

1984, the Beginning of a New World Communication Order?

Last year was declared by the UN General Assembly and by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as World Communication Year.

Talking about World Communication leads us to mention the First Conference of Non-Aligned Information Ministers (COMINAC) which was held on the 26th of January 1984 in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Addressing the delegates, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi expressed the hope that the Non-Aligned Information Ministers Conference would help "decolonize" news. What Mrs. Gandhi meant was that Third World Nations should reduce their dependence on the international news agencies and call for a "new world information and communication order based on justice and equality".

According to the Indian Prime Minister, non-aligned countries should be conscious of the "special contribution that the media can make to development and social change, they should also try and learn from one another's experience more than from that of affluent societies".

We at the Raida have been aware of the importance and necessity of improving communications not only with local women's organizations and individuals, here and in the Arab World, but also with all our readers wherever they may be.

Moreover, and throughout the past, we have become aware of the increasing trend towards media saturation and of the way public life is starting to invade the hours, days and weeks of the individual's private world.

We have also noticed how the media tend to encourage a consumer mentality by advocating the "good life" but also failing to provide the means and methods to achieve it, let alone the capacity to be able to criticise it. This we believe is particularly true for women who are often lured by the media to live lives that do not correspond to their social or economic reality. In addition is the fact that images of women in the written press, television and popular fiction are usually that of passive, dependent creatures with few concerns except within the domestic or romantic spheres. It is not surprising then to find more and more women in the Arab and Western World who are trying to counterbalance this image by producing their own magazines, journals, radio, TV programmes and establishing their own publishing houses.

We do hope that the articles we have included will help start a dialogue between us and our readers, not only about the role of women in the media but in all spheres of their lives. In this present issue of Al-Raida we focus on some of the problems Arab women encounter with the media in their countries.

In order to start this dialogue, which we believe is essential to a New World Communication order, we have added a new section to our journal entitled "Open Forum". This is a section open to all our readers who wish to voice their ideas, write their commentaries, suggestions or articles on any issue pertaining to women, preferably Arab ones.

Write to us and you'll be heard.

Wafa' Stephan

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H.R.H. Princess Wijdan Ali of Jordan

The National Gallery of Jordan celebrated its fifth anniversary on the 7th of February 1984. Founded in 1979 by the Royal Society of Fine Arts, the Gallery's main objective is to be a pioneer of the arts not only in Jordan but also in the rest of the Arab world.

The president and founder of the Royal Society of Fine Arts is H.R.H. Princess Wijdan Ali, an eminent artist herself.

Born in 1939, Princess Wijdan completed her graduate studies at Beirut College for Women (Beirut University College today)- in history and politics. Since the 1960's her canvasses have figured in both group and one-person exhibitions in many European, Arab, and Third World countries.

Her paintings are distinguished by strength, tranquility, brilliance and intensity. Her favorite subject is the desert which she has been painting for the last 4 years and which she finds always fascinating.

During the winter holidays, our co-editor had the opportunity to meet Princess Wijdan at her office in the Gallery and recorded with her the following interview.

Q: Y.R.H., who was behind the idea of creating a gallery of Fine Arts in Jordan?

A: This idea has been with me for a long time, since 1970. In 1972, the Royal Council of Fine Arts was formed. Our plans were very big and our main aim was to create the National Gallery.

We first had a "Fine Arts Week" with a jewelry exhibition, a mosaic exhibition, a fine arts ball, a play in Jerash where the mosquitos attacked all the spectators and a folklore evening at the Amphitheatre, all to raise funds. But no matter how hard we worked it was hard to get the necessary money. I realized our plans were far too grandiose to be implemented then and there, so these things were left alone until 79.

Q: What happened in 1979 so that it was possible to implement your idea ?

A: In 79, we founded the Royal Society of Fine Arts and this time I had learnt my lesson. We started very soon and rented this building. We had a collection of works that the Society



owned at the time of the opening. The rest of the works were on loan from the Pakistani Government, because the main collection of the Gallery is of contemporary Islamic artists. Soon we were able to expand very rapidly. In 1982, our collection had grown from 70 to over 100 works.

The Gallery officially opened in 1980 and despite all the difficulties, mainly financial, we have been growing. We've built the 2nd floor last year and since the opening we were able to hold over 30 exhibitions, some of them international ones.

Q: What were these exhibitions?

A: We had a contemporary French works exhibit, all originals (dating 1960-1980). The Minister of Culture at that time (under President Giscard d'Estaing), told me they had never sent such an exhibition to any 3rd World country. We had a Turkish exhibition on the history of modern Turkish art in the 20th century. It was held to commemorate the centennial anniversary of Kamal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey.

We had a wonderful Iraqi exhibition. The Iraqi

government was kind enough to donate half the exhibited work (16 pieces) to the Gallery. We also held a Tunisian exhibition, a British sculptor's exhibition with Henry Moore's work. Barbara Hepworth's work was also among the works that came here.

Q: How would you describe this Gallery?

A: This is a museum, don't look at the size. It is a small museum and it's unique in its kind in any Third World Country. It is the only collection of modern contemporary Islamic artists work in this part of the world and we refuse to accept any second rate exhibit.

Q: What do you mean by Islamic works?

A: When we say Islamic countries we mean in the cultural and geographical sense, as it used to be before.

Many people come here and expect to see Islamic works in the classical sense. What we would like to have is a collection of work coming from countries where Muslims live, like Indonesia, Malaysia. Our aim really is to have a Third World Gallery, a National Gallery for Third World artists because this does not exist anywhere.

Q: How do you go about collecting the works. Do you do it in person?

A: I do it myself and the director of the Gallery, Mr. Suheil Bisharat,⁽¹⁾ does it as well. Believe me, I don't pass any opportunity without getting good works for the Gallery. There are different methods.

The main one is that I know very many artists through my travels and contacts. Some of them I don't know personally but I know of their work. So I contact them by letter. Most of them donate one work for the Gallery, others donate one and we buy one. Very few really only sell their work.

Q: What are the criteria of your choice of paintings for the Gallery?

A: The Gallery being a museum, I have to forget first of all my personal likes and dislikes.

This is a museum and it has to show the best. In some countries where there is an established arts movement it is not difficult to choose because the good artists are well known. In other countries where the arts movement is only beginning to flourish, I buy the best of what exists.

Q: Do you have many women artists' work in the Gallery?

A: We have a very big number of women painters in our collection. There is Suha Nursi, Samia Zaru, Mona Saudi (Jordan and Palestine), Naziha Selim and Suha Youssef (Iraq), Helen Khaal and Juliana Seraphim (Lebanon). We also have women artists from Pakistan.

Q: As a woman artist, how do you view the state of the arts in Jordan and in the Arab World in General?

A: I don't believe there is a woman artist and a man artist. There are good artists and bad artists. This is what I believe in regardless. Like a writer, there is a good writer and a bad writer. I don't believe in putting dividing lines between female and male criteria. As for the scene in the Arab World, it's really accelerating very fast and I predict that in ten years time Arab artists will have quite an impact internationally. Unfortunately Third World artists are not usually recognized internationally until they leave their country and adopt a Western country as their own. But in 10 years time this scene has got to change.

Q: As an artist how did you start, why did you want to be a painter?⁽²⁾

A: I don't know why I wanted to be a painter. Actually it is a difficult question. I used to come to Jordan on holidays from Beirut where I was studying history and politics. I had a teacher at high school who was French, she was a painter too. She suggested we should have conversation in French then try painting. Since then I found I was more at ease painting than doing anything else. Anyway, I discovered quite late in life that if one can, one should do what one wants to do, not what your family, society or friends want you to do.

I was a business woman. I sold my business and gave all my time and energy to art and I'm happy this way. I'm not making money but I'm happy.

Q: How do you manage to do all the things you do? To be the President of the Royal Society of Fine Arts, a painter, a wife, a mother anda princess?

A: I'll tell you how I manage. I am not a socialite. I have no social life as such. I get up early in the morning and paint from 7:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Normally, when my husband comes home at 2 p.m., I'm with him and the children till 7 p.m. I have four children. I help them, especially my young son, with their homework. We have an early dinner and I write at night after the

children go to bed. The person who has really helped me a lot is my husband. He's a rare specimen among oriental men. He doesn't impede my work and respects my privacy.

Q: You mentioned writing. What kind of writing is it?

A: Being the President of the Royal Society of Fine Arts, I've been asked to give several conferences on art, Islamic art especially. I usually prepare my papers for that. Now, I'm working on a series of books on Islamic Civilisation for Children. It takes lots of research work and you have to give children the facts as they are without trying to direct their taste or way of thinking.

I also just completed a research in Arabic on the "Rights of Women in Islam" It has not been published yet.

When I finish with the series of books for children I intend to join Istanbul University to complete my post-graduate studies in Islamic Art History.

Q: Back to the Gallery now. In what direction would you like to see it going?

A: I would like a bigger building and a bigger

collection and to have space and means to expand what we have put down on paper.

I would like to expand our Reference Library on Art and Architectural Books, give more lectures at the Gallery, have more art educational programs for children and to send more of our local artists to study abroad through scholarships. I would also like to see a housing project, a small village for artists where they can live there. They would pay for their houses on a soft-loan sort of program. I would like to see social security given to artists. I've talked to the Minister about this and he's promised me that within two years this would be achieved.

(1) **Suhail Bisharat** is a prominent Jordanian artist who developed a highly original and individual technique. He uses a mixture of coffee and gold to paint with. His works can be seen in the Gallery too.

(2) Some of Princess Wijdan's work can be seen in the Gallery. The technique she uses is one she has developed herself. She works with a palette knife in vertical and horizontal movements in layers of colours. Most of her canvasses are big and depict the desert at different seasons and moods.

OPEN FORUM

Lettre a une Jeune Consoeur

For this first issue of Open Forum, we have asked well-known poet and journalist Claire Gebeyli (see Al-Raida, Nov. 1, 1983, p. 5) to write a piece of advice to a young woman journalist.

Claire's language is so beautifully poetic that it would have been an injustice to translate it into English.

Investir dans l'éphémère, dépendre du fugitif faut-il vraiment aimer ce métier pour accepter qu'un texte publié le matin ne soit plus d'actualité le soir! Que de fois en terminant un article n'ai-je eu sous la langue ce goût âcre qui marque les gestes que la raison conteste ...

Oui, il faut beaucoup aimer ce métier pour continuer ce vol de libellule, fugace et pathétique, au dessus du présent; poursuivre une carrière qui en fait est un défi au temps; accepter ce duel où fatalement on ne peut être vainqueur

Mais pourquoi commencer cet aperçu sur une note négative? Peut-être pour souligner combien le journalisme exige une vocation ou encore pour rappeler que contrairement à d'autres professions il

faut beaucoup de détermination pour suivre ce sentier de l'écriture.

