



al-raida

BEIRUT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

November 1, 1987, Vol. VIII, No. 42

CONTENTS

Editorial

Why a Women's Liberation Movement? 2

Article

Lebanese Women Came out of the War
Stronger More Self Confident and Assuming
More Responsibilities 3

Information

Women and Development 4

Paper

Arabist Miriam Cook Acclaimed Lebanese
Women Writer's Contribution to War.
Emily Nasrallah's Works were given Special
Tribute 5

Book Review

The Strangled Echo by Nazik Saba Yared . 8

Conference

Lebanese Women Witness to War 9

Story

The Aunt of Rafiq 12

IWSAW Publications

Guide for Writers & Illustrators of Children's
Books
Guide for Setting-up a Children's Library 16



Why a Women's Liberation Movement?*

"Stop that frantic interest in the Women's Liberation Movement! Rise, unite, but concentrate on a more important issue such as the political dissensions which afflict your country and tear it into pieces!"

This call came from a sociologist who sometimes participated in the editing of IWSAW publications and became exceedingly worried about the spread of terrorism and the menace of complete disruption in Lebanon.

While I shared his worry, I tried to show him that our work for women's liberation can go on, even in war time, jointly with the task of liberating our country.

The Lebanese war was started by a group of men enslaved by their own passions as well as by outside contradictory ideologies. Women, as a whole, have acted as slaves to men. They have been passive spectators or submissive followers. Liberating them from ignorance and blind submission is doubly important because they have been subjected to a double form of slavery. It is the task of the Women's Liberation Movement to make unprivileged women conscious of their rights and needs and to shake off the self centeredness of the privileged as well as to sensitize them to the needs of their environment.

In war time, liberated women are able to play an important role. While men fight against each other, the women's movement can be a model of unity. In fact, as members of the Red Cross and other international organizations, they have shown their ability to join hands in spite of sectarianism. As mothers, sisters and teachers of the young, they can spread ideas of service, forgiveness, patriotism and humanitarianism. Instead of mechanical repetition of men's slogans and bitter declarations, they may give them a lesson in good will and objectivity.

Women, acting together as a group, may be a factor of reconciliation and mutual understanding, not only in their own country but also with the women of neighbouring and far away countries, through correspondence, international conferences and exchanging publications. Formulating these links was indeed the ultimate purpose for the creation of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and other similar institutes in various parts of Asia, fifteen years ago.

For a number of years, I have been in the habit of listening every morning to a 5 minute program broadcasted by a Western station under the title of "Reflections". The daily program is given by writers, thinkers, and religious leaders, representing various creeds, races and nations in East and West, yet all the speakers insist on peace and understanding despite differences in affiliation. The program has not solved the problems of the world but it shows that, while dissensions exist everywhere there are still certain individuals and groups who are working for peaceful solutions of world differences. Anyone suffering from injustice or working for it should not feel alone in the struggle.

Communication is a most important source of enrichment and guidance, why not take advantage of this tool?

The advice given by the sociologist at the beginning of this editorial should be a call for women's unity with the aim of liberating themselves and, consequently, their country.

By liberty, we do not mean irrational conduct or the freedom to harm one's self or others, but the freedom to think, to speak, to plan, away from the despotism of stereotypes and dishonest leaders. Without freedom as a goal, a union may become a form of slavery.

Rose Ghurayyib

(* This question was discussed from a different point of view in an editorial of *Al-Raida*, May 1, 1981, Vol. IV, No. 16

Lebanese Women Came out of the War Stronger, More Self Confident and Assuming More Responsibilities

The transfer of a large number of families from the village to the city by default, contributed to the change of image, first of the Lebanese woman and second of her role in society.

The war, in spite of its odds, was for some a rich, progressive and developmental experience, as much as it was a tormenting and traumatic one. It certainly left its mark on every Lebanese and taught each one of them, especially women, hard lessons of survival and the ability to overcome all kinds of hardships: physical, emotional, economic and political. At the same time, the war was an opportunity that opened new horizons for many women and motivated them to take a new turn in their lives.

