil spike), but also it is a nation in which the indigenous population is a small minority. Current "official" figures estimate that UAE nationals constitute between 15% and 20% of the country's total population (UAE Interact, 2006). The remaining 80% plus are expatriates. Though most of them have come to earn a living, they are discouraged from making the UAE their permanent home due to the country's laws and customs.

Expatriates make up the bulk of the workforce, and they perform both the manual and intellectual tasks that keep the country running. The government hopes to replace expatriates with local people through a process called "Emiratization." Most students expect jobs that give them management roles; it is unlikely that Emiratis would perform manual labor and many do not want to "work their way up the ladder." Therefore, the country will continue to depend upon an army of workers from India and Pakistan to build the infrastructure projects sprouting in the desert. Earning less than \$300 per month, these workers labor long shifts in temperatures hovering around 50° Celsius, erecting the air-conditioned shopping malls, apartments, and luxury homes of the favored few.

Today, as oil and gas revenues flow from the well-head, life is lived large with the Emirati equivalent of two cars

in every garage. The state provides an easy life for nationals with free education and medicine, high-paying government jobs, short working hours, expensive pensions and inexpensive housing loans. The UAE has blossomed in the desert and recently has taken the first small steps away from oil dependence. The federal government has invested heavily in tourism, aviation, re-export commerce, and telecommunications. In doing so, the leadership has recognized that the country must make more of its human resources. Devoid of most natural resources except for petro-carbons, the UAE, particularly the Emirate of Dubai, has invested billions of dollars in high technology. The great dream is that educated and trained nationals will replace the thousands of foreign professionals now running the new technology economy (Walters, 2001, p. 82).

This new economy and a trained female [and male national] workforce are the twin pillars of hope for tomorrow's UAE. Yet, these pillars could just as easily topple rather than prop up the future. As the new knowledge-based economy propels the society into an unknown future, that same new economy will enfranchise individuals, particularly women. As women are trained for the "modern" workplace, the roles of wife and mother in the current model of a functioning family will collide with the role of an educated and empowered woman who wants (and is needed) to work outside the home. This transition will not be easy. In Western societies, such as the United States, a focus on the individual — isolated, independent and separated — is embedded in the values of the culture (Connard, 1996). To call these facts into question is "seemingly to question the value of freedom" (Gilligan, 1993, p. xiv). But these fundamental "facts" are different in

Arabic/Islamic societies. Traditional societies, such as that in the UAE, have focused more on the group and interrelated networks, defined in no small measure by religion and circles of kinship and friendship.

Underlying social environments are already changing as the UAE lurches forward towards a more diverse, modern economy (see Connard). For conservative Muslims, alteration of core values is perceived as no less than an attack on their faith. "Brought up in a complex but functioning system of social loyalties and responsibilities, [a conservative male] finds those loyalties, defined by faith and kin, denounced as sectarian and nepotistic, and those responsibilities derided and abandoned in favor of capitalistic

acquisitiveness or socialistic expropriations" (Lewis, 1993, p. 39). Many male Muslims are not keen to see their supremacy lost in their own homes "to emancipated women and rebellious children" (Lewis, 1993, p. 40).

Research Questions

Patterned after a much larger survey routinely conducted at a major Midwestern university in the United States, Zayed University created a 187-question questionnaire exploring family and family life, how students conduct their lives both on and off the university campus, their emotional and mental state, health and nutrition, the relationship of values to academic performance, and their media life. This questionnaire, "Towards a Culture of Merit," will become part of the Transitional Women series, holistically exploring and benchmarking the life and times of these young women. Many of the results of this questionnaire and other studies have already been published or presented as part of a stream of research. The results are derived from the young women that we have affectionately labeled the "Gen Zeds."

Method

The survey was administered in class to students in the College of Communication and Media Sciences during the last two weeks of May 2002 on the Abu Dhabi and Dubai campuses. The survey was anonymous. Because Zayed University is both an English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language environment, instructions were explained. When necessary, words were defined. A total of 100 out of 250 students responded.

Results

Sixty-three percent of the respondents were from the Dubai campus; 37% were from the Abu-Dhabi campus. The minimum age was 19; the maximum 23 and the mean age was 21.5 years. The students were at the upper edge of the age range among the siblings. Sixteen percent classified themselves as sophomores, 20% as juniors, and 58% as seniors. The mean grade point average was 3.11 (out of 4); the median was 3.10 and mode 3.50.

Most students were living among family groups. Ninety-two percent lived with their parents, 2% lived with their own family, and 4% lived with their husband's family. Only 2% lived independently. Six percent of the students had children. The mean number of female siblings was 3.7; the mean number of brothers was 3.2. The maxi-

imum number of female siblings was 11 while the maximum number of male siblings was 9. The number of siblings varied by emirate. The mean number of sisters in Dubai was 3.8; in Abu Dhabi it was 3.4. In Dubai the mean number of brothers was 3.3; in Abu Dhabi that figure was 3.2. The mean age of the youngest sister was 14.1 for all emirates; the mean age of the oldest was 23.8. Mean age of the youngest brothers was 14.2; the mean age of the oldest was 25.1.

Students came from families with largely uneducated but financially well-off parents. About 74% of fathers had completed high school or less; 78% of the mothers had completed high school or less. Only 23% came from families in which both parents had a high school education or more. Only 4% came from families in which both parents had a college degree.

Forty percent of students classified their family as middle class; 38% classified themselves as upper middle class; and 11% classified themselves as wealthy. Only 2% said that they came from poor families. Half of the respondents attended a high school with more than 500 students, 28% came from high schools of between 251- 500, and only 9% came from high schools of fewer than 100 students.

Parental encouragement was listed as a reason for attending Zayed University (ZU) by about 16% of the respondents. About 13% said ZU was their first choice, about 12% listed the fact that ZU was close to home as a reason for attending, and about 11% said that successful placement of ZU graduates was the reason they chose the university.

Most students had wide-ranging, complex, and multiple support groups with whom they interacted in many ways. Twenty-five percent of students spoke to their mothers daily, 42% spoke to them at least several times a week. Respondents spoke to their fathers much less frequently. Fifteen percent spoke to their fathers daily; 20% spoke to them at least several times a week. On average, students spoke to 3.5 adults, in addition to their parents, for advice and support.

Friends and friendship were a big part of their lives. About 94% of all students said they felt part of a group of friends. The circle of close friends comprised about 4.3 females, of whom 3.9 attended the same university. The size of the friendship circle varied by campus: In Dubai

... students aged in their early twenties should be addressed as 'girls,' not women. A woman has had sex; a girl has not.

Many male Muslims are not keen to see their supremacy lost in their own homes 'to emancipated women and rebellious children'.



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the circle was 3.9 friends while in Abu Dhabi that circle was 4.8 friends. These friendship groups were (and remain) critically important. They provide encouragement, a sounding board, a support system, and a sense of connection to the respondents. About 85% believed their friends cared about them. About the same number believed that friends listened to them and encouraged them to be the best they could be in everything that they did. When hard times hit, 95% went to their friends for advice. About 92% did so because they believed that these friends supported them during difficult times.

Several means of communication helped maintain these circles of friendship. A primary one was the face-to-face communication associated with simply being on campus. When asked why they attended ZU, 27% agreed strongly with the statement "I like college for the academics" and 38% said they liked college for the social atmosphere. Even more enjoyed the relative freedom of the campus, where they were not responsible to a parent, a husband, or a brother, and where they could lead their lives relatively unfettered. The grounds have become a place where they can laugh and tell jokes and explore their lives. Though exploration may seem a non-sequitur, the "Lovelaceian" nature of the internet means that the thin grey wire leading to the LAN connection and to the world at large allows them to go over the walls of the grounds and become free.

Technology has influenced how students communicate with their friendship circles and others in the United Arab Emirates. One device that has had a major impact is the mobile telephone. One of every two people in the UAE had a mobile telephone in 2001, making it the highest per capita cell phone user in the Arab region and the 11th in the world (Castillo, 2001; for today's figures see CIA, 2007). Three in four of the students had mobile telephones and most carried them on campus, despite the fact it was against university policy. Students circumvent the policy by putting their telephones on vibrate and using an earpiece, the wiring of which is hidden beneath their *abaya* and *shilah* (the traditional shawl and cloak). Some used telephones to communicate with the boyfriends they were not supposed to have. Students who used the mobile telephone more frequently seemed to be risk takers. Those who agreed with the statement "it is okay to break ZU's rules" spent an average of 9.5 hours on the mobile during a typical week; those who disagreed spent an average of 4.4 hours.

... attendance at Zayed University has become a form of birth control because many students can postpone the inevitable by spending four years at university.

Even more pervasive among the students was internet use. The data in this survey show that in a typical week ZU students spent as much time on the internet as they did in the combined activities of reading magazines, newspapers, and books. They also spent more than twice as much time on the internet as they did shopping, twice as much as they did watching television, and more than they did in physical contact with friends.

Nielsen-like media diaries unconnected with this survey have shown that many students access the internet morning, noon, and night and maintain multiple e-mail accounts (see Walters, 2002).¹ Data from this current survey reinforced those findings: About 80% of students checked their e-mail at least once daily and about 78% had a home computer in addition to their laptop. Students also had a special place to use that computer and to study. All students had access to the internet on campus during the school week, which runs Saturday through Wednesday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. They often used the internet in the library — where they gathered with friends — or in the cafeteria, which is wired as well. In these places, they congregated around the flicker of the computer screen much like the children of an earlier generation gathered around the glimmer of the television (Pulos, 1988).

Every student chatted or surfed, sometimes "talking" with people their parents don't know about, and going to sites of which they might not approve. Some students fretted about getting caught. Risk takers among the group worried that their behavior might be a problem. The more a student used the internet the more likely she was to agree with the statement "I worry that I will get into trouble due to my behavior here on campus." Those who agreed with this statement spent an average of 7.2 hours weekly on the internet; those who disagreed spent about 5.1

hours on the internet.

Measures of emotion, mood, and self esteem suggested patterns of usage tied to feelings. Highlights of these findings showed that about 16% of the respondents reported often feeling unhappy, sad or depressed. Those who related less well to their peers spent about twice as much time on the internet as those who related well to their peers; respectively, these were 11.9 hours and 5.8 hours per week. Those who wanted to be left alone spent 14.9 hours on the internet; those who did not spent about 9.7 hours. The smaller the number of

friends the higher the number of hours a respondent spent on the internet. Using the mean number of friends to divide respondents into groups, frequencies showed that Group 1 (below mean friends) used the internet for about 9 hours per week and that Group 2 (above mean friends) used the internet for about 4.9 hours. *P* equaled .065 for the two-tailed *t*-test.

Because of the large number of variables, the data can be divided in many ways. One straightforward, logical way is to explore the similarities and differences between campuses. The cities and emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai are different in their physical as well as psychological and cultural characteristics. Abu Dhabi is home to the federal government, has extensive greenery and low-rise buildings, and is religiously conservative. Dubai is a city of high-rises with a fast-paced and big-city lifestyle more tuned to the hurly burly of a vibrant commercial center. According to at least one student, Dubai has become "the Bangkok of the Middle East."

Besides adopting new devices such as the mobile telephone and the internet, other communicative habits such as the family eating an evening meal together may be changing. Only about half of the students gathered around the evening dinner table at home on a regular basis, and, when they did, they had carry-in much of the time. About half of the families ate meals at restaurants frequently. These are activities in which the grandmothers of this generation most certainly did not participate.

Discussion

The results of this survey are several. They show patterns of communications usage among female college students at what might be described as a public-private university (like the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor in the U.S.). As children of the digital age, these students are more likely to use the internet than to read or exercise. These electronic media are a bigger part of their average day than any other activity, even sleep. Results also showed that media usage was heterogeneous. Some students used the internet and the mobile telephone more than others. Heavy users of the internet tended to be sad or depressed and had smaller circles of friends than did lighter users. Some users of these two media might be called risk takers because they used the internet and the mobile telephone for activities that they knew might cause them trouble. Typically, these would include going to banned internet sites, chatting or Instant Messaging (known as "IM-ing"), and using the mobile telephone on campus. Such students clearly were probing the boundaries of authority. In some ways, the findings describe typical college students anywhere in the world. In other ways, the find-

ings describe fundamental differences between cultures within the UAE, both in terms of societal basics and communications patterns. Women in the United Arab Emirates are absent from the halls of power and have been almost invisible in the media (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldenberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 17; taken from Olsen, 1978). This caption from a wedding party picture illustrates this latter point. No females were shown. Though she was mentioned, the bride was not pictured.

Sheikh Hamdan bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Dubai Deputy Ruler and UAE Minister of Finance and Industry, and Sheikh Saud bin Rashid Al-Mualla, Umm Al Quwain Crown Prince and Deputy Ruler, yesterday attended a ceremony hosted by Abdullah Al-Musawi, FNC Member, on the wedding of his son Faisal to the daughter of Saeed Ghanem Al-Marri. Also present were senior officials, and prominent citizens. (Monday, March 3, 2003, *Gulf News*, p. 7)

Zayed University students will need to overcome such hurdles to win the race to make their voices larger. To date, progress has been mixed. Although some students are not silent, the majority remain so. A student protest to mark the anniversary of the Intifada in 2002 attracted perhaps 20 participants. Some students take risks; most do not. Some students note that they feel powerful; many feel powerless. Naturally, there are differences between those who let things happen and those who make active choices. Scholars who have studied such issues in the United States believe that individuals grow up "... to see themselves as 'deaf and dumb' when they are raised in profound isolation under the most demeaning circumstance" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 34). Some of these circumstances remain part of the female experience in the United Arab Emirates. Here a "learned agoraphobia" is reflected in the expectation that students wear black cloaks and shawls, drive in dark-windowed cars, and live in neighborhoods in which housing compound after housing compound turns inward, with high walls separating them from the outside world.

Even controlling their own fertility is beyond the means of most – only perhaps a quarter of married women use birth control methods (United Nations, 2001). Virginity among unmarried women is a prized family possession. So concerned are these girls that most choose pads over tampons, fearing that tampons will damage their hymens. The vocabulary of address reflects the concern about virginity: Proper etiquette requires that students aged in their early twenties should be addressed as "girls," not women. A woman has had sex; a girl has not (see Gilligan, 1993, p. 70). In the UAE, it remains "illegal" to give birth without a father (Nazzal, 2003).



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Many activities reinforce life roles and patterns, including the games that children play. For boys, *Karaba*, *Ma'okazi*, and *Qarahief* emphasize physical skill and gross motor skills. For girls, *Saqila* and *Umm al Lal* emphasize turn taking, protecting the young, and group communication. As both genders move from childhood into adolescence, that movement is marked by a change in dress. Where once they could wear Western-style jeans in public, boys acquire the *agal*, white *dishdasha* and *bisht*, and girls don the black *abaya* and *shilah*, even in the oppressive heat of the day.

Some childhood vestiges such as needing group talk carry forward into adolescence and early adulthood. Group talk, which contains the rhetoric of inquiry, does not carry with it the pejoratives associated with the Western notion of gossip (Spacks, 1982, pp. 33-34; Belenky et al., p.186). Learned in childhood and practiced in social gatherings known as the *majlis*, this interconnected inquiry is fostered by e-mail, by instant messaging, and by the mobile telephone. This interconnected inquiry reflects the fact that these students have what has been described as "a literal faith that they and their friends share the same thoughts and experiences." It also reflects the fact that they relish having so much in common (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 38).

The path these girls will take tracks the familial and educational environments in which each is reared. Sometimes the choices between forks in that pathway are unclear. That is because families and schools differ tremendously in the degree to which they either reinforce risk-taking or encourage conforming behavior among women (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 79). It is also because allocation of life chances and advantages differs considerably by family and by society (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 160).

In some societies, remaining dependent on the family is socially unacceptable (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 126). In the United Arab Emirates, that dependence is expected. By law, unmarried girls remain dependents up to the age of 26, and they usually do not live on their own. Women of this generation will struggle mightily to detach themselves from such expectations (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 129) because society will continue to exert pressure upon them (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 148). Even so, some examples of detachment can be seen. As this study, other surveys, focus groups, and interviews have shown, attendance at Zayed University (and others) has become a

form of birth control because many students can postpone the inevitable by spending four (or more) years at university. Using the internet provides a momentary escape from family and from the inwardly-turned, architecturally-separating and walled family compound. The mobile telephone and the internet provide a brief refuge from the tumult of their "connected lives."

Whether the majority of these women will ever become truly independent (or actually desire to do so) is a serious question, the answer to which will shape the future of the country. The assumptions that these young women make about the nature of truth and reality shape their value systems and the way in which they see the world and themselves as participants in that world. These assumptions also affect their definitions of self, the way they interact with others, their public and private personae, and their sense of control over life events (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 3).

More than three decades after their own "liberation," many Western women have not found a happy compromise between home and work.

Conclusion

"Gen Zed" students are different from those who came before them. These students have been reared with a constant flow of media imagery streaming from computers, televisions, and movies. Their reality is the temporality that imagery from those computers, televisions and movies creates. Remote control and mouse in hand, these students have fast-forwarded into the mediated world.

The "Gen Zeds" have developed an "interactive culture" exhibiting qualities increasingly divergent from the life routines of their grandmothers

and mothers. Some Zayed University students are striving for independence and autonomy. Many have an emotional and intellectual openness generally not common to the society at large. Some post their innermost thoughts in a chat room or chat with strangers late into the night. Perhaps a greater social inclusion will come with the new technologies of communication. Whatever else is true, the immediacy, interactivity, and speed of the internet has already greatly accelerated the process of communicating and opened up previously unheard of worlds of knowledge and interaction (Walters, Quinn, and Walters, 2005).

They have become the "bulge" in the python for the United Arab Emirates. They are the leading edge of a groundbreaking generation of highly trained citizens, many of whom have been educated in an English-speaking environment. Having been exposed to new con-

sumerist ideas via advertising and programming, these young people are among the first to harvest the many benefits of a marketplace economy. What appears clear is that this group is more media savvy and more media oriented than either their parents or grandparents. Yet what effect their training and exposure will have on Emirati society at large is on the razor's edge.

While the proverb "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world" may be true, it is also true that "mothers who have little sense of their own minds and voices are unable to imagine such capacities in their children" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 163). In this journey toward the future, these students have few relevant role models. Beginning in 2006, two wives of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, have begun appearing on the pages of the *Gulf News* promoting civil organizations and charitable organizations. Two women have been appointed to ministry level positions in the federal government in Abu Dhabi. The reality is that none of these women has succeeded solely on merit; all were either "born to the purple" or connected by family, marriage, or *wasta*.

The forward-looking alternative to this problem is to create a culture fostering the resources of the mind and leadership by expertise rather than connectedness. Whether this culture of merit can actually develop in the United Arab Emirates remains unclear. Despite a modernizing economy, kinship and marriage still count, and

extended family networks wield enormous power in all aspects of life. This creates a system in the UAE that is antithetical to modern, transparent economies that generally require that the best – not the best connected – rise to the top in the major societal institutions.

Although the under-25 generation attends school, many young people lack the motivation either to work hard or to excel. Students learn at an early age how to play the system, expending time and effort haranguing teachers or plagiarizing instead of studying. Many are averse to working for a private company, preferring the comfort of traditional top-down ways of managing in government-run enterprises.

Even the mere education of women is a problematic issue in the UAE. While lip service is paid to the power of higher education, women must be valued, not just as wives and mothers, but as potential leaders in the workplace. Even if Emirati women can gain approval from the men in their families for breaking with the past, it may be impossible for them to reconcile the conflicting expectations that they will both rock the cradle and rule the world. This is not surprising. More than three decades after their own "liberation," many Western women have not found a happy compromise between home and work. The question thus remains whether Emirati women can do better than their Western sisters, if they are so permitted, and whether current advances represent the beginning of a new reality or mere tokenism.

Endnotes

1. Nielsen media diaries keep track of who is viewing what at what time in American television-viewing families. These records are kept in diary form.

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Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment and Achievements of Arab Women

The Lebanese Consulate in Dubai and the Northern Emirates in collaboration with the Lebanese American University Alumni organized a forum on the "Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment and Achievements of Arab Women." The forum was held at the Murooj Rotana on December 3, 2005. It hosted a number of regional and international experts and educators, in a bid to raise the profile of Arab women in the leading industries in the Middle East region. The forum was split into three sessions consisting of politics and media, business, and women in a socio-cultural context, with each session composed of two speakers offering differing views on the subject being discussed.



Ms. Adalat Nakkash, Consul-General Donna Turk and Mr. Saad El Zein

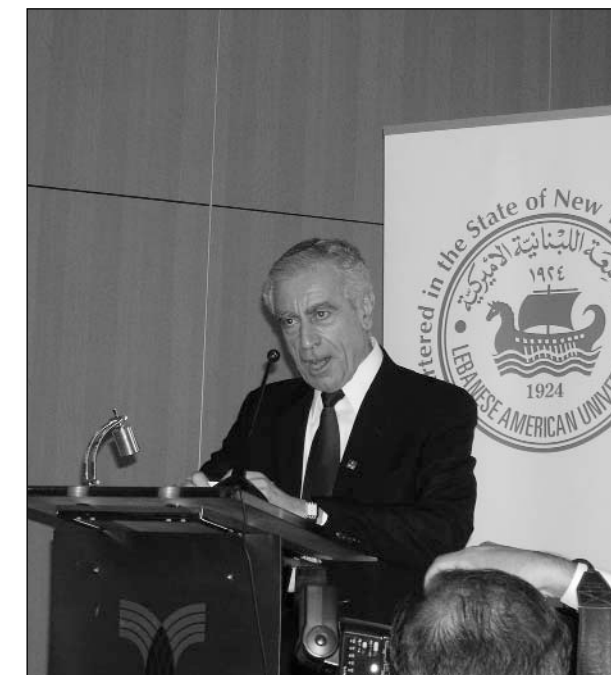


Ms. Magda Abu-Fadil, Ms. Maha Kaddoura, Dr. Joseph G. Jabbra, Mr. Saad El Zein, Ms. Adalat Nakkash, Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, Ms. Donna Turk, Dr. Abdallah Sfeir, Ms. Emily Nasrallah, Ms. Jeannette Mufti, Ms. Taline Avakian and Dr. Hissah Al-Sabah.

Opening Speeches

Women in the Arab World: Challenges and Opportunities

Address by Dr. Joseph G. Jabbra, President of the Lebanese American University to the Dubai and Northern Emirates LAU Alumni Chapter at the Gala Dinner, Dubai, Friday, December 2, 2005



Dr. Joseph G. Jabbra

Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends,

First, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for inviting me to speak to you tonight on this happy occasion. Second, I'd like to salute you for choosing for your forum such an important topic, The Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment and Achievements of Arab Women. Third, I am grateful to all the participants in this conference whose contributions, I am sure, will add significantly to improving the life of women in the Arab world, and fourth, I'd like to extend my most sincere gratitude to the organizers for working so hard to make this event most productive and most enjoyable.

In Road to the Future, Mustapha Al-Barghouti says that in the Arab world women are still marginalized, and that human development may not take root unless women become active participants in Arab society.¹ He goes on to say: "It is quite clear that the dilemma of Arab development will not be solved without focusing fully on human development, the development of the citizen and his/her role in economic, social and political life."² In its general volume on human development, the UNDP states: "Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in its broader scope is a key objective of the Millennium Declaration" (UNDP, 2003b, p. 7).

In my talk tonight, I will address four women-related issues: the role of the Lebanese American University

(LAU) in the education of Arab women, the contributions of LAU's Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World to Arab women and their concerns, and I will conclude with a challenge to both LAU and the Institute.

Women-Related Issues

There are four women-related issues I'd like briefly to elaborate on. They are women and education, women and empowerment, women and health services, and women and inequality.

Women and Education

In today's world, education is important because it is the only way to the good life that the Greek philosophers spoke about in glowing terms millennia ago. With education we can chart a suitable career path for ourselves, enjoy the delights of the modern world, realize our highest aspirations, contribute to society, and find self-fulfillment. With education, we can have better health, be more productive members of society, have a better income, and provide more amenities for our families. Without education, none of these can be realized (UNDP, 2003b, p. 7).

Therefore, it behooves every society to make sure that not only men but also women have the opportunity to get a good education. As we well know, women are strong agents of change because they are the primary care givers of children and are effective agents of social-



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ization. They attend very closely to the needs of their children and contribute significantly to the initial formation of their sense of the world around them. Therefore, if women are well educated, they can use their education to form and contribute to the education of the next generation. Further, the daughters of educated women can, in turn, become strong change agents, contribute to the well-being of society, earn more income, and educate their sons and daughters to become better citizens of their countries and the world (UNDP, 2003b, p. 7).

But while women's education may enrich the mind and satisfy the soul, it is not sufficient by itself. Arab societies must pay close attention to the content of women's education and make sure that women have equal opportunity to specialize in the sciences where they are currently underrepresented. School and college curricula must also contain knowledge that corresponds to the needs of society, real as well as potential, particularly in mathematics, engineering, and the sciences in general. Perhaps because of the lack of attention to the latter, education in the Arab world has been unable to contribute significantly to the development of Arab societies. Further, while a significant advancement in the education of women has taken place in the Arab world, with improvements in literacy and enrollment, these achievements have not yet caused a significant change in the social, economic, educational, legal, and religious attitudes of Arab men who, on the whole, still regulate women's role and place in society. As a result, and despite a noticeable improvement, more than half of Arab women are still illiterate. Arab governments should realize that while education is very expensive, the cost of ignorance for half of Arab society can be staggering (UNDP, 2002a, p. 3).

In Lebanon, the system of education is the most advanced in the Arab world and men and women have equal opportunity in education (UNDP, 1997). In fact, women's enrolment is now a bit higher than men's. But women are not transferring their education into the labor market; models of appropriate gender roles keep them at home after marriage, and particularly after they start to have children. Moreover, international experience has shown that the entry of women into the labor market will not by itself free them from the social shackles of society. What is needed is a paradigm shift, a change or adjustment in society's social, cultural, and economic dimensions (UNDP, 1997, p. 106).