Il semble déplacé et ridicule d'établir ici des règles du "savoir écrire" ou de "l'art d'informer". Il existe des thèses et des bouquins pour remplir bien mieux que moi ce rôle initiateur. Ainsi en m'adressant à d'éventuelles futures collègues je ne voudrais offrir que quelques vieilles clefs qui m'ont servi de guide au cours de ces années d'exercice.

"Ouvrier de la plume". Le terme paraît bizarre? Il sous entend pourtant ce que pour moi semble être en principe de base: le souci du travail bien fait et par ricochet le "respect du lecteur".

"Mille fois sur le métier tu remets ton ouvrage". Le vieil adage retrouve ici son sens le

plus total: s'informer avant d'essayer d'informer les autres. Fuir l'approximatif. La notion confuse. Le brouillard dans sa propre connaissance.

La tentation est grande pour celui qui se trouve en possession d'une tribune (et l'imprimé en est une) de se sentir au-dessus de la mêlée. De s'arroger le droit d'imposer aux autres son regard.

Pour s'attribuer, pourtant, ce privilège que de travail, que de maîtrise de soi, que d'humilité ne sont nécessaires. Chaque fait, chaque point doit être vérifié, inspecté, examiné. Chaque idée passée au tamis, chaque phrase scrutée à la loupe ... Doubter, donc, de soi? Reviser inlassablement ses propres connaissances? Sans nul doute. Car pour avoir droit à la confiance il faut bien la mériter. Le lecteur est un juge implacable. S'il attrape en faute celui qui prétend savoir plus long que lui, il ne pardonne jamais l'imposture.

Toujours sur le qui vive, donc Comme si à chaque instant on passe un examen de passage. Ne jamais se dire que se public "ne verra que du feu" en noyant sa propre incertitude dans des fioritures de style ou un océan de paroles Le dédain du public et la méséstime de son pouvoir d'évaluation témoignent d'une malhonnêteté intellectuelle aussi méprisable que la friponnerie du plus vulgaire des voleurs.

Et l'originalité, alors? Le sceau personnel? La spontanéité dans l'expression? Autant d'atouts au service de la vérité. Autant d'armes au service d'une cause. Celui qui possède le talent d'écrire peut donner une auréole à la plus inerte des matières. À condition que cette matière soit authentique. Le peintre d'une "nature morte" en fait un chant de vie et le musicien des bruits confus, une harmonie céleste. C'est là où intervient l'alchimie créatrice et c'est en maniant ces outils invisibles que le journaliste rejoint l'écrivain et la grande famille de l'art....

Dur, ingrat, astreignant, le métier d'informer? Oui, certes. Mais aussi plein de joies, de compensations, de satisfactions profondes.

Quelle chaleur au fond du cœur, en effet, quand on réussit à établir avec le lecteur ce pont d'amitié, cette complicité tacite qui est un vrai pacte de fraternité humaine.

Je me dis souvent que si je devais résumer ma démarche professionnelle dans un seul vœu je n'hésiterais pas à demander la grâce d'enfermer dans mes écrits ce cri poussé par toutes les bouches. Car ce n'est qu'ainsi que le journaliste donne un sens à sa mission et tend un miroir à son époque. C'est sa revanche contre la précarité de son métier, la récompense de ce vol de libellule

sanctionné par les minutes qui passent. Le fait de se fondre dans son public pour devenir sa voix, son porte-parole, n'est-il pas un privilège qui vaut tous les sacrifices?

Elaborer d'avantage? À quoi bon Il en est de la soif d'écrire comme de toutes les impulsions. On n'attend pas les directives des autres pour se jeter sur une source fraîche ou l'expérience d'autrui avant de répondre à l'appel qui jaillit du fond de soi-même. Celle qui porte en elle le grain trouvera toujours moyen de répandre la semence. Les avertissements, les mises en garde, les modes d'emploi tendus devant elle ne feront que stimuler sa volonté....

Et c'est peut-être dans cette intention que j'écris ces lignes.

Car malgré les difficultés et les servitudes, les obstacles dressés dans un milieu où les femmes doivent lutter âprement pour leur place au soleil, où chaque pause signifie une mort dans les mémoires, je choisirais pour conclure les vers d'Éluard: "Et si c'était à refaire, je referais ce chemin". Pouce par pouce et centimètre par centimètre

CLAIRE GEBEYLI

Information and Propaganda

One of our political leaders once declared that propaganda may have a stronger effect on people than the atomic bomb. He meant that whether propaganda takes the form of true or false information, it can play a highly significant role in shaping public opinion; in other words, in shaping people's minds and attitudes as a whole.

In our days information is no more static. It has become a dynamic tool, a powerful force widening its sphere through swift and easy communication; making its way into every place and locality. It thus travels, and from local information may in the long run become so widespread that it would exert its influence on the minds of world leaderships as well as on the world inhabitants everywhere.

As for propaganda, its influence is hard to remove, especially when ordinary or common people are subjected to it, and common people form the majority in every country. Propaganda thus becomes a force for peace or for war, for good or for evil, for construction or for destruction.

Nations today are so interdependent culturally, economically and politically that they recognize the importance of information transmitted to them and about them. They insist that it be true and well founded.

I believe that shaping of public or world opinion depends on information which may be accurate and trustworthy or false and misleading. The importance of information has recently made it a science for which a new term, "informatique" has been coined. This science aims to study the technological and psychological methods which help make communications quick and accurate.

In Lebanon, the newly established **Center of Automatic Information** (Nov. 1983) reveals the concern of this country for the subject. For having been since time immemorial, a crossroads of cultures due to its strategic geographical position, Lebanon is also trying to become a crossroads for information. In fact, the large number of newspapers published daily in the country in Arabic, French and English, and the even greater number of weekly magazines belonging to different

religious, political, cultural or social groups well illustrate this trend.

It may be appropriate to add here that it has been the policy of Al-Raida to offer what it considers to be true and unbiased information about a specialized and most important topic: "Women in the Arab World".

We at Al-Raida try as much as we can to transmit regionally and internationally a better understanding of the Arab woman, her traditional role, her place in today's society and her aspirations and potential for the future.

Following the Lebanese policy of openness to cultures, we intend to keep working towards a better understanding between women and men in Arab countries as well as to participate in moving public opinion towards the adoption of stands which might help develop world cooperation and understanding.

It is an ambitious plan but we hope that our efforts, no matter how small and limited, will not fail to have some effect.

Rose Ghurayyib

TRAVEL REPORTS

Report on a Research Trip

Between September and December of 1983 sponsored by a Fulbright award, I visited seven African and North African countries conducting interviews with women from various social classes, occupations and experiences. I also contacted the various women's associations in the countries. The aim of this trip was to reassess the position of women and the women's associations in the different countries as well as to collect material, published and unpublished data, and literature. I now have about 60 (1½ hour) tape recording of interviews in Arabic, English, French and Wolof with women, and sometimes men, speaking about the pressing issues facing women today, or discussing their lives. I also took many photographs and travelled with two assistants provided by the University of Illinois, one for the Anglophone

countries, the other for the Francophone ones. Both women had been co-conveners of the **Common Differences: Third World Women and Feminist Perspectives** conference held at the University of Illinois last Spring.

In Egypt the feminist writer and physician Nawal el Saadawy provided me with contacts with women from a variety of backgrounds. Through her and other contacts I was able to interview novelists and journalists such as Ekbal Baraka, Mona Hilmi and Fathiya Al-Assal as well as business women, doctors, nurses and maids.

In Sudan we were the guests of Ahfad University College for Women in Omdurman. Amina Badri, a professor at the college, wife of the dean and an active member of the Bubaker Association for Women's Studies, arranged for us

to meet a variety of women. Thanks to this very efficient woman we were able to study an excellent cross-section of women's roles in Sudanese society. It was one of the most productive stops of the trip. We met with many of the students and classes and gave several lectures at the College. The Bubaker Association has been very active in bringing to the rural areas of Sudan much needed medical, literacy, and hygiene programs. The Association is also conducting an energetic campaign there and in the cities for the eradication of sexual mutilations.

In the Ivory Coast and Senegal, we had several meetings with university officials. We contacted **Amina Traoré**, professor at the **Institut d'Ethno-Sociologie of the University of Abidjan**, and a well-known feminist. I met with **Awa Thiam**, professor and researcher at the **University of Dakar**, editor of the journal **Femmes et Sociétés**, author of **La Parole est aux Nègresses**, and activist against sexual mutilations. We went to a village in the bush with one of my former students, **Molly Melching**, now working for AID. We conducted interviews in the village in Wolof with the help of Molly. In Dakar and in Abidjan we also had several interviews with women from different classes of the population.

In Morocco we were met by the "**Groupe Etude-Féminine**" in Casablanca. Two work-groups were created in January 1983 through cultural associations in Casa. The aim of these groups is to analyze the condition of Moslem-Arab women in general and of Moroccan women in particular and to try to bring to light the reasons for their millennial slavery. Some of their activities were centered around the cultural week of March 8, 1983 and included many discussions on women and the personnel code, employment, teaching, militant Palestinian women, women and cinema etc. Their projects for 1984 are a book and cinema etc. **and the Election**, (a book which will be in Arabic and for which they are looking for a publisher), and studies on prostitution, publicity, and popular songs. We had many important meetings and discussions with these women, separately and as a group.

We also met with **Souad Filal** and the other members of the "**Groupe de Recherche sur la Femme et L'Enfant**". We visited and interviewed women in Rabat and Fez. I was able to go with two nurses to the "bidonville" of Casa and talk to some of the women from the poor districts. **Fatima Mernissi**, the well-known feminist writer and author of **Beyond the Veil**, was out of the country.

In Algiers we met with a group composed of

literature and linguistic professors. They publish a journal called "**Kalim**" of scholarly articles, a good number of which are devoted to women and feminist issues. We had lengthy talks and interviews with two of the women novelists: **Yamina Mechakra**, author of **La Grotte Eclatée** and **Myriam Ben**, author of **Ainsi Naquit un Homme**, two books which I teach in my classes. We went to Oran and had meetings and discussions with the "**Groupe de Recherches sur la Femme Algérienne**". This group has been one of the most active groups in North Africa and the Arab world in terms of their research, publications and activities. For many years they have published **Isis**, a scholarly journal devoted to research on women which was printed through the University until last year. Recently they added a new publication, **Voix-là** which includes less academic material and gives "**Voices**" ("**Voix**" in French) to women from various strata of society and with different interests.

In Oran we conducted interviews with the maids and cleaning women of the hotel where we were staying. Most of them were in a polygamous family setting and wore the veil to go outside. They all expressed the desire for their daughters to live differently.

In Tunisia we met the journalist **Amal Ben Aba** and other members of the "**Groupe d'Etudes de la Condition des Femmes**". We had an interview with **Jalila Hafsia**, director of the Club Taher Haddad and author of several books. The women we met there seemed the most free of all the women we met on the trip in terms of possibilities for expression, development, choices, and life-styles.



Group in Tunisia

The wealth of material collected throughout the trip should provide the information necessary to write articles and possibly books, which should come into existence in the coming years. Already "Les Cahiers du Griff", a feminist journal in Paris, has asked me to direct a special issue on Arab and African women for which I welcome any article. The issue is due to come out in 1985.