The toll of the war was great on all, and particularly on women. She was left, in her capacity as a housewife, with the job of cleaning the debris of shelling and shattered glass that hit the homes. She was the siren who could sense the danger and gave orders to her family to rush to shelters and safe corridors. It was the duty of the women and still is to cope with living in economic hardship. It was mostly women who would exploit any temporary lull in the fighting to run to the bakery, well and supermarket to get bread, water and food for her family.

The war entrusted some women to become decision makers and bread winners following the loss or incapacitation of the husband, or his emigration to foreign lands. Many women were widowed and left bereft looking after their children and managing their households at the most crucial times. Many were driven, to enter the work force by sheer necessity and economic need to become: teachers, clerks, secretaries, telephone operators, hospital orderlies, factory workers and saleswomen in boutiques and supermarkets.

Because of the war and its long duration many young girls, whose families were forced to leave their villages and sought refuge in Beirut and its suburbs, were able to continue their education. A large number were able to enter the university and pick up a career. Others whose

means were more limited entered night schools and learned secretarial skills, computer, advertising, etc... As a result of their exposure to urban living or modernism — so to speak — thousands of Lebanese women entered the job market for the first time in their lives.

Although the overwhelming majority of Lebanese working women are classified as seasonal workers who carry menial jobs in factories, hospitals, agriculture and domesticity, still they became earners for their living and often for their families as well.

The war, as such, represented a breakthrough in the launching of a new generation of an economically independent woman. Like other societies, stricken with wars and conflicts, few are the families in Lebanon that can live on a single breadwinner. The defacto influx of women into the job market, precipitated by force of circumstances and economic need, came suddenly and abruptly and often lacked proper training skills and educational preparedness and guidance.



The thrust towards employment, long or short term, drove hundreds of married women and most of single girls to work. The problem that Lebanese women and men are facing is that there is not enough work for them. There is definitely more supply than demand at times of severe economic crisis. Dispossession and high inflation affected all strata of society.

Lebanese women showed a remarkable sense of management and direction. They were able to pull themselves and their families together, as bravely as possible following the many traumatic experiences many had passed through. Countless are the mothers, wives and sisters in Lebanon who are still mourning and weeping over the loss of their loved ones. No wonder many are still in black and often seen visiting cemeteries and graves. Needless to mention the multifaceted performance of women, who often looked after the old and the sick, nursed the wounded and looked after their comfort as well as their moral and physical rehabilitation.

The role of Lebanese women during the war and after any tragedy that befell the family should be recognized and respected. Time and time again women proved to be better survivors than men. Often women would be driven by instincts and intuition to pull their families from the ashes. Many stood to the challenge and turned to be the pillars that put the house back in order.

Women's contribution as "home builders" proved best among the displaced and dispossessed families who were forced to change their residence and become refugees in their own country. Although women are known to be attached to their homes more than men, it is often the woman who would solace the husband over the loss of property and restore confidence in the children and their ability to start all over again.

Women proved to be extremely efficient in creating warm homely atmospheres for their families even in the most difficult circumstances, in their temporary lodgings, which often are in schools, convents or basements. Mothers proved over 13 years of a cruel and violent war that they are a great moral force who hold confidence in a better future no matter how dark the present conditions are. Women's dynamism and perseverance could rival a tireless engine often working endlessly day and night to soothe the pride of a hurt husband and meet the demands of young children.

Always driven by affection, patience and hope, Lebanese women carry with dignity and style their war crosses. It is mostly women, be they mothers, technicians or social workers who cater to the handicapped and look after their physical and emotional therapy. Women play an important role in improving the lot of refugee families.

To start a home from scratch for families with limited means, where the husband is nearing retirement age and the children are too young to work, is not an easy task.

The war in Lebanon set a new course for women. Improvement of their status, inside and outside the home, should be carried a step further to improve their status on a national level. This is yet to be seen.

Maha Samara

Women and Development

The Institute of Social Studies (ISS) is offering a degree in Master of Arts Development Studies from 5.9.88 to 16.12.89 at the Hague in the Netherlands.