Women and Empowerment

It is not enough to educate women; it is essential that they be empowered. Education and empowerment give women the opportunity to become active members of society and effective contributors to its well-being. Further, empowering women means that Arab societies

and governments must support women's basic requirements to live comfortably, provide them with the opportunity to reexamine their status at home and in society, and protect them from violence, both physical and mental (UNDP, 2003b, p. 86).

Violence against women is a world-wide phenomenon and the Arab world is no exception. In the last week of November 2005, one of the television stations in the Arab world related the story of a 25-year-old woman, six months pregnant, who was beaten, almost to death, by her husband. She was taken to a hospital where she lost her baby; her teeth were broken, and she was incapacitated, yet she refused to say that she was beaten by her husband because of the shame ('*aib*) factor. This is what you call double abuse: first by her husband and second by the customs and traditions of her society.

There is no doubt that there is a women's empowerment deficit in the Arab world. For example, in terms of gender empowerment measures, the Arab region ranks next to last — only sub-Saharan Africa has a lower score.³

Women and Health Services

Part of the gender crisis in Arab society results from women's poor access to good health services, which contributes to a significant mortality gap between men and women. Despite women's biological advantage, they have higher mortality rates than men in a number of countries; and while progress is being made on this score, a lot remains to be done. The "missing women phenomenon," in part, refers to women who die because they don't have ready access to good health services (UNDP, 2003b, p. 50).

Every year, about 500,000 women die from pregnancy and childbirth complications. Moreover, scores of women are afflicted annually with injuries and infections related to pregnancy and childbirth (UNDP, 2003b). In order to reduce women's premature deaths and diseases, the Arab world must provide better access to health services and health care. Arab societies must address all social obstacles that prevent Arab women from seeking proper health services. This is a pressing issue, especially in light of the fact that "the region's maternal mortality rate is double that of Latin America and the Caribbean and four times that of East Asia" (UNDP, 2002a, p. 3).

Women and Gender Inequality

One of the goals of the Millennium Declaration calls for the improvement of women's representation in the political, cultural, economic, and social arenas. Moreover, gender equality is at the core of whether some of the most noble human aspirations can be achieved: "from improving health and fighting deadly diseases, to reduc-

ing poverty and mitigating hunger, to expanding education and lowering child mortality, to increasing access to safe water, and to ensuring environmental sustainability." (UNDP, 2003b, p. 50)

Providing women with the opportunity to get a good education is important but not sufficient. It is equally important to create jobs for women that are commensurate with their education and talents, and assure for them a sustainable and dignified existence. Arab societies must open the door for women to participate in politics, and occupy visible positions and positions of authority in the private as well as the public sectors. Arab societies must realize that gender inequality is so serious because it prevents half of the population from being fully productive (UNDP, 2002a, p. 98). It is unconscionable that half of Arab women are still illiterate and not prepared to participate in nation building. It is unacceptable that Arab women continue to suffer from "unequal citizenship and legal entitlement often evident in voting rights and legal codes" (UNDP, 2002a, p. 3).

Moreover, the participation of Arab women in the political arena (legislative assemblies, cabinets) remains extremely low, perhaps the lowest in the world. Arab women, on the whole, are not normally employed, and if they are, their wages are lower than those of men. There is no doubt that society as a whole suffers when a huge section of the population is idle and not productive. This situation, of course, lowers family incomes and standards of living, especially in a world where both husband and wife must work in order to even make ends meet (UNDP, 2002a).

As with political participation, Arab women's formal economic participation remains low as well. This is unacceptable. Although women's formal economic participation in society has increased in a number of Arab countries, it still leaves a lot to be desired. Arab women's ability to contribute to society and to gain from their work experience remains hindered by customs, habits, conventions and legal restrictions (UNDP, 2002a, p. 11).

There has been no serious discussion about gender and globalization in the Arab world. In fact,

Globalization may have its winners.... However, in the Arab region, their numbers are relatively small and highly stratified. Anecdotal evidence suggests that these winners are mainly males. On the other hand, there are discernible numbers of losers, both males and females. Evidence suggests that, among the losers, female groups tend to be worse off in terms of economic exploitation and unemployment in situations where cost-cutting and flexibility are of paramount concern. (CAWTAR, 2001, p. 15)

Even in Lebanon where women have progressed considerably over the past two decades, they still do not participate effectively in all aspects of Lebanese life. Lebanese women are still subject to many acts of discrimination and don't occupy many important decision-making posts. As a result, they don't participate actively in the modernization process (UNDP, 1997, p. 112).

This situation is not unique to the Arab world. Although women in developed societies have made significant strides in the areas of employment and holding public office, their drive has met numerous difficulties. In her newsletter, *Your Guide to Women's Issues* (October 20, 2005), Nikki Katz speaks of the "glass ceiling" phenomenon which has been debated and discussed for the past 20 years without much success. In this regard, Katz speaks of the paucity of women in leadership positions, and the pay inequality between men and women.

Although women in developed societies have achieved a great deal in the business and political arenas, they continue to experience serious difficulties in realizing their full aspirations. Progress by women in the Arab world has certainly been slower. As explained above, many obstacles stand in their way, ranging from socio-cultural to educational challenges. Many argue that the answer to these challenges lies in making education fully accessible to both men and women and fully coeducational. Education is a key to a paradigm shift in the way the Arab male understands and defines the role and place of women in Arab society.

Lebanese American University

I will now focus on one institution of higher education that is providing a golden opportunity for men and women to earn an education that will help Arab societies eliminate gender inequality. We are proud, ladies and gentlemen, that the roots of the Lebanese American University go back to 1835, when a group of adventurous missionaries from the Presbyterian Church in the United States decided to establish in Beirut a school for the education of women in the Ottoman Empire. According to a 1940 Beirut College for Women class project entitled *A Short History of Women's Education*, that date, 1835, is carved on a stone in downtown Beirut. "If you go into the yard in front of the church downtown, you will see a monument. It marks the site of the first edifice built as a school for girls in the Turkish Empire."⁴

In 1924, the institution that became Lebanese American University was founded, and in 1927 it became the American Junior College for Women. In 1948-1949, the College program was expanded to the university level, and named Beirut College for Women (BCW). In 1950,



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BCW was granted a provisional charter by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York that later became an absolute charter in 1955. In 1973, the name of the college was changed from Beirut College for Women to Beirut University College (BUC), and it began to accept men into its programs. In 1985, the Board of Trustees decided to establish branches in Byblos and Saida (this operation is currently suspended), and in 1994 the Board of Regents approved and adopted a new name, Lebanese American University.⁵

From 1924 until 1973, the institution graduated 5,113 female students, and from 1973 to the present, 9,712. Students came from various Arab countries, Europe, and America. Enrollment at the University now is about 6,300; and about half of them are women, and 18% come from 68 countries the world over. Although we don't have reliable data on all our women graduates, we know that some of them went on to have careers in the public as well as the private sectors across the globe. They have been achievers in medicine, the arts, teaching, writing, social work, journalism, music, the sciences, and the media. And scores of them have raised terrific families. The sons and daughters of both continue to attend their parents' Alma Mater.

In her 1967 book, *Pioneering Profiles, Beirut College for Women*, Dr. Marie Aziz Sabri wrote:

In the last forty years, Beirut College for Women has been the main continuous force which has supplied the Arab World with large numbers of women pioneers who, through knowledge, have found the key to freedom. When the Arab World has been changing at a great pace, Beirut College for Women (BCW) graduates have made a unique record in professional life and in services to their countries.⁶

Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World

In 1973, the university (then known as Beirut University College, BUC), established the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World with five clear objectives: strengthening women's curricular offerings at the university; carrying out research on the role, status, and place of women in Lebanon and the Arab world; advocating positive change regarding the rights of Arab women; serving as a clearing house for individuals, groups of individuals, and institutions who are concerned about women's issues in the Arab world and beyond; and empowering Arab women through engagement and education (Sabri, 1967, p. 1).

Inspired by these objectives, the Institute immediately engaged in three important types of activity: academic, special events, and action and development. Although

the Institute does not offer a degree program, it has persuaded departments in the humanities and social sciences to offer courses related to women's issues to interested students. Moreover, the Institute, through sponsored research, began to address the role and status of Arab women in education, the environment, literature, economic development, management, the media, and history. Furthermore, the Institute has, since its inception, hosted a number of conferences, seminars and workshops focusing on important women's issues.⁷

In regard to special events, the Institute hosts annual film festivals that focus on women's images and profiles, the veil, women in cinema, and women's sexuality. Since 1988, it has organized celebrations of International Women's Day. Highlights of such events have included photographs of and by women, with special emphasis on Lebanese pioneer women, music, concerts, and other cultural and social activities.⁸

Third, the Institute has promoted action and development programs, with the goal of promoting women's literacy and increasing their social and political awareness. These action and development programs include a basic living skills program, written in Arabic and used by social workers and educators to help illiterate Arab women acquire literacy. Another important program focuses on empowering Arab women through 12 second-level literacy booklets that contain stories involving women and civic education, empowerment of women, violence against women, women's health and the environment, and rehabilitation of women in Lebanese prisons.⁹

To its credit, the Institute has many publications, in English and Arabic, centering on women's issues. Chief among these is *Al-Raida*, a quarterly journal which was established in 1976 with the objective of strengthening Arab women, promoting research on Arab women, and reporting on the Institute's and the University's activities. My observation is that *Al-Raida* has been carrying out its mission admirably.

The Challenge

It is clear that the Institute has been engaged in researching women-related issues and advocating the improvement of the status and role of women in Arab society and beyond. While this is important, I believe that the Institute has not been given the opportunity to live up to its potential, especially at an institution that was first established for the education of women.

From this podium, and with your support, I'd like to challenge LAU to support and strengthen the Institute so that it may become a major force, meticulously researching

women-related issues in the Arab world and beyond, and advocating a significant improvement in their condition.

More specifically, I'd like to see the Institute fully supported by the University on the basis of a well thought out strategic plan prepared by the Institute, in consultation with top-notch experts in the field of women and gender studies. Such a plan should tell us how the Institute can become a major research and action center, where the four issues I have already mentioned, namely: women and education, women and health services, women and empowerment, and women and inequality, are fully researched, and, in light of that, solutions proposed to address the challenges that stand in the way of improving women's role, status, and effective participation in Arab society.

Moreover, the Institute should become a repository of significant sets of data relating to women's issues, a resource center professionally maintained, and to which scholars, practitioners, and government experts can have access and consult for the purpose of learning and pursuing women's equality in Arab society. Achieving this goal would make the Institute a place where scholars, practitioners, and government experts can gather for defined periods of time to do their research and learn from what the Institute will have to offer.

Further, I am of the opinion that *Al-Raida* should become a refereed journal, publishing excellent research articles on women's issues. My reason for taking this position is that nothing can put a center or an institute on the regional as well as the global map except well-researched, scholarly, and peer reviewed articles on important topics. And nothing is more important than the fate of half the population of the world.

Finally, in all the research done on women in the Arab world, and in an effort to collect and store reliable and useful data in that regard, I would recommend the use of the Gender Related Development Index: (GDI), and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The first helps us understand the inequality of achievement between men and women, and the second helps us account for the participation of women in decision making across all levels of society (UNDP, 1997, p. 106).

Allow me, colleagues and friends, to conclude by saying that even women who achieved a great deal in developed societies continue to experience major difficulties in their drive for equality at all levels between men and women. The achievements of and remaining challenges for women in developed societies clearly point to how much work Arab women will have to do in order to gain their proper role and rightful place in Arab society. Let

LAU and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World lead the way. Let both become a shining beacon of hope for improving women's condition and role in the Arab World. And let both help Arab men and women complement each other in the exciting task of building a better Arab society for ourselves and for future Arab generations.

Thank you.

Endnotes

1. Cited in the *Arab Human Development Report*, 2003, UNDP, p. 164.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
3. North America, over 0.6; Oceania 0.5; Europe 0.5; Latin America almost 0.4; Arab countries, not even 0.3; and sub Saharan Africa, a little over 0.2. *Arab Human Development Report* 2002, p. 28.
4. <http://www.lau.edu.lb/general-info/historical-backg.html>
5. For details, see Orientation Program, Lebanese American University, Board of Trustees Meeting, May 12, 13 and 14, 2005; and Lebanese American University, Academic Catalogue, 2004-2005, pp. 3-4.
6. See a document entitled The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Lebanese American University, no date given.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*

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Opening Speeches

Welcome address of her H.E. Ms. Donna Turk, Consul General of Lebanon — Dubai and Northern Emirates



H.E. Ms. Donna Turk

I would like to point out the fact that the forum plays a critical role in emphasizing the dynamism of the academic environment in Lebanon and enhancing its impact on Arab women. This will be made clear through different statements made by an elite group of Arab women who have excelled in many political, social, and business arenas.

Lebanon has established itself as a main center for education in general and higher education in particular. The multiplicity and diversity of universities has created a dynamism which has allowed equal educational opportunities for both men and women, spreading knowledge among people that has:

1. Reduced social discrimination;
2. Developed both private and public higher education, and opened local university branches; and
3. Promoted academic knowledge through scientific research, which is extremely important due to its vital role in enhancing the quality of education.

One of the key purposes of higher education is to serve the needs of an adaptable, sustainable, knowledge-based economy at local, regional, and national levels. While many institutions are national and international in their outlook, they have also developed an importance in the local and regional contexts. This importance is not only due to the centrality of higher education to the

future economic and social well being of the communities in which they are located, but also to the role that higher education plays in changing the very structure of the economy.

In recent years there has been a growing emphasis on the local and regional roles of higher education, to the extent that over three-quarters of such institutions now refer to local and/or regional objectives in their strategic plans. At the same time there have been a number of attempts to measure the impact of higher education at the local and regional levels. These studies have shown that, simply by their existence, higher education providers make a significant economic contribution in a locality — whether or not they adopt an explicit mission to generate local or regional economic activity or to play a part in the cultural life of their locality or region. The range of their role is in fact very wide, extending to support through research and consulting, attracting investment and providing new sources of employment, meeting labor market needs, supporting lifelong learning, and as centers of culture contributing to the quality of life in their localities.

Indeed, in spite of the often-inevitable difference in the purposes and timelines of research in higher education institutions and in the world of commerce, there has increasingly been a mutual recognition of the advantages of partnerships, and a will on the part of the higher education institution to seek them.

Because of established relationships between values, language, culture, economics, and education, there is a uniqueness of education in Lebanon and this I will now discuss.

The Components and Characteristics of Higher Education in Lebanon

Understanding the components requires defining the tasks or objectives:

The first objective is to provide vocational education through academic learning that is related to the needs of the society, and characterized by a certain margin of freedom and independence.

The second objective is to provide a civil and political education; in fact, universities develop the human resources of individuals who will later take on positions in the state, civil society and public sector, and this is achieved by the acquisition, through debate and discussion, of those principles guiding civil, cultural, and human identity.

spread throughout the world. The first two ministries to be established were the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, and the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training, to enrich the Lebanese educational system. In 1946, after independence, the Lebanese government replaced the old curricula, coming from the French Mandate, with new ones, and the Arabic language was imposed upon all schools as the primary language of instruction. The government also left students the freedom to choose a second language or more (French, English, etc...). Then the curricula were changed again. Each step of the educational process was specified with a defined goal.

In Lebanon, the educational levels after high school are university, college, professional institute, or high technical school. Lebanon has 23 universities, of which the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU) are internationally known. AUB was the first English-language university to open in Lebanon, while the first university to open was the French-language Université Saint Joseph.



Ms. Adalat Nakkash, Consul-General Donna Turk and Mr. Saad El Zein

The Lebanese educational system has been a bilingual/trilingual system for a long time, teaching, besides Arabic, French and English as basic languages. A former minister once said that we make good use of this poly-lingual feature [of our society]: English is a practical language, French is a refined language, and Arabic is the mother language that molds the national cultural identity. In this context, the Lebanese American University stands out. LAU was the first women's college in Lebanon, which later transformed into a college that admitted both young men and women. It is also the seat for the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, which engages in academic research aimed at the study and support of women's issues and conditions in the

Arab world. LAU offers its students new perspectives and prepares them to be dynamic elements capable of introducing change into their society.

It is imperative that our young men and women continue to be anchored in the cultural values and religions that are only available in our part of the world. In short, if you want to attain the best progressive education within a mosaic of cultural celebrations and established history, while preserving our conservative religious and family values, your destination must be Lebanon.

These two objectives, though distinct, are yet complementary, and contribute to build an active citizenry — free, responsible, having enough insight and perception, and capable of formulating a judgment and opinion about themselves and their political society. Having said this, the question is why did we choose Lebanon? What are the characteristics of higher education in Lebanon?

At the beginning of history, Lebanon was one of the pioneers of the alphabet, and from its shores the alphabet



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Opening Speeches

Welcome address of Dr. Abdallah Sfeir, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Lebanese American University



Dr. Abdallah Sfeir

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues,

A couple of years ago the decoding of the human genome was completed. The number of human genes turned out to be one third of what was anticipated and it was also found that an infinitesimal part of this code differs between one person and another, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, and geographical location.¹ This rather surprising discovery led many scientists to recognize that humans are much less coded than we initially thought, and that in itself may well be the secret behind intelligence and the development of mankind.

In other words: We are far more the result of our enculturation and development, in both the positive and negative senses; we are not prisoners of the natural genetic capital we are born with. Obviously racism, as well as gender bias, are pretty much cultural and not natural.

Gender bias remains well-established and not easily questionable in many societies. It is in this atmosphere of obscurantism that the founders of the Lebanese American University (LAU) established the first institution dedicated to the education of women. "The university's early days in 1835 find a reminder on an engraved stone in Beirut's city center: Site of the first edifice built as a school for girls in the Turkish Empire."² The engraving refers to the American School for Girls, established in Beirut by American Presbyterian missionaries. This high school progressively

added college programs and moved to the current site of the Beirut campus in Ras Beirut under the name of the American Junior College for Women (AJCW) in the early 1930s.

In 1948-1949 the AJCW program was expanded into a university-level institution under the name of Beirut College for Women (BCW). It was then chartered by the regents of the State University of New York, delivering AA [Associate in Arts], AAS [Associate in Applied Science], BA, and BS degrees in several majors. As a recognized university-level liberal arts college, it played a key role in serving the educational, social, and economic needs of the Middle East.

In 1973 the institution changed its name to Beirut University College (BUC) and men were admitted to some of the programs. In 1978, BUC opened an off-campus program in the north and a year later another one was operational in the south. In October 1991 classes started in the newly-built campus at Blat overlooking Byblos. It was officially inaugurated on July 16, 1992. In October 1992, BUC became a university and in 1994, the Board of Regents of the State University of New York approved BUC's request to change into the Lebanese American University (LAU), reflecting further growth and the addition of several professional schools. In the current Fall 2005 semester, more than 6,000 students are enrolled at LAU at its two campuses.

Today, and despite being co-educational, we can affirm

again that the institution was, and still is, a force for the education of women in Lebanon and the Middle East. This commitment was started long before most of the world recognized the need and moral obligation to educate women in a collegiate setting.

When LAU became a co-educational institution it did not renege on its origins nor on the priority it places on women's education. Indeed, this change may have even strengthened this role. The times had changed: The local prevailing culture was no longer concerned about mixing female and male students in the same classrooms and accepted the co-educational mix. Growing the college with the enrollment of men permitted it to develop, add more majors, and provide a more natural setting for women and men to live and work together on equal grounds and prepare for the modern-day workplace where gender is not supposed to play an important role.

The new mission, values, and vision of LAU — that only recently were developed by the Strategic Planning Team and approved by the Board of Trustees in its September 2005 meeting — still emphasize the aim of the founders: "To always seek the truth, respect human dignity, and promote gender equality."

In the same year the BUC name was adopted, 1973, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was founded. This was another signal reaffirming the University's continued commitment to women's education. This Institute further complemented the educational role by providing a research arm — the first resource center of this kind in the Arab Middle East.

In a way, IWSAW was also a natural growth as it was founded under the impulse and leadership of educated and empowered women of the AJCW and BCW days. The so called "pipeline theory" which holds that educating women will inevitably bring more women into education has held its promise. In a male-dominated environment it usually takes very enlightened fathers to send their daughters to universities; the following generation has the advantage of being born into households of educated mothers who presumably, we have to assume, would have chosen to marry educated and enlightened spouses.

Unfortunately, this so-called "pipeline theory" does not always work so well. The pipeline often has leaks - educated women going back to traditional environments where they cannot exercise much influence on their surroundings.

Or the pipeline "clogs" when women are not welcomed in professional environments where they can be fully engaged in and practice their professions as well as become role models for the following generation.

Education opens up the individual to the wonderful world of knowledge, a non-negligible accomplishment by itself, but this alone does not suffice nor fulfill the ultimate aims or objectives of women's empowerment and gender equality. Women's education is recognized as the best investment for societal growth due to the impact it has on infant mortality and public health.

Education is certainly a noble aim, but not an end by itself, and it is in this area that IWSAW has focused most of its recent activities: complementing women's education with the necessary support of research to provide our societies and decision makers with the means to "unclog the pipeline," and open up the huge untapped potential and added value that women can bring to their societies.

I think you would agree with me that greater women's empowerment would inevitably produce:

- More compassionate businesses;
- More caring governments; and
- A more just and peaceful world.

As the world has progressively transformed from material to immaterial and a world economy driven by knowledge, the "traditionally held female attributes" of gentleness, love, caring, and humility have recovered their merit of being great leadership virtues.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to say that today's event is a celebration and recognition of what several generations of students, staff, and faculty of LAU have accomplished in this area.

Today's event is planned by, executed by, and dedicated to, the women who have come to embody the dream of LAU's founding fathers and mothers.

It is an honor for your humble male servant to address you today and celebrate with you the success of great women of the Middle East.

Racism, as well as gender bias, are pretty much cultural and not natural.

Endnotes

1. http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genom/publicat/primer2001/4.shtml
2. <http://www.lau.edu.lb/general-info/historicalbackg.html>



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Session 1:

Empowerment of Women in Politics and Media

The Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment and Achievements of Arab Women

Dima Dabbous-Sensenig

Director, Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW)

Introduction

When I was asked to participate in this forum, I thought it was clear what I was getting myself into. As [then] Acting Director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) and a media scholar, I thought this was going to be a presentation on media and gender, the intersection of two fields I am quite familiar with from an academic perspective. Easy, I thought. However, when I talked a few weeks ago with Ms. Nakash concerning the details of the presentation, she explained that she expected something personal. I wasn't so sure anymore. Not because I can't be personal, but because I have never done that in public, especially in relation to politics. This is indeed one situation, I thought, where I was not sure I wanted the personal to be political, no offence to sister feminists intended.

So for the coming few minutes, I will do my best to draw on the personal when talking about the political, hoping to strike the right balance. I know it is a fine line to tread: I wouldn't want to tip the balance one way or another by either drowning you in personal details, or boring you with academic jargon. So please bear with me while I give it a try.

Looking at the title of the conference, I saw the following key words: Empowerment, Women, Education, Politics, and Media, in addition to the roles of IWSAW and LAU in all that. Seven key words in total. Certainly a



Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig

lot of ground to cover in 20 minutes or so. But, since I was asked to be personal, I thought, maybe I can get away with being somewhat creative too. If I cannot cover all these areas in such a short time and give them their due, maybe I can instead figure out the common thread that links them all together and allows me to hit seven birds with one stone, so to speak.

So, which common thread would that be? Maybe I can just start with me! As a woman, I was empowered by my media-related education at LAU and then learnt about politics or how to be assertive and involved in power sharing when I was later on hired as a faculty member, also at LAU, and then went on to become acting director of IWSAW at LAU. I think I just got all seven key words in a single sentence, and managed to mention LAU three times!

Women, Media, and Politics

Allow me now to elaborate, going back to the idea of the common thread holding together all these apparently distinct key concepts. I believe this common thread to be the concept of "role model," basic to theories of social learning and identity formation developed in psychology, sociology, and media studies. Role models are "other persons who, either by exerting some influence or simply by being admirable in one or more ways, have an impact on another" (Nauta & Kokaly quoted in Schroeter, 2002). "People perceived as role models may be able to facilitate

[other persons'] development (and identity formation) via their support and guidance as well as via the degree to which they provide inspiration and modeling" (Nauta & Kokaly quoted in Schroeter, 2002). They help young people form notions "of who they are and who they want to be,"¹ with socialization being the most important factor in identity formation.

Such role models can be real life characters found in the immediate environment of young people, such as the family or the school, where values and ideals are usually taught. Indeed, when teaching one of the women's studies courses at LAU, I make it a point of asking students, male and female, who their role model in life is. A typical answer for female students is: my mother. Such a response is very endearing: We all love our mothers and will forever be grateful for their relentless love and sacrifice. But if I were only to have my mother as a role model in life, I know I would not be where I am today. My mother taught me the importance of unconditional love within a family setting, and she certainly is a role model in that respect. But as a homemaker, she was simply incapable of giving me advice on how to fend for myself in the real world, outside the sheltered environment of the home. Here again research on identity formation has shown that, for those teenagers and young people who do not find role models in their immediate environment, "media icons can provide an alternative source of socialization" (Skirvin, 2000). These media role models can be fictitious (characters in movies or TV series), or real (athletes, singers, artists, etc.).

Young people increasingly use the material available through the media to form their "self." Considering the crucial role played by the media role models when it comes to the formation and development of "individual identity" in young people, the following questions come to mind: What female role models are available to young women in the mass media? And to what extent do these role models empower young females and prepare them to be active participants in society? Knowing that studies have shown that males and females are more likely to select same sex people as role models,² an examination of media representations of women is essential to answer the above-mentioned questions. Who are the women portrayed in the media, especially on our TVs, the most ubiquitous and influential of all mass media?

Studies of media representations of women are replete with statistics and analyses that document the extent to

which the media continue to stereotype women, relegating them mostly to the private sphere or reducing them to sex objects, whether in advertising or regular programming. When, exceptionally, alternative representations of womanhood are available (and there are indeed serious omissions where powerful women or feminists are left out, just as is the case in most history books), these representations are rarely positive, preventing these media women from acting as role models in the process of identity formation in young female viewers (Dabbous-Sensenig, 2000).