General observations resulting from the trip are that most of the women's associations are facing serious difficulties such as being directly forced to stop, or having to go underground, or having to assume all the responsibilities for their publications and distributions with practically no means, or existing in the fear of prosecution or persecution, or all of these combined.

As in most countries around the world, the women's movements are often accused of not being objective and of not being scientific enough, even when they are among the few in a University



Group in Morocco.

producing scientific research (the women in Oran are a good example). The temptation has often been to become assimilated into the dominant voice in order to avoid eradication. Fortunately, most of the women's movements have avoided this pitfall and have asserted themselves autonomously in the midst of tremendous trials.

In Egypt, a women's association started and headed by Nawal el Saadawy was stopped by the government.* In Senegal, the movement against sexual mutilations, with Awa Thiam as one of its

leaders, often comes under heavy attack by various African groups and individuals. In Morocco, the Groupe Etude Feminine and all of its activities were sharply criticized by the press which connected them with prostitutes and drug addicts! And finally in Oran (Algeria) the GRFA (Research Group for Algerian Women) was dismissed from the CRIDSSH (Center for Research and Information in Human Social Sciences) of the University of Oran (see the announcement in this issue).

Reasons for such difficulties will have to be analyzed within the whole economic, political, and social framework of the area under study. It is not, however, the aim of this report.

Other observations are that I found women eager to speak and to voice their problems. The various associations made it clear to me that they felt the need to create stronger ties with the various women's organizations throughout Africa and the Arab World; that it would strengthen them and make them feel less isolated in what they sometimes tend to see as their unique problem. Many expressed the need to find a platform to voice their difficulties, the means to publish their research, and to publicize their activities, especially when this seems impossible in their own country.

I wonder if Al-Raida and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) in Beirut could serve as this platform and link?

**

Evelyn Accad

** Evelyn Accad is a professor of comparative literature at Illinois University Champaign - Urbana. She is currently in Lebanon on a Fulbright Grant to teach Women's Studies at Beirut University College.

Author of books, studies and poems she travels extensively throughout the Arab World and Africa doing research on women. Her book, "L'Exilée" (see Al-Raida May, 1, 1983, p. 15), tells the story of a woman symbolically mutilated by religion and patriarchy. It has been very well received by critics and feminists alike.

Anyone wanting to contact Dr. Accad is welcome to do so at:

c/o BUC, P.O.Box: 13-5053
Beirut, Lebanon

* See Al-Raida, Aug. 1, 1983, p. 15.

Announcement fo GRFA

The GRFA (Research Group on Algerian Women) asked us to announce that they have been excluded from the CRIDSSH (Center for Human Social Sciences Research and Information). They were notified of this decision by the director of the CRIDSSH who wrote:

"... the direction of the CRIDSSH has decided that as far as it is concerned, it wants to stop the GRFA experience. Starting today the CRIDSSH disclaims any responsibility concerning the activities of this group and does not authorize it to use the CRIDSSH any longer." November 6, 1983.

The GRFA believes that its work must continue at any cost.

They are asking all those for whom their efforts make sense to show their solidarity:

—Any letter of solidarity for the GRFA would help.

— Texts (poems, essays, reviews, life stories) as well as research, are welcome and will be published in a new journal they are starting.

Their address from now on is: BP 17049, ORAN EL FETH, ALGERIA



GRFA: Group of Research on Algerian Women in Oran



In the bush in Senegal with Molly Melching

Impressions on a Trip to Egypt

Egypt, popularly known as the "Mother of the World", is one of the most fascinating countries of the Middle East. Not only does it contain great archeological treasures — dating back to Pharaonic, Coptic and Muslim times; it has also shaped modern Arab politics, literature, art, journalism and cinematography of this part of the world.

I have visited Egypt four times during the past twelve years, each time at a different season.

The last visit — **November 21-28, 1983** — was the most interesting one because I went not as a tourist, but as co-editor of *Al-Raida*, with the task of making contacts with various women who were involved in one way or another in the fight to improve women's status in Egypt. During this trip I also served as an observer at the MEAwards workshop, which was held in Cairo from the 25th to the 27th of November, and which focused on

the measurement of women's economic participation.⁽¹⁾

I was truly fortunate for I was able in a short time and at a very short notice sometimes, to meet many outstanding women in their homes, offices, universities and during coffee breaks at the workshop, and talk to them about their work, lives, struggles and attitudes towards the women's movement in Egypt and the Arab World.

The outcome of my meetings was enriching and exhilarating both on the personal and professional levels. I was struck by the courage and patience of Egyptian women and by their stubborn

(1) See the report on this workshop by IWSAW's official delegate, Nada Khuri, on p. 18 of this issue.

determination to balance successful careers with rewarding family lives. I was impressed by the pride with which Egyptian women talked about, defended and practiced Arab and Muslim values.

In the minds of most, there were no basic contradictions between being an authentic Arab woman and being "liberated." For these women, "liberation" meant first of all freedom of choice in careers and personal lives. It also meant respect for the family as an essential component of society. Belonging to closely-knit family units, they said, was an asset rather than an obstacle to "liberation". Many mentioned to me the encouragement they had and still have from their husbands, fathers, bosses or teachers. Such encouragement enabled them to pursue more easily the aims they set for themselves in life.

This is not to say that Egyptian women are not aware of discrimination, injustice or bias existing in their society. It simply reflects the fact that these women were not anti-religion, anti-family, etc. They believe that they should build their struggle for liberation on what is positive and worthwhile in society rather than complaining and criticising what is bad, without attempting to do anything about it on the practical level.

One successful example of this way of thinking was **Amina Said, the first professional woman journalist in Egypt**, who started her career as reporter in 1943 while pursuing her graduate studies in English Literature at Cairo University. Her late husband, Dr. Abdallah Zein el Abideen,

then her fiance, would cover up to her parents when she used to return home late at night from work at the newspaper. Dr. Abideen an eminent professor of agriculture at the University, also took a major share in raising their three children.

Now in her middle seventies, Amina Said is the first Egyptian woman to be **President of the Board of Directors of "Dar el Hillal"** a renowned and powerful publishing house in Egypt. At the end of our hour-long interview in her office she told me that she is not considering retirement and that she will only stop working on the day she dies. (2)

Amina Said was probably the most outstanding woman I met during my trip and one of the most admired women in Egypt.

As for the outcome of my other encounters with women, they will be published in the next issue of *Al-Raida*, which will concentrate mainly on Egyptian and North African women. You will learn about Ikbal (Baraka) Fathia (Al-Assal), Sakina (Fouad), Mona (el Hadidi) and other Egyptian women, you will discover what interesting and important things they are doing with their lives and for their country. My gratitude goes to all those who have been encouraging and helpful and interested in the work of the Institute.

W. Stephan

(2) Amina Said will be the pioneer of our next issue of *Al-Raida*.

MEDIA REPORTS

Arab Women and Media

The role Arab women play in the spoken, written and electronic media was the subject of a seminar organized by the **Union of Tunisian Women** in conjunction with UNESCO, in November 1983.

The seminar, held in Tunis, was attended by delegates from various Arab countries. It was chaired by **Mrs. Dardana Al-Masmoudi**, an executive committee member of the Union of

Tunisian Women, and an expert on media. The seminar centered on two main topics:

- The first was related to the **image of Arab women in the media**; and whether this image corresponds to the role women play within their families and in the cultural, social and economic life of their countries.
- The second topic centered on **Arab women's participation in the media**; as journalists in

newspapers and magazines, producers in radio and television, and authors of children's books and school-books.

"We have noticed that the number of women working in the media in Western countries as well as Arab ones has increased tremendously," said Mrs. Al-Masmoudi. In Lebanon and Egypt for instance — and they are countries with a long history of women's participation in the media — women form 20% of the total number of media workers. This is not a bad percentage she added, for in Western countries women's participation in the media does not exceed 40 percent.

In Tunis, according to a report presented by the Ministry of Information, the number of Tunisian women working in the media is 10 percent. The report also revealed that this percentage is rapidly increasing due to the fact that the number of women students enrolled in the **Press and News Institute** is augmenting rapidly.

Moreover, says Mrs. Al-Masmoudi, despite the increase in the number of women working in the media throughout the world, the image the media projects of women has not altered significantly. The reason, she adds, is due to the deeply anchored belief that women are less important than men. Unfortunately, this belief is perpetuated by most of the women working in the media themselves, and underscores the importance of our seminar in which we tried to warn media women not to work against their own interest nor the interest of their sisters. We are not calling for a conflict between men and women, declares Mrs. Al-Masmoudi, but for women in the media to realize the power they hold in their hands.

About the image the Tunisian media projects of women, Mrs. Al-Masmoudi believes that it is no different from the image that is projected by the media of other Arab countries. This is despite the fact that the Tunisian government has given women the same legal rights as men, since the independence of Tunis 27 years ago.

The reason Tunisian women have not tried to change the image the media projects about them, says she, is due to the fact that women in Tunis did not have to fight for equal rights, they were automatically given to them. It is only now that Tunisian women are realizing that the image they have does not truly reflect the real changes that occurred in their lives.

Before independence, affirms Mrs. Al-Masmoudi, Tunisian women were not educated, now they are. Before independence, only 2% of women were university students, now they form 25% of graduates and these graduates participate actively in public and economic life.

When asked about the role Arab women should play at home and in society she answered: "The problem is that of striking a balance between home responsibilities and work responsibilities. It is also a question of cooperation between men and women, for men have an important role to play at home and within the family ... The family will become unbalanced if we burden women alone with familial responsibilities."

"The changes that happened to the education of women in the Arab world and to their legal status necessitates a new framework for the organization of the Arab family," declares Mrs. Al-Masmoudi. The needed change is to give the man a role to play within his family in order to enable the woman to participate in work outside the home sphere, exactly like the man and with the same rights and duties.

The economic development happening in Tunis requires women to work outside the home, she said. For example, 60% of workers in the textile and food industries in the country are women.

In conclusion, Mrs. Al-Masmoudi commented on the role Arab women are allowed to play within the framework of the Islamic doctrines ("Shari'a") by saying:

"Islam acknowledges the right of women to education and does not state that women are not allowed to work. Islam also gives women the right to own property and to dispose of this property. So how can women work and study and buy and sell property if they are confined within four walls? Even those who follow the Islamic doctrine to the letter acknowledge the right of women to work and go out of the home to perform their social duties. . . On the condition that they wear clothes that preserve their modesty."

Algerian Women in Press and TV*

This article on the "Image of Woman in the Press and Television" begins by quoting two passages of the Algerian National Charter:

"The press, the radio, the television (...) will have to portray an attractive culture susceptible of satisfying the ideological and esthetic needs of the citizen, as well as raising his (her) intellectual level" (p. 69).

"Actions that will aim first of all to transform the mental and negative juridical environment, should intervene towards the betterment of woman's fate." (p. 72).