The objectives of this programme aim at increasing the understanding of women's recognized and unrecognized contributions to society in all countries and within a historical perspective; to develop a theoretical framework for the analysis of the root causes, forms and dimensions of their oppression and exploitation, and the various ways in which this is manifested internationally; to stimulate critical evaluation of current development strategies from the perspective of their effects on women; and to search for alternative methods, policies and strategies. Special emphasis is placed on the documentation and analysis of women's organizations and on their struggles to change the situation of women, particularly in Third World countries.

Admission is on a competitive basis. Apply by using the form available from the ISS, the Netherlands Embassies or other representatives of the Netherlands abroad, or from international organizations. All letters and documents must be submitted in English, the official language of the ISS.

The main admission requirements is a sound academic background, preferably in one of the social sciences. Applicants should hold at least an appropriate Bachelor's degree or its equivalent, and must have a good command of the English language and relevant working experience in local, national or international governmental or non-governmental organizations. The programme particularly encourages applications from women in the women's movement or otherwise actively involved in the struggle to end gender subordination. In exceptional circumstances certain admission requirements may be waived to permit their participation in the programme.

For further information contact the Academic Registrar (c/o Student Office) Institute of Social Studies, P.O. Box 90733, 2509 LS - The Hague, The Netherlands. Phone: 70-510100, Telex 31491 ISS NL. Cable: SOCINST.

Arabist Miriam Cook Acclaimed Lebanese Women Writer's Contributions on War. Emily Nasrallah's Works Were Given Special Tribute

Dr. Miriam Cook, Professor of Arabic at Duke University, wrote a paper on **Women Write War: The Centring of the Beirut Decentrists** in the series of papers on Lebanon that the Centre for Lebanese Studies issued at Oxford University* in July 1987.



Who are the Beirut Decentrists?

They are: Ghada al-Samman, Hanan el-Sheikh, Daisy al-Amir, Claire Gebayli, Etel Adnan, Laila Usairan, Emily Nasrallah, Nuha Samara and Umayya Hamdan.

According to Cook, Lebanese writers, artists and poets tried to capture the pulse of the violence of the war in Lebanon better than political and economic analysts. They produced fantastic accounts of Beirut horror and Lebanese traumatic life. "In this creative efflorescence the most active were women and particularly the women who wrote in the capital but were tangential to its literary tradition. They were the Beirut Decentrists." (p.4)

The common denominator of this group of women writers, shared Beirut as their home and the war as their experience. They abhorred the use of violence and were disgusted with armed militias. They were decentered in a double sense: physically, they were scattered all over a self-destructive city; intellectually they moved in separate spheres. They wrote alone and for themselves. According to the author "they would not conceive of their writings as related to those of others, yet their marginal perspective that gave insight into the holistic aspect of the war united them and allowed them discursively to undermine and restructure society around the image of a new centre". (p.4)

Cook added "the Beirut Decentrists, while not sharing the usual or expected traits of literary recognition, still merit inclusion in the canon of modern Middle East literature." (p.4)

Most of Beirut Decentrists belong to upper or middle class backgrounds. They were compelled by the war to become an increasingly visible part of the sphere and began to recognize the role they might play in a society undergoing massive transformation at all levels. This new consciousness or awareness inspired novels, short stories and poetry that became increasingly feminine in orientation.

Collectively the Beirut Decentrists had forged a war myth whose protagonists were both men and women. With time it became primarily women. They spoke about daily life, the routine and boredom, the omnipresence of gunmen and armed militias who were always present on all occasions; weddings, funerals, parties and other surprising incidents of warmongering.

In the literature of Beirut Decentrists, women stay behind and men leave the country to look after their business interests in the Gulf, Europe or the Americas. All the writers seem to agree in their criticism of those who left their country in time of need. Many hinted at a radical transformation in identity in their excellent treatment on the subject of emigration.