Feminists and the feminist movement are often ridiculed when covered by the media. Where feminists are concerned, their coverage is rarely issue-oriented. They are instead physically scrutinized and caricatured as non-feminine, ugly, fat, old, hairy, bitter because of failed relationships with men, etc. (Wolf, 1993). Similarly, the few female politicians that exist and capture some media attention are treated more superficially and visually than their male counterparts, with the media paying more attention to their physical capacities than to their mental faculties. To cite a few examples, when Margaret Thatcher was in power, media interest in her was often concentrated on her sense of fashion (or lack thereof); just as during Madeleine Albright's notorious visit to Lebanon she made news headlines thanks to the length of her skirt when she met the Lebanese president. The most recent example of such unfair treatment of female politicians, as some of you who followed the German elections may have noticed, is that of Angela Merkel who attracted more attention with her bad hair day on election day than with the fact that she was on her way to becoming Germany's first ever female chancellor.

... LAU provided me with the unique opportunity of finding those female role models as a young undergraduate.

This distorted, superficial media coverage of women in positions of power, which treats them as movie stars or as participants in fashion shows rather than as shapers of social and political reality, has several serious consequences as far as women and politics are concerned: Women's issues are neglected and excluded from public debate, and the activities of women MPs trivialized. More seriously, such coverage obliterates the important function women in politics can have as role models who can help inculcate the "right type of confidence" among younger women and encourage them to participate in political life (Karam, 1998, p. 38).

Indeed, research into the reasons that account for



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Mr. & Ms. Fadi Ismail and Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig at the pre-gala reception.

women's poor participation and interest in political life lists, among other factors, the lack of media support for female politicians and media insistence on portraying women in traditional, non-political roles. Another important factor is the lack of confidence in women's ability to deliver, whether on the part of potential female candidates or on the part of their voters (Karam, 1998). Without diminishing the importance of the political and socio-economic factors that work to exclude women from politics (type of electoral system, feminization of poverty, and so on), the psychological or socio-cultural factor that I spoke of last plays an important role in the empowerment of women and affects their participation in political life. I would like to quote here Rawya Shawa, a Palestinian MP:

It is very difficult for women to talk, to argue, to press for their concerns. How can we encourage women to talk and to express themselves? Maybe the woman in the hut has a lot to say, but we have to encourage her to talk... the answer is education. Education has led many women in my society to join political parties or participate in political activities. Education is the most important channel for encouraging women to speak out. (Shvedova, 1998, p. 27)

Women and Education: The Role of IWSAW and LAU Indeed, education and training for women's leadership in general, and for orienting women toward political life in particular, are key. Research has established the positive link between women's level of literacy (mainly university education) and the likelihood of them being perceived as

men's equals in social spheres (Shvedova, 1998, p. 29). Equally important, however, is the possibility to present women with "work patterns that are conducive to political leadership" (Shvedova, 1998, p. 27). Women need to have an understanding of the concerns of women, mostly through gendered awareness-raising. They need to develop argumentative and lobbying skills, and they need networking if they are to be empowered or to be trained for political careers. Some researchers talk of "women's leadership schools" where such training can be carried out, and where the skills acquired by those women who "made it" can be passed on to the younger generation who can learn about the experiences of those women and improve their performance. Without such education

and such training, women's lack of confidence in their ability to move and shake things will be perpetuated, and their under-representation in the political sphere reinforced, even though they have the same potential as men. Some researchers refer to this lack of confidence as "the culture of fear." Feminist author Naomi Wolf, for instance, speaks of "fear of power" among young women, a fear that even the best university education may not dispel. To Wolf, twenty-first century women may well be more literate than ever, but they remain "power illiterate." Their self-esteem, at the heart of identity formation, may be boosted by their education, but self-esteem is not just about "feeling confident about oneself" (1993, p. 236). It is about "feeling confident about one's right and ability to change the world" (p. 236).

If that diagnosis is true, if women are afraid of being empowered and of joining political life despite the increasing number of political, educational, and economic possibilities available to them, then what explains this "culture of fear" and this "power illiteracy" amongst even the most educated of women? In order to answer this question, allow me to come full circle and to go back to the concept of "role models" with which I started off. When Wolf asked a group of university students about their reluctance to assume leadership positions, a common justification was their fear of being "shot down," "disliked," or "criticized." They were afraid of being women and failing. When asked if there has ever been a woman "who used real power in a way [they] respected" outside family circles, the answer was a definite no. I quote one of her students:

I went through my history book and there were hardly any women. They are not there. The examples are not there. If you do not show women role models — that women can get in positions of power — then why should you even try? (1993, p. 254)

"The main mission of the women's movement is to inculcate the right type of confidence and belief among women, and to cultivate assertive stances among them" (Shvedova, 1998, p. 38) by having their leadership skills honed. Women should come to realize that power is not a domain exclusive to men, and should learn to overcome the taboo that makes it virtually impossible for them to claim power or achievement, because they are told that power is not feminine. But in order to do that, they need female role models, they need mentoring by women who made it, and who can tell them that they can make it too. During my adolescent years, I often asked myself who my role model in life was. Sadly, I could not think of a single female role model. Only male role models came to my mind. Great scientists, writers, or artists. Even my dad was a role model because, against all odds, he made something out of nothing. But those male role models did not help much. They were all male, I was female, and I could not help thinking that they probably made it precisely because they were male. I was desperately in search of a female role model I could learn from and be like when I grew up.

Fortunately for me, LAU provided me with the unique opportunity of finding those female role models as a young undergraduate. They were not great scientists, or writers, or artists — people I had no chance of encountering in real life anyway. They were better than that. They were real women whom I could see in action, whom I could interact with and directly learn from. Some of them were great teachers who taught me what it meant to be truly professional in the workplace. Others were chairwomen, deans, and vice presidents whose position of power was a constant source of challenge and yet they rose to the challenge and proved themselves in what is still a male-dominated society. To many of these women I am doubly-indebted: first for showing me that it can be done, and later on for entrusting me with doing it. It was a female professor at LAU who requested that I replace her after she fled the country when the civil war became too dangerous for non-Lebanese faculty to stay. It was a female chair who increasingly entrusted me with more courses and responsibilities, gradually building my self confidence and preparing me for an academic career. It was a female dean who recommended me for ever more challenging tasks, last but not least of which was that of directing the Women's Institute at LAU as of October 2005. And I can go on.

What all these women do not know is how much I owe who I am today to them. For years, I watched them in action at LAU, which is, as a university, a microcosm of society. I watched them defending positions, leading discussions, debating issues, making decisions. I watched them asserting themselves in public with authority, fairness, intelligence, and eloquence. They were role models and mentors in the truest sense of the word, though they probably are not even aware of it. I would like my presentation today to be a tribute to them, and to LAU that welcomed them and nurtured them, allowing them to live up to their full potential. My only wish, in closing, is to be able to repay both these women and the institution which was a pioneer in the Arab world when it introduced education for women in 1924 and a pioneer again when it created the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in 1973. I know I may not be able to repay the debt directly — some of these women are not even around anymore — but maybe the best way for me to repay them and LAU is to pass it on.

Endnotes

1. This information is taken from a current project, "Media for role model creation and identity formation in adolescent athletes", sponsored by Georgetown University's Children's Digital Media Center. <http://cdmc.georgetown.edu/projects.cfm> Accessed November 22, 2005.
2. Ibid.

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Session 1:

Empowerment of Women in Politics and Media

Women's Empowerment and Achievements in the Arab World: The Empowerment of Women in Politics - The Jordanian Experience

Jeanette S. Mufti

University of Petra Amman, Jordan

The empowerment of women has been an ongoing process for over six decades, since the establishment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in 1946. Shortly after that date, the tragic exodus of the Palestinians from their homeland took place, and the impact was tremendously devastating to Jordan and the Arab world at large. In the absence of human security, hope and the opportunity for good education were shattered. All Jordanian girls who had been sent to Palestine for their matriculation level of education had to leave their schools abruptly and return home with utter disappointment.

Amman, the capital of Jordan, was still at the beginning stages of its development. Only elementary and secondary levels of education were available for both sexes. So women turned toward Beirut for its renowned American Junior College for Women (AJCW). However, due to the conservative nature of Jordanian society at the time, it took a lot of determination and persuasive negotiations with families for them to agree to send their daughters as far as Lebanon in pursuit of their education. Yet, AJCW had such a distinguished reputation and status as a women's college in the region that it was not long before Jordanian women could realize their dreams of higher education. For almost two decades AJCW remained an important institution in the Jordanian context. In the meantime, political and social changes in Jordan started having an impact on the way of life and people's thinking, and so the first university was estab-



Ms. Jeanette S. Mufti

lished in Amman in 1962. It was coeducational!

Naturally, the Jordanian alumnae who returned home with bachelor's degrees in the various disciplines available at AJCW, whether in the humanities, the sciences, or the arts, "broke the mold," and using their unique perspectives to bring about genuine change soon immersed themselves in the labor force. Realizing the importance of setting an example for other women, and enlightening members of their own society to encourage a new regard for human rights and equitable social and political development, many specifically chose to work in the field of education. This was a very important dimension for the empowerment of women. Since then, Beirut College for Women (BCW, formerly AJCW) graduates have proved to be highly motivated in whatever work they have been involved in — realizing that their country really needed them to make use of their education and the positive attitudes and values they acquired during their college years. They had the benefits of being away from home, making decisions regarding their own future, and making good use of the rich academic and socio-cultural diversity they had been exposed to in the Lebanese environment.

Empowering women — whether politically, socially, or economically — became more of a need that had to be addressed seriously and systematically on the national level in order [for Jordan] to keep up with regional and global changes and challenges. With the advent of the United

Nation's call for a "Women's Decade" in the 1970s as well as ongoing amendments to the Jordanian Constitution, women could enjoy the right to vote and the right to run in parliamentary elections.¹ However, the political situation in the country was rather complicated due to the outcome of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. The last general parliamentary elections took place just a few months before June 1967, and from that date until the late 1980s, democratic political activities for the representation of people in legislation were almost nonexistent. Since this was rather an embarrassing situation for a country like Jordan, an alternative to parliament was formed in 1978 by appointing 70 men and women to act as a body to monitor governmental performances without the right to withhold confidence. This body, the National Consultative Council, ran from 1978 to 1984 and while women were formally included, their token representation was not up to women's political ambitions at the time. It was appreciated, however, as an official declaration of women's constitutional rights in public work and decision-making posts. Three BCW graduates out of a total number of nine women, in fact, participated in the Council throughout its six-year duration. Another positive addition to the empowerment of women in Jordan was the appointment of a woman as the Minister of Social Development in 1979, coinciding with the adoption of the national strategy of integrating women into development.

In the meantime, the Jordanian people were questioning the very important matter of the absence of a parliament. This issue was becoming more and more debated by all Jordanian activists, NGOs, and civil associations. Eventually, the general elections of 1989 took place with the active participation of women. For the first time in Jordanian history 12 women ran for election in several electoral constituencies; but the outcome was disappointing for all of them, as they found out that society at all levels was not yet ready for women MPs. It was interesting to realize that women were luckier with being appointed rather than elected! People on the whole, and specifically females, did not trust the abilities of women in public work. "If there are men in parliament to defend women's rights, there's no need for women to be there..." This statement was heard from some of the male elected MPs! Yes, women in 1989 ran to the polls most enthusiastically - to vote for men!

Nevertheless, the snowball had begun rolling, and in the following general elections of 1993, one out of three female candidates made it successfully to be the first

woman MP in Jordan. But, again, four years later, the 1997 general elections proved to be a disappointment. None of the 17 women candidates made it to the House of Deputies. These elections were a setback to the advancement of women in the legislative realm versus their advancement in the executive one. In fact, while there had been an increase in the appointment of women ministers, and women appointed in other various decision-making posts in the different areas and sectors, women were basically non-existent on the electoral scene. Women were simply not getting enough votes to carry them to parliament. As a compensating measure, more women were thus appointed to the Senate (the King's Council).

In response to the urgent calls of women's groups and women's federations to increase the number of women in leadership, the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW)² was established in 1992. JNCW aimed from the start to be "a policy forum... to reflect the desire of the government to optimize the participation of women in economic, social, and political life" in Jordan. Subsequently a quota for women was passed in parliament. This was finally implemented in the recent elections of 2003, thus making it possible to have six women MPs among a total of 110. Not very impressive, I suppose, but it was the quota system that made it possible.

It is worth mentioning at this point that Jordanian women were given the same rights as men in the 1952 Jordanian Constitution, but the

premise of empowering women was only adopted as a strategy for women's development some 30 years later with the launching of the UN Decade for Women. Plans of action to ensure gender equality have since been drawn up for implementation. A lot of work has actually been done so far. To cite a few examples, Jordanian laws have been amended to ensure labor rights for women, have increased access to better education and healthcare services, and for quite a while now the serious issue of domestic violence towards women and children has started to be addressed.

Over the years women in Jordan have acquired a patriotism and national awareness that have been strong motivating factors for them to work for the love of their country and to serve it to the best of their abilities. They have learned a lot from the suffering of people around them, and so they have turned toward political, educational,

... despite the laws that give women and men equal rights on paper, at the grassroots level women seem to be always lagging behind.



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and social involvement. Generally speaking, while we are witnessing today an increasing number of Jordanian women who have contributed to and benefited from the development of the country, there remain numerous social obstacles for women to overcome in realizing their political aspirations.

First, there has been the traditional socio-cultural framework within which women function, and there lie the constraints of gender that thwart attempts at freedom of movement, individuality, and self-expression. Second, the economic status of women is a crucial factor of empowerment, success, or failure. Women, on the whole, are financially dependent on fathers, brothers, husbands, or even sons. Hence, lacking the minimal requirement of economic independence for running for election, for instance, women find themselves in debilitating and disappointing situations for any self-fulfillment and achievement. Third, despite the crucial role of the leadership (the state) in Jordan and its policies and directives in bolstering and pushing women further toward decision-making positions in society, successive Jordanian governments have, paradoxically, also implemented some measures that have not been at all supportive of increasing women's empowerment. For example, the one-person one-vote formula in the electoral law implemented since the 1993 general elections, has been absolutely disadvantageous for women in the following elections. Other examples in legislation are the Family Status Law, the Penalty Law, and the Citizenship Law, which need to be addressed seriously in order to empower women in the family framework and in society. Lastly, there are the personality traits, qualities and capabilities of women themselves that are a hindrance to their advancement due to family background and upbringing, domestic violence, male-female discrimination, and backward attitudes — all of which most, if not all the time, lead to a lack of self-confidence and a poor self image.

So, the question of what constitutes success and personal achievement for Jordanian women arises here. Have women been successful in their own endeavors, and if yes, how far have they reached? And what are the parameters of success?

Even though success is more or less relative, it must be admitted that a lot of success has been achieved in Jordan. However, I find that this success has been mostly individual. Much remains to be done.³ There are still women in Jordan who join millions of women and girls around the world in a daily struggle to exercise their basic human rights. And there are still women in the Arab world, including Jordan, who are far from having attained their goals of equality, freedom, self-fulfillment, and development. And despite the statistical indications

of the high enrollment of females in schools and universities, education has not necessarily been a conclusive factor for women to obtain their fair share in their families, the work force, and the upper strata of management and policy making. Moreover, despite the laws that give women and men equal rights on paper, at the grassroots level women seem to be always lagging behind.

Women's rights are human rights and should be addressed as such. Until this is widely accepted, women everywhere, including in the Arab world, will always find themselves yearning for the attainment of those rights with the motivating motto: "...to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield..."

Endnotes

1. There have been supportive measures on the international level for the advancement of the status of women. For example, the UN International Decade for Women (1976-1985), the Four World Conferences: Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985, Mexico 1990, Beijing 1995, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) among others. At the local level: the Jordanian Constitution (since 1952), the National Charter of 1991, and the Cabinet Decree of 1992 which established the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW), a semi-official entity with the mandate of: (1) Promoting women's roles in the public sphere, as well as coordinating between NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and government on women's issues, (2) Assuring the implementation of gender mainstreaming in planning in public institutions which rejected any form of gender-based discrimination, and (3) Reviewing all legislation related to women.
2. The JNCW, headed by Her Royal Highness Princess Basma Bint Talal, is a focal point for governmental institutions regarding women's concerns. Its establishment demonstrated the seriousness of the successive governments' intentions to invigorate the democratic process in an overall framework of reform. It was assigned to officially represent Jordan in all regional and international bodies and conferences relating to women. The Cabinet Decree of September 21, 1996 delegated a pivotal role to JNCW as a semi-governmental organization reporting directly to the prime minister — thus given the authority articulated by the Beijing Platform for Action — to act as the primary focal point for the government in all areas related to women's affairs. It played an active role in training female candidates in preparation for the 2003 parliamentary elections. The 1999-2003 plan is a gender mainstreaming initiative at the national level for gender equality. A very significant contribution of the JNCW in empowering women was the municipal elections of 2000 — first by appointment and then by elections. It was an accomplishment at the grassroots level of local governance.
3. See report on the Status of Jordanian Women (UNIFEM), Arab States Regional Office, 2004, Chapter 3, pp. 47-61.

Session II:

Empowerment of Women in Business

Dr. Hissah Saad Abdulah Salem Al-Sabah

Vice President of the Women's Affairs Committee in Kuwait and President of the Council of Arab Business Women, Kuwait

Good afternoon, Your Excellency, Mr. President, Members of the Board of LAU and Members of the LAU Chapter in Dubai. I really thank you for inviting me to be here to talk to you today about a subject that is very close to my heart — and that is business. I actually started my own business at a very young age — at the age of four. Yes, my mother discovered one day that I had a lot of coins and she asked me where I had gotten them from. I asked her, "If I tell you the truth will you spank me?" and she said, "No, please let me know." So I told her that I was very clumsy in art class and I used to take the labels from the bottles of juice and sell them in the school and that's how I made my money. She encouraged me and she really backed me up and that's how I started in business.

Today I would like to start my speech by referring to the famous Moroccan sociologist, Fatima Al-Mernissi. In her book, *Islam and Democracy*, she says: "If democracy did not exist in the world, Arab women would have invented it." We see that in the last 50 years Arab governments have been focusing on state building and neglecting to address the needs of one of the most important assets in society — and that is women. Women make up half of the human resources of this region. Today's government and private sectors, and whoever else is interested in the development of this region, should support women in all areas of society. How could we achieve this economic and social development? It is possible and only possible by systems of good governance, which means that the rules are the same for all participants — men or women. Furthermore, the participa-



Dr. Hissah Al-Sabah

tion of and feedback from the private sector, civil society, labor and political sectors is important. Greater participation of women in state, social and economic institutions would help to introduce new ideas and innovations that would lead to overall better governance.

In each Arab country, the approach to women's participation in the public sphere has taken a different path. Tunisia, which is an exception to all the other Arab countries due to the leadership and guidance of the late President Bourghiba, was able to enact a series of reforms in favor of women's participation in the economic and political spheres. Some Gulf governments have tried to improve the status of women through education, thus, today we can see that the rate of literacy among women has risen to 52.5%. Yet education is still a problem in rural areas in the Arab region. Education on its own is not enough. We see that in both Kuwait and Jordan high literacy has not led to great participation in politics.

Women are also facing a gender bias that works against them: They fall short in allowances, pensions, and social security, which discourages them, and so they stay out of the labor market. So, the answer to all these challenges is to focus on women's education, training, participation in the economy, participation in decision making, legislation pertinent to women, and the involvement of the media to raise awareness to improve women's status. When we talk about legislation — and I'll refer back to my colleagues who spoke earlier — women are not on the legislative committees. For



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example, today in Kuwait the Kuwaiti woman has the right to become a candidate and to enter parliament, but unfortunately she does not sit on the legislative committees and that too often means she's not aware of her political rights. "What are her political rights?" "What is her political agenda?" So, to solve this we need a lot of training for women in politics; we have to also train them in economics.

To address both issues, we have created a Council for Arab Business Women, which I will talk about today. The Council is comprised of women from the 22 Arab countries and is under the auspices of the Arab League. The idea for such an organization came from Arab business women themselves. We met in Cairo and established this Council. I am one of the founders and two other members are here: Hassa Al-Osaily, Head of the Committee and on the Board of Directors as well, and Head of the Committee for Conferences and Head of the Media, Dr. Aisha Albusmait. Each of us created a society of business women in our own countries and then we joined this Council.

The Council is only six years old but it has managed to take giant steps. The first thing we did was to invite 70 business women to Kuwait and get to know each other. We followed this up by creating a website that, according to Dr. Albusmait, we are upgrading whenever she has the time to upgrade it. We have already held our second economic forum, which we just finished in Cairo, and it was a success. The Council has managed to gain the support of Prince Al-Walid Ben Talal. He is our mentor and strategic partner. We are creating a company for Arab women which will be based in Riyadh, and where we will be promoting their work. We will hold an exhibition, an annual exhibition, that we hope to later also hold in other Arab countries, at which the work of Arab business women will be displayed. We will study the quality and upgrade it so that it meets international standards. We have also signed a protocol with the Commercial International Bank of Egypt, for small- and medium-sized enterprises. The Council — for the first time with Hassa Al-Osaily — held the first Arab Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises Conference in Dubai last year, and this year, 2006, we will be holding our second such conference. One of the aims of the Council is to promote Arabic handicrafts. We will organize a big festival in Paris in spring 2006 to highlight Arab handicrafts with the support of a number of first ladies in the Arab world.

After Beijing, the leading ladies of the Arab world came together in a summit in 2000. Out of that there came the creation, in each of the Arab countries, of a committee for the advancement of women. For example, the committee in Kuwait is led by H.H. Sheikha Latifa Al-Fahd Al-Sabah and I am the vice president. In Bahrain they have a similar committee and in Egypt they have another one. These are meant to promote Arab Women. With the Council we do

a lot of training for Arab women in business and empowerment. We are also doing similar training in Dubai for the leaders of small- and medium-sized enterprises as well as working with LAU on training in this area for young entrepreneurs. We are in the process of doing these things that I am talking about — it's not just ideas.

In [the area of] real estate, we are training women to enter into this important business. We have found that Saudi women are among the richest in the world in real estate and we are trying to get them to change their use of that real estate into an asset. We have also talked about the empowerment of women in the political arena. I think the problem is that it is difficult for one woman to vote for another woman. So what we say is even relevant in 2007, while we're hoping Kuwaiti women will enter the parliament, there should be a quota for them otherwise they will not be able to succeed. The other thing that I would like to say is that three years ago in Oman when we had our meeting, we came up with the idea that women should be entering chambers of commerce. Today, we have two Saudi women who have been able to join the Chamber of Commerce in their country for the first time, as well as having witnessed the nominations of other women candidates. One of the other things that the Council wants to do is to create a company in which all Arab business women have shares and a board of trustees in each country with Prince Al-Walid Ben Talal acting in Riyadh. This company will offer training among other things and will market itself in order to encourage more women to join. We'd like to see more and more Arab women joining this Council because at the end of the day it is for them and this is why it was created. Also, we want the Arab countries that do not yet participate to join us. We are still missing Libya, unfortunately we're missing Palestine, and we're missing Iraq. But slowly, slowly we're trying to pull them to come and join us. We're looking forward to our third economic forum for which we have yet to find a host country. We have two offers but we're still deliberating.

To conclude what I am saying: The empowerment of women will come through increasing the number of women serving in important decision-making [capacities]. Today, luckily for us, we have a female minister in Kuwait and she's the Minister of Planning and is doing a lot to help us prepare Kuwaiti women to enter parliament. As I said, in the Gulf we have been able to get women into chambers of commerce. Today we're also seeing that our governments are supporting us by helping us with small- and medium-sized enterprises, and in that sense we're working to support grassroots development in Egypt and the region. In addition, we are getting money in the Gulf to support further small- and medium-sized enterprises.

I thank you for listening to me and for inviting me to speak.

Session II:

Empowerment of Women in Business

Taline Avakian

Member of the Board of Trustees,
Lebanese American University



Ms. Taline Avakian

I would first of all like to extend my thanks to Mrs. Donna Al-Turk, the Lebanese Consul, to Mrs. Adalat Nakash, the LAU Dubai Alumni Chapter President, and to Mr. Saad El-Zein, the Chapter's Vice President, for having organized this forum and invited me to it.

As a Trustee of LAU, let me tell you that at almost every board meeting, the questions as well as problems and their possible solutions of our alumni and the various alumni chapters are often at the top of the agenda. Therefore, these types of forums and conferences organized by the various chapters are very much encouraged in order to raise awareness of the Lebanese American University (LAU). I wish you all the best in the continuation in your endeavors in this very important voluntary task. The alumni are vital for the endurance of our Alma Mater.

The subject of my talk today is the role of higher education in the achievements and empowerment of women in the Arab world, and also to say something about myself as a business woman.

Before going into the subject, I would like to give a few statistics relating to women in education and the workplace in the Arab world. These statistics come from the project, Development of National Gender Statistics Program in the Arab Countries, and was prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

(ESCWA). I will just take two countries for the sake of comparison.

- 1) There are 55% girls and 45% boys in high schools in the United Arab Emirates, in Lebanon the ratio is 50:50.
- 2) Enrollment in universities in Kuwait is 60% women to 40% men. In Lebanon it is 50:50.
- 3) The proportion of women in the labor force in the United Arab Emirates rose from 5.1% to 14.8% between 1980 and 2000, in Lebanon, the proportion went from 22.6% to 29.6%.

These are just a few statistics showing how women in the Arab world are doing in schools and universities.

In the field of education there is no doubt that women have become equal to men, and in some cases have exceeded men in absolute numbers, which in itself is a very good indication of the importance that is being given to education. However, male and female students are being attracted to different fields of specialization. Proportionately more women than men are enrolled in education and the humanities, and more men than women in the natural sciences. Women tend to work in different sectors of the economy as compared to men. Over the past decade, a higher percentage of women than men were engaged in the service sectors of virtually all Arab countries according to a survey carried out by ESCWA. Not only are women and men employed in dif-



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Ms. Taline Avakian and Ms. Emily Nasrallah

ferent occupations, but they also hold different positions in the same field. While women are well represented in professional roles in the Arab world, they tend to be employed in an assisting capacity. Men tend to be more concentrated in managerial roles.