The Image of Woman in the Press

The magazines that are most read in Algeria, says Abdelkader Hammouche, are the French ones. These magazines convey an "absurd" image of women that does not correspond to the reality the majority of women live in. It only corresponds to the reality of women belonging to the privileged classes who are not at all representatives of the feminine condition in Algeria.

These women's magazines, the author adds, do not propose "reality" but "sentimental dreams" and "evasion". They portray woman as a seductress wholly concerned by love, submissive to man, and totally a political.

Moreover, these "foreign" revues do not only aim at making women dream and at distancing them from the "true" problems they confront, but they mainly "clamour" occidental clothes and products. This process is very successful in Algeria, he comments, because many of "our" women make regular trips abroad to renew their wardrobes in order to remain "eternally young and pretty".

Thus the feminine foreign press, he declares, is a "social product" carrying enormous economic interests, because it addresses itself to people to whom it denies simultaneously a "real and autonomous economic and social insertion."

The reasons why the foreign press has a considerable audience in Algeria says Hammouche, is because there is no local feminine press, except for the "El-Djazairia" revue. It is also because this foreign press proposes to woman a way of life that responds to her dreams. The culturally alienated woman, says he, easily and comfortably identifies herself with the "seductress image" whose life is

only concerned with beauty questions on one hand and with the universe of love and passion on the other.

The Image of Woman in Television

According to the author, the noticeable regression of book-reading, the loss of interest in movie houses and the general climate of insecurity have contributed to make television the most popular past-time in the country.

The question to be asked then, is whether the films shown on television respond rigorously to the imperatives of the Social Revolution as specified by the National Charter.

If we observe Algerian films, says Hammouche, we realize that they generally confine women either to the role of passive wives or to young girls waiting to be married. "It is not the woman as object that is portrayed in the foreign press but the woman as slave, the woman as childbearer".

In addition to local films, which are quite rare, there are the Egyptian serials and the foreign films. Most serials end with marriage. The life of women they portray is a never ending episode of rivalry and struggle to catch a man.

These television serials, says the author, are destined to women at home, making them accept their fate and sharpen their feelings, at the same time as making them dream of a glamorous life.

Exactly like the foreign revues, these films are conducive to amorous evasion. Many women identify themselves with the heroines. The true problems of women such as: professional activity, in political life, etc. are never mentioned.

Moreover, in those films the man does not confront the woman, he is rather her subject says Hammouche. The struggle of the sexes does not exist. The films portray a non-conflictual society in which the woman evolves in a "bourgeois"

* This is a translated and abridged version of an article written in French by Abdelkader Hammouche a jurist contributing to the Algerian Women's magazine, "Al-Djazairia."

It appeared in a special issue of the magazine which focused solely on the subject of "Woman and Culture". (La Femme et la Culture).

environment that tends to favor her role as mother-wife-childbearer.

The danger of these Egyptian serials, he concludes, is not only a moral one, but these serials also affect the mind, shaping it with a "bourgeois mould" that further renders inaccessible the equality between men and women.

Conclusion

One thing is certain says the author: "The written press as well as television in Algeria, do not correspond to the principles stated by the National Charter". The contradiction between the principles and the reality is blatant. On the political level, the Charter states clearly the vital necessity to "act" on the mentality of people in order to reflect the socialist principles that guide the country. Unfortunately, this is not what is happening on the practical level.

On the contrary, the Algerian television prepares people's mentality by deforming it. It does not address its programs to the rural or

working class woman but to the middle-class one, who is "fulfilled" by being submissive and idle. It addresses itself to the apolitical woman and not to the one who would like to participate fully in the political life of her country. In sum, the image of woman in television is a great "mystification".

As for the written press it also neglects women's causes, which explains the extreme slowness in which mentalities are changing towards an "authentic liberation of women".

What should be done, concludes Hammouche, is to encourage the creation of local women's magazines and "control" their content so they will not be swayed into "cultural alienation". Moreover, film producers should use local talents to write scripts and encourage all literary potentialities.

These are in brief some imperatives that should be taken to give a new dimension to Algerian culture in order to "remove" women from the cultural alienation they are subjected to since independence.

First Woman Information Minister in Jordan

Leila Sharaf, one of the most politically and socially active public figures in Jordan, was appointed Information Minister in the newly formed Jordanian Cabinet in January 1984. Who is this woman and how did she come to hold this important post?

A Short Biography*

- Leila Sharaf, born Najjar comes originally from Lebanon. She grew up there and completed her high-school education with the Lebanese and French Baccalaureat in the "Ahlieh" school in Beirut.
- Between the years 1962 and 1965 she worked, while studying at the University, as a news presentator on Lebanese television



* This short biography is based on 2 interviews made with Mrs. Leila Sharaf before she became Minister of Information. The articles can be found in:

— *Feyrouz* February 26, 1984, p. 76-77.

— *Sayidaty*, Vol. 3, No. 149, January 16-22, 1984, p. 20-23.

- She graduated in 1965 with a **Masters from the American University of Beirut**.
- During the same year, she married **Abdel Hamid Sharaf**, a colleague of her at University and one of the members of the Jordanian Royal Family.
- She moved with her husband to Jordan and during their first two years there, their first son, Nasser, was born.
- From 1965-67, her husband was appointed Minister of Information in Jordan.
- In June 1967, after the Arab-Israeli War, Abdel Hamid Sharaf was appointed Jordan's Ambassador to the U.S.A.
- During her five years stay in the USA as a diplomat's wife, Leila Sharaf became President of the **Islamic Women's Association**, which encouraged cultural and social exchange between Islamic and Western countries.
- She was also member of many diplomatic clubs which grouped wives of ambassadors and politicians in Washington.
- Leila Sharaf was also President of the **Cultural Islamic Association**, which organized seminars and cultural evenings in conjunction with the big universities and museums in the USA, like the Metropolitan Museum for instance.
- Mrs. Sharaf was also President of the American University of Beirut Alumni Chapter residing in North America, more than 3 thousand in number.
- In 1972, Abdel Hamid Sharaf was appointed Ambassador of Jordan at the United Nations and in 1976 the couple returned to Jordan where Abdel Hamid became President of the Royal Hachemite Council.
- In 1979, Mr. Sharaf became Prime Minister of Jordan till his untimely death in July 1980.
- Before and after her husband's death, Mrs. Sharaf remained active in the social and political spheres. In 1977 she founded the **Association for Cerebral Paralysis** and was its president for 2 years. She was also Vice President of the **Royal Jordanian Society for the Protection of the Environment**.
- At the time of her appointment as Minister of Information of Jordan, Mrs. Sharaf was Vice President of the Committee of the **Jerash Folkloric Festival**, a well known cultural artistic festival that takes place annually in the ancient city of Jerash in Jordan.
- Leila Sharaf has a second son, Fares, who is 13 years old.

- About her role as a mother Mrs. Sharaf says that she treats her two sons like friends and insists on respect and democratic discussions.
- **Her hobbies** are the theatre, classical music and reading. Her favorite books are political memoirs. The last book she read was **The World is made of Glass** by Morris West. Before that she read the memoirs of: Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, President Anouar Sadat and Laurence Olivier.
- Leila Sharaf **speaks four languages**: Arabic, English, French, Spanish, and a little bit of Hebrew.
- **Her motto in life**: The woman who works a lot can work more.

First Woman TV Announcer in Saudi Arabia



In a country where women are not allowed in public without the veil and where they are mostly confined to the private sphere of the family, Salwa Shaker breaks out with traditions to become

the first female public figure on Saudi Television.

A multi-talented woman who sings and writes for children, acts in radio and television serials, Salwa Shaker presents a family program on TV with emphasis on health.

Her husband, a radio announcer himself, has been with her on a study tour to the U.S.A. to learn elocution and voice techniques. Back home they both present a popular radio program.

Asked whether it was harder to work for

television or radio, Mrs. Shaker commented: "Each medium has its own characteristics and special demands. Radio requires a good and clear voice while television concentrates more on a person's features. TV work also takes more preparation time than radio."

* Information based on an interview with Ms. Shaker in *Sayidaty*, No. 152, 6-12 February, 1984, pp. 28-29.

European Women Criticise the Media

A Council of Europe seminar held on 21-23 June in Strasbourg, France met to discuss "The Contribution of the Media to the Promotion of Equality between Women and Men".

The discussions in which some 60 experts and media representatives — mostly women — from 21 European countries took part, focused on three major themes:

- the "role of the media as agents of social change",
- the "employment policy in media organizations" and
- the manner in which advertising perpetuates sex-stereotyping.

The seminar came out with the following conclusions:

—The media have a major impact on the social behaviour of individuals and should endeavour to mirror the current state of society and avoid presenting an out-moded picture; they must therefore portray women in the role they actually play in modern society, particularly in employment. Special adult education programmes should be devised in simple language for specially

disadvantaged groups of women (migrants, rural communities etc).

— As women are distinctly under-represented in posts of responsibility within the media themselves, specific opportunities for training (including branches traditionally reserved for men) should be made available for them and, where applicants have equal qualifications, preference should be given to women candidates until genuine equality of treatment has been achieved. Greater participation by women in planning programmes would also give them the chance to represent the feminine point of view in areas traditionally regarded as being a male preserve (politics, business, etc.). In the media, both men and women should take part at all levels and in all departments, particularly in editorial posts.

— There should be absolute respect for women's dignity in advertising. The effort should also be made to avoid portraying men as ridiculous or clumsy when confronted with household tasks; the same applies to women in technical matters. Above all, advertising should refrain from presenting aggressive, dominating or violent behaviour as the ideal male norm.

(International Women's News)
1983/3, p. 39)

A Strategy for Change

Women must devise an overall strategy for change in the information and communication order of the world, says Marilee Karl of ISIS. Our goals are clear, she adds, we want media which are responsive to our needs as women, which enable us to communicate with each other about our lives and experiences, which give us the information we need to make choices and decisions, which do not

distort, belittle or demean women or confine us to stereotyped behavior and roles; media in which women participate and share in determining the content, in decision making and in control.

How can we obtain these goals, asks Karl? Is it through reform of existing structures, radical change, creation of alternative networks or through work on several levels at once?

Some voices are now calling for women's participation in the New International Information Order in what seems to be a process similar to that of "integrating women into development". This call declares Karl must be carefully analyzed, otherwise women may end up being "integrated" into a new international information order as detrimental to themselves as their "integration" into much of "development" has been ...

According to the writer, the "integration" or participation of women in a male-dominated system is not sufficient, other basic changes are needed as well. These changes involve trying to get more media coverage about women, more stories and positive images of women in the press in order to help change public attitudes as well as women's self-images.

But, warns Karl, attention must be given to the quality of the coverage as well as to the quantity. The media could very easily increase the amount of information about women without becoming any more responsive to their needs. Moreover, pressure should be exerted on the media to discontinue those practices most damaging to women — like

sexist ads, the use of sexist language in journalism, etc ...