With the intensity and cruelty of the war in Lebanon, writers could no longer indulge in the luxury of ideal reflections. The war and all the change that it necessarily connoted forced itself into the villagers' consciousness. Emily Nasrallah, a Decentrist whose entire literary works from 1962 until today focuses on this dichotomy between modern and traditional, between Beirut and the village, between men and women, has dramatized the incursion of the war into village life. Radwan, the protagonist of her 1981 novel **Flight Against Time** describes how Israel used to air raid villages in South Lebanon, and how ordinary people managed to carry on with their lives as normally as they could.

Experiencing war and surviving it is a keynote that could be found among all Decentrist writers. Although one could draw an analogy between the emigration of the village to the city and overseas emigration from Lebanon to far away places, like the U.S., Canada and Europe.

(* Centre for Lebanese Studies, 59 Observatory Street, Oxford, OX 26EP.

The writings of the Decentrists epitomise the changing attitude of those who stayed in Lebanon during the war vis-a-vis those who left.

The works published before 1979 usually hint at women's steadfastness and deep commitment to their country and traditions compared to men's cowardly vacillation. By 1982 male protagonists had become explicit targets of Beirut Decentrists' bitterness as best shown in Umayya Hamdan's **Blue that Comes With the Wind**.

Nuha Samara in **Two Faces One Woman** also wrote about men who fled to international capitals and sent tender letters to their wives exhorting them to pray for peace so they might return.

The Israeli invasion in 1982 was an important landmark in Lebanon and for its women writers. Before 1982, Beirut Decentrists had consciously fragmented and subverted language so as to start anew. The fragmentation was for the construction of a new entity defined by the civil war context. The language available for the post 1982 writer was, therefore, either the language of the creatively fragmented wartime experience or the language of the unfragmented remembrance of a pre 1975 Lebanon that had exploded into hate and violence.

Beirut Decentrists chronicled the Lebanese war from its inception and in some cases, such as Ghada al-Samman's **Beirut 75** (1975) and Etel Adnan's **In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country** (1973), they anticipated it. The author describes their contribution by saying "their marginality to society and to literary canon gave them the perspective of the other. Exclusion gave them a holistic if peripheral, vision that the excluders had lost when they set themselves up as the all-important self or centre." Cook adds "the writings of the Decentrists trace a thread of normality that links the usual accounts of violence and explosions. Writing allowed these women to perceive a routine that did not deny the war but rather pinpointed a new logic, the logic of the bullets. This logic undermined previously unquestioned modes of behavior and allowed for the emergence of a new social order and civic structure." (pp.9 and 10)

The evolution in feminist consciousness that transformed male emigration into cowardice and female writing/staying into honor is best seen in the works of

Emily Narallah, for the theme to which she calls repeated attention is emigration. In her post 1982 works, Nasrallah explores the implication of the invasion on the question of emigration and searches for a new language to deliver the change and subsequent chaos.

Nasrallah's background and personal experience was intertwined with emigration. She was born in Kfeir, a village in South Lebanon. She came to study in Beirut where her rich uncle who had emigrated to America paid for her education. Hence at an early age, Nasrallah knew that male Lebanese emigrate and Lebanese females stay behind awaiting the return of their menfolk. Nasrallah later managed to pay for her university education at the American University of Beirut, by selling her articles to local newspapers and magazines. Her life set a model or an affirmation of a life for women beyond the narrow confines of traditional village life. In the meantime she suffered the loneliness of the village girl in the big city. Writing became her only solace.

Her early writings, which include **September Birds** (1962) and **The Oleander Tree** (1968) reflect the concerns of Arab women writers of the 1950s and 1960s. In a way she resembled Leila Baalbaki and Colette Khuri who wrote of the prison house of domesticity and the stifling of women's individuality within patriarchy.

During the 13 years that intervened between the appearance of Nasrallah's first novel, **September Birds** which won high acclaim in Lebanon and the Arab World, and the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, Nasrallah wrote two novels, **The Oleander Tree** (1968) and **The Pawn** (1974); two collections of short stories, **Island of Illusion** (1973) and **The Source** (1978); two children's books, **Bahira** (1977) and **Little Shadi** (1977). In each work Nasrallah struggles with the conflicting values of her society that was at once modern (male) and traditional (female).