One thing is very clear though, education at the higher level, i.e. the university level, is obviously becoming very important for the development of society in every respect. This has been the trend in Europe and America for many years now, and the Arab world is catching up.

The gap in career achievement between men and women after having left university is still there, however, even in Europe and America. And here the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Copenhagen Declaration and Program of Action are important in stressing the importance of women's equal participation in the workplace. At a recent regional conference held in Amman, the Arab countries collectively expressed concern about

The only things that ever remain, strangely enough, are what we give to others.

women at work and proposed that national governments take concrete steps to insure equality and equity for women in the labor force. I sincerely hope that such steps are actually being taken and are proving effective. Just for the goal of gaining information, maybe an independent survey should be done to check on this vital issue!

Compared to other developing regions, the economic activity rate of women in Arab countries is on average low, particularly in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. This is partly due to the fact that jobs are relatively scarce as well as due to long-held views about the role of women in society. Attitudes and misconceptions concerning women who work must be tackled, not only to allow women to participate fully in the workplace, but in order for them to achieve economic independence and guarantee a lifetime of equality between men and women.

Culture affects women in Arab societies in other ways as well. There are certain attitudes that have in some ways become a barrier to develop-

ment, particularly the tendency to still treat women as a source of danger and consequently to cut them off from the public space and deny them entry into economic activities. When a culture believes this, it loses a large portion of the potential productivity of the society. Any system that privileges men from birth, simply because they are male, and gives them power over female members of society, is bad for both women and men. In particular, it builds in men a sense of entitlement that discourages them from improving, advancing and achieving. This sort of discrimination does not exist only in the Arab world, but indeed is found to different degrees all around the world, even in so-called advanced industrial societies.

And I must say that it is simply too easily forgotten that when it comes to economic activities, one of the greatest virtues a country or community can have is a culture of tolerance. When tolerance is the norm everyone flourishes economically, because tolerance breeds trust, and trust is the foundation of innovation and entrepreneurship.

There is no doubt that as the world changes, global trends will require Arab societies to change attitudes and Arab governments to enact hard-core policy reforms, at the heart of which are labor regulations. These will need to guarantee a better use of Arab women's potential as workers and guarantee them standards of fairness in labor relations that do not hamper the flexibility of the labor markets and the opportunities available to women. Educational policies will need to be revised to equalize opportunities for men and women and provide them with skills required for the future.

Returning to a discussion of statistics, one can see that female participation in the work force all over the Arab world is increasing steadily, and this is mainly due to education. In the globalized world where business is conducted today women are becoming aware of so many things that otherwise they would be ignorant of. And, they know today, the only way to succeed in this ever faster-paced world is to have a good university education.

When I was at university at LAU (then BCW) at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, we had quite a few young women who came from the Gulf states because, at that time, there were hardly any colleges or universities there. But now, things have changed in the Gulf. Universities are being created in the Gulf because these states have come to believe in educating their men and women at home. Consequently, we at LAU have to become a university of excellence, in order to compete with the ever-growing number of colleges

and universities in the Gulf region. Yet, this has not been bad at all; on the contrary, more and more people are being educated and the standards are increasing for all.

The United States and Europe have become very powerful because of the priority they place on education and research. In this day and age, no single person should be left without an education. Equal opportunities must be given to girls otherwise we will be losing a very important sector in our society.

Having said all this, the actual picture of women in the Arab world is not that bleak after all. Women are at the heads of ministries in governments and some companies. For instance, in Lebanon today, the Minister of Social Affairs is none other than Her Excellency Mrs. Nayla Mouawad; the Lebanese Consul General to the Emirates is Mrs. Donna Al-Turk; the United Arab Emirates Minister of Economy and Planning is Her Excellency Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi; etc. But this is not enough. Women must be in leadership positions throughout society, and aim to reach positions just like the few that I just named. They should be taken as the examples for other women to follow.

As for my personal experience as a business woman, I have been quite lucky to have had a tolerant husband who never tried to keep me at home and tied to the stove! He wanted me out there with him in the work place because he believed that women can do just as well as men, and given the opportunity, they can perform even better at times. He saw no difference between men and women in the workplace.

Working has provided me with some great and valuable experiences in understanding different societies, and also enabled me to become more tolerant. It has also helped me in my charitable work. Currently, the big conglomerates and international businesses are stepping into the field of charitable work. They have started to give back to the underprivileged what they collect from the rich and wealthy. It has given me the opportunity to come across some incredible people who have helped me in this area. And in the end, as the saying of a famous Armenian poet, Vahan Tekeyan, goes: "The only things that ever remain, strangely enough, are what we give to others."

And last but not least, in conclusion, I would like to share with you one of my favorite quotes from Louis Pasteur: "Fortune favors the prepared mind." I find this quote to be particularly appropriate to today's forum.

Thank you.



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Session III:

Empowerment of Women in Sociocultural Context

The Role of the Lebanese American University in the Empowerment of Women

Emily Nasrallah

Writer

Allow me to start with a word of thanks to the Dubai and Northern Emirates Chapter of the Lebanese American University's Alumni Association. Chapter President Adalat Nakash and Vice President Saad El-Zein kindly invited me and gave me the opportunity to be present among you to participate in this conference on the empowerment of Arab women in various fields, such as politics, economics, and socio-cultural activities; and the role of a university in general, and LAU in particular.

Since its establishment, LAU, our university, has taken a leading and avant-garde role in Lebanon and the Arab world. In its time as the American Junior College its education was carried and spread by the early missionaries who were totally devoted to the role of teaching and rendering humanitarian services. It is important to go back to those early times and to the waves of graduates who were aware of their pioneering role, and carried with pride the enlightening message [of their education] to several Arab countries.

While researching the curriculum vitae of these pioneer women, a work published in six volumes, I was alerted to the great role that this, our university, had played in shaping these pioneers. I shall limit my mention to only a few of them, ladies whom I met and interviewed, especially those who participated in an educational mission campaign that started out from Beirut in 1937 for Mosul and Kirkuk in Iraq — big cities in rural areas. We find the



Ms. Emily Nasrallah

graduates of the Junior College going there carrying all their knowledge of the modern fields of teaching, education, and enlightenment, with an emphasis on the role of women in the family as well as society. I shall mention as examples a few names like Anissa Najjar, Salwa Nassar, Rose Ghurayyib, Edvik Shayboob, and Najla Akrawi. To this day we are still seeking their goals: The empowerment of Arab women in the school classroom while teaching reading and writing, as well as in the home, where they instituted a new style of education that included mothers and other family members.

A few of these pioneer women told me stories of how they used to sit with the family over a cup of tea and recite poems or invent games derived from and related to familiar experiences, which permitted them to participate and express themselves in the best way. When they observed the difference in dress between the wealthy students and their colleagues who were less privileged, they decided to introduce a uniform, thus avoiding feelings of inferiority among the students. These home encounters were given the appropriate name, *qubulat*, which means a day at home; and with this type of encounter, education became accepted by all family members. And so instead of gossip dominating social gatherings, talk began to roam with Rose Ghurayyib around Al-Mutanabbi, and Abi Al-Ala' Al-Ma'arri and others, or with Anissa Najjar on the importance of rural revival and development. Ms. Najjar brought this idea

back to Lebanon where she founded her pioneering institution, the Village Welfare Society, which was and remains concerned with the development of rural society and educating women to best use their talents, while learning new methods in education, health care, and home economy.

These early educators were also aware of the role of sports in healthy education, so they introduced camping and encouraged the forming of sports teams, such as basketball. It was indeed a positive step and an avant-garde outlook at such an early time — the 1930s.

Where are we Today in Comparison?

The torch went on and is still expanding its circle, giving light and flame to an ever-increasing number of women students, not only in Lebanon but throughout the Arab world. Conservative families have known and still believe that LAU is the ideal university where their daughters can get their higher education in a healthy atmosphere.

So, what was started as a Junior College is now LAU, this prominent and big university, accepting both men and women and thereby providing a competitive atmosphere that urges our girls to develop and use a larger part of their potential talents. Unfortunately, as Dr. Salwa Nassar admitted during an interview I was having with her, many female university students continue to use only one third of their intellectual capacity, leaving two thirds dormant.

When I was asked a few years ago to be the graduation ceremony speaker at the Beirut campus, I was stunned by the large number of graduates of both sexes and the diversity of the fields of specialization, including the sciences, thus enabling this institution to meet the increasing community demands and requirements, and putting it on a competitive level with any one of the historically prominent Beirut universities.

When I joined this university in the mid-1950s, when it was still Beirut College for Women (BCW), I was coming from a remote village. I was naïve but boiling with ambition for education. With only five Lebanese pounds in my purse, I was still determined mentally to overcome all obstacles, despite my modest background in wealth and social status. Both administrative leaders, Dr. Roda Orme and Dr. Mary Sabry, welcomed me as someone special, a treatment I later discovered each of my classmates also received. I felt that I was a special person, privileged to be in this college and obtain a university education instead of, and I present myself as an example, someone destined to end her education in a third class elementary school.

I consider myself lucky to have had the opportunity to come all that way, which brings me to direct a special

appeal to our universities and their administrators to give our village boys and girls, and the unprivileged sector of our Arab societies, the same opportunity to reach higher education and achieve their ambitions. We must do this because the most important help we can give our youth is the opportunity to reach their goals in life. This is especially true for our young women who have to work doubly hard to get there, starting with home and community obstacles, and increasing in the wider society where they face challenges at every step.

The role of LAU has not been limited to a traditional teaching program, however. It has also played a very important role in other fields of knowledge. In 1973 it created the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), directed for 24 years by Dr. Julinda Abou Nasr, afterwards by Mrs. Mona Khalaf, and now by Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, who is present with us here, as the Acting Director. The Institute has expanded its activities beyond the university curriculum to join forces and interests with cultural women's activities in Lebanon and the Arab world. It has involved itself in publishing books on women's issues, especially in the fields of art, literature, education, and law, and in particular those related to women's rights, with an emphasis on those from rural areas. It has published 35 books so far. The Institute has held congresses, conferences, and lectures revolving around women in their many activities, thus attracting a wider audience than the university community and alumni.

I, as a writer who has researched the lives and careers of many of our pioneer women, wish to point out the importance of a documentary film prepared by Mrs. Mona Khalaf and her team on some of our pioneer women, their lives and their struggles, at an early period of our awakening. Further, I wish to note how we have listened with great interest to the voices of those who are still living — Emily Faris Ibrahim and Rose Ghurayyib, to name only two. [Rose Ghurayyib died in January 2006.]

The Center for Lebanese Heritage that was founded in 2002 takes LAU's cultural activities to an ever-wider audience. Its active Director, poet Henri Zoghaib, is ever-busy searching to bring forth voices from the past who form the roots of our present times.

The pioneering work of LAU did not limit itself to its country of origin, but went on to cover many Arab countries. In education and the arts, childcare, and the handicapped, LAU's alumni took the University's message and established centers and institutes in their countries: Mrs. Suad Jaffali in Saudi Arabia, Princess Wujdan Nasser took care of museums and heritage in Jordan, and in Kuwait we have among us here today a shining example of suc-



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cess in the personal presence of Princess Hissah Al-Sabbah.

The early history of women's awakening in the Arab world coincided with the advance of university education. It was also connected with national movements: The great Huda Sha'rawi of Egypt, who was the head of the Arab Women's Union did not limit herself to her country of origin, but extended her hand to her sisters in most Arab countries. They all worked with great enthusiasm, meeting the need for their talents and making important contributions to the building of strong nations.

Here, I would like to point out the importance of the support of the men who stood by the pioneer women and their cause since the beginning of their struggle. One of them, and perhaps the most well-known, was Kassem Amin of Egypt. His book, *The Emancipation of Women*, caused a revolution at the time. In Lebanon, one of the most supportive was the writer and journalist Girgi Nicola Baz, founder of *Al-Hasna'* magazine as well as Mohammad Jamil Beyhoum.

Their encouragement was much needed then, and today we still need more support from men in positions of political power and decision-making to consider the importance of the presence of more women in politics as well as other public activities. We need more women judges, ministers, and members of parliaments, as well as

diplomats who can reflect the image of the Arab women of today. Of course, I don't mean to deny the presence of our outstanding women political figures in many Arab countries, but their number is far lower than our aspirations. I hope the day will come when women will be judged by their capacities and qualifications not by their sex.

Earlier in my speech, I mentioned my writing about pioneer women; but I think that pioneer women are still among us, and each one of them has a story to tell. Many share the sentiments of their earlier peers, like Rose El-Yousef, who wrote in her memoirs, and I quote: "I made of myself this lady." They are proud to speak about their successes and the obstacles [they] surmounted.

My interest in researching their stories grew out of my feeling that there is a big gap between them and the

generations that followed. Our young and educated women are moving with the tides of the present times, seeking success — sometimes by the shortest roads. In my book, I try to tell these younger generations to look back a little to evaluate and compare, and to realize, also, that without those pioneer women and their struggles we wouldn't be where we are now. The same can be said about all the generations who helped build and advance LAU and other universities.

But research is not my main field of writing; I am first and foremost a fiction writer. I have written novels and short stories, and later in my career I have written for children, stories as well as novels, to encourage our younger generations to read in their mother tongue. This is a big issue facing educators and parents as well: How to make children read, especially in the Arabic language.

My writing, in general, reflects my life and experiences in a traditional society, and my rebellion against prevalent traditions that keep women where they have been for too many generations. Being a woman, it was most natural for me to write about women in my society, that is, the traditional society.

Two more themes prevail in my novels and short stories: emigration from rural areas to big cities and abroad, and the war as I witnessed and lived its events in Lebanon. Since my early days I refused to accept the prevalent traditions as they were. When my par-

ents allowed my younger brother to leave the village and go away for his higher education and I was not allowed to do the same, I felt the unfair discrimination between the two sexes. If it were not for an emigrant uncle in West Virginia in the United States I wouldn't have been able to go to a boarding school. But the real struggle with my family came after my graduation from secondary school when I wanted to come to Beirut for my university studies. Here, I also had to surmount another obstacle: the financial part.

I remember well those formative years, when I had to work and study to live in the city, always conscious that all the eyes of my village were watching my steps. Being the first girl of my generation to leave for Beirut, I carried a big responsibility, not for myself only, but for the many generations of girls who came after me. But the new feeling of independence and freedom that accompanied me that morning on my first day at this University, with

the key of the boarding school (Al-Ahlah) in my pocket, will never be forgotten. On that day I learned my greatest lesson: The importance of our personal freedom, and how we should always work to help others realize it. During that same year I entered the field of journalism, and this gave me the chance to push my ambition for independence even further. During the early years of my career as a journalist I was a minority among a majority of men. In the media at that time we could count the number of women on our fingers. At the start I was the only woman working for a weekly magazine. That was not easy. Actually, it was challenging and I took the challenge with great courage as I had to prove myself at every step and assure my colleagues that I was there for a serious purpose, like themselves.

There is almost no need to mention that young women journalists are now in every scene in the media, and they have gained more confidence in themselves and in their capacities than their predecessors. LAU, in its various programs, has contributed to this as well as [to the development of other] various fields in the arts and sciences.

I feel now that we have gone far beyond the question put to me by one of my colleagues in the early years of my career as a journalist, when he asked me: "Who writes your stories?" I confess that the question shocked me. At first, I thought the fellow was joking, and then I became aware of his seriousness; and when he noticed that I did not answer his question he added: "You know, every woman writer has a ghost writer — she needs one for sure."

More women are writing now, not in journalism only, but in all types of literature. Through their work they are seeking different goals, artistic as well as human. Researchers and scholars point out that women's literature in the Arab world is now surer, stronger, more polished and more committed than ever before. Also worthy of mention is that the identification of women writers as a group gives them more confidence and strength. At the same time, however, this can be negative when they are labeled as "feminist writers," as if to say they are inferior, or they belong to a different race, and this can encourage discrimination against, and even antagonism towards them.

Anyway, we are now witnessing the emergence of new women writers and scholars who are outspoken, concerned, courageous, and confident. We hope this may help to change the status of women in Arab societies. This tells us that there is more opportunity for women to express themselves, and that they have come a long way from the time when women's voices were allowed to express themselves in public on two occasions only: the

exuberant chants of weddings and the sad lamentations of funerals.

In the course of my personal research into the early period of intense women's activities, several characteristics became evident:

1. The women pioneers were mainly writers who came, mostly, from the middle class in their societies.
2. Much of their writing was about other women's activities, or about outstanding women in the East as well as in the West, extolling their glories and successes, with the obvious intention of demonstrating to their readers that women can be, and are, free and active leaders in their communities.
3. They established contacts with colleagues and counterparts in other Arab and foreign countries, as well as in their own countries. This gave them the opportunity to exchange ideas on similar issues and conditions. It is worth mentioning here that there was always a connection between the women's emancipation movement in the West and what was — and is — happening in our Arab societies.

Now let us return to the present and the continuing role LAU is playing in our modern times and world. At a meeting between the alumni and President Joseph Jabra, I learned from his welcoming speech how many dreams are still waiting to be realized. When he announced an upcoming project, a school of medicine at LAU, an alumna asked him whether there is a need for a new medical school when so many are available at other universities. Dr. Jabra answered: "We are serving the region and not one country only." Yes, indeed, hasn't this University always been serving the whole region, and since its earliest days?

This ambitious role was played by the various American and Lebanese presidents that preceded Dr. Jabra — each one helping to foster the development and growth of LAU towards ever higher goals and a more prominent future. But no one individual, no matter how strong and capable he/she is, can run a university without a team that puts its efforts together with the head. And if the university is the legitimate child born to a civilization, I believe that no civilization can be complete without a university. In this same sense, no civilization, in any nation or history, can be realized, and take its respectful place in history, without the complete participation of its female population.

We need, more and more, to share our talents and experiences. We need to work together, to help our nations to live in the present, and to keep advancing on the roads of freedom and enlightenment.

Thank You.



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Session III:

Empowerment of Women in Sociocultural Context

Maha Kaddoura

Founder of the Kaddoura Foundation*



Ms. Maha Kaddoura

First I want to thank you for your presence and to thank the organizers for inviting me to this interesting forum because it deals with a very interesting subject.

Now, it is common knowledge that women represent half of society, which means that society's progress is related to that of women, and vice versa. In fact, the social development of women, including higher studies, is important since educated women are symbolic of the nation as a whole. If women could have their fair share of global care and appropriate education, they would really participate in developing their narrow environments while also fulfilling their duties and entering the wider world, which would expect a lot from them. Women have lived for a long time confined to the home and held hostage by old traditions — although we have to remember that at a certain time in the past women were a very important economic element of society. The wife of the Prophet Mohammad was a business woman and the Prophet Mohammad worked for her. Thus, we should remember that in former times we were active economically and not believe what we hear now from, for example, the Taliban, who say that girls shouldn't go to school or women shouldn't go to work, or something that totally contradicts religion and Islam.

Women have participated in destroying ignorance in their societies while they have also been the innocent victims of ignorance. In some societies women have been con-

sidered an unavoidable evil, a matter that no legislation or religion admits. The three monotheistic religions put women — not the women here, but rather the woman as mother — on a pedestal, indeed a very high pedestal. A Jew can not be a Jew without a Jewish mother; the mother of Jesus, and consequently the mother of Christianity, is the Virgin Mary; and when the Prophet Mohammad was asked who his most beloved person is, he repeated: "My mother, my mother, my mother."

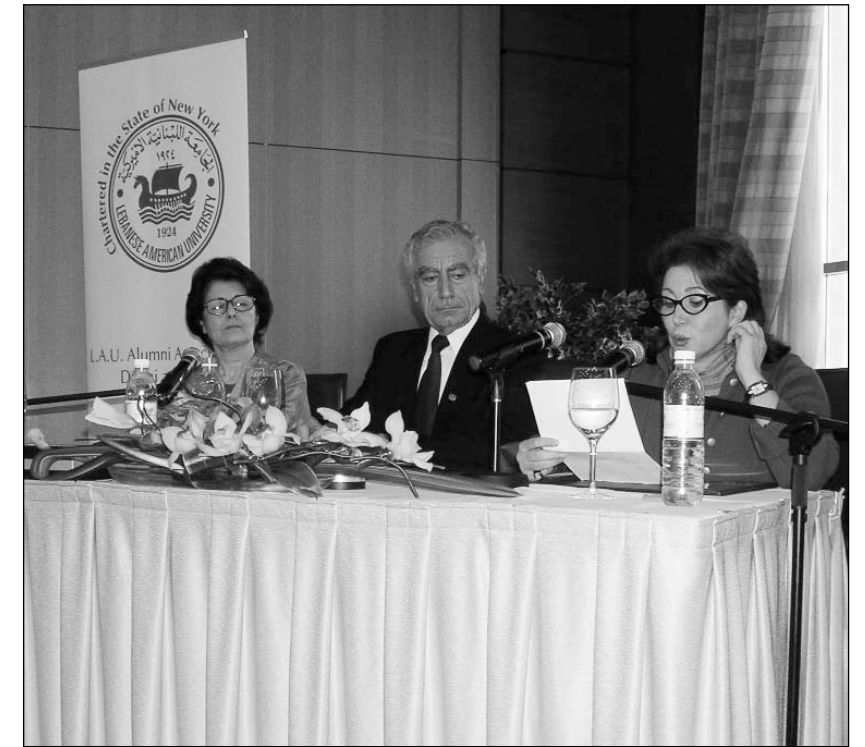
We know from these examples how important the roles of women and mothers are. Nowadays, women are involved in all educational fields — even though they are still suffering in some backward societies — and rational people can not argue over the necessity of educating women if they are to be part of building a virtuous generation that is of benefit to their nation and humanity. As many of the modern sociologists, such as Frederick Le Play, say: "The family is the main hive, the main cell of society. Therefore, a society can not grow unless its hives unite, cooperate and are ready to work and produce competent individuals." Only an educated and cultivated woman can undertake the mission of organizing, strengthening and bonding this hive and not neglecting the spirit of the family. This woman has understood life, studied the behavior of society, and observed its past and present and looks optimistically toward its future, at last appreciating the mission her nation is expecting her to fulfill.

I'm reading a very interesting book about Francine Gomez, the head of Waterman. While she was the one who saved the company from bankruptcy, in her book Gomez testifies: "I don't know what to consider myself; outside the home I was a successful business woman with a brilliant career ahead of me. I ran a good business and did a good job." However, when it came to her family, Gomez admits that she failed as a homemaker: "My husband left me because I didn't have enough time to spend with him. My two children also left for the same reason."

The life of this woman raises a very important topic: the roles of women inside and outside the home. An intelligent woman would, of course, establish an equilibrium between the "private" and the "public." At the same time, I remember a friend I met in South Africa. She was a physician and told me that during this stage in her life she had decided to spend four days at home and three days in her clinic. She knew that in the future she could go to her clinic six days a week, and she was sure that later on when her children grew up, it would be too late for her to see more of them. I think this is an example of good equilibrium between the "private" and the "public" sphere for women.

An educated woman is the most precious jewel that can be offered to the nation for building the future. However, the problem today lies with the space in which the educated woman works. Many cultural and social factors have affected women negatively, despite scientific research and development. Too often we see educational institutions pushing girls into work that is considered more proper for them than for boys, as if they were born to practice some profession that may even be inappropriate for or inferior to them. This happens despite the fact that a woman is no less competent than a man in her ability to comprehend various fields of education. They are alike. Women should have the right to enjoy life's freedom, to get an education and to work.

A study was carried out in the United States about self-confidence; it talks about how low self-confidence is a very big problem for both men and women and how to increase it. The best ways are through education and social or work-related achievement. Women get over



Ms. Emily Nasrallah, Dr. Joseph Jabbara and Ms. Maha Kaddoura

this problem through education. Educated women represent the hope of expanding our cultures, societies and economies. An educated woman can interact with her peers and contribute positively to life. She can influence others directly through advising, informing and encouraging. Educated women make social changes and improvements through spreading democracy and emphasizing the human side in their relations with people in society. Active women can work for a more peaceful nation as well as contribute analytical logic and patience to their country. They can be very good negotiators and activists in the humanitarian field. They can be activists for democracy and humanism.

Lastly, if a virtuous generation depends on virtuous women and their ability to spread progress and refinement, a corrupted generation stems from corrupted women since the behavior of people is the result of their education. Nothing is better than educated women for building nations and developed societies on all levels. A virtuous woman is a virtuous generation.

Endnotes

*The Kaddoura Foundation helps mothers who are heads of households in Palestine and the Palestinian camps.



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Round Table

The Role of Higher Education in the Empowerment of Arab Women

■ Compiled and Translated by Myriam Sfeir

Managing Editor

The role of higher education in the empowerment of Arab women was the subject of a round table discussion held at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in January 2006. The participants Lara A, Evette G., Yasmine D., Rania G., Dahlia K.S., Maysa H., Zeina M., Josiane M., Myriam S., Marie Jose T. and Rana W. represented several of the major universities in Lebanon. The moderators were Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig and Dr. Jennifer Skulte-Ouais. Due to space constraints, the following are excerpts from the two-hour discussion.

Dima Dabbous-Sensenig: The purpose of this meeting is to get your feedback on the role higher education plays in empowering Arab women. Given that we are preparing an issue of *Al-Raida* on this topic we would like to know: To what extent does getting a higher degree allow you to take leadership and decision-making positions? We are interested in the position of the younger generation, your position, and the problems you are facing in terms of reaching top-ranking decision-making positions. To what extent does higher education help you? We strongly believe that we cannot move forward if we do not identify the problems encountered.... Why did you end up in higher education?

Rana W.: Nowadays, women are more ambitious and education gives them the venue to actualize their dreams. Things have changed and life has developed. Women are refusing to stay at home and be dependent. They are asking to be equal with men.

Lara A.: Going to school and later on to university was a given. I took it for granted. It was not even a choice I had to make.

Marie Jose T.: Education was a must. Ever since I was 16 I was interested in politics and history. I ended up majoring in Political Science at Notre Dame University (NDU) and I currently work at the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

Yasmine D.: Working on a Bachelor's and Master's degree was something I took for granted. This is partially because of my mother who instilled in me the pursuit of knowledge. She is a very intelligent and ambitious woman who wanted to become a doctor. However, she wasn't that lucky because her parents refused that she pursue her higher education for two reasons, namely the war and her choice of major. My grandfather worried that my mother would end up unmarried because studying medicine requires sac-

rificing several years of one's life. Hence, because my mother was prohibited from realizing her dreams, she projected all her ambition onto me. She always encouraged me to pursue my dreams and aim high. This is partly why I decided to work on my higher education.