Hand in hand with these efforts, says the writer, is the patient work of research and documentation of the anti-women bias of the media and the collection of data on the negative image of women in the media, on the lack of appropriate information and on discrimination of women in media jobs.

This is the new material for consciousness raising and changing public opinion, declares Karl. Awareness that media images are taken for granted and accepted even by women themselves is a first step for enlisting support and organizing to bring changes in the media's treatment of women.

* The following article is an abridged version of a piece written by Marilee Karl for **ISIS, an International Women's Information and Communication Service**. It was published in 1983 (p.189) in their Resource Guide for Organization and Action. Entitled "Women in Development" this Guide has sections on Women and Multinationals — Rural Development — Health — Education and Communication — Migration and Tourism — Latest Resources.

CONFERENCES

Second Family Planning Conference (Beirut, 3-5 November 1983)

While Lebanese Politicians met in Geneva for the first National Reconciliation Conference in November 1983, the **Lebanese Family Planning Association** was holding its **2nd Evaluative Conference on the Status of Women in Lebanon**.

Present at the conference was a large number of delegates from women's organizations, universities, government offices, the Lebanese Red Cross Society, IWSAW, and members of the Press.

At the end of the gathering the participants issued a **Seven Points Recommendation Paper** based on the following :

1. The situation of women in Lebanon cannot be, looked at in isolation but only within the Lebanese social context. Women's problems are

social ones that should be the concern of all men and women involved in the social field. Therefore, any improvement of the women's status in Lebanon will have to be considered as an improvement in the status of her family as well as her society.

2. The situation of Lebanese women at present is tragic but not only because of war. It is in fact the result of a long history of discrimination and neglect and therefore cannot be solved instantly with a stroke of a magic wand.

The solution of women's problems in Lebanon needs an accurate knowledge of social reality and serious scientific investigation, as well as conferences, workshops and seminars which will help awaken public opinion and local leaderships.

3. The Lebanese National Council of women should take the initiative to push its affiliated societies to review their memberships and reorganize their executive committees. After that, the various local women's organizations should coordinate their activities in order to save time and duplication of tasks, to be more effective in the improvement of women's status in Lebanon.
4. The participants realize that a large part of women's problems in Lebanon stem from socialization at home which differentiates between girls' and boys' roles. It continues at school with sexist schoolbooks, then at the workplace where there are "feminine" and "masculine" jobs and prevails in all society."

The role of the media is important in this respect for it should educate people about sexual discrimination through special TV and radio programs.

5. Lebanese women suffer from poor working conditions and have a low participation rate in the workforce when compared to men. With increasing inflation, decreasing social services (due to their disruption by war), the participants called for a series of studies to be undertaken in order to analyze the economic situation of women during the war.

Some of the suggestions include:

- increasing the number of child care centres
- giving women the chance to do secretarial jobs at home
- giving them the opportunity to do "service-jobs"

- at home (like ironing - mending - cooking for families)
 - encouraging poultry and bee raising in rural areas
 - encouraging the creation of green houses.
6. Due to the war situation in Lebanon, women and their families are facing increasing problems that call for immediate action namely:
 - problems of war widows.
 - unemployment due to closure of shop factories and offices
 - school absenteeism
 - increase in the level of illiteracy especially for women
 - lack of vocational guidance
 - lack of adequate health care facilities, health guidance, and family planning programs.
 - problems of orphans and outdated adoption laws
 - problems of citizenship for children of foreign fathers (the law in Lebanon gives the Lebanese nationality only to children born of a Lebanese father)
 - lack of specialized recreational and educational programs for children on radio and television
 - problems of rural women who have suffered differently as a result of the war.
 7. The participants reiterate their belief that women's problems have a negative effect not only on women but on the family and society as a whole. Therefore, they urge all those responsible to take these problems into serious consideration.

Euro-Arab Social Research Group Conference (Amman, 18 - 20 Nov. 1983)

The Euro-Arab Social Research Group held its **Annual Conference in Amman**, Jordan, from November 18 to November 20, 1983.

Present there were researchers from Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland who discussed the topic of **Working Women and Family Structure**.

The conference was opened by her excellency Mrs. In'am Al Mufti, Minister of Social Development of Jordan and for three days, the

people conferring centered their discussions on two aspects of the problem of working women and family structure, namely: the "levels of reality" and the "theories and methods" utilized.

The "levels of reality" referred to the family, the image of women, attitudes and behavior, health, leisure, sexuality, family formation and life cycles as well as emigration and migration.

There was also a special focus on the micro-determinants of the work of women, using a

wide variety of methodological approaches and conceptual definitions of work, leisure and possibility of evaluating women's productivity within the family.

At the end of the conference, the participants found that the problems and concepts related to the issue of women's work and family structure were very similar in both the Western and Arab Worlds. There was also a consensus on the necessity to do more research on the relationships between the work of women and class structure, state policies religion and ... war!

Understanding of the historic dimension of change was also found to be of paramount importance, as well as the necessity of having more

comparative studies on the topic and of writing more social biographies of women.

The proceedings of this conference will eventually be published in a book by the Euro-Arab Social Research Group.

For more information contact Dr. Selim Nasr:

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Irene Lorfin*

* Irene Lorfin who is an Associate Researcher at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was invited to the conference to report on research findings of the Institute on "Women and Work in the Arab World."

Measurement of Women's Economic Activity (Cairo, 25-27 Nov. 1983)

This report is an attempt to summarize the issues and questions raised at a regional workshop sponsored by the Population Council and the Ford Foundation on The Problem of Measuring Female Participation in the Labour Force in the Arab World". (1) The workshop, held in Cairo from November 25-27, 1983, joined together delegates from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, North-Yemen, Sudan and Tunisia. The Participants came from different fields and specialities: Statistics, Economics, Sociology and Anthropology, which gave a holistic approach to the problem.

Present also were Dr. Frederic Shorter the regional representative of the Population Council's Office for West Asia and North Africa; Dr. Barbara Ibrahim of the Ford Foundation and Dr. Huda Zurayk of the Faculty of Health Science at the American University of Beirut who both organized and co-chaired the meetings. Dr. Catalina Wainerman an Argentinian Sociologist from the Centro de Estudios de Poblacion (CENEP) in Buenos Aires and a foremost expert in the field of female labour in Latin America was also there.



From left: Dr. Huda Zurayk and Dr. Barbara Ibrahim, co-chairpersons.

"Do you work?"

Ask this question to a random group of Arab women and most of them will probably answer

"No, I'm a housewife."

•But go to their villages and populated cities, visit them in their houses and fields, observe how they spend their days from dawn to dusk, and you will be astonished to see how much they work. Besides child care and cooking, the average Arab woman is a very productive being: from tending crops, sewing, reaping and fetching water, to grazing and tending the animals, to housework (such as sewing, canning and food preservation) to selling home-made products and foods. These are only

(1) In 1979, The Population Council jointly with the Faculty of Health Sciences of A.U.B., sponsored a Study Group which also discussed the measurement of women's economic participation. The report of this Study was published by the Population Council as a Regional Paper No. 12, and can be obtained from the Council's Bureau (P.O.Box: 115 - Dokki - Giza - A.R.E.). Its title is: "The Measurement of Women's Economic Participation. Report of Study Group." Beirut, 12-13 October 1979.



Some of the participants at the workshop.

some of the many activities she does which, translated into economic terms, yield an impressive rate of economic participation.

And yet, if we go back once again to our official censuses and labor surveys, we are struck by the stunningly low rate of economic participation of our Arab women. Why is this so?

First, to be sure, the problem is not only that of the Arab region but one faced by most developing countries. Women in these countries have always worked, but their work has largely gone unmeasured. One reason for this is the fact that the mode of economic activity — particularly female activity in developing countries is different from that in industrialized countries. Females in the Third World work mainly in unpaid family and domestic production, activities that fall outside the official definition of economic productivity used in censuses and labor surveys. But at the same time, activities such as these translated into monetary terms, are a considerable economic contribution to the household income since if not provided by the females of the family, they would have to be bought from outside sources.

Recently, efforts have been made to correct some of the misconceptualizations of economic activity. Two types of problems face Arab census bureaus and researchers alike: (1) How to measure economic activity of women like agricultural work and part time work, which is usually missed because of cultural reasons and problems in interviewing techniques, although it falls within the official definition of economic activity. (2) How to expand the definition of economic activity to include non-market activities such as housework and others. This problem is relatively more complicated than the former.

A question might be raised as to why it is necessary to measure women's economic participation. It is surely going to make the task of

the census bureaus more complicated. The question becomes: is it worth all the trouble? What good will it do to the national economies of developing countries, and will it improve women's economic participation in these countries? Also will it have any influence on women's status and their perception of themselves?

The answer is definitely yes. Needless to say how important census information on population and manpower is to any government, accurate information on female economic participation is just as important. It is the job of policy makers and planners to use this information in order to intervene and direct the course of social change for the well being of society. If the economic productivity of women in the Arab World is to be improved, it is important to know what types of activities women are presently engaged in and what activities best fit their cultural settings and life styles. As to their status and self image there will definitely be a positive change once the value of female work is officially recognized and respected.

A related problem is the need to study the patterns and directions of change in the economic participation of women in the Arab World. Developing countries in general and the Arab world in particular are passing through a stage of rapid change which is eroding the traditional bases of their economies. Large scale, industrial and market economies are rapidly replacing the traditional household and agricultural modes of production — the same modes of production that are the domain of females in these countries. How has this change affected female labor and what will happen in the future? Will development increase female participation or decrease it? Does the rural migration encourage Arab women to join in the modern labor force or are cultural factors working against it?

These are only some of the questions which must be answered if any improvement in the economic participation of females in the Arab world is to be made. Furthermore, the answers cannot be found unless full and accurate information is gathered. It is a responsibility which governmental census and labor bureaus as well as academicians and social scientists must jointly carry out.

Below are excerpts of some studies that were presented at the workshop.

EGYPT (2)

In an attempt to uncover the under representation of women in national labor surveys a study was undertaken by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization And Statistics (CAPMAS) in the area of Greater Cairo

In this study, a selected sample of women interviewed by CAPMAS in an earlier survey (May 1983) was selected to be reinterviewed (October 1983) but with greater indepth questioning and probing about their economic activities. Special attention was paid to the questions asked, to the interviewing techniques and to the training of the interviewers. The interviewers chosen were all females as opposed to the earlier surveys which used mostly males. It was believed that males entering traditional homes and talking to females or asking questions about them would bias the answers and give less accurate and incomplete information about those females.

Results of this study showed that a large percentage of the economically active females of the sample had been overlooked by the May survey and had been labelled as housewives. Most of these were single, young and did home type jobs such as selling eggs, manufacturing and selling home made cheese, sewing and selling dresses, and helping husbands and fathers at their farms. Many of them worked more than 15 hours a week (the minimum working time set by government standards to consider someone as economically active).

On the basis of these results, CAPMAS took

several steps towards improving its surveys and refining their measuring instruments in order to become more sensitive to women's activities.