In Nasrallah's works the women were responding to the perceived mandate to be passive and the challenge to change. She has written about the Lebanese war two novels, **The Memories** (1978) and **Flight Against Time** (1981); and two collections of short stories, **Women in 17 Stories** (1984) and **The Lost Mill** (1985). Both novels continue to focus on the question of emigration but the new ingredient is survival.

Nasrallah's works in general dramatize what was happening in Lebanese society. The war had collapsed the difference between Beirut and the village. The war gave birth to a new attitude and a new context. The village no longer had the dubious luxury of isolation, as the war forced the village to adopt what was new and different, so that tradition might confront, and become assimilated to modernity. "Beirut and the village were identified in such a way that the village had become a microcosm for Lebanon." (p.12)

The freedom of male emigration which sanctioned unpatriotic behavior. i.e. leaving Lebanon with impunity was no longer even an option. The only options left were those that had previously faced the village women: staying or leaving forever.

Nasrallah presents the choices for being in war torn Lebanon as having been feminized: Lebanese men and women waited and maintained a continuity with the land or they could be like the radical village women who left and were rejected. Moreover to stay in Lebanon after 1975 compelled acceptance of the condition of the traditional village woman while at the same time recognizing and thus overcoming or escaping its passivity as the radical village women had done. "The war had revolutionised the consequences of "escape" so that it not longer entailed ostracism as it had done before the war and merely denoted an overcoming of destiny." (p.13)

Maha Samara



Flight Against Time

By Emily Nasrallah
Translated By Issa J. Boullata
Ragweed Press — Charlottetown — 1987.

Flight Against Time is a moving story about the immigrant experience. An elderly couple leave their village in Lebanon to visit their children and grandchildren now living in the new World: Prince Edward Island, Canada. They find a world of peace and great comfort, but despite the war back home, the old man longs for his small village and a way of life deeply etched in his heart.

Nasrallah skilfully weaves truth and imagination to create a story rich in human emotion and psychological insight. The novel stands as witness to a time and its people, a mirror of the whole cultural and historical movement that is Lebanon of the present. A work that exemplifies the strength of the modern Arabic novel, Flight Against Time reflects the emotions, ideals and passions that all immigrants experience, be they our ancestors or our neighbours of today.

The Strangled Echo by Nazik Saba Yared*

Nazik Saba Yared is a well known writer, novelist and critic in Lebanon and the rest of the Arab World. She is at present Professor of Arabic at Beirut University College and the Lebanese University.



The Strangled Echo is a novel written in Arabic with the Lebanese war as background. The events take place in Beirut and Paris between October 1975 and April 1976, i.e. the beginning of the war. Najeeb and his family live in Sanayea, an elegant bourgeois quarter of Beirut — before the war. But soon its inhabitants find themselves caught in a cross fire where the bullets, rockets and bombs of the fighting parties fall heavily on them. Many buildings and hotels are damaged or burnt, and Najeeb's flat receives a direct hit. His wife and two children were frightened to death, so Najeeb decides to evacuate his family during a short pause in the fighting. He sends them to Paris where his brother-in-law lives with his family. With time the fighting decreases. Najeeb goes back to his work, and renews his ties with old friends and acquaintances who are still living in Beirut. Among the employees in his office is an intelligent, efficient young girl called Noha, who takes pity on her lonely colleague. One day she asks him to come home with her to meet her mother and brother. As time passed the comradesly relationship between Noha and Najeeb turns into a close friendship. Encouraged by their loneliness and the emptiness of their lives in the devastated city, their friendship begins to take a turn that both of them want to avoid. Najeeb flies to Paris over the Christmas holidays in the hope of bringing back his family. But his wife, who is still traumatized by her experience in Beirut, refuses to accompany him and decides to stay behind.