DDS: So it is revenge for your mother.

YD: Yes, it was partly to avenge my mother. But, to be honest, I believed in my potential and wanted to pursue my education.

Josiane M.: I am very fortunate to have parents who encouraged their children, irrespective of their gender, to pursue their higher education. According to my parents, any degree lower than a Master's was not acceptable. My parents supported me greatly. The reason why I decided to join Saint Joseph University (USJ) and do my Diplôme D'Etudes Approfondies (DEA) after a three-year lapse was because I have a passion for Political Science. Moreover, USJ has one of the best Political Science departments in Lebanon. I knew I was capable of juggling work and studying, so here I am. Once I finish my DEA I am planning to go for a Ph.D.

Rania G.: My situation is the exact opposite. My family and I left war-torn Lebanon and settled in the United States. Since an early age I was really into art and pottery and I wanted to venture into that field and discover the artist in me. I decided to join a non-academic program where I took Art History design workshops. My parents were not pleased. They tried to advise me against such a choice but when they realized that I was adamant they respected my wishes because freedom of choice was respected in my family.

My father was very supportive and he often said: "Let her do whatever she wants to do; she will eventually find her way." After I finished my design certificate we came back to Lebanon where I worked in the fashion industry for four years. After that, design and fashion were completely out of my system. I literally lost interest in them and wanted to explore my options. So I decided to major in Political Science and International Affairs. I was very interested in politics because politics dominates our lives in this part of the world. I joined the Lebanese American University (LAU) and started from scratch. I was admitted as a freshman student. At that time I was 24 years old and had two sons. It was very difficult with a family in tow but I did it and graduated in July 2004 with a GPA of 4.00. After that, I joined the United Nations and worked for the center for women. Along with my job I started working on a Master's degree and will graduate this June.

DDS: Empowerment of women can take place in many

forms; education is one tool. Studies and statistics show that if you do not use this tool you will not be empowered. Many educated women in Lebanon and Syria do not use their education or put it into practice. It is such a waste given that the least education can do is empower women financially.

Evette G.: I finished school when I was 18 and started working as a school teacher. [At that point] the war was raging and I had lost both my parents. I taught for three years then decided I needed to further my education. Hence, I enrolled... at the Université Saint Joseph (USJ) and then worked on my Master's degree. I was working and studying at the same time. After completing my Master's I applied to France for a Ph.D. During that time I met my husband. So I had two options: either to further my education and work on a Ph.D. or get married. I opted for marriage, got children and was busy with them. Twenty years later, I decided to pursue my dream and work on a Ph.D. given that I was no longer busy with my children.

Going back to university was very empowering. Even though I strived to update myself throughout those 20 years by traveling to France to participate in training sessions, I often felt I was lagging behind. I have to admit that my husband helped me a lot and supported me immensely throughout my academic and professional career.

Female students usually perform better than their male counterparts in schools. Yet, when it comes to the work-force women are discriminated against and paid less because it is a patriarchal society and men are considered the breadwinners in a family. Familial relations ought to be egalitarian and if there is equality at home then it makes all the difference. Women should learn how to balance their familial and professional roles. Women ought to be organized.

Zeina M.: My case is very similar to the majority of those present here. Higher education was a taken-for-granted thing to do after school. I completed a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Sociology then completed a Master's degree while working as a graduate assistant. I sometimes consider applying for a Ph.D. but somehow it seems very far-fetched. Going back to being a student with all the financial burdens and restrictions this period entails is very taxing.

Being a woman is an impediment when you want to pursue higher education. Getting married is an obstacle in itself. Moreover, giving birth to children incapacitates us whether we like it or not. Women will lose out on being appointed to higher positions because of the fact that they are married or have children.



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Even though higher education is always on my mind, it is a matter of priority [to me]: Do I want to pursue a Ph.D. or get married? A lot of female students of my generation went to university to kill time or to catch a husband. They were not really interested in higher education per se; higher education was a means to an end.

Jennifer Skulte-Ouais: In the US it is joked about, though less so now, [that a B.A. is really] the “M.R.S.” (i.e., marriage) degree.

MH: I was in the same department as Zeina and I was very frustrated because it was a lousy program. You end up with no skills. I often used to complain and was worried about the future. What was I supposed to do with a degree in sociology when I had no practical experience?

Myriam S.: Education was highly valued by my parents and after I graduated with a B.A., I wanted to work for a year or so before doing my M.A. My parents didn't want me to work. They put a lot of pressure on me to apply to universities and after working for a year I traveled to England to do my Master's. I was the youngest student in the Women's Studies program. Everyone was much older, had several years of experience and knew exactly what they wanted to work on for their M.A. thesis. I, on the other hand, didn't know anything. It was a very interesting experience but I regretted not waiting a couple of years before doing my M.A. At that time, I wasn't ready or equipped for graduate work. My parents advised me not to wait. They often insisted: “If you don't do your Master's now you'll never do it.” I felt very [pressured] and after a year I succumbed to their will.

I was the only Arab in my department. Despite the fact that my colleagues were of very different nationalities I was considered an alien by them simply because they didn't know where to place me. To them I was an Arab woman but I was not veiled. I was an Arab who wore “Western” clothes. The subject that I was working on was: “Virginity and Family Honor” and I remember someone attacking me - saying: “You're talking about virginity? Who talks about virginity?” To her, it was an alien subject. I had a Russian girl telling me: “You're working on 'Virginity and Family Honor.' What is this stupid subject? It's no longer an issue anymore...” and I really had to explain [the importance of this issue] to her and at the same time I felt I was so young.... Everyone knew what they were doing and I felt I didn't know what I was doing there.

JSO: How closely or not do you relate higher education to money in general or to one's earning power?

MH: It is a culture and you learn it from early on. You go into higher education because you want a higher salary.

That was the reason why most of us decided to go for higher education. Of course, it is important that one majors in a field he/she likes because you should enjoy what you are doing. Going for a higher education was the natural thing to do. My parents went out of their way to give us a good education. They spent all their savings to send us to the best schools and universities. When I applied to the American University of Beirut (AUB) I had no idea what I wanted to major in. Given that I was a Math student I didn't have much choice. So I decided to major in Architecture despite the fact that I knew nothing about it. During my second year at university I realized that I needed to shift majors if I wanted to find a job. So I opted for Sociology and did my Master's in Sociology.... While at university I was constantly worried about my career and about finding a job given that I had no practical experience whatsoever. For instance, I taught myself how to type. I learned it by myself at home.

YD: Formal higher education, in my opinion, is associated with expanding one's intellect rather than increasing one's income. Money was never an issue for me; what I was interested in was a higher position. Unmarried women in Lebanon are looked down upon. There is an immense pressure that is put on women to get married or else they are stigmatized as “old-maids.” This is where the gap lies. After a woman graduates she has to find a husband even if she wants to work or further her education; she still has to secure a marriage proposal. Most women who are working nowadays are doing so because of economic need and they are joining the labor force after securing the permission of their husbands. Besides, even if women are allowed to work, rarely do they become decision makers within the household. Very few men are willing to accept that. Many of my colleagues and friends admit that they are very restricted by their husbands. My husband, on the other hand, is very different. Had he not been broadminded I wouldn't have married him.

DDS: To what extent are we able to reconcile our upbringing, our culture, and our role as mothers? Women are often put in situations where they have to choose between motherhood and a career. At the end of the day, when women choose to go for higher education and still be mothers they tend to do everything. Women end up with a triple burden and the load often cripples them and they collapse. So [do] you have any idea how to reconcile the role of motherhood and leadership positions?

RG: I think balancing a career and a family is very hard but it is doable. Of course each and every one of us has a capacity and it is up to us to decide if we are capable of juggling things. Achieving such an arrangement requires the collaboration and support of the husband and of the extended family.

On another level, many factors hinder women from reaching decision-making positions: the culture, the political will, how we fail to view women as capable leaders, ... the undemocratic systems that we have that hinder women — people fail to choose freely. Yet when it comes to ordinary people like us I believe if women want to make it — study, work, and have a family — it is possible because I believe that where there is a will there is a way.

ZM: Most of us would need help or an extra pair of hands if one decides to combine work and motherhood I assume. Otherwise that would be way too much. Domestic help is needed. Most males — no matter how liberated and open-minded they are — still expect women to be responsible for the housework. Given that domestic workers are available makes juggling a lot easier. It is a class issue in my opinion; it boils down to whether one can afford to get extra help.

JM: I have been married for the past two-and-a-half years and both of us do not want kids right now. So whenever I am asked: “When will you have kids?” My answer is “When I finish my DEA.” People are outraged that I want to finish my degree before having kids. People don't understand. I am sick of these reactions.

YD: I am refusing to have kids. I have been married for the past six years and I still don't have children. I don't want to have children. I don't really like children. I often give excuses to people, but to be honest I am not planning [on having] kids. The problem is my husband. He wants to have children. For now he is ok with my decision. I don't know what will happen later. I agree that there is this pressure to procreate. Everybody feels entitled to ask about this issue, even the taxi driver on the road.

DDS: I am 40 years old and I have a daughter from a previous marriage and I am still under pressure to have children.

MS: What Yasmine is saying is very daring, but also there are cases where women opt by choice to stay at home and raise their children. They study and earn a degree just for self-satisfaction. I have heard very negative views about stay-in-moms. Another point is that things are definitely changing and women are putting their degree into practice and are joining the labor force. Yet, there is a very important point we have to acknowledge: The fact that cheap domestic labor is available in this country makes things a lot easier. Whether we like it or not the issue of housework is no longer discussed between couples that can afford help. Because domestic workers are available they are expected to do all the housework. Yet, supervising the house help and making sure the household responsibilities are taken care of is a woman's pre-

rogative. Men no longer feel they need to help out simply because they provided their wives with a domestic worker.

YD: The extended family also helps out in terms of raising children. Children of working mothers are often left with their maternal or paternal grandmothers.

ZM: I was raised by a working mother. She is 71 years old and is still working. We had help for a while, yet since I was six I don't recall having a live-in hired help. We had a domestic worker come in once a week to help out with the housework. Given that we are three sisters we used to attend to the household chores after school and then after work. The fact that my mother was widowed at a young age and was left with three daughters to raise was very straining and tiring. My mother would have loved to continue her higher education but it was impossible.

DDS: I would like to raise a point here: We are discussing education, higher education, and women in leadership positions. Why is higher education important for you? Is education a survival thing? How does one use one's education? What are the benefits of education? Are you working on a degree to be intellectually satisfied or does it give you a sense of independence, being part of your society and being able to change it? Why do you want to work? Does education provide you with authority? Please reflect a little bit on this point.

EG: Women who assume a leadership role in society should be very careful when dealing with their husbands. Women should differentiate between assuming a leadership position and having authority. Women ought to know how to use the authority they have. I believe that misusing authority is counterproductive and wrong on both sides.

DDS: Of course this is important, but I also want you to reflect on the issue and question whether this is fair. When a woman reaches a position of power in her workplace this might affect her relationship with her husband. Some husbands feel somehow threatened and fail to accept their wife's success. Is that the case when it is the other way around? I strongly believe that such an issue is raised only when it involves women. Why should that be a problem? I would also like to raise several other questions, namely: Are you planning to use your education to acquire a leadership position? Are you interested in leadership positions? How can one occupy a leadership position when you are not prepared to do so at home? When one doesn't have guidelines one has to create his/her own. Is it easy? Please reflect on your education. Does the university prepare you to assume leadership positions? You may think you are not interested in leadership positions and you believe it is not for you. If so, why is it not for you?



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Dalia KS: I would like to go back to a previous point. The university is not preparing us for a career. All the material we study is so theoretical and dry. The university curricula should be more practical. I studied International Affairs and Diplomacy and all we did at university was read and read theories. When I went to apply for a job I was told I don't have any work experience....

ZM: It is [not necessarily] education that allows one to reach leadership positions but one's work experience. I believe that work experience is very important for reaching leadership positions. It is the struggle I went through: the job, the project, my encounters with people. Probably my Sociology background helped me communicate better with people. My work experience, my mistakes and what I have learned from my mistakes are what made me what I am today and what pushes me to go forward.

When we were at the B.A. level we acquired the theoretical knowledge needed to graduate. However, we weren't even taught how to formulate a proper questionnaire or to conduct proper interviews. I once approached one of my professors for help on an assignment. ... The professor's answer was: "I don't have time to correct your analysis. My eyes are hurting me from reading. I don't want to read anymore." That incident affected me greatly. I will never ever forget it. The professor I am talking about used to make fun of us in class. Instead of teaching us how to better analyze, he used to Xerox our term papers, put them on transparencies and joke about our mistakes. He also preferred "cuties" over serious students — if you were a cutie you got away with murder.

DDS: That is doing the exact opposite of what higher education is supposed to do, namely give you more self-esteem.

JSO: My questions here are the following: Are men and women equally affected by the theoretical [and] unpractical skills that they acquire from the system of higher education adopted in Lebanon? Are men, whether inside or outside higher education circles, taught to make connections [with the working world] and women are not? Let us try and factor gender into the formula.

DKS: Many parents encourage their daughters to opt for majors that will allow them to work and raise children. Women are encouraged to become school teachers. Parents are indirectly destroying one's ambition.

JM: Given that I am a Political Science student, one of the recurrent remarks I used to hear was "don't work in foreign affairs because it does not suit women." Before the

law was amended, employees at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were expected to return to their country after a period of three years. Women were not encouraged to pursue such a career because when they get married how would they drag their husbands with them?

JSO: I got a job at LAU and I dragged my husband to Lebanon.

DDS: Same for me. I dragged my husband too.

MH: Related to the point that you made earlier, namely: Is the university supposed to give you the skills needed to join the labor force? When university started, it was not supposed to do that. Maybe we need to redefine what the university is supposed to give us. To me a university education implied more financial independence.

JSO: I'm not an Arab woman, but I definitely got a higher education degree to gain more financial independence. I looked at my parents and said to myself, "I do not want to struggle the way they have."

DDS: My university education here at LAU had a lot of the problems you mentioned. However, I have to admit that I had good teachers who equipped me to work later on in my field. For me, it made a lot of difference that those teachers were women. Watching my female teachers in action was very empowering. I looked up to them. To me, each one of them was a "super woman."

So it is important to have role models, yet, it is also imperative to have gender sensitive courses. Can you reflect on the courses you took at university and their content? Theoretical and technical experience is important, but please try to reflect on your education in terms of course content, gender sensitivity, and tell me to what extent it has helped you — or not — feel the way you feel about yourself. If you were told, for instance, that you are "nothing but a pretty face," did that make you feel bad about yourself?

JSO: Both of you [Lara A. and Rana W.] are in Elementary Education, which is a female-dominated field, did that affect you?

LA: Unlike what some said, I believe that education implies economic independence. Within the family, a woman's opinion starts to matter and her voice is heard the minute she starts generating money and spending on household expenses. A lot of women are subjugated because they are economically dependent.

DDS: How much is the university preparing you for the future and for you to have an autonomous personality?

RW: We are hardly prepared given that the university is barely surviving. Professors are fed up with the way they are treated so they rarely show up to give their courses. We go home and study on our own. We are not encouraged, and fail to do things from the heart. Had we been in a university that respects us it would have been a totally different story.

DDS: Is there a difference if the professor is a male or a female?

RW: To be honest, there is no difference. It depends on the professor's personality. Dr. Fadia Hteit is very nice, she is very supportive and constantly encourages us. She feels with us and often tells us that we can be a force for change and we can change things if we try. To change things students have to be united and this is not the case; politics and religion come in and we are not a united front so I guess there is nothing we can do.

LA: Given that our department at the Lebanese University is an all-female department, we often think about what we are missing out on. For instance, we often question what it means not to have men [in our department] at the university. As female students we realize how much we need male colleagues and how much we depend on them. When we have a problem at the university, we, as women, are unable to formalize our demands and mobilize our efforts and make our voices heard.

DDS: I don't understand why that is so?

LA: Because the mere fact that there is no mixing [between sexes] poses a problem. Had the university been a men's university the situation would not have been better. It is not that we as women are unable to do things. We can. But plans materialize when both genders are working together to reach a goal.

It makes all the difference when the university is a mixed one. From the minute you wake up to go to the university everything changes. Going to an all-women's university where there is no interaction between males and females is not healthy. When you are in a mixed environment you express yourself and your opinions differently than when you are in an all-girls' university.

YD: Maybe when a man is present one is more self-conscious.

MH: What she is trying to say is that because they are in an all-women university they are missing out on real-life situations given that they don't interact with men.

DDS: To what extent is your education helping you and

giving you the skills to argue your point and make yourself heard?

JSO: Politics, broadly speaking, infiltrates our everyday life. There is politics at this table. The issue of power dynamics is very important where age, education, background factors, etc., all feature. I just want to raise one point [regarding the current topic]: In the United States [many assert that] female students who are enrolled in single-sex universities are much more self-confident. They are less self-conscious when arguing their position. However, the research available as I understand it is not conclusive.

MS: I had two exchange students from Australia in my class and they were very bothered at LAU because they felt that men were invading their space.

DDS: Please reflect on this issue of politics in the broad sense of the word where you have to share power with men, and where your aim is to change things.

LA: I need to stress a point that might have been misunderstood. When a woman graduates from an all-women's university it does not mean that she will be less self-confident or she will be unable to deal with men in general. We all interact with men outside the university and even within the university when men come to visit us. The problem is when you lack motivation or when you no longer care about things. Let me try and explain myself better: When you attend an all-girls' university and you know that you will be seeing the 29 female colleagues you see everyday you are no longer motivated to take care of your physical appearance. At first you make an effort but then you lose interest and question what the point of dressing up nicely or wearing makeup is. So, you start looking in the mirror less and after a certain point you no longer care. You arrive at the university drained and tired and this lack of motivation becomes contagious. You lose interest in everything — your appearance, voicing your opinion, engaging in discussions, etc.

ZM: What you are trying to say is that the mere fact that there are no male students in the university renders you less interested in taking care of your physical appearance. So you mean there are no gender dynamics here, you are taking the man, not as an equal, but just as the biological opposite sex because this is where the attraction and seduction game comes in, whether consciously or unconsciously.

DDS: The question here is: To what extent is this empowering her as an element in society who is going to move things forward?



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YD: I think that this is setting her role as somebody who wants to please men physically and as somebody who needs the mirror of man. Hence, one's value becomes associated with how men look at you and I don't like that.

RG: I completely identify with what they are saying and feeling. It is a natural feeling. It is important to be empowered but you have to take into consideration this "other" who is the opposite sex. Creating a world here in the university is not reflecting the real world. It's single sex, so you are going to feel different than if you were living in a world that reflects the reality of men and women.

ZM: I think it's a two-way thing. It is the actual presence of the other sex and it is also what comes with it in terms of discussions and debates, particularly in Education if I'm reading you well. If you had male students with you I think maybe they would contribute to the discussions in a different way. This is where the lack of interaction or the lack of interest is reflected.

LA: It's a minor point that reflects many aspects in one's life. Because we opted for Early Child Education (Preschool) and given that all the students who are enrolled in the department are women, we ended up in a single-sex setup. So, in a way, it is our choice of university and specialization that has kept us from interacting with men and not our society.

DDS: Society too is responsible because majoring in Elementary Education is not an appropriate field for men. There is a point I would like to raise here. Unfortunately, women only see themselves through the eyes of the men looking at them; their self-esteem does not come from within and from what they can do, but rather from how men view them. This is a problem, a cross-cultural one. Wherever consumerism is very high in society, the pressure is on women to concentrate on their looks. Hence, as long as I look pretty I feel good about myself.

To what extent is your education neutralizing this pressure? Education tells me that my worth comes from within. Is your education and higher education helping you rid yourself of the pattern [of concentrating on how one looks]? To what extent is this happening in the course content, in the university, the teachers that you see, in your interactions with your friends, etc.?

YD: I think that higher education gives you the self-confidence that a man's admiration would have given you. It provides you with an alternative to being dependent on how men look at you, and it provides you with an internal source of self-confidence. So yes, my education helped me a lot. However, many female students on campus told me that they sometimes felt that some male pro-

fessors failed to see them as anything other than a physical being. I know that because I interviewed many female students while working on an article about sexual harassment at LAU.

Male teachers still look at women from the traditional point of view, namely: Is she beautiful or not? And sometimes one's grading is affected. So higher education is not serving its purpose here because higher education is supposed to give you an internal source of self-confidence and a feeling of self-worth. So, when a teacher tells you that you are the source of your grade and that your physical appearance is the reason why you took the following grade then it defeats the purpose.

MJT: I also think it's a question of attitude: how you react to things, how flexible you are. For example, I was told by one of my university teachers that getting a Master's degree abroad is a waste of money. According to him, because I am a woman I am bound to get married and become a housewife.

We are exposed to such sexist comments all the time and I think it is a question of attitude. It depends on the person and if he/she has the inner strength to fight back. I don't consider such comments impediments; on the contrary, I actually see them as challenges. I often feel I want to fight back and defeat such claims.

My boyfriend often tells me that he sees me as half male, half female because I'm working all the time and I don't have time to see him anymore because I have a lot of work.

DDS: For the rest of you, has your education helped you or is it just related to one's character and personality?...

DKS: The attitude of university professors does influence the performance of students. When teachers encourage you to work hard, you feel motivated. But when teachers don't take their profession seriously it affects you greatly. You become de-motivated.

DDS: This problem applies to both males and females. As females, where are you getting your empowerment from? Is it from education? [Financial and other] problems are common to both male and female students. That's taken for granted. But on top of that, female students face additional problems because they are women. I want to hear more.... Do you think you're being disadvantaged additionally on top of all the problems because you're a woman? ...

JSO: If you could change one thing about higher education so that women would be more empowered in per-

sonal relationships, in public roles, or as politicians, or in their private jobs, what would you change?

RG: It's not something related directly to gender, as [it's] said that the best students are usually women. Excellence — whether by males or females — needs to be better acknowledged. I have two other suggestions regarding higher education. The link to employment, as everyone was saying, also affects women because women don't know how to gain access to employment. So, if higher education can also bridge the gap between graduating and being able to have the network to find employment as well as full graduate scholarships (for example, Marie Jose here got the Fulbright Scholarship). So I mean a challenge like this would really help women and empower them.

MH: I believe that career orientation sessions are also very beneficial and important. However, despite the fact that orientation sessions are taking place they are very market-oriented. They fail to mold you into a better career person. You get a lot of talk about things you can do but nobody follows you up; nobody guides you. You are given a lot of brochures to consult and then you're on your own.

JSO: What about leadership training?

MH: Leadership. I don't think it's an issue for most of the people in this country. There are so many obstacles to face before you worry about whether you're going to need leadership training or not.

JSO: But... leadership, broadly defined, what does it mean to be a leader in the classroom?

MH: Whether you are going to find a job or not and being a woman and

MS: And you have to keep the job as well.

MH: And being a woman there is the worry which kind of job you are going to get.

JSO: For example, in the US, at job interviews they are interested in what kind of leadership skills you have. What can you contribute to make the business more innovative and bigger? What do you think needs to be changed in order to empower women, is there something in higher education that can do this?

DKS: I think not only leadership training but leadership courses [are needed] more than Women's [Studies] courses because there's this culture that teaches women that by default they are not leaders. They are more educators, and so taking classes on leadership would raise, I think, women's goals and make us more ambitious.

JSO: It is interesting that you made the differentiation that educators are not leaders whereas actually in my mind, I link the two directly. But that is an excellent point.

(Talking together)

JM: I think universities should help their graduates secure job opportunities, especially for their female students. I know a lot of universities in the US that do this.

JSO: In the US they now call it the "old girls' network." It used to be the "old boys'." All the men in power went to school together and keep and strengthen those relationships in their personal and business lives. Women have been trying to translate this idea into a network for women so that when, for example, my department is trying to hire a professor in political science, I try to think of all the good women that I know and — not that I'm just discriminating against men — it's just we need to encourage women who might not feel that they have a chance....

YD: Role models are very important. It would be good if the university could hire more female professors and encourage more women — I don't know — make awareness campaigns or something, hire more women leaders.

JSO: Something just came to mind when I was thinking about female workplaces. I have an on-going discussion with my mother about the fact that she doesn't like female bosses. She's in the United States and she doesn't like female bosses and [meanwhile] I've had wonderful female bosses for the most part. Think of role models... especially women.

ZM: I've had very bad experiences with female bosses. It was terrible. They could be harmful and heartless ...

JSO: Do you expect something different of them or do you feel they...?

ZM: I don't know but I think there's so much pressure on women [bosses] to prove themselves that they try to make sure that their positions are secure. So, irrespective of who the person in front of her is, she stops being understanding.

MH: You expect them to be more understanding?

(Talking together).

ZM: I mean I'm not saying understanding. Being human. I'm not saying being lenient or just making exceptions because you're a woman or just giving you a special treatment. I'm just saying being human....



The Role of LAU in Empowering Women: A Personal Experience

Anita Farah Nassar has been affiliated with the Lebanese American University (LAU) since 1965, and throughout those 37 years, she has served LAU diligently. After graduating from the Beirut College for Women (currently LAU) in 1969 with a Bachelor degree, she worked at the nursery school then later joined the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) as Program Coordinator and was later promoted to Program Officer. She also received her Masters degree from this same institution after it became a full-fledged university. She currently serves as the Assistant Director of IWSAW. Given that this issue of *Al-Raida* investigates the role of higher education in empowering Arab women, here is what Nassar had to say about her university years.