1. The probing method was implemented. This means that when a woman claims that she does not work, the interviewer instead of labelling her as a housewife, directly asks her a series of follow up questions to uncover any other paid or unpaid house activities.
2. The number of female interviewers was increased from 7% to 28%. This number, however, remains very low and should be increased.
3. The number of households to be interviewed by each interviewer was decreased from 15 to 10 each. This means more time spent by each interviewer with his interviewees and hence, better care when asking questions and writing down answers.

SUDAN (3)

In Sudan there is little or no information on the female labor force. The only two population censuses on which we can rely for some figures on women's economic participation are the 1955 and the 1973 censuses.

However, there appears to be a large discrepancy between those census rates and those reported by anthropological and sociological observations of Sudanese women especially rural women.

For example, in the 1955/56 census, less than 10% of the Sudanese female population was reported to be economically active. In the 1973 census this figure improved remarkably with some rural areas having as much as 56.3% active women and others only 2.5%. However, these rates are believed to be much lower than what anthropologists and sociologists have consistently observed in rural Sudan.

A study conducted by the social welfare department in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, resulted in some fascinating figures about the economic activity of the Sudanese woman particularly in the

(2) The case of Egypt was presented by:

- Dr. Sarah Loza of the Social Planning and Administration Consultants, (SPAAC), Cairo.
- Dr. Barbara Ibrahim of the Ford Foundation, Cairo.
- Mr. Mohammed A. Abdel Karim and Mr. Kamal Ali Fauag of the Central Agency for Public Mobilization And Statistics (CAPMAS).

(3) The case of Sudan was presented by:

- Dr. Ahmed Hamad of the Department of Econometrics at the University of Khartoum and
- Ms. Alia Shams El Dien of the Information and Research Department.

Darfur region of Western Sudan ⁽⁴⁾ . For example, in pastoral households, females (women and girls) alone are responsible for seed grinding, food preparation, housebuilding, tending big animals, raising poultry, and selling home made products. Males help, and only to some degree, in water and fuel fetching and in sheep grazing.

In agricultural households, females do more than 50% of the agricultural chores such as land preparation, sowing, weeding, reaping, food storage, and horticultural production. Only in plowing does male participation exceed the female's, and even then they only participate in 54% of the plowing. Females do the rest. However, when it comes to selling the agricultural produce and spending the revenue, males have an upper hand: 69% of the marketing and 76% of the spending is a male responsibility. **These figures show the discrepancy between the Sudanese women's economic participation level and her social status. They also show the discrepancy between her real participation rate and the rates that official censuses project.**

NORTH YEMEN ⁽⁵⁾

The conditions of the North Yemeni women are no better than those of her sisters in the rest of the Arab world. The most recent population census of 1975 showed a low 8.5% economic participation rate for women. How much of this is a reflection of the real situation and how much of it is due to information gathering problems is yet to be found.

In 1983 the North Yemeni government cooperated with the Ford Foundation in planning and carrying out a large scale labor survey of women in rural North Yemen. The goals of the survey were primarily to find out the extend of female participation in all economic activities, paid as well as unpaid ones. Field work started in November 1983, results have not appeared yet.

A large sample of 2327 rural households was randomly picked. Twenty female interviewers were carefully chosen and trained in the field. Besides demographic information such as age, marital status and educational level, data were collected on



From left: the Yemeni, Lebanese and Egyptian delegates

the economic activity of the females of the households with emphasis on both primary and secondary activities.

This survey, with its refined data collection techniques, is the first of its kind in Yemen and one of the most developed surveys done so far on the female labor force in the Arab world. It is hoped that the results would reveal a more accurate and complete image of the North Yemeni woman's economic activity conditions.

LEBANON ⁽⁶⁾

The latest and only labor survey conducted in Lebanon was in 1971. Since then no national figures on the Lebanese labor force emerged and it is impossible at this time to conduct any national surveys or censuses to update the figures available.

In 1971, and according to official survey figures, the Lebanese woman had the highest economic activity rate amongst her Arab sisters (17.5%) ⁽⁷⁾ The largest number of active Lebanese women was found to be in agriculture (22.5%) But according to the report, these figures could have

(4) Study available at The Information and Research Department, Council of Ministers, Khartoum, Sudan.

(5) The case of North Yemen was presented by Ms. Bilqis Al-Dabbi and Ms. Lattifa Al-Thawr of the Central Planning Organization in Sana'a.

6. The case of Lebanon was presented by Ms. Dolly Feghaly of the National Employment Institute and Ms. Nada Khuri of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World.

(7) The National census and labor force studies in the Middle East adopt the definition of economic activity as "any activity which is devoted to the production of goods or services which is measureable in economic terms and in which, generally speaking, people are gainfully employed." (UN F-18, P. 100).

been an underestimation of reality since many of the active rural women when interviewed usually would not admit that they worked and just labeled themselves as housewives. An improved and refined survey, as the ones conducted recently in Egypt, Jordan and North Yemen, should show higher figures for the Lebanese women's economic activity today. This, however, remains only a speculation until a national labor force survey can be conducted and its results published.

A study conducted in 1982 by I. Lorfing and M. Khalaf ⁽⁸⁾ attempted, for the first time in Lebanon, to transform the non-monetary economic contribution of women into monetary value and consequently to measure their actual contribution to the total household income. The study, done in two villages in the Western Beqa' region, aimed at finding the basic determinants of this economic contribution and its impact on family dynamics and decision making patterns.

To do this the two researchers considered as income generating activities; "those activities that result either in cash" (earned)" or would have entailed reimbursement of money had it not been provided by household members" (imputed). A list of activities performed by each member of the household and the time spent on each was noted. Imputed economic activities were quantified according to what they would have cost had they been bought from outside.

Results showed that in the majority of households surveyed (53%), women contributed between 5% and 25% to the total household income. This contribution was essentially determined by 3 factors: 1) **Their life cycle:** women with all their children below 15 years contributed least, and women with their children over and below 15 years contributed most; 2) **The income level of the household:** as the total household income increased, women's relative contribution decreased. 3) **The size of land cultivated:** as the cultivated land increased in size and income women's relative contribution

As to the impact of female contribution on family dynamics, the study showed that in general there is little or no impact and that a democratic pattern of decision making between husband and wife existed, especially in matters related to allocation of family resources.

In sum, the study shows the possibility of redefining the concept of economic activity and remeasuring it accordingly, with more accuracy. It is also hoped that such studies can be of benefit to labor officials and statisticians to help them refine and improve the measurements of the Lebanese woman's economic participation.

CONCLUSION:

From the above, one can conclude that the picture which census bureaus and labor surveys present on female economic participation in the Arab World is far from accurate. The image of the Arab woman as an unproductive being who is economically dependant on males of her society is not true. **The perpetuation of this image will neither improve her status nor her economic productivity.** Therefore, there is an urgent need for more studies on this subject coupled with an equally urgent need to spread awareness of the problem among all those interested in female economic participation. The Cairo Workshop was one occasion where Arab experts involved in the measurement of female economic activity shared their experiences and points of view. It is hoped that such meetings and workshops would sensitize researchers and statisticians to the problem and its complexities and that it would encourage them to take practical steps to improve the measurement of Arab women's economic participation.

Nada Khuri

N.B. An enlarged and completely revised edition of Regional Paper No. 12, (see ref. 1) has been recently published in November 1983, by the Population Council of West Asia and North Africa. Its author is Dr. Huda Zurayk and it is entitled "Women's Economic Participation". It contains a section on profiles of women's work, another on the census as a measurement tool and how to improve it. The last part deals with expanding the meaning of economic activity in addition to references.

(8) "The Economic Contribution of Women and its Effects on the Basic Dynamics of the Family in Two Lebanese Villages." Unpublished.

We Have a City to Patch Up



She writes what is not popular
She unveils hidden problems
She hits herself on the walls of reason
And of semiotics and of criticism

She saw the sun of harvest
She put her heart in a prison
She took the bird of her novels
And told it to go, to go to the horizon

We have a city to patch up
The orange tree, the vineyard to replant
We have to search for the sun above
And to help the woman rise up and to find hope again

They will go on holding hands
They will trace flowers on the road
They will plant trees in the gardens
They will light the morning star

She moves on encircled by canons
She adds wings to her prison
She once again picks up each line of her violin
And she leads the child to the firs of dawn

I learnt to sing in your hands
I wove the thread you stretched out
I found the words that you left out
And I wrote, I wrote tomorrow's vision

Evelyne Accad
Urbana, 1981

THEATRE

Andrée Chedid talks about Love, Power and Violence

If seeing Andree Chedid's latest play is an unforgettable experience, meeting her in person is even more so.

Intense and attentive to every word you utter, she seems eager to capture as quickly as possible

the essence of what you're saying. Then, when she does respond to your questions, she uses such precise and rich language that it's a pleasure to sit back and savour the flow of her sentences and ideas. (cont.)

My hour long conversation with Chedid took place in a little cafe in Paris among the bustle of cars and the chinking noise of cups and saucers on wooden tables.

We spoke about her latest play "Echec a la Reine" — (Checkmate to the Queen) which was showing at the "Theatre du Quai de la Gare" from Feb. 22 to April 1, 1984.

"My play is about power, love and violence", began Chedid. "It is set in an enclosed universe (a palace), at an indefinite epoch, in an indefinite country because I wanted to say things that could be heard and understood by different people. I have the impression, that what is most important in human beings is what transcends frontiers."

"My story is about a Queen and her Fool," Chedid explained: "One day they play a game, she bets on her kingdom, he on his freedom. The Fool wins and he becomes King. But the Queen has a Son who has left his kingdom in search of liberty. One day he comes back. The game becomes a conflict."

You can't see them on stage, but the populace are watching intently the events in the palace. They have expectations, the sovereigns obligations. Fate and History will decide who will win and who will lose.

The plot, is so simple one might say, but one has to add that the issues, are complicated. For what makes matters complex, is the universality of the themes used and the incredible finesse with which Chedid depicts her characters.

The Queen, confined all her life to the closed universe of the palace, longs for freedom and self-fulfillment. The Fool, hiding behind his attire,

has more freedom than the Queen for he can play many roles and say whatever he wants.

"In fact, the Fool is quite an extraordinary man", says Chedid. He is very lucid and can speak the truth because he is a fool. Moreover, he is deeply in love with the Queen to whom he is ready to give everything, even his own life.

The Son by contrast returns from his long absence eager to resume his duties as a monarch and greedy for power.

The Queen's niece, Zina, who never approved of her aunt giving up the throne, takes sides with her cousin to help him recover his kingdom.

"This terrible conflict between the Son and his Mother," Chedid explains, is not just a conflict of generations. It is a conflict of ideals.

The Queen is disappointed with her son because he is disgusted with life. For her, life is never deceptive, on the contrary.

"She resembles those women of the Orient who hold on ferociously to life and are never discouraged or desperate."