1. How do you assess your university education? What was distinctive about your university years?

My university years were very enriching. During my college years, things were very different. Unlike nowadays, we didn't have much choice in terms of universities to attend and majors to select. The only two institutions that were available for English speaking students were the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Beirut College for Women (BCW). I opted for BCW because I wanted to experience the family-like atmosphere for which BCW was well reputed. Because BCW was an all girls' college that was small in size and student body, new students were very well taken care of. For instance, every three new students were assigned a senior student that we called "older sister". Among the duties of the "older sister" was to assist new students during the orientation period organized by the college. These "older sisters" toured the campus with us to help us find our way around. They also escorted us while we received proper advising and helped us with our registration. The "older sister" phenomenon was viable then, but I realize the impossibility of implementing it nowadays since the student body at LAU is over 6,000. Although the new electronic system of course registration serves the ever-increasing student body, it lessens the interaction between the students, their advisors and the administration.

Even though we were pampered as students, we had very demanding professors that urged us to work hard in

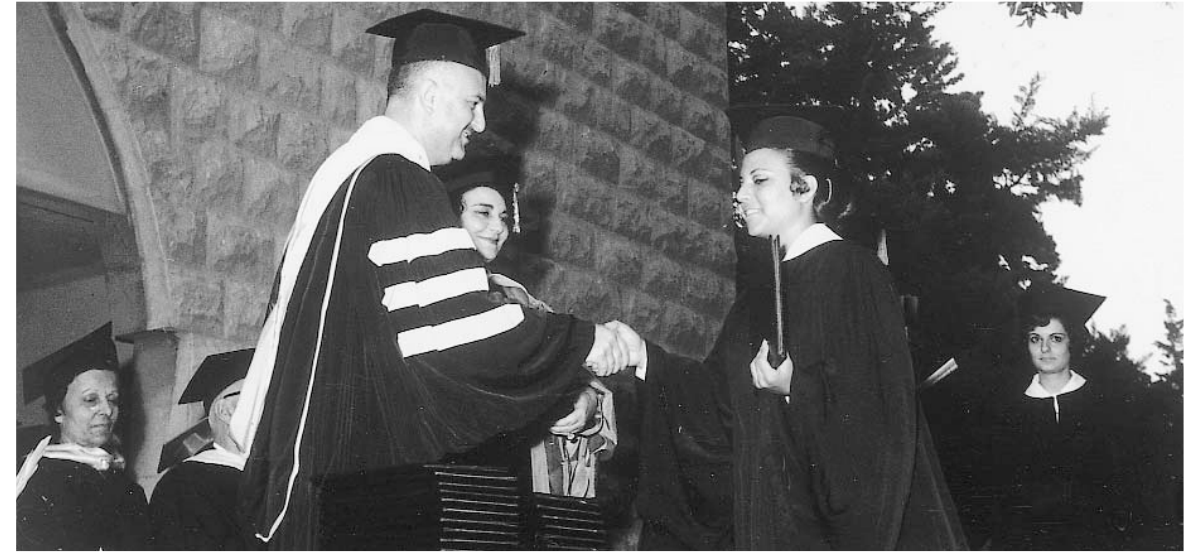


Anita Farah Nassar

order to receive our degrees. My professors were my mentors. They played a major role in shaping my personality. They also instilled in me the leadership skills needed to succeed in my career. They molded me into what I am today. They believed in me, taught me everything I needed to know, and encouraged me to grow.

The administration and teaching body worked incessantly to provide us with the best possible education. Moreover, they assisted us in finding suitable jobs. I have to admit that the very challenging job offers I received were because of my university education. When the American Community School (ACS) hired me, I was the only Arab teaching there. Back then they only employed American citizens. Despite the fact that I was working in a school that applied all the new educational methodologies, I never felt at a disadvantage. I rose to the challenge and felt very confident given that I was very well prepared at BCW. There was nothing discussed or applied in early child education or elementary education that I didn't know.

One very important prerequisite for graduating at the time was that students had to complete 120 hours of community service. We were required to volunteer either in an orphanage or in a retirement home or read for the blind. This, I believe, was very essential for very many reasons. It helped develop our sense of altruism where we



Anita Farah Nassar receiving her degree from Dr. Raja T. Nasr and Dr. Marie Aziz Sabri, Acting President of Beirut College for Women

learned the importance of helping others. It also served to build our personalities and made us feel more responsible and needed. Moreover, it taught us the importance of solidarity. The fact that we interacted with, and were helping people who were less fortunate than we were gave us a sense of worth. We felt like we were making a difference and the fact that people depended on us made us feel very useful. It is a shame that community service is no longer a university requirement. I think it ought to be reintroduced given that it helps spread tolerance and social awareness.

2. How empowered did you feel after earning your degrees?

Given that I am an educator, I value education greatly and believe that it is the most important element that leads to empowerment. If I am to answer this question it is important for me to define an empowered person. An empowered person is someone who has "power-over" the decisions that impact his or her life. So when we talk about education, I believe it is bound to empower women simply because it allows people to gain control of their lives.

Studying and working in an institution that strives to empower women by educating them and encouraging them to reach decision-making positions affected me greatly. Moreover, being part of the university that founded one of the first women's institutes in the region made me value the importance of women's empowerment. Besides, working at IWSAW in my capacity as Program Coordinator and later Program Officer allowed me to empower women by implementing the various development projects IWSAW runs, namely the Income-generating Project, the Prison Project, the Basic Living Skills Project and the Literacy Project. Thanks to these projects,

marginalized women are being armed with the tools needed to create healthier lives for themselves, their families, and their community. Moreover, these projects help in improving the familial and economic situation as well as the lifestyle of these marginalized women.

Thanks to my university education and because of the fact that I was introduced to community service at an early stage, I was able to become a trainer and later a trainer of trainers. In my capacity as trainer of trainers, I work closely with social workers and train them on how to develop the creativity and skills of marginalized women. I also train schoolteachers on ongoing professional development and here my graduate work as well as my work experience has helped me prepare the workshops and develop the appropriate material and tools for ongoing education. It is important to note that IWSAW's Income-generating Project enabled women to find productive alternatives within their households. It also assisted women prisoners earn an income and made them feel useful.

One last point I would like to add here is that my work at IWSAW on educational and developmental projects for children and women facilitated my joining the graduate program. So I believe that my university education and work experience have helped me greatly. They shaped my personality and molded me into the person I am today.

3. Is there anything you would like to add?

Had it not been for my husband and children I wouldn't be where I am today. They were and still are a tremendous support. The nature of my work requires a lot of dedication and hard work on my part and they are always there to lend a helping hand.

Interviewed by Myriam Sfeir



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Teaching about Women and Empowerment in the Arab World

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How can women's studies, and feminist theory and methodologies best serve the Arab world?² The region is now home to quite a few research centers devoted to gender studies and programs of instruction that were based on the relevance of feminist theory developed in and for the Arab world.³ In addition, many "gender specialists" are now employed by the numerous NGOs in the region. Still, all of these new areas of study or employment face complex challenges, especially if education is to lead to women's empowerment.

First of all, the goal of women's empowerment through education is not a given. There is a great deal of disagreement about the degree of transformation necessary or even possible in Arab society. Moreover, it is not clear to many that women are an integral part of the very fabric of society and lie at the heart of its developmental needs. Furthermore, women, are not, as is commonly believed, merely another under-represented interest group. Beyond this, another debate rages over whether women can be "mainstreamed," especially in more segregated environments. Most importantly, many forces in Arab societies oppose women's empowerment if it means changes in women's duties and responsibilities in the family.

Many women's and feminist studies programs are in their infancy, though the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University is the adult exception, dating back to the early 1970s. And, for reasons like feminism's uncomfortable "step-child" status in interdisciplinary studies and university politics complicated by post-colonialism, some theoretical and methodological aspects of empowerment remain controversial. For example, the use of comparative data, theory, and methodologies from the other regions of the world are not well integrated into regional curricula. Progressive pedagogies, effective mentoring, efforts to affect the pre-collegial curriculum, and ideas from the Western self-development and self-empowerment movements have also taken a backseat to more traditional education. The essential link between feminism and women's studies is still in question.

In my view, the most essential feminist component of women's studies, indeed, of education itself is the intent to empower. Women's studies informed by feminism centers on the empowerment of women. Ignoring the locus and workings of power uncouples feminism from women's studies, and diverts us from the very point of using gender as a category of analysis.⁴

Empowerment, a complex and relative notion, implies that there is a scale of power, and a linear progression from one end to the other. This view generally focuses on power through a modernist lens forged by postcolonial conditions in the Arab world. In undertaking the task to empower students, a responsible educator should complicate and enrich understandings of "women," "men," "gender," "Arab," and "agency." The educator needs to conceptualize the paths toward empowerment. This helps women ask why we are where we are now.⁵ When the women studies educator attempts to explain women's legal status or the economic or health situation in Egypt,⁶ or discrimination under the law in Lebanon,⁷ an emphasis on lessons learned is key.

The educated regional population does possess increased awareness of gender as a category of power and status. However pre-collegial students may not yet understand how social processes are related to gender. Gender, to them, is an XX or XY label, and not necessarily a condition that needs to be altered in their view. Or, they may perceive different versions of gender roles as cultural indicators that divide the religiously conservative from the liberal, or one nationality from another.

Other false dichotomies complicate the study of women, such as sharp contrasts between women in rural and urban settings; essentialisms of social class which fail to recognize the effects of social mobility via state mechanisms; divisions of time or history; and the treatment of Arab women as a monolithic and exceptional category. It is therefore up to educators to describe the oppression of women as a broader condition. Our students need a sense of the universal implications of gender — that the world's women are a majority of the poor and one third will be subjected to violence. Or, that two million girls under the age of 15 are forced into the sex trade each year and twice as many women as men are affected with HIV in Africa.

Basic universal definitions of empowerment often begin with educational, legal, political, and professional rights. This includes access to all professions; equivalence in salaries, opportunities for advancement, insurance and pensions; economic rights to own and dispose of property, and to pay for goods at the same rates as others. Women seek rights over their own bodies, to receive support for women's health issues, and prosecute those who engage in domestic violence, rape, or abuse. Empowerment may involve quotas, or affirmative action policies, or may require new structures to enable implementation of protective policies, and enforcement of new laws. Teaching about these issues presents special challenges for educators in the Arab world.

Teaching and effecting the empowerment of women requires combining tools from a variety of sources. Self-empowerment is a fairly contemporary theme that seems most pronounced in Western scholarship and pedagogy. Many works of literature, biography and autobiography from the Middle East illustrate feminist self-empowerment, and the old maxim that "the personal is political." The theme of self-development has a lengthy history in Sufi philosophy and literature. The examination of family relationships that was an essential part of early women's studies is another avenue for discovery. Women conference attendees often compare and discuss their family relationships and bearing on their self-esteem and self-image. To some degree these ideas are also available in anthropological literature (Joseph, 1999 and Abu Lughod, 1986). However, the point of this literature is primarily to describe existing social relations, and not necessarily to emphasize transformation. Students are learning more about women's history in "niche" programs,⁸ but mainstream education continues to ignore women's presence whether in world history, or Islamic and nationalist histories (Qassem, 2005).

Feminist process — an exercise during which group members respond to a specific statement, proposal, or question, and defer discussion until all have expressed themselves — is supposed to enhance participation and egalitarianism. While women's studies centers and NGOs may be familiar with "process," and utilize it, instructors in the Arab world are frequently too concerned with maintaining student respect, and find it risky to soften their pedagogical style. Beyond style, pedagogy is often simply absent. Educators are so exhausted with the struggle to survive professionally, that it is very difficult indeed to create the desire for lifetime learning and intellectual regeneration.

Mentoring also has important roots in both Arab and feminist cultures, and has been crucial to public activism and professional advancement. No one is born knowing how to chart a course of professional development, or how to respond to significant workplace challenges. Sometimes, women, experiencing the Darwinian dilemma themselves, may shortchange mentees or even play off protégées against each other. Yet we know that mentoring programs aid retention of women in non-traditional fields and can serve as an important source of support. Mentors can impart or demonstrate key professional skills such as public speaking, personal presentation, problem-solving, and organization. Mentoring and women's leadership programs suit both mixed-sex and single-sex university environments.

To teach about empowerment, we should effectively



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communicate the ambiguities of social change. Many of us lecture and write for audiences outside of academia. Yet, our deep intellectual understanding of the mixed progress toward women's empowerment may not always help us communicate our knowledge. We need to strategically tailor our messages to the present, rapidly shifting set of circumstances. To do this, I developed a "balance sheet" for Arab women's empowerment. The incremental progress that this balance sheet has recorded over the past five years⁹ is helpful in communicating ideas about women's empowerment.

Successes

- The passage of a law in Egypt in January 2001 making divorce easier and providing for family courts. These courts are to include mediators.
- Increased female enrollment and performance in educational institutions as demonstrated by statistical data.
- The incorporation of "women's voices" in society, including more attention to women's history and expression in the past and present.
- A marked decrease in the fertility rate in some urban areas of the Arab world.
- The increase of prominent women who have entered male-dominated professions, or run successful businesses (Sullivan, 1986, *Al-Raida*, XVI, 83-84, 1998-1999) and new networks for women in professions and business.
- The creation of numerous NGOs focused on a) creating sustainable development and income generation for women, b) eradicating girl's illiteracy and addressing the need for higher retention rates for girls in high school, and c) empowering women political candidates.
- Growing evidence that people oppose violence against women, and support legal efforts to outlaw it.
- Increasing numbers of women in politics in Morocco, Iraq, and the Palestinian Authority as well as an increase in women's interest in politics in many other places.

Ambiguous Factors

- The legalization of 'urfi marriage in Egypt as well as the increase in other informal forms of marriage.
- The increasing cost of marriage in urban areas around the region (Singerman and Ibrahim, 2001).
- The apparent significance of college degrees as qualifications for better marriages rather than correlating to more and better career opportunities for women.
- Increasing numbers of female heads-of-households in rural areas due to male migration as well as increasing rates for female migrants (Juntenen, 2001, Salih, 2003, Ennaji, 2006, Zuhur, 2003, 2006).
- The future status of women and family law in Iraq.
- The failure of Saudi authorities to implement separate desks for women at ministries, increase women's employment opportunities, and the May 2006 decision to remove photographs of women from newspapers.

Failures

- Women were not permitted to run for office or vote in Saudi Arabia's 2005 municipal elections.
- The continued prohibition on women's driving in Saudi Arabia, and the subsequent rise in the overall number of women who lack mobility and the means to become employed (due to the cost of a car and driver).
- The practice of FGM (female genital mutilation) involves a larger number of women in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries than we thought, including northern Iraq.
- The continuity of "old" and rise of "new" versions of polygamy (Al-Krenawi, 2000; Zuhur, 2006).
- The continuing valuation of virginity and male responsibility for female sexuality means that many women are still strongly encouraged to marry instead of pursuing careers and advanced education. Others resort to hymen replacement or subterfuge to maintain their "honor."
- An apparent increase in crimes of honor in both rural and urban settings.
- The thwarting of the campaign to create a civil law of personal status in Lebanon (El-Cheikh, 1998-1999, Zuhur, 2002).
- The continued existence of laws in numerous Arab states that grant citizenship on the basis of the father's – not the mother's – nationality (Botman, 1999, Joseph, ed. 2000).
- Attacks by Islamists on prominent feminists (Gallagher, 2003, 2006).

A contextual approach is particularly helpful in explicating "the map," which also shows that efforts to improve income and living conditions without changes in basic notions concerning gender and sex-roles do not always empower women. Such efforts formed the basis of the early social welfare and government orientations.

Some women speak of a backlash against their gains in the public space. The concept of backlash speaks to many of the ambiguities above. Economic effects and inter-relationships of social and political change can also elucidate the data and trends discussed here. Simply gaining access to educational rights does not necessarily lead to a stronger female presence in politics or in society as a whole. Wholesale changes in public perceptions of women, changes in legal rights, and the creation of women's networks and special training for political leadership are required. Changing the laws that pertain to women's bodily integrity – as in the banning of FGM in public facilities – will be ineffective if medical personnel are unconvinced of the merit of the law.

Issues of Public Space

Arab women do not function just as men do in public space (nor do Western women, for that matter) because

of historical attitudes towards women's bodies which express themselves in differential laws and behaviors (harassment, pressure to veil, rape). Public space means the street, schools and universities, public transportation, television, cinema, entertainment venues, the workplace, governments, even the Web (Sami, 1999, Afsarrudin, ed., 1999; Haddad, 2001, Nouriaie-Simone, 2005). Clearly the gendering of spaces has changed over the last century; just think about examples of women in public entertainment over time (Danielson, 1997, Zuhur, 2000, Zuhur, ed.1998, 2001b, and Zuhur in Nouriaie-Simone, 2005d, and Franken, 2001).

In communities where women's university enrollment or employment is quite recent, the movement of women in the public space has been both modified and enabled by *hijab*-wearing and access to transportation. Research on the issues of public space, harassment, and dress sought to explain a wave of new veiling that coincided with a growth in religiosity (Rugh, 1984, Zuhur, 1992, MacLeod, 1991, Hammami, 1990, Brink and Mencher, eds. 1997, Bahgat, 2001).

The *hijab* has been voluntarily adopted by millions of Muslim women. It is not clear precisely how many women decide to wear the *hijab* as a result of peer pressure, direct contacts with religious organizations, or on the basis of individual motivations. Today, it is the *niqab*, or face mask that is the more recent sign of religiosity — the *hijab* alone is deemed insufficient. This trend is most common in the Gulf states, but also appears in Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq. One interesting point for teaching about empowerment: while the *hijab* (or *niqab*) has not prevented men from harassing women in public space, it has increased the vulnerability of unveiled women. Moreover, anyone now instructing Muslims addresses at least some students wearing *hijab* who may differ with the instructor's, class's, or literature's approach to veiling.

While in the United States most teach that Saudi women's inability to drive is a marker of disempowerment, should we apply apologetics in the region? The 1990 driving demonstration by 47 Saudi women resulted in their punishment, and not the lifting of the ban. One wrote:

Sometimes I wish that I never went to school or learned anything so I would not see the unfairness and the wrongdoing and not be able to do anything about it, and most of all, so I would not know that I do not have rights. (*Austin Peace and Justice*, January 16-22, 1990 and reprinted May 1991)

Today, Saudis are still proposing modifications for the introduction of female driving. In Iraq, militants have attacked women who drive. In other areas of the Arab

world, women's driving has clearly enhanced their career opportunities.

Political Rights

Students understand that political rights for women mean, at a minimum, suffrage and the right to run for office, and to be appointed in non-elected governmental positions. Still, simply electing or appointing women is insufficient, for without politicians and officials who consider the effects of various policies, laws and measures on women's status, no cohesive headway toward social change or reform will ensue. Some female politicians and decision-makers may be as ambivalent toward the empowerment of women as their male counterparts, yet others (who may influence male counterparts) are responsive to the concerns of poor and illiterate women as well as the educated and to the increasing number of woman-headed households in various districts.

By 2005, women in Bahrain and Qatar had achieved the vote. Women in Kuwait campaigned for suffrage and demonstrated wearing pale blue clothes. They finally won the right to vote in May 2005, the culmination of efforts started following the Gulf war (Reeves, 1999, Severeid, 1999; al-Mughni and Tetrault in Joseph, ed. 2000, p. 255). Saudi women have been disappointed by their continued denial of political rights, and it is hoped that a government campaign to increase the numbers of female identification card holders and provide separate polling facilities will pave the way for women's participation in the 2009 elections (Zuhur, 2005b, pp. 33-34).

Women elsewhere have turned their attention to the issue of women and political leadership. Lebanese proponents of female political leaders have noted problems that stem from women's gender socialization. These problems exist in a political environment in which egalitarianism is included in the national constitution but largely does not exist (Mobassaieh, 2000).

In Egypt, the National Council for Women cooperated with the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights to groom and prepare women for the 2000 election (Zuhur, 2001, Elbendary, October and November 2000). Of 120 women, only seven were elected. It seems that education, family support, social status, and to some degree, economic status are initial factors explaining why so few women won. Considering this, the decision to support "quotas," or seats reserved for women at a minimum number in Morocco, thanks to support from the Palace, and in Iraq, a compromise with women politicians that was backed by the Coalition Transitional Authority have been important and positive steps toward women's empowerment.



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Probably the most difficult questions for educators go beyond the numbers of women in politics and concern democratization's benefits as they impact women. Etatism, or state-led reform, has thus far led to more political action benefiting women than we may see with democratization if it empowers larger blocs of Islamists or conservatives (presuming that the latter two groups are less supportive of or are against feminist reforms). State-sponsored feminism has been a major focus in materials written about the Arab world (Najjar, 1988; Kandiyoti, 1991; Brand, 1998; Joseph, ed. 2000; Al-Ali, 2000, Charrad, 2001). Scholars have also held that feminist reforms which lack grassroots support may be the cause of popular backlash.

Legal Reforms

In the area of legal reform, significant steps have been taken toward the empowerment of women, or at least toward more equity. Still, progress in this area has been complicated by the long historical debate over secularism versus religiosity in public life and the complicated derivation of civil laws from various codification systems. In some cases, there has been a failure to create civil laws, while in others, the success of new modifications is not entirely complete. And, with regional Islamization, it is no longer a given that civil law benefits women more than a reinterpreted, or "reformed" shari'a system – even educators are divided on this issue.

Lebanese President Elias Hrawi first proposed to legalize civil marriage in 1996. Women's groups and progressive political parties favored optional civil marriage, but opposition arose first in the Sunni religious establishment, and spread to other religious officials (Dick, 1998, Chahine, 1998, "Statement" n.d.). Prime Minister Hariri's decision to postpone the issue with the Syrian president's interference reflected Lebanon's political realities (El-Cheikh, 1998-1999, Khouri, 1998, Zuhur, 2002, 2005c).

Lebanon granted women the right to vote in 1953. The delicate balance between the various confessional groups in the country is formalized in the Taif Accord that ended the civil war. The accord also paradoxically calls for the reduction of sectarianism. Sectarianism has a direct bearing on women's issues as it empowers religious leadership, who too often seek to prevent inter-religious marriages and maintain control over personal status (divorce, marriage, adoption, inheritance, and custody).

The Egyptian parliament passed a new law affecting divorce after lively debates and allegations of political steamrolling, and President Mubarak signed it on January 29, 2000. Following a failed intervention by an arbiter for each side in accordance with a Quranic principle (Surah IV:35), divorce may be granted in three months and is to

be irrevocable. The new law prevents men from divorcing their wives without immediately informing them (*talaaq al-ghiyabi*). This reform kindled a certain degree of backlash, however. It provides a method for women to divorce regardless of the legal grounds for their action so long as they forfeit monetary compensation and the traditional gifts given. This so-called *khul'* law also created a family court that was to facilitate divorce cases as well as a family insurance plan. Among the reform's architects was Mona Zulficar who had earlier identified many discriminatory aspects of laws in Egypt (Zulficar, n.d.).

Debates concerning the laws of personal status first emerged in the nineteenth century when the customs of female seclusion and the lack of education for women were also questioned. The Ottoman Empire issued two imperial edicts allowing women to sue for divorce on limited grounds in 1915 and codified family law in the Ottoman Law of Family Rights in 1917. Subsequent laws were passed in Egypt in 1920 and in 1929 broadening the grounds for divorce by incorporating principles outside the Hanafi legal school. Women could obtain a divorce under certain conditions: if they were deserted, mistreated, denied financial maintenance, or if their husbands were imprisoned or had a serious contagious disease (Esposito, 1982, pp. 53-55). Other proposed but rejected reforms would have allowed women to write clauses into their wedding contracts restricting their husband's right to take another wife.

Subsequent efforts ensued in 1971, due in part to the efforts of the Minister of Social Affairs, 'A'isha Ratib. Special reforms affecting divorce, custody, and retention of the family home were eventually decreed by President Anwar Al-Sadat in 1979 during a parliamentary recess, and then later passed by the legislature – these were dubbed "Jihan's laws" after First Lady Jihan Sadat (Zuhur, 2001). However, because of their extra-parliamentary method of legal passage, the Higher Constitutional Court declared these reforms to be unconstitutional in 1985.

The 1979 personal status reforms had incorporated new grounds for divorce by a woman if her husband took another wife without her consent. Additionally, she was to be informed if her husband divorced her and allowed to obtain a notarized certificate of divorce. The divorced wife could keep the custody of her children until the ages of 10 for a boy and 12 for a girl. She could be awarded the family apartment as a residence until she remarried. These reforms permitted female employment so long as it did not interfere with their "family duties" and ended the practice of *bayt al-ta'a* (house of obedience) wherein the husband could imprison his wife at home until he obtained her "obedience." The 1985 retraction of these laws undid these reforms.

Unfortunately, the Egyptian reforms of 2000 are not a civil law in the most complete sense as they do not apply to Coptic women. The Church has long refused to recognize divorces that did not involve grounds of adultery and has denied couples who were divorced in "civil" proceedings the right to remarry (Zuhur, 2001, Hatem in Joseph, ed. 2000, Zulficar n.d.). And the reforms failed to settle the question of children's nationality which they receive through their father, an aspect of legal discrimination that affects nearly all Arab women. Notably, Palestinian women reformers have recently achieved a change in this area (Al-Rifa'i, 2005).

Lastly, the 2000 reforms brought a legal status to *'urfi* marriages. Such marriages, contracted via simple oral agreement or written contracts were practiced in Egypt since the 1940s but have never been considered legitimate marriages implying transference of property, duties of financial support or inheritance. Growing in popularity due to the high cost of *nikah* marriage (Singerman in Singerman and Hoodfar, eds. 1996), couples increasingly resorted to *'urfi* marriages. These marriages sidestep family authority (Mutawwi', 2000) and were critiqued for their similarity to *muta'* (temporary) marriage (Zuhur, 2003, 2006) known as *sigheh* in Iran (Haeri, 1989) or the so-called "visiting" marriages authorized by some Sunni clerics. The press attacked "deviant" youth and women who participated in *'urfi* marriages, who were endangering the entire social fabric of virginity, honor, and chastity (Abaza, 2001). Some women married four to six men through *'urfi* (*al-Ahram*, March 22, 1999; and al-Akhbar, September 28, 1999) though a few men outdid them with scores of *'urfi* wives. Since the passage of this law, Hind El-Hinnawi filed a paternity suit against actor Ahmed El-Fishawi and although theirs was an *'urfi* marriage, she won her case based on a DNA test. In teaching about such unions, one needs to convey that alternative modes of patriarchal control, such as these more informal unions, may socially or legally disadvantage women.

Violence against Women

Violence against women bridges the areas of women's legal and bodily rights. It will be up to the next generation of women activists to create conditions in which women are free of physical violence – whether beatings by their husbands, honor crimes, rape, or FGM. Ongoing denial of violence complicates discussion as well as lingering beliefs that it affects lower class women, not elites, or that types of violence, like FGM are irrelevant to women in areas where this custom is not practiced. Reformers who attempted to address FGM, like other versions of violence against women, thought that education and modernization could resolve these issues.

Legal reform by itself also presents a false solution. The

death of an eleven-year-old girl in Cairo in 1999, despite the ban on FGM being performed in public health facilities, illustrated the complicity of the medical profession, and the inadequacy of legal change on its own. Female circumcision, just like the preservation of virginity until marriage, is believed to be a "good tradition"¹⁰ because it controls both female sexuality and the designation of paternity. Women as well as men support the tradition, even though the practice is harmful to women's reproductive and psychological health. The medical establishment in Egypt has not educated doctors about the negative effects of FGM. Some reformers called for "medicalization" of FGM, meaning that the main problem was infection at the hands of non-professionals (barbers, midwives) and that in hospitals and clinics infection could be controlled. A scandal ensued after CNN aired coverage of a young girl undergoing FGM in Egypt. The official fiction that the practice was primarily conducted by those of rural origins and was dying out had been challenged directly. The minister of health then imposed a ban on FGM in public places, and despite serious legal challenges which overturned the ban for a time, it was re-upheld. A Task Force on FGM has engaged in a multi-pronged campaign against the practice (Seif al-Dawla in Ilkcaracan, ed. 2000) but its efforts have been hampered by tradition. Truly changing minds would necessitate educating the public through the discussion of sexual issues in the media and in schools.

Researchers previously estimated that 50-60% of Egyptian women have been circumcised. However, a 1995 EDHS (Egypt Demographic Health Survey) showed that 97% of Egyptian women who have been married ("ever-married women" including divorcées and widows) are circumcised (Zanaty, et al 1996; Guenena and Wassef, 1999). And, while many women in the Mashreq have complained that this practice does not impact them, in fact Bedouin women are circumcised in the Sinai peninsula and the Negev, as are some women in the Gulf, and a large number of Iraqi Kurdish women (Irin, 2005).

The discussion above illustrates the challenge of teaching about issues of women's bodily rights. Not all institutions protect academic freedom. Students may challenge educators whom they regard as critiquing the morality of their society. Perhaps what should be emphasized is the hypocrisy of a moral system allegedly designed to protect its members but which in fact victimizes them.

It is due to the import of the cultural code of sexual honor and the value granted to virginity and chastity that hymen replacement (to ensure "virginity" at marriage) occurs all over the Arab world as do honor crimes. Campaigns waged to alter the penal codes, notably in Jordan, are very relevant to the issue of women's empow-



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erment. Unfortunately, this campaign has ran into a backlash, and in any case, has only been able to address the aftermath of such crimes in its effort to mandate more severe penalties (Zuhur, 2005).

Where Arab women stand on protections against rape and other forms of violence against women is also relevant. Rape laws invoking the traditional concepts of honor and family ownership of women's bodies have been codified by the state, but not always to women's best advantage. In addition, women's testimony is often doubted, and women are held accountable for their own victimization. Even with witnesses, as in the 'Ataba bus case in Cairo where a girl was raped despite her conservative dress style, and her mother's presence at the bus station, the judge rebuked the victim for not wearing the *hijab*, although he did note that she had worn a long skirt. In other cases, as a result of their understanding of the law, police have often attempted to force the victim to marry the rapist (Sonbol, in Ilkharacan, ed. 2000, Zuhur, 2007). The steady pursuit of justice has not yet taken place, and the double standard guiding men's versus women's sexual behavior remains in place, though some efforts are being made to create shelters for women and programs to serve rape and abuse victims.

Conclusion

There are many additional important issues and related examples that can be used for the teaching of women's empowerment in the Arab world. Given more space, we could address women's literary and cultural expressions and their impact on the road to empowerment. These, too, have mixed effects, if, for instance, we consider the great popularity of women in entertainment, who appear empowered and influential, but may not be. One only need think of the 2003 death of Tunisian pop singer, Zikra, at the hands of her husband. However, in briefly reviewing some remaining obstacles to empowerment, I

want again to point out that education (sometimes limited only to literacy) and modest income-generating projects are clearly insufficient to bring about a much higher quality of life for women of the Arab world, which should be our aim.

Teaching about empowerment in ways that strongly emphasize self-empowerment puts the whole process into a more positive light. Here, women's life-stories, such as the memoirs written by Leila Ahmed (1999), Hanan Ashrawi (1995) and Fay (Afaf) Kanafani (1999) can play a role like that of women's literature (Arebi, 1994, and too many others to list). By grasping the workings of self-empowerment in the lives of prominent women, we can encourage students to change their own lives through self empowerment. Women's studies in the West gave some special attention to the topic of self empowerment, but some of these have been trivialized. Those of us who come from positions of little power must alter our consciousnesses and levels of self knowledge in order to effectively utilize our connections, and deal with heightened social challenges or severe setbacks in our own uneven individual progress toward empowerment. Recognition of the effects of patriarchy on our own lives and learning to think in a liberated manner are difficult but useful achievements. We can thereby gain confidence to break boundaries, to create, and to empower.

The arduous task of self-empowerment differs from quotidian efforts to chronicle women's gains and losses through public policies and reform. But these complement each other. Without movement toward equivalent legal rights, access to public space, and political influence for all women, individual women have little hope of further expanding their individual rights. Self-empowerment is necessary, as is effective coordination of our various efforts to further women's empowerment overall.

Endnotes

1. The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense or the US government.
2. This question absorbed Dr. Cynthia Nelson, who passed away on February 14, 2006, having devoted much of her considerable energies to this issue. She sponsored a Regional Conference on Gender and Women's Studies held at the American University in Cairo in May 1997 (see *Cairo Papers for Social Science*, 1999). Later I presented a follow-up paper at the Troisième Colloque International sur le Thème: "Femmes et Education," Le Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur la Femme, Université Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdallah, Dhar El Mehraz, Fés, March, 2002.

3. Laurie Brand. *Women, the state and political liberalization: Middle Eastern and North African experiences*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998; also see Mounira Charrad. *States and women's rights: the making of postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
4. Joan Scott contributed the notion of gender "as a category of analysis," Judith Butler has written extensively about the "performativity" or performance of gender, and both scholars contributed the following: Judith Butler and Joan Scott. *Feminists theorize the political*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).
5. This type of inquiry can look at history as in Aziza Al-Hibri's

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New Section in *Al-Raida*

As of the forthcoming issue, a new section will be introduced titled 'Letters to the Editor'. Please send your comments to al-raida@lau.edu.lb

A Scholarship Program in the Gaza Strip:

A Practical Approach to Female Empowerment

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Like many Palestinians, 32-year-old Manzur calls Gaza a prison, the biggest in the world. He lives a short distance from Gaza City in Beach Camp, home to 50,000 refugees. True to its name, the camp is by the sea, but even the beach here is blighted by the squalor and overcrowding. Manzur is lucky to have a job, as a hotel security guard, but earns too little to buy a flat or hope to attract a bride. He lives with his parents, four sisters, eight brothers and a grandfather. They share four rooms between them (*The Guardian*, July 27, 2000).

This story is all too common in the Gaza Strip. Large families, low incomes, poverty, high levels of unemployment, inadequate access to safe drinking water, low levels of infrastructure, low quality health care, and government corruption all plague this tiny strip of land on the eastern edge of the Mediterranean. Factor in the persistent low-scale warfare and it becomes apparent that this is a very difficult place in which to live. Many of these issues require immediate attention. The peace process is ongoing, the international community has contributed large amounts of aid to bolster the Palestinian economy, and international development organizations such as the UN and the World Bank have implemented projects to address Gaza's most pressing needs. However, it is also necessary to take

a longer-term approach and, in this regard, one may legitimately ask what the costs and benefits are of implementing a scholarship program for girls in the Gaza Strip? An equally valid question is what modifications of this successful policy idea, which has already been tried in Guatemala, are required to transplant it to the Gaza Strip?

Introduction

Women living in the Gaza Strip face unique challenges. There is a problem of child marriages, in which girls as young as 12 are compelled to marry men in their twenties to reduce the family's financial burden. Honor killings, though rare, do occur in some isolated villages. If a woman is suspected of having an extramarital affair or an indecent relationship with someone outside of marriage, a member of her family will kill her in the name of "family honor." In the most extreme cases, even if a woman is raped, her brother or father will kill her, rather than seek punishment for the perpetrator. "Many men who commit honor killings cite the Qur'an, but most scholars say there is no justification in Islam for these crimes. They are a manifestation of the social pressures of traditional societies, which hold that women are the property of the family, whose honor rests on their obedience and virginity" (*New York Times*, November 12, 2000).

Another added burden that women must bear is the set of informal rules and societal norms regarding dress code. Practically all Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip are veiled, in contrast to the West Bank, where there is a much greater degree of freedom in the choice of what to wear. In more socially conservative Gaza, the *hijab* has been tied to the political situation. Women who are veiled are deemed more patriotic. Palestinian women that don a veil are considered more pure and upright than the "morally loose" women of Tel Aviv. As a result, there is an intense but subtle pressure on Gazan women to dress conservatively, even today.

Overpopulation in the Gaza Strip has a disproportionately adverse effect on women. It is not uncommon to see families of 15 or 20. Often, the burden for taking care of the family falls squarely on the mother and eldest daughters, since the men in the family are most often in school or at work. School dropout, which is closely related to child marriage, affects girls more than boys. According to the Palestine Economic Research Institute and the World Bank, "males have higher enrollment rates than females at the upper secondary level in refugee camps and villages, but equal rates in the cities" (Diwan & Shaban, 1999, p.160)

Looking at the Gaza Strip from a long-term economic perspective, one of the most serious issues is the continued high rate of population growth. As it is, there are not enough jobs to go around and the education system is already at or above capacity. Scarce water resources will become even scarcer. Already miserable living conditions will become even more unbearable. Unemployment will reach staggering levels. The Palestinian government could simply impose a one family one child policy but such an authoritarian solution could unseat an already unpopular government. In any case, such a policy would be unrealistic since it is in the government's best short-term interest for Gazans to have as many children as possible. Moreover, such a solution would do little to improve the comparatively weaker position of women in society. A much more rational and sustainable solution would be to implement a scholarship program for girls.

Policy Parameters

To boost secondary school enrollment among Palestinian girls in the Gaza Strip, the program will target girls age 12-15. It will primarily target girls that are already attending school since school dropout among girls below the age of 12 is generally not considered a problem. Of the 2.7% of students (both male and female) who dropped out in 1995-1996, most left between the 7th-10th grade (Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, PASSIA). According to the latest population estimates, there are 275,000 Palestinian girls

under the age of 15 in the Gaza Strip. If one assumes that the population is evenly distributed in this age bracket, then there are roughly 75,000 girls age 12-15.

We will want to target our group more narrowly by including only those girls that belong to households living on \$2 a day or less. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 33% of Gazans live on the equivalent of \$2 a day.¹ Taking this percentage and applying it to the 75,000 figure results in 24,750 girls that would qualify for the program. Therefore, the target group would include roughly 25,000 beneficiaries.

The program itself will award a small scholarship of \$5 a month for 10 months a year (\$50 a year for each student). We will discuss how we arrived at this figure later. It will be a four-year trial program and if funding is available and the project is a success, it can be renewed. Ideally, however, one will want to incorporate self-sustaining elements into the program so that no further implementation will be necessary. The girls will be encouraged to share their new-found knowledge with their younger sisters and younger classmates. Moreover, it is hoped that a large percentage of these girls will become future leaders in their communities and help create their own poverty alleviation programs.

Another aspect of the scholarship program will be to introduce some urgently needed girls-only classes. In this sense, it will differ from other scholarship programs that have been tried around the world. Such classes will include health education, family planning, self esteem and for the 14- and 15-year-olds, perhaps even agricultural extension classes. In such an impoverished and densely populated area as the Gaza Strip, classes like this are crucial for the future well-being of Palestinians in this region. Quantifying the cost of such courses is a difficult task, but one could come up with a figure that includes teachers' salaries, textbooks, and other school supplies. It should be quite feasible either to train existing teachers or employ two new teachers at each school within a modest budget. The teachers should be dynamic, enthusiastic and highly competent, drawing from the wealth of talent of expatriate nationals and other international candidates, who, in some cases, could volunteer their time.

In terms of geographic location, the program will be broadly based. There are eight refugee camps in the Gaza Strip, where 39% of the total population of 440,000 Palestinians lives (CIA, 2000; *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 2000). According to PCBS, there are 538 schools in Gaza, including 326 "basic" schools (grades 1-10, ages 6-15), which include girls in the target group. In 1995-1996, there were 305,324 students in Gaza at the pre-tertiary level (PASSIA). If we return to the figure of 75,000 girls

Special Features

that are between the ages of 12-15 and assume that 90% of them attend school (which is the national average for primary and lower secondary levels), this results in 67,500 girls in the target age range that attend one of the 326 basic schools (Diwan & Shaban, 1999, p.160). Thus, the per-school enrollment average is 207 girls in the target age range. The program could be implemented at all 326 basic schools. Targeting the poorest third would reach roughly 70 girls at each school, for a total of 22,820 beneficiaries. The remaining 2,180 girls that are still eligible should be drawn from the 2,500 or so girls between the ages of 12-15 that are not attending school.

Apart from being between the ages of 12 and 15 and in a household that lives on \$2 a day, another requirement for participation in the program will be a parental signature on a waiver, disallowing marriage until the girl's 16th birthday. The contract could be legally binding so that even if the girl withdraws from the program and gets married, the parents would still be liable and could be taken to court and fined. Granted, it would be difficult to enforce such a policy, but not impossible; it would require the cooperation of the Palestinian legal system. An emergency fund of \$1 million could be set up for potential legal costs and other miscellaneous expenses associated with the program. But it should be clear to all program officials that the emergency fund is to be used only in dire circumstances. One way to cut costs would be for the lawyers representing the schools to be unpaid.

There remains one last issue: In what form and in what way will the scholarship award be given to the girls' families? The girls could receive the payments at school following parental approval of admission into the program. Members of the administration could give the eligible students cash, which they would then be responsible for handing over to their parents. Or, if parents preferred, they could come to the school in person to claim the award. This method uses an existing bureaucracy (school administration) to deal with the logistics of handing out the award. Keeping a careful record of eligible students will incur administrative costs. The program will also require a highly competent project manager at the UNDP (United Nations Development Program) who has a strong finance and accounting background, and whose integrity has never been questioned. The UNDP already has an office in Gaza City, and this could serve as the central source of funding for the project. The salary of the project manager should not be overly inflated. If other UNDP staff members are needed, volunteers could be drawn from the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) program.

Admittedly, in practice, it will be difficult to know exactly which families are living on \$2 a day. Visiting refugee camps will help alleviate this problem. If there is an over-

whelming demand to participate in the program, then the UNDP may want to consider expanding the breadth of the project, either incorporating a higher percentage of girls in the target age range or including higher grade levels, contingent on its ability to gather more funds. It would be useful to include community groups and parent committees in deciding which girls should receive an award. Particularly in a period of closure, it is crucial to identify which girls belong to families that have fallen beyond the reach of a safety net. Local community groups and NGOs can help in this process. Whenever possible, existing household surveys conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics should be used. One hopes that the information gathered contains the specific names of families who are below the poverty line.

Potential Benefits

Many potential benefits could accrue, and not just to girls and women but to broad segments of society. These include a lessening of the problem of child marriage, a drop in the total fertility rate with positive effects on limiting overpopulation, a decrease in school dropout among girls, an increase in women's labor force participation rates and earnings, a reduction in infant and child mortality, a decrease in maternal mortality, as well as intergenerational educational benefits. A scholarship program for girls could also potentially improve family health and nutrition and even result in significant environmental benefits. One could also argue that educated women would no longer tolerate such outdated customs as honor killings and a dress code. Having learned that there are alternatives, these young girls would grow up into women that fight for their legal and social rights.

Mitigating the problem of child marriage alone would be reason enough to implement a girls' scholarship program. Parents would no longer want to marry off their daughters if someone else was able to pay for their education expenses. Moreover, as part of the program, school officials and community leaders should explain the importance of girls' education to the parents. Presumably, the parents will be receptive if they have their children's best interests in mind.

Reducing the total fertility rate will be crucial if Palestinians in the Gaza Strip want a higher standard of living. The current rate of 6.55 is not sustainable (CIA, 2000). Empirical evidence suggests that there is a strong correlation between a woman's education level and the number of children she chooses to have (Appleton & Collier, 1988, p.567). The more highly educated a woman is, the fewer the number of children she is expected to have. The argument is that receiving an education creates more of an opportunity cost for having a large family. Instead of caring for children, the woman

can be doing other things, like engaging in income-earning opportunities. Here, a potential benefit could be an increase in the number of female teachers, for which there is currently a need. Across the West Bank and Gaza, less than 1% of school teachers hold an M.A. or higher degree, about 40% hold a B.A. or Higher Diploma, and roughly 59% have a qualification lower than B.A. (PAS-SIA). So there is definitely scope for some of these girls to enter the teaching profession. A second part of the argument is that well-educated parents will focus more on the quality of their children rather than the quantity.

Lowering the dropout rate of girls will only have positive effects on society. At school, the girls can learn valuable tools that they can later apply as they become functioning and productive members of society. They can work on farms, at schools, in local businesses, or become ministers in the government. Currently, far too few women are contributing to economic growth in Gaza. They are making dresses or baking bread, but with a solid education, they could make a far greater contribution by, for example, helping to participate in the peace process.

Finally, with increasing levels of education, especially knowledge of health care, women are more likely to take steps to reduce child mortality, be healthy during pregnancy, and ensure adequate nutrition for their family. Taken as a whole, such informed nurturing could have highly beneficial effects for Palestinian society in Gaza. A healthier labor force would be more productive. Higher productivity in turn would lead to higher levels of economic growth which, with the right choice of microeconomic policies, could help lift some of the poor above the poverty line. Additionally, one should not downplay the role of educated women in seeking an end to restrictive and parochial traditions such as honor killings and dress code.

Potential Costs and Reasons Why the Program Could Fail

One can identify five factors, none of which are insignificant, that could prevent the full success of the project. These include a cultural factor, the political situation, government unwillingness to approve such a project, a poorly chosen scholarship amount (either too large or too small), and a potential backlash by men or Muslim leaders. Also, one may legitimately ask what would happen if the girls drop out of school after the scholarship program?

There is a question of whether a higher level of education among girls would necessarily decrease fertility rates or whether culture would offset such an effect. Arab culture places a strong emphasis on having a large family. This has been compounded in Gaza by the political situation, which leaders have used as a reason to call for a demographic struggle against Israel. However, there is evidence

that well-educated middle-class Palestinian families have fewer kids than refugee families. Therefore, one can guess that the education factor overrides the cultural factor in the choice of how many kids to have.

The political situation is a major quandary. It is not uncommon for schools to entirely close down during periods of clashes between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian youths. If, during the course of a year, schools are out of session more often than in session (which happened often in the late 1980s) then a scholarship program would be of little use. To a large extent, the program assumes healthy relations between the Palestinians and Israel, which may not be a realistic assumption in the short term.

Government recalcitrance poses a third challenge. This problem ties into the cultural aspect. The Gaza Strip is a highly patriarchal society. The government, which is made up largely of men, may not buy into the idea of favoring girls' education over that of boys'. Overcoming this obstacle would require successful negotiation between the UNDP project manager and the Minister of Education. If the manager can successfully convince the minister of the potentially large economic benefits of the policy, then there should be no problem in obtaining government approval, which is required for practically every development project.

Next there is the question of whether \$5 a month is an appropriate amount. In Guatemala, "\$4 increased girl's attendance by at least 23% and reduced the dropout rate at least by half in the pilot project" (World Bank, 2000). The rationale for the stipend was that: a) it would not be greater than the family's income, b) it would be less than the capability of the girl to generate income through her own work, and c) it would cover minimum needs to compensate a girl's family for her lost labor income and the cost of school supplies without establishing a dependency on the stipend. GNP per capita in Guatemala is \$1660 (World Bank, 2000). In the Palestinian territories, GNP per capita was \$2400 in 1997 but has since dropped to \$1780 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, PCBS). It is a dismal \$1370 in the Gaza Strip (PCBS).

Whether \$5 a month is an appropriate amount is in part an empirical question and project stakeholders, after a few months of implementation, could decide if \$5 is sufficiently changing behavior. There are several questions that are particularly relevant: What is the average transportation cost for a Palestinian girl in the Gaza Strip? How much do school supplies cost? What level of wages can a 12-15 year old girl earn if she is not in school? Are there lost income opportunities for the mother if her eldest daughters can no longer care for siblings? What is the value of the dowries being offered to families of

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young teenage girls? In Gaza, even though GNP per capita is lower than in Guatemala, it is likely that the opportunity cost of sending a girl to school is higher because of child marriage. Also, the Guatemala project was implemented in 1996 and the \$5 takes inflation into account.

A negative externality that could arise is a backlash by either men or Muslim leaders. Either before the program is in place or once it is implemented, men may raise objections to the project. If there is a perceived sense that the project runs against the grain of Palestinian society then men may not allow their daughters to participate. In Bangladesh, following the establishment of micro-credit programs for women, there appears to have been an increase in the incidence of domestic violence (Schaffner, 2000). One may well ask if such an unintended consequence may occur in Gaza if, for example, husband and wife disagree on the merits of the program. However, there do not seem to be any negative repercussions associated with existing programs that specifically help women.

Another possible concern is that well-off families who send girls to private schools will transfer their girls to public schools. However, there are only 11 private schools in the Gaza Strip (PASSIA). Moreover, there is such a huge discrepancy in the quality of education between private and public schools that a \$5 monthly scholarship is unlikely to change behavior. On average, there are 45 students per class in Gaza. In private schools, there is nearly one student per teacher (PASSIA). This raises a new question. Is the quality of education in Gazan public schools high enough to result in all of the aforementioned intergenerational benefits? The assumption is that learning does occur and that school is a pleasant experience, despite the overcrowded classrooms. Needless to say, the Palestinian Authority will still have to invest heavily in building more schools.

If girls drop out of school once the scholarship program is over, then the objectives of the program may not be met. UNDP staff should closely monitor what happens to the graduates. It is quite possible that the program will only have the effect of delaying child marriage by a couple of years rather than reducing it. In this case, fertility rates would probably remain quite high and women's workforce participation would remain low. The host of spillover effects associated with girls' education would not be realized. However, if the program is designed the right way, then the girls would have an improved sense of self and would have learned specific skills that could help them gain employment, or at least move to places that do have employment possibilities.

Conclusion

Implementing a scholarship program for girls in the Gaza

Strip could result in important long-term benefits. The purpose of the program, to improve women's standing in society and to reduce fertility rates, requires the endorsement of the government and key decision-makers within households (often men). If this is accomplished, then the policy will likely increase attendance and reduce the dropout rate, as it already has in places like Guatemala. Quite possibly, the program will also help reduce child and maternal mortality and help improve family health and nutrition. In turn, these positive spillover effects will result in higher levels of economic growth and productivity.

One must keep in mind, however, that even if fertility rates go down, quality of life may not improve. For one, 50% of the population is under the age of 15 (CIA, 2000). Richard Gwyn of the *Toronto Star* points out that "in Gaza, the median age (or the age of most of the people) is now an incredible 14.4 years" (October 13, 1999). To a large extent, Gazans will have to ride out this age bubble and hope that water access, infrastructure and education will expand to accommodate these increasing pressures.

Complementary investments in social services are therefore essential. Unfortunately, it is not at all apparent that the government is up to this challenge. "The Palestinian Authority is riddled with corruption. Its management of the economy has largely followed an unhealthy pattern of protectionism, nepotism and the multiplication of lucrative monopolies that scares off most potential investors." (Wilkinson & Curtis, 2000). The sad truth is that misery and suffering will probably pervade Gaza for years to come. A scholarship program is merely a step in the right direction.

Table 1: Educational Attainment by Gender

Education Level	Male	Female
B.A./B.Sc. and above	6.1%	2.4%
Intermediate diploma	6.1%	4.8%
General secondary certificate	15.1%	12.5%
Preparatory certificate	29.2%	26.0%
Primary certificate	28.5%	21.3%
Have not completed any educational level	7.4%	33.1%

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1995

Table 2: Drop-out Rate by Gender

Subject and Level	Male	Female
1st Secondary Scientific	1.1%	3.4%
2nd Secondary Scientific	1.0%	3.5%
1st Secondary Literary	8.4%	11.0%
2nd Secondary Literary	4.0%	9.0%
1st Secondary Vocational	4.0%	9.9%
2nd Secondary Vocational	2.6%	10.2%

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997-98

Table 3: Benefits Attributed to the Scholarship Intervention in Guatemala

Itemized Benefits	
Attendance	20% increase
Dropout rate	50% decrease
Active Participation	18% increase
Teacher attendance in second half year	40% increase
Future earnings	Minimum increase of \$35/year per additional year of schooling
External benefits	Reduced fertility and mortality, promote healthier childrearing practices, emphasis on education

Source: World Bank, 1996

Box 1: Literacy

The literacy rate is 84.3% among individuals aged 15 years and older in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with little difference between the two regions. This rate varies between males and females: 91.5% for males and 77% for females.

Box 2: School Attendance

In the Gaza Strip, the percentage of school attendance among boys aged 15-17 is 71.9%. For girls of the same age group, the rate is 63.8%. By contrast, in the West Bank, the school attendance rate for 15-17-year-olds is 65.2% for boys and 63.6% for girls.

Endnotes

1. This figure has risen dramatically in the wake of Israeli border closure, which prevents tens of thousands of Palestinian laborers from entering their jobs in Israel. After two-and-a-half months of closure, the UN says that half the population lives on \$2 a day or less, with even higher rates in Gaza (Orme, December 6, 2000). Nonetheless, we will want to target girls in the poorest one third of Palestinian families in Gaza.