As for the Fool,, Chedid continued, he believes that living a full life and betting on love and beauty is a way to win life and transcend death. Jok, the Fool, is a man who understands fully that life is made of compromises and games but, by temperament, he knows that one lives much better if one lives generously and openly. At a certain time he is seduced and lured by power and accepts it willingly. He realises that being in a powerful position can have positive aspects. He gives himself to the people, makes reforms and ends up feeling responsible to them.

But for Chedid the real questions is: "Where



Born in Egypt of Lebanese parents — Andree Chedid writes in French and Lives in Paris.

Author of numerous books of poetry, novels and plays, Chedid has been awarded many important prizes for Literature. They include: the Louis Lapier Award for poetry (1976), the Aigle D'Or for poetry (1972), the Royal Belgian Academy's Grand Prize for French Literature (1975) and the Mallarme Award for poetry (1976).

do responsibilities end and greed for power start? "You told me", declared Chedid that you were completely against violence. So is Jok, who even when he has the opportunity to kill stops short and says: No one will make an assassin out of me. Therefore, Jok consciously refuses to use violence even though he knows he is capable of it".

When I asked Chedid whether she really believed such people as Jok and the Queen, existed, she replied: "I really believe in this. I really believe that in life one always has a chance to meet absolutely extraordinary people. I also believe that

one should bet on lights rather than on shadows while realising that shadows exist."

As for her views on women, Chedid says: "It is important for a woman to be a lover, it is important for her to be a mother and know what responsibility is. But it is also important for a woman to express herself and to desire liberty."

Thus for Andrée Chedid, famous author and fulfilled woman, there are people who never give up on life and continue to hold on to their dreams till the end. There are others who change when they become adult, she says, and this is sad.

Wafa' Stephan

PROGRESS REPORTS

Rural Women in Sudan⁽¹⁾

Sudan is the largest country in Africa and one of the poorest. Three quarters of its 20 million population live in rural areas and 45 percent of them are under 15. About half the population have access to clean water but fewer have good sanitation and most live in poor housing. Education is limited; male literacy stands at 25 percent while female literacy is 4 percent. Community health facilities are old and concentrated in towns. Half of the Sudanese doctors (2,000) work in the capital Khartoum, but in 1977 the Sudanese government started training community health workers who would provide free health care for the whole population, especially the rural one.

It is against this background that two community projects involving women were created in Sudan. The first, funded by USAID and run by Khartoum University's Faculty of Community Medicine, aims at training midwives. The project, which began in 1981, covers 100,000 people who live in 90 villages on the Nile. The three-weeks training session for a midwife is divided into four parts: child nutrition, birth spacing, diarrheal disease and immunization.

An FAO project established in 1980 aims at creating pilot farms in 3 villages, 42 kms away from the city of Um Dirman, where the workers are exclusively women. Talking about this second project, its director, Mr. Khalaf Allah Ismail said that it is the first of its kind in Sudan and the first one which involves women a hundred percent. It aims at doubling the revenue of rural women by enlarging the size of the cultivable plot around their houses and encouraging them to raise farm animals (especially chickens) for family-consumption. This FAO project involves 59 women from the 3 villages of Al-Triss, Al-Shukayla, and As-Salmaniya. These women agriculturalists fence their own blocks of land, plow them, irrigate them, plant them, harvest the produce and sell it to nearby towns and villages. One year after its creation it has proved to be a success.

When asked about the reactions of the husbands to this project Mr. Ismail said: "Our first condition was that the women involved in the project should be able to manage with both their duties as housewives and agriculturalists".

Halima Abbas, a Sudanese woman agriculturalist from Al-Shukayla village says: "I am proficient in rainwater agriculture. This project gave us the opportunity to use modern methods of irrigation, a fact which has doubled our harvests of vegetables and fruits. We use some of these

(1) This report is a summary of two articles:

— "Women Agriculturalists in Sudan" *Sayidaty*, 8-14 Aug. 1983, No. 126, pp. 26-27.
— Carter, N. "Sudan's Access of Community Health". *People* Vol. 10 no. 3, pp. 20-21, 1983)

produce for our own consumption and sell the rest at nearby towns and villages".

Rabiha Abdel Dafe, a housewife, says: "I have succeeded in taking care of my children and raising poultry. We longed for fresh vegetables and we had to buy them from cities which are far from our village. In addition to that we had to pay a lot. But since last year we have been blessed with continuous green on our land, our children are well fed, and we wake up every day to the sounds of cocks to say our prayers ... We have planted carrots, aubergines, lettuce, mouloukhiah, spinach etc."

This project also includes lectures and training sessions about the best way to cultivate the land, how to prepare natural fertilizers, how to choose the type of seeds and poultry to breed, and how to vaccinate animals.

Rabiha adds: "There are three child-care centres, one in each village involved in the project. These centers have been of great help to us because we are not worried anymore about our children. Moreover, we are given lectures on ways of conserving vegetables and talks on how to prepare nourishing meals for our families".

As for the midwives training project which has been going on for 2 years, health workers still have to combat traditional beliefs. During the campaign against diarrhea, one survey showed that although all mothers thought a doctor was the best person to treat their children, a third of them went to religious or traditional healers for help. Many mothers believed they should not breast-feed or give liquids to children who have diarrhea, so midwives had to teach them oral rehydration therapy.

Nafissa, a midwife from Wad Ramli, a village involved in the project which is about one hour's journey north of Khartoum, has been a village midwife for 16 years. Persuasion is needed to improve the nutrition of children she says: "When I visit the mothers I often find the children are undernourished or anemic. Many mothers do not understand that having babies close together can affect their health." Nafissa and other midwives who total a number of 4,500 in the country encourage women to make their children's diets more varied by using locally grown foods.

Family planning is a more difficult idea to introduce. Dr. Abdel Rahman el Tom, chairman of the Faculty of Community Medicine says: "Many people wanted family planning but were afraid of breaking Islamic Law. So we organized a meeting of Sudan's leading Islamic scholars who agreed that contraception is acceptable if it is done for the

health and well-being of mothers and children, and this advice was passed on to local religious leaders."

In general, however, the majority of women in Sudan want large families and do not use contraceptives. The World Fertility Survey puts the total fertility rate per woman as 6.9. Even among those women who say they want no more children, 83 percent of them do not use contraception.

The Sudan Family Planning Association has set up clinics in hospitals and tried to encourage doctors to make contraception available. The impact of these clinics is greater in towns than in rural areas. For instance, World Fertility Survey figures for contraceptive use in North Sudan where primary health care system is more strongly established, show that contraceptives are used by 16 percent of city women and 3 percent of rural ones.

Why this concern with family planning one might ask? Sudan's present population is about 20 million. In a country where life expectancy is still only 45 years, much remains to be done to improve the health of people, especially women and children. Moreover, and taking into account that by the year 2000 and at present rates of growth, Sudan's population is likely to be 33 million (about 60 percent of whom will live in rural areas), one can say that although much has been done already, a lot remains to be achieved.

Primary Health Care in South Yemen

The People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (or South Yemen) is the poorest Arab Country. As much as 98 percent of its land is completely barren and the remaining 2 percent is suitable for cultivation only through irrigation. The population density on the cultivated land has been estimated by the World Bank to be 1,600 inhabitants per square km.

Faced additionally with a high percentage of illiteracy, an infant mortality rate of over 150 per thousand, and high rates of overall mortality and ill-health from largely preventable diseases; the Yemeni Government is embarking on an ambitious programme of bringing primary health care and family planning to the bulk of the population living outside the capital, Aden.

In Aden itself, where housing, nurseries and kindergartens are all in short supply, many women want only two or three children. In fact, virtually every form of fertility regulation is available in the Yemeni capital including vasectomy. But for the rest of the country it is a different matter; the average number of children per woman is around seven and women are just beginning to learn about fertility control.

Mahani Mohsin, one of the pioneers of family planning in South Yemen, was trained in nursing and midwifery. She is now **Deputy Director of Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning** for the whole country. About the difficulties facing the government for bringing health to the villages Mahani says: "There are so many problems to overcome, not only health problems, but social and cultural ones which cannot be separated from health." She recalls visiting a woman in a country-town who was eager to have contraception as soon as she heard of the possibility.

"Do you really think I can delay my next pregnancy?" the woman asked Mahani. "I was relying on breast feeding." And in a whisper, when her mother-in-law tried to object, the woman said: "Don't worry about what she says. If you have something, give it to me."

The Yemeni Government intends to make family-planning available gradually in rural areas, mainly for birth-spacing. Moreover, at least half of the country's preschool children have second or third degree malnutrition. What is to blame are: poor feeding-practices, a trend towards earlier weaning, sheer poverty and inadequate protein and seasonal shortages of fruits and vegetables.

Currently two governorates in the country have started to train health guides who are volunteer health-workers chosen by their communities. They receive three month's training in their community in hygiene, sanitation, nutrition and basic health

care. Most of these health-guides are teachers or literate farmers, but almost all are men. Once a month they produce simple reports showing the cases they saw, the drugs they gave, the work they did. They also list any births or deaths. This information is valuable because South Yemen is a country where there has virtually been no reporting of health or vital statistics. These health guides are now under careful observation in restricted areas, before they work nation-wide. But the critics of the program are skeptical that the volunteers will continue to work without any payment.

The health guides receive full support from the People's Defence Committee, the ruling party's grass-roots organizations. Their value is already recognized by the communities they serve and instead of asking for more health posts, as they used to, people are now asking for more health-guides.

However, the intention of the government is that the Primary Health Care units will eventually be run by community nurse-midwives, a new breed of health workers, recruited from the communities they will later serve. Although not full-fledged nurses, the community nurse-midwives (CNMs) must have eight years' schooling and attend a two-year course, which includes family planning.

These nurse-midwives will supervise the health guides and the traditional birth attendants as well as provide the vital first point of contact between the volunteers' preventive work in the community and the professional medical back-up services. So far, some 300 nurse-midwives have graduated and 250 are working in hospitals and in the country's 45 health centers which provide family planning.

One of the problems facing the community nurse-midwives project in South Yemen, says Mahani Mohsin, is the drop out rate. Since the age limit for the training course is 15 to 25, many CNM's leave when they get married.

Another problem is the recruitment of girls from remote areas since virtually all training has been taking place in the capital, Aden. But as some families discouraged their girls from going so far away from home, residential training centers are now being built in several governorates.

In conclusion, says Mohsin, South Yemeni nurse-midwives have a vital role to play in primary health care. We have found that it is best to train them on the spot, in their own environment. You really cannot teach them theoretically, you have to watch how they work and try to correct them when necessary, she added.

(People, Vol. 10, No. 3, p. 17)



*Mahani
Mohsin:*

Woman Through 17 Stories

In this collection of short stories, Emily Nasrallah tries to depart from the conventional atmosphere and mood that women's problems are usually treated in, to talk about women in the "absolute".