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Remembering Rose Ghurayyib (1909-2006)

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In the early 1900s, when young women rarely had access to education, Rose Ghurayyib's strong belief in women's right to enlightenment enabled her to pursue higher studies and spread progressive education among young Arab women and girls.

Home, Schools, and Higher Education

Rose Ghurayyib was born in 1909 in Damour, a small town on the coastal road to south Lebanon, and she spent most of her childhood there. In an interview conducted at the Yasou' Al-Malak convent on August 30, 2000,¹ Rose said:

All my life was a struggle. Since childhood I felt alone. Having had only brothers and no sisters made me feel that I was on my own. My brothers, Michel and Antoine, were very good to me. They gave me freedom of choice and never interfered in any decision pertaining to my pursuit of a good education or a career as an educator. My father, Salim Ghurayyib, and mother, Hneini Aoun, always supported girls' education and sent me to good schools. Later on, when I became a young woman, they never objected to the fact that I wanted to venture into higher education, but when I decided to leave my hometown of Damour in 1930 and head to the capital, Beirut, to the American

Junior College for Women (AJCW)² in Beirut [currently the Lebanese American University], my father and mother expressed their worry that higher education could hinder my marriage opportunities. I convinced them that marriage was not as important as education (R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, August 30, 2000).

Ghurayyib's passion for education and her gratitude to those who opened the way for her to realize her dream are expressed in her handwritten, undated, and unpublished short autobiography:

My life, character, and education were influenced by three sources. The first was my home. I took the love for work and the will to dare to experience new things from my mother. I took the ability to criticize, analyze, and yet to be tolerant from my father, and the love of reading and Lebanese folklore from both. The second source was the schools I attended. I was only four years old when I started learning both languages, French and Arabic, at the elementary level at the Damour convent school. Education then was based only on rote learning. I continued my secondary education at the American School of Sidon where I was exposed to English and to a progressive system of education. The third source was in Beirut where I spent



Rose Ghurayyib

most of my lifetime studying and teaching. In the fall of 1931 I registered at the American Junior College for Women (AJCW) as a sophomore student.³ ...In June 1932, I graduated with an Associate in Arts degree.⁴ This degree enabled me to pursue my higher education at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and to graduate in 1934 with a BA in Arabic Literature with distinction. I was initially interested in sciences and biology but my background in these subjects was weak and my professors, Dr. Constantine Zurayk, Dr. Anis Al-Makdisi, Dr. Anis Freiha, and Dr. Jubrail Jabbour, advised me to specialize further in Arabic literature. Much later, in 1945, I completed a Master's in this field. My thesis was entitled "Aesthetic Criticism in Arabic Literature." Throughout these years I was simultaneously studying and teaching the Arabic language (Ghurayyib, n.d.).

Ghurayyib was not only distinguished in academia, but her passion for extra-curricular and social welfare work classify her among the pioneers who believed in the overall development of the person. As a student at AJCW, Ghurayyib was involved in many college activities: She was chosen as the chair of the Arabic Literary Society, she participated in theatrical productions and wrote poems and short plays as well. According to Najla Tannous Akrawi (A.A. degree, 1933), one of Ghurayyib's close friends and a distinguished AJCW alumna:

[Rose] was strongly attracted towards voluntary social work in the various welfare projects of the college. She participated in the first Village Welfare Camp initiated by Miss Winifred Shannon⁵ in 1930. She was among the first volunteers who went to Deir Mama Camp in Syria in the summer of 1932 (Sabri, 1967, p. 70).

Akrawi goes on to sum up Ghurayyib's qualities as a student at AJCW:

[Rose had] an absolute honesty that knew no compromise, great modesty to the extent of self-effacement, a brilliant and universal mind that harvested all the scholarly rewards without any trace of self-consciousness or pride. If you add to this fact that we all loved her, and because of some subtle finesse of her personality, were never jealous of her, you might get a glimpse of the unique person that is Rose Ghurayyib (Sabri, 1967, p. 71).

Rose Ghurayyib's Long Career in Education

Rose Ghurayyib's career as an educator started in 1927 when she established and headed the Damour Elementary School in her home town. In 1931, she moved on to teach at the American School of Sidon. It was then that she decided to continue her higher education at the AJCW. Anissa Najjar, another close friend of Ghurayyib and an AJCW alumna, described her as follows:

She was a serious, dedicated, and studious young lady. She barely had any time to stop and speak to anyone. Her outstanding intelligence attracted us, Najla Akrawi, Salwa Nassar,⁶ and myself. We appreciated her and we all became good friends. Fate reunited the three of us in 1937 as teachers in Mosul at the Iraqi Ministry of Education (*Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib*, 2006, p.17).⁷

According to Marie Sabri⁸:

Rose was invited by the Iraqi Ministry of Education to go and teach in Mosul's Secondary School for Girls. Being interested in the new development and re-awakening of Iraq, especially in the field of women's education, Rose felt the urge to answer the call and be among the pioneers who offered their services for such a worthy cause (Sabri, 1967, p. 72).

When Ghurayyib was asked to recall her many experiences related to her trips to Iraq between 1937 and 1941, she answered with a smile:

We usually went as a group and we traveled via Aleppo to Mosul using the Automatrice railway [a coastal railway that connected Lebanon to many Arab countries]. One time, I had to go by myself. I traveled by bus and I had to

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stay overnight in Damascus, Syria, in a hotel. At that time it was unacceptable for girls to travel unaccompanied, and to spend a night at a hotel was even worse. I did not sleep all night fearing that I would be robbed. I guess we were young, full of enthusiasm, determination, and we dared to travel to different places for a good cause (R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, August 30, 2000).

For Ghurayyib and her friends Anissa Najjar, Najla Akrawi, and Salwa Nassar, Mosul was the place for special and exciting years. She recounted:

The Iraqi government recruited young female graduates from Lebanon to teach at the public schools in Iraq as there were no private schools then. These young educators rented houses and lived together. I lived in the same house as Anissa Najjar and Linda Karam. They called us "sayidat al-shabqah," meaning "ladies of the hat," as we wore hats and they did not. I taught the Arabic language and other subjects and we had to participate in extracurricular activities. Our female students in Mosul looked up to us with great admiration and we were their ideal model due to our modern, progressive teaching style, and to our reaching out to their community through theater and music. We even published a school magazine, *Banat Al-Dad*. ...We spent our time in creative work and we turned the school into a cultural centre. As a result, our students were high achievers in the official exams (R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, August 30, 2000).

Anissa Najjar further described this cultural movement in Mosul by saying:

I was the principal of the school in Mosul where Rose was teaching. She was in the Arabic department. We introduced extra-curricular activities for our graduate and Baccalaureate classes. These activities would include book talks, poetry, the work of famous writers, plays, and debates. We always ended our activities by serving our audience Iraqi tea. I could always depend on Rose; she was always my right hand although 17 other teachers were at the school then (Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib, 2006:18).

Her many memories of Iraq meant a lot to Ghurayyib. One could instantly notice the radiant expressions on her face when she talked about her theatrical experiences and the many plays that were performed as part of the extracurricular activities. She spoke about those achievements with great humor:

I was best in the role of men. We were all females at school and someone had to perform the role of males in the script. I best fitted these roles. I was tall, thin, and I pinned my hair up. We performed mainly Said Taki Al-Din

stories (R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, August 30, 2000).

The fervent bond that these young women had was strong enough to keep them united even in turbulent days. Anissa Najjar commented on these difficult days:

When the Second World War started and Lebanon was under General Duntz we gathered to discuss what would become of us. Salwa Nassar said: No one will be interested in my physics or math. I know how to sew so I will work as a seamstress. I [Anissa] said: I know how to cook so I will open a small restaurant, but Ghurayyib said with despair: I am of no use, no one will benefit from my literature so I will surely die of hunger. We assured her that we would never leave her and would take care of her (Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib, 2006, p. 18).

They all stayed in Mosul until 1941. When Ghurayyib was asked why she returned to Lebanon, her answer was: "My health deteriorated and I was very tired so I decided to come back and rest" (R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, August 30, 2000). However, resting was not on her agenda; as soon as she arrived in Beirut she became head of the Arabic Department at the AJCW. In 1945 she moved to the Collège Protestant Français to teach Arabic until 1955. In 1956, she was back at the Beirut College for Women (BCW) as a professor in the Arabic Department. In 1973, upon the establishment of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), alongside her teaching responsibilities, she became the first editor of the Institute's quarterly journal *Al-Raida*. Ghurayyib remained in this position until 1983, when she moved full circle to her final refuge, the Yasou' Al-Malak Convent. She remained an active contributor to, consulting editor of, and researcher for *Al-Raida* until she passed away on January 11, 2006.

Rose's Ghurayyib's Contributions to Literature and Scholarship

Rose Ghurayyib is known for her indefatigable dedication to literature, education, and women's empowerment. She was a pioneer in critical creative writing and literary research. As early as 1947 she wrote a piece in the monthly journal, *Sawt Al-Mar'a* (The Woman's Voice) criticizing the dependence on others that prevailed among men and women in the Orient, as opposed to the self-reliance that prevailed in the West. This, in her opinion, was due to inherited habits and an upbringing that encouraged blind allegiance to leaders who could be merciless rulers, and/or religious figures or even feudalists. Ghurayyib's analytical criticism was even more apparent in a 1948 *Sawt Al-Mar'a* article, "Hal Li Lubnan Risalah?" (Does Lebanon Have a Message?), in which she questioned the achievements of Lebanese thinkers, writ-

ers, and educators. Specifically, she criticized their tendency to slavishly mimic the West, ignoring their own culture, folklore, and language. So much was Ghurayyib an advocate of critical thinking that she stated at the end of her article: "One line written by a creative mind is better than a thousand copied volumes" (Ghurayyib, 1948). Ghurayyib contributed to every issue of *Sawt Al-Mar'a* until it closed in 1958. When asked whether she was paid for her contributions, Rose answered: "I never got a penny for this work. My aim was to master writing, speak what was on my mind, and call for change." (R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, August 30, 2000)

Ghurayyib started writing for journals in 1924 while still in her teens. She recalls those early days:

I was only 15 years old and still a student at the American School of Sidon. A migrant from the Ghurayyib family came to Damour and established *Al-Shams* journal. He encouraged me to write about progressive ideas that would lead to change and improvement. I kept writing for *Al-Shams* for many years. Later on, when I was 21 and a teacher at the same school, I wrote an article entitled "Ma Hiya Al-Madrassa al-Lati Yahtajouha Waladak" (What Type of School Does Your Child Need?). *An-Nahar* newspaper contacted me and was interested in publishing what I wrote. That was the starting point of my long trip with *An-Nahar* and my articles were published on a regular basis. Later on the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University published these articles in a book entitled *Adwa' Ala Al-Haraka Al-Nisaiyyah Al-Mu'asira* (Contemporary Feminist Movement in the Arab World, 1998), (R. Ghurayyib, personal communication, August 30, 2000).

Although Rose faced some very difficult situations in her lifetime, her strong will and passion for writing helped her to overcome them and never give up. In 1976, she was displaced from Damour due to the civil war in Lebanon, and lost her house, village, and all her literary work and manuscripts. She faced this cruel situation stoically by saying: "I can rewrite all that was lost and destroyed" (Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib, 2006, p. 15). Her mind always overpowered her emotions. According to Emily Nasrallah, a chronicler of the lives of pioneering Arab women in education, what helped her to achieve this was her Sufi beliefs.⁹

Later on when she had to move to her solitary final refuge in Yasou' Al-Malak Convent, she again had to face a situation filled with loneliness and seclusion, but her passion for writing and work helped her to alleviate this solitude. During an interview for *An-Nahar* newspaper on August 12, 2000, Rose was asked whether a woman who is in her nineties would still be interested in writing.

She answered with an assertive confirmation that she was in the process of reorganizing all her work and that she still had some unpublished manuscripts that she needed to submit. Work for Rose meant life, and life in her definition meant: "Growth, a continuous growth in knowledge and experience. Every night I ask myself what I gained today and what I lost. Life is a struggle for achieving enlightenment, experience, and knowledge" (Aad, 2000, p. 17).¹⁰

Describing the work of Rose Ghurayyib, the novelist Emily Nasrallah states: "Rose Ghurayyib dedicated her life to work." In Nasrallah's opinion, Ghurayyib covered mainly three major fields: Creative teaching and education, women's issues, and literary work. Rose loved her mother tongue, the Arabic language, and worked hard to make this language appreciated and loved by her students. To this end she published many reading and grammar books for the elementary level. Moreover, her love of folklore and children's literature marks her as a pioneer in writing for youth and young children. She left behind a rich collection of stories, poetry, music books, and plays - more than 70 books (Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib, 2006, pp. 13-14).

This voluminous production was not offered to Ghurayyib on a silver plate; Ghurayyib had to struggle to overcome the many obstacles that faced her. All who knew Rose know for a fact that she never depended on anyone to handle her accounts or to carry out any legal matter related to her books on her behalf. She rarely left the convent except to visit a publishing house to demand her copyrights or to negotiate the printing of a new book. She was in constant struggle with some dishonest publishers who denied her copyright to her work. Henri Zoghaib, a Lebanese writer and poet, highlighted this struggle by stating that "Rose's distress was mainly due to the fact that she gave the publishers a lot of bread but gathered only crumbs" (Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib, 2006, p. 22). Emily Nasrallah, Anissa Najjar, and Nafissa Al-Rifai all witnessed and confirmed her long agony with the different publishing houses. She passed away not knowing who the faithful guardian of this heritage will be.

Rose Ghurayyib never liked the idea of people receiving awards or superficial credit for their work. She turned down every invitation that had such a purpose. According to Nasrallah, her friends and students always had to come up with substantial excuses to get her to attend any event, especially if she suspected that it was in her honor (Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib, 2006). To this effect, Najjar commented: "Rose ... loved, observed, criticized, appreciated, and advised her friends and those in her entourage; but it was hard for her to handle her society's mistakes" (Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib, 2006, p. 17).

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Though she tried hard to escape ceremonies held in her honor, she was awarded the Medal of the Association of University Graduates in Lebanon, 1968; the Cedar Order, 1971; and the Gold Medal for Education, 1980. At the commemoration of Rose Ghurayyib held by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World on March 23, 2006, Dr. Joseph G. Jabbara, President of the Lebanese American University, said:

May the memory of Rose Ghurayyib continue to be an everlasting inspiration for all of us. May her achievements in life continue to be a source of pride for all of us and for LAU, and may her extraordinary life continue to be a cause of celebration for this well-knit extended family that we call LAU (*Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib*, 2006, p. 11).

BOX

Rose Ghurayyib's key works:

Al-Naqd al-Jamali wa Athaurhu fi al-Naqd al-'Arabi (Aesthetic Criticism in Arabic Literature), 1952.

Jibran fi Atharihi al-Kitabiyya (Impact of Gibran's Literature), 1969.

Tamhid fi al-Naqd al-Hadith (Modern Literary Criticism), 1971.

Mai Ziyadeh:al- Tawahuj wa al-'uful (A Biography of May Ziadeh), 1978.

Nasamat wa A'asir fi al-Shi'r al-Nisa'i al-'Arabi al-Mu'asir (Contemporary Arab Women Writers and Poets), 1980.

Adwa' 'Ala al-Haraka al-Nisaiyyah al-Mu'asirah (Contemporary Feminist Movement in the Arab World), 1988.

Fi 'Alam Jibran (In the World of Gebran), 2000.

Fi Mindhar al-Naqd (Critical Perspective), 2001.

Endnotes

1. Interview conducted in Arabic on August 30, 2000 and translated into English by the author.
2. Lebanese American University. Formerly Beirut University College (1974-1994), Beirut College for Women (1950-1974), and American Junior College for Women (1924-1950).
3. In those days a high school honors graduate with five years of teaching experience used to be admitted to the sophomore class after passing a special entrance examination.
4. Recipient of both the Scholarship Cup, the highest academic record of the year, and the Torch, the highest award bestowed on the ideal college student.
5. Winifred Shannon, Acting President of the American Junior College for Women 1935-1937.
6. Salwa Nassar Ph.D., a distinguished AJCW alumna (1933) and former President of the Beirut College for Women (1965-1967).
7. All quotes and information taken from the booklet *Natadhakar Rose Ghurayyib* were translated into English by the author.
8. Marie Aziz Sabri Ph.D., distinguished AJCW alumna (1941) and former Acting President of Beirut College for Women (1967-1969).
9. A Sufi is a seeker of the ultimate truth. Sufism is a mystic tradition of Islam encompassing a diverse range of beliefs and practices dedicated to Allah/God.
- 10 The quote from *An-Nahar* newspaper was translated into English by the author.

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Homage to Rose Ghurayyib

Julinda Abu Nasr

In our effort to pay homage to Rose Ghurayyib, we asked the first director of IWSAW, Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, a life long friend and colleague of the writer, to reflect on her relationship with the late Ghurayyib.

Rose was a very dear friend. We worked closely together for more than a decade and remained friends until she died. Prior to meeting her, I had already learned a lot about her from my mother who had taught her as a student at the American Evangelical School in Sidon.

According to my mother, Rose was diligent, hardworking, a perfectionist and one of the most intelligent students she had ever taught. When Rose transferred to an American school from a French school, she did not know any English. However, by the end of the year she earned the highest score in the whole school on the English test. Unlike other students, Rose spent recess time reading or studying or consulting her dictionary to accelerate the learning process.

As a young person she wanted to become a nun but her mother would not allow it. Her desire to study medicine was also blocked by her parents, hence she opted for Arabic literature. This decision may be considered a blessing since she excelled in literature thus enriching the Arab library with her literary contributions.

Rose had difficulty communicating with her parents and people in general. Even though she was loved and appreciated by many, she was a loner and hardly accepted social invitations or paid visits to anyone. She felt that these activities were a waste of time, and was very suspicious of many. She was reserved in showing her feelings or opening up to people, a drawback in her social relations which she regretted in the last year of her life when she was bedridden with a broken hip. I recall her saying to me, "I do not know how to show my affection or appreciation to people who love me. I was lucky to have so many friends who genuinely cared and supported me but I regret that I did not know how to reciprocate."

Our friendship developed when she came to live at the Beirut University College after she was displaced from her home during the 1975 war that devastated Lebanon. Rose occupied a small apartment in Shannon Hall above the offices of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World directly across from the apartment where I lived. As the director of the Institute at the time, I was in the process of recruiting an editor for *Al-Raida*. It was our luck that Rose accepted to assume full responsibility for the task. She produced *Al-Raida*, single handed, in English and Arabic, as writer, researcher, and editor. It was smaller in size than it is now, but she managed to turn it into a scholarly publication on Arab women that attracted a lot of subscribers from East and West. Over and above she helped in translating documents, articles, and conference proceedings in addition to the research she conducted on Arab women that culminated in three books, *Mai Ziyadeh:al- Tawahuj wa al-'uful*, *Nasamat wa A'asir fi al-Shi'r al-Nisa'i al-'Arabi al-Mu'asir*, and

Adwa' 'Ala al-Haraka al-Nisaiyyah al-Mu'asirah. She did all this for half a salary in appreciation for the college which gave her lodging when she was displaced. As if all this work was not enough to pay her debt, she donated to the University a sum of money as well as all her books and manuscripts.

Working at the Institute was a continuation of a mission Rose had started many years before. She was a pioneer in the struggle for women's freedom and a feminist who had written extensively on women's liberation and women's rights. She struggled to empower women and alert them to the need for rebelling against inherited stereotypes that enslaved them. In her essays that appeared regularly in daily newspapers and women's magazines, she tackled issues of women's oppression, exploitation in society, at work, and within the family. She urged women and men to take immediate action to change prevalent conditions that kept women in the abyss of ignorance. Rose left a rich literary inheritance in books and articles on women's issues.

In her dealings with people, Rose was very modest and so was her lifestyle. Despite being considered an outstanding writer who was honored and decorated on several occasions, she never felt special. She considered herself first and foremost a teacher, and she was an excellent teacher. Rose was very knowledgeable and creative. She could converse on a variety of topics in three languages and never hesitated to write a poem, a play, a jingle or a rhyme at a very short notice in any of the three languages she had mastered, namely English, French, and Arabic. Rose was an avid reader and a prolific writer who was very critical of her achievements and felt uncomfortable when praised. She was always striving for higher levels of excellence.

Although she looked austere, Rose was very sensitive, caring, loving and tender. She was able to relate to children and young people with ease. She enjoyed their company, identified with them and took pleasure in telling them stories and writing for them. Her contribution to children's books exceeds 110 stories in addition to songs, plays, poems, and rhymes. *Alnakd al Jamali*, a book on literary criticism for adults is considered a classic in the field, and her translation of Nadia Tuweini's difficult poetry from French to Arabic is a masterpiece.

Forgiveness was another characteristic of hers. She never held a grudge against anyone, not even those who were responsible for her displacement and the destruction of her house. Her rich library with choice books was looted and so were all her belongings, including two manuscripts that were ready for print. Her reaction was, "Thank God the library was stolen and not burnt down. At least I know that the books are being read and are of use to someone." Although she knew who took it, she was willing to forgive and forget.

According to those who were at her bedside when she passed away, Rose left this world in peace with herself and the world. She was surrounded by people who loved her and took good care of her. Her last words were, "Love is happiness." With the departure of Rose, I lost a dear friend from whom I learned a lot and whom I will surely miss.

Because I am a girl, I must study

A father asks his daughter:
Study: why should you study?
I have sons aplenty who can study
Girl, why should you study?

The daughter tells her father:
Since you ask, here's why I must study.
Because I am a girl, I must study.

Long denied this right, I must study
For my dreams to take flight, I must study
Knowledge brings new light, so I must study
For the battles I must fight, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study.

To avoid destitution, I must study
To win independence, I must study
To fight frustration, I must study
To find inspiration, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study.

To fight men's violence, I must study
To end my silence, I must study
To challenge patriarchy I must study
To demolish all hierarchy, I must study.
Because I am a girl, I must study.

To mould a faith I can trust I must study
To make laws that are just, I must study
To sweep centuries of dust, I must study
To challenge what I must, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study.

To know right from wrong, I must study.
To find a voice that is strong, I must study
To write feminist songs I must study
To make a world where girls belong, I must study.
Because I am a girl, I must study.

Retrieved from <http://www.gmc.ge/images/PDF/BuLletin2006-9E.pdf> Accessed October 20, 2006.

The Marie Bashir Scholarship Award

In 2005 the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) received a scholarship for post-graduate studies from the Governor of New South Wales in Australia, Her Excellency Dr. Marie Bashir. The scholarship, which amounted to 25,000 Australian dollars, was to be offered to a young female Lebanese LAU student to pursue her studies in Australia for the academic year 2006. Dr. Abdallah Sfeir, Vice President for Academic Affairs, formed a search committee that was composed of the following faculty members: Dr. Tarik Mikdashi, Dean of the Business School, Beirut campus, Dr. Mars Semaan, Dean of Students, Byblos campus, Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, Director of IWSAW and Dr. Victor Khachan, Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Byblos campus. Drs. Dabbous-Sensenig and Khachan developed selection criteria based on the applicant's academic excellence, namely her GPA, English language proficiency as well as immediate commitment to the scholarship. Three applicants were short listed and interviewed. Nohad Mouawad was chosen to receive the scholarship given that she had the highest GPA, spoke and wrote English impeccably and showed great commitment to the scholarship. The following piece written by the scholarship recipient, describes Mouawad's experience as a graduate student in Australia.

My Australian Experience

Nohad Mouawad

Nohad Mouawad, an LAU Communication Arts graduate, is the recipient, through the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, of the Marie Bashir Scholarship Award.

When I graduated from LAU with a BA in Communication Arts (Radio/TV/Film) I honestly had no clue what I was going to do next. I had directed my play and my film, completed two internships, and now I was a fresh graduate trying to find her place in the field. I had found my experience at Lebanese TV stations somewhat limited so I tried my hand at event planning. This experiment proved interesting and entertaining but also quite tiring and stressful. And, I was eager to return to media practice. So, when I learned that I had been granted a scholarship to study Professional Communication in Australia, I was very excited.

I didn't know what to expect when I embarked upon my journey to Sydney. All I had in my mind were vague images of the Opera House, Harbor Bridge, and kangaroos leaping through the desert. The country, however, proved to be much more than I could have imagined. First of all, my program and campus involved many international students from countries as diverse as Sweden and Mexico. From my first day of orientation I was exposed to different cultures and attitudes. I got the chance to see that although my friends' backgrounds differed from mine we could all enjoy each other's company and find many traits in common. Second of all, I discovered that Australia had endless amounts of sites to see — both natural and man-made. The country is full of interesting architecture, wondrous plants, and bizarre animals — enough to keep me entertained for at least two semesters. Finally, the MA in Professional Communication program proved to be far more challenging than I expected. Most of the students in my classes were from Canada and had a great deal of experience in PR and marketing. This gave them a competitive edge

over me, since I had very little business experience. However, I was soon able to get up-to-speed on the terminology and learn from their examples and projects. I tried my best to always contribute to class discussions by drawing on whatever experience I had had in the fields of media and event management. I also had to read extra

material relating to marketing and the latest trends. By the end of my first semester I had contributed to developing a full-scale integrated marketing communications plan that could be presented to a corporate client (fictional in this case) and done my own analysis of an Australian brand.

The two theoretical classes that I took — *Transnational Communication* and *Media and Audience* — I found to be continuations of the courses I completed at LAU, such as *Media and Society* and *International Communication*. I felt well prepared for the class discussions because of the wealth of readings I had been exposed to at LAU. Additionally, my practical experience in radio and television production gave me a different perspective on topics such as audience theory.

Overall, my Australian experience changed me for the better. I have developed a greater degree of independence, deeper knowledge of the media practice, skills in corporate communication, and a broader perspective of the world's cultures. The best part of my trip to Sydney has been that I have been able to combine studying and academic learning with travel and meeting new people. I would have to say that I learned as much snorkeling on the Great Barrier Reef as I did writing a paper on audience theory. All of these elements combined have made studying in Australia a time in my life that I will never forget, and my degree has actually changed my career-path. I now look forward to either finding a job in public relations or corporate communications or continuing my experience in broadcast television.



Nohad Mouawad