The heroines of her short stories do not all come from the same background. They are sometimes travellers in Paris (*A Parisian Night*), in Stockholm (*The Summer of Women*) or in a far away island (*The Bird of Hazard*). We find among them the Philippino woman (*A Bird from the Philippines*), the migrant woman returning to her natal village (*A Summer Wind*), the one that attends an evening party in a foreign country (*The Dinosaur*) or the Bedouin woman bound to the customs of her tribe (*The Desert, The Morning Star*).

Some of Nasrallah's short stories are merely descriptive, like the one in which she compares a woman to a "butterfly", to a "mirror" or to a "doll". Sometimes the author chooses uncommon characters like the black woman who lost her feelings and started idealizing herself (*The Light of His Eyes*), or the very popular woman who never found a husband and chose instead to transform this "failure in love" to achieve high intellectual recognition (*A Recommendation Card*).

I liked the story entitled *A Summer Breeze* which presents a woman very talented in singing and dancing and who was able — like the pipe-player of the fairy tale — to enchant a whole village

and transform herself from a dull placid woman to one full of life and happiness.

The Dinosaur story is very well written, in addition to being very sarcastic about a man who claims "liberation" when he is in fact very traditional.

The Cocoon is a good story that analyzes well the generation gap between a mother — the author herself — and her daughter. However, there are stories whose aim is not clear like *The Magnificent Borders of Illusion*. Others in which women's portraits are either not convincing or not realistic, like *The Hidden Roots*, for instance.

Some stories focus too much on women's bodies and their physical attributes, e.g. *The Butterfly* and *The Mirror*. This, at a time when these women should have concentrated their energies on building up their intellectual and critical abilities in order to achieve a new balanced personality. As for Nasrallah's style, it is characterised by precision, flowing expression and a focus on details. Her sentences have a poetic rhythm that blends harmoniously with the drawings of her daughter, Maha Nasrallah.

Rose Ghurayyib

* This is the latest book written by the Lebanese novelist Emily Nasrallah in Arabic. Its title is "Al Mar'a Fi Sabaata Ashara Quissa". Nawfal Publishing House, 1984.

"Femmes de la Mediterranee," *Peuples Mediterraneens*, No. 22 - 23, Paris, 1983

This double issue of *Mediterranean People* is devoted to women of the Mediterranean. It includes eighteen theoretical and descriptive articles from various countries around the basin, as well as some poems by Amina Said. It is directed and introduced by Monique Gadant who underlines that "she tried to give a platform to women in whom is embedded real possibilities for change" (p. 6).

The first article entitled "Becoming liberated in Beirut" by Khaoula Mokhtar, tells in vivid words her struggle to become free, first from her

traditional village background, then from the war in Lebanon. The second are three interviews of three contemporary Algerian women. The third is about the "Spanish Feminist Movement during the Civil War" (1936-38), coming out mainly from the working class and claiming to be anarchist. The fourth, by Fadwa El Guindi, is on "Veiled Activism", an explanation of a return to the veil by some Egyptian women belonging to the Islamic resurgence movement. The fifth is on "the Inner Revolution of a Khomeyni Activist", the views of Sakine, a 16 years old Iranian maid who became

engaged in militant activities against her father's will and in the name of Islam. The sixth is a "Survey of the Feminist Movement in Italy" with long excerpts from interviews and a bibliography. The seventh and eighth are on Palestinian women: interviews with Samira Khoury, the Palestinian leader of the Democratic Movement of Women in Israel, two other Palestinian women, and May Sayegh, the President of the Union of Palestinian Women.

The ninth article of this journal is based on discussions with Turkish immigrant women interviewed in France. It analyzes the major movements in the Turkish women's liberation before and after the Ataturk period. The tenth shows the ambivalent attitudes between tradition and modernity affecting Tunisian women, often looked upon as exceptional in the Arab World because they benefit from a code of personal status. The eleventh, on "Being a Woman in Yugoslavia", shows the contradictions women face under communism. In the twelfth, Evelyne Porrett writes about the life she shared with Egyptian peasants in the Fayoum district. Over the years, she wrote down conversations she had with men and women who confided in her. The thirteenth asks questions about the identity of Corsican women. The fourteenth describes the "Role of Women in Maghrebian Communities in Southern France". The fifteenth analyzes genealogies, the history of marriages and the system of transferring land and how it affects the condition of women in a Southern Italian Village. The sixteenth article studies "Aures", an Algerian women's poetic

creation and the relations between history and ideology. The seventeenth by Yamina Fekhar describes a childbirth in Algeria showing the value placed on childbearing in Islam.

Finally the last and possibly the most important article in this issue is by Rossana Rossanda who questions feminine culture and how out of pure negation, feminism can become the positive principle of a new relationship with others. For that, she develops an interesting and significant argument by using the unusual equation of power passion rather than reason, to throw new light into man's idealized "logos". She also puts psychoanalysis and the concept of androgyny as means to an identity under new scrutiny. Moreover, she shows how, throughout history, the right of women to be different has tended to identify them with their subordinate status.

My only criticism to this excellent compilation of information on Mediterranean Women is that not enough articles are written by the concerned women themselves, instead, there are only transcriptions of interviews or of life-story recordings of these women.

This criticism is appropriate in this issue of *Al-Raida* where we are precisely dealing with the problem of how to communicate, receive and transmit information more effectively, and how to involve more women from various Arab countries in this process.

Evelyne Accad

REPORTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Kuwaiti Working Women

Kuwaiti women suffer from discrimination in job opportunities, says the **Committee for Working Women of the Kuwait Labor Union**. Although the Kuwaiti labor law does not differentiate between men and women, working women are restricted in promotion in both the public and private sectors and are prevented from working at night.

Educationally, Kuwaiti women have come a long way since the first half of the century: their illiteracy rate has been reduced from 77.9 percent in 1957 to 49.6 percent in 1980, and while only 0.1 percent of women obtained the Secondary School Certificate in 1957, 7.7 percent did so in 1980. In addition, Kuwaiti women between 1965

and 1975 formed 61 percent of all Kuwait University graduates.

But these figures do not reflect a similarly encouraging trend in employment. According to official statistics, Kuwaiti women form only 9.2 percent of Kuwait's workforce, compared to 27 percent for expatriate women residing in Kuwait. As Dr. Shafiq Bastaki of Kuwait University argues, replacing expatriate working women with Kuwaiti women would not solve the problem because Gulf nationals, whether male or female, refuse certain types of work carried out by expatriates.* In addition, Kuwaiti women do not take up employment due to the difficulty they find in striking a balance between family responsibilities and work.

On the other hand, Mrs. Amal Al Gharaballi, a researcher at Kuwait University, believes that illiteracy and ignorance are the main problems of Gulf women in general. She blames the official media for giving a false image of Kuwaiti society. Programs for women on Kuwait Radio, for example, concentrate on subjects such as cooking and make up, perpetuating the traditional image of women and creating an impression of a female society that depends on males.

(Arab Times, Nov. 22, 1983).

* Kuwait has a populational 1.6 million. Only 42% are nationals, the rest are expatriate workers of various Arab and Asian Nationalities.

Mediterranean Women's Studies Institute

A new institute for the study of Mediterranean woman has been recently established in Athens, Greece. Its main objectives are:

- to investigate the position of women in the Mediterranean countries and the role women can play in the development of this area;
- to promote women's cooperation in the struggle for equality in all sectors;
- to mobilize women to save the Mediterranean Basin from pollution;
- to encourage women in the effort to preserve the cultural inheritance of the Mediterranean countries;
- to study methods and initiate efforts of conflict resolution in the area.

The Institute's main research projects and

publications are:

- Women in Mediterranean Society: Social, Economic and Political Studies.
- Mediterranean Women in History and Culture: Publication Series.
- A Newsletter entitled KEGME

For more information about the Institute write to:

Elen Arnopoulos — Stamiris
KEGME Director
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Athens, GR 115 22
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(WIN News, Vol. 9, No. 4, Autumn 1983)

Call For Joint Arab Broadcasting Service

A three-day symposium held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia from 26-29 February 1984, called all Arab countries to join hands in establishing a broadcasting service beamed to major international centres, to project Arab culture and ideas without resorting to propaganda.

The gathering, attended by senior representatives of Arab funds and financial institutions, also recommended to undertake a study on the full utilization of the Arab satellite

for economic and social development.

It also asked Arab educational institutions to introduce courses aimed at preparing the younger generation to meet the challenge of modern technology and called on governments to establish national information data networks to encourage cooperation between information organizations.

(Reuter, Riyadh, 29 February, 1984)

Women Leaders Need Many Female Friends

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher said in an interview with the BBC, that the friendship of other women helped her overcome the cares of office and that she did not think any women in power could be happy without a large number of women friends.

She also paid particular tribute to Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by declaring: "I find it very

easy to talk to Mrs. Gandhi. We understand the combination of the pull of family and the total dedication to politics."

Mrs. Thatcher, who became Britain's First Woman Prime Minister in 1979, added: "Women should have the ambition to get top jobs. Sometimes it's thought to be unfeminine to do that. It isn't at all".

(Reuter, February 28, 1984)

Policewomen In Bahrain

"Bahrain has at present 48 policewomen who play an active role in maintaining peace and security and are actively involved in the well-being of women prisoners and juveniles under their care", declared Major Awatef Al-Bader of the Bahraini policeforce.

Major Al-Bader added: "Policewomen are now being more readily accepted by society and

increasing numbers were volunteering to join the force. After a four month intensive course, they are given training in the use of weapons and posted to various centres in Bahrain. They are mainly responsible for the juvenile welfare centres".

(Arab Times, November 14, 1983)

Kuwait Says Yes to Test Tube Babies

A communique issued by the Supreme Council of Islamic Legislation on April 1, 1984, declared that in-vitro fertilization was an acceptable method of procreation in Kuwait.

The Supreme Council however puts a condition for its acceptance which is that the fetus should belong to a couple who wants a child in order to assure its genealogical descendance. Moreover, very strict measures should be taken in order to avoid any risks of error in conception.

This newly taken decision by the Supreme Council of Islamic Legislation puts an end to a long debate in Kuwait to legalize test-tube babies. in a country that is witnessing a rapid decline in the natality level of Kuwaiti Nationals contrasted by a raise of the natality level of non-Kuwaiti nationals residing in the country.

According to the latest official figures, the percentage of Kuwaiti Nationals dropped from 46% to 41.2%, in a country that counts one million and a half inhabitants only. It is not surprising then to find the Health Minister of Kuwait, Mr. Abdel Rahman el-Awadi, qualifying as "national " the problem of sterility in Kuwait. Mr. El-Awadi also said that the implementation of the test-tube babies project could resolve 30% of the sterility problem in his country.

This is why he added, the Kuwaiti government has decided to create a specialized centre for test-tube babies, that would be ready to function in five years time.

(AFP, Kuwait, April 1, 1984)



Yemeni Woman
by
C. Tahan

Apology

Due to the deteriorating security situation and to severe electricity cuts during the past months, we have grouped the last 2 issues of Al-Raida together. We apologize to our readers for the inconvenience it may have caused them.

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