Back in Beirut his friendship with Noha quickly turns into love — a desperate hopeless love. Noha clings to it being the only rich thing in her boring existence, as all her friends have gone, and there is nothing to do besides her work. Najeeb discovers in Noha an intelligent, interesting and generous person who is able to fill his life

and replace the vacuum created by the absence of his wife and children. When his wife finally comes back for the Easter vacation, Noha decides to put an end to their relationship. Uselessly, though, Najeeb's home life turns into hell after his wife discovers his liaison with Noha. Noha once again takes pity on him and accepts to see him but she fully realizes the hopelessness of their situation. Where lies the solution?

In the end the reader finds her sitting alone watching a T.V. documentary about the first weapon made by pre-historic man.

This unexpected and symbolic ending gives the reader food for thought as do many other passages in the novel.

The Strangled Echo shows the impact of war on the Lebanese family. Its realistic depiction of Beirut under fire, of the devastation, kidnapping and death. It gives also a lively and precise picture of life in that city during the early months of the war. The novel also transports us to Paris, painting the lives and emotions of the Lebanese who had fled their country to escape death and unemployment. The author describes and analyses with great exactitude and insight the thoughts and emotions of her characters both in Beirut and Paris, their fears, hopes, dreams and longings; and mainly the conflict that goes on in the heart and mind of each of them, especially in her two protagonists, Noha and Najeeb, as they face their insoluble dilemma. A dilemma which so many Lebanese men and women faced because the war dispersed families, wrecked homes, changed values and altered personalities and people.

However, the author does not fall into the trap of a melodramatic story so easy within such a context. She deftly gives the most dramatic events a humorous turn which keeps the novel within the bounds of the realities of life with all its human strength and weakness, joy and sadness, gravity and ridicule. All related in a lively, easy-flowing and succinct style so rare in the Arabic novel, captivating the reader's interest and curiosity, and sustaining the suspense of the story till the last word in the book.

*Beirut, Nawfal, 1986, pp.226

Lebanese Women Witness to War

Lebanese women witness to war was the theme of a three day conference held in Paris from October 20 to 22, 1987 under the auspices of the League of Arab States.

Fifteen prominent career women representing a cross-section of Lebanese society interpreted the effect of war on the various walks of life in Lebanon.

A number of French and Arab journalists interested in the Lebanese crisis as well as Lebanese and Arab personalities residing in France attended the conference.

The session was opened by the Arab League Director in Paris, Dr. Hamadi Essid, a veteran Tunisian diplomat familiar with the complexities and intricacies of the Lebanese problem. Ambassador Essid acted on several occasions as the Arab League' special envoy to

Lebanon during the 1975-76 crisis. In his speech, Dr. Essid pinned great hopes on the contribution of Lebanese women in achieving peace.

Lebanon's Permanent Representative to UNESCO, Dr. Adel Ismail addressed the participants and Ms. Nelly Salameh acted as coordinator to the conference. Ms. Salameh, who introduced the speakers, described the role of Lebanese women in the war as "the saviours of the fabric of Lebanese society". She pointed to Lebanese women's contribution to the progress and development of their country in particular and the Arab world in general.

The conference revolved around five main themes. Following is a replica of the program, indicating the theme of each session, the speakers and the titles of the papers presented.

Program of the Conference: Lebanese Women Witness to War

First Session

Women and the Media in a Lebanon at War

Ilham Kallab-Bissat: "Image of women in the Lebanese media."

Alouié Sobh: "The literary and artistic production of Lebanese women during the war."

Second Session

Children: Victims of War

Fadia Hattit el-Amine: "Influence of war on mother-child relationship."

Leila Chikhani Nacouz: "Expressions of war through drawings of 7 to 12 year old girls."

Raja Nehmé: "Adolescent literature and war."

Third Session

Women and Confessionalism

Nadia el-Ali: "Relationship between confessionalism and feminist action in the Chouf region."

Dalal Bizri Bawab: "Women and Muslim religion during the war."

Matil Bounassif Yaghi: "Effects of confessionalism on Lebanese women during the war."

Fourth Session

Impact of War on the Status, Role and Work of Women

Nazik el-Amine: "The changing role of displaced women during the war in adverse situations."

May Hazzaz: "Defying the war: women witnessing issues of adverse situations."

Irene Lorfing: "Women and work in Lebanon during the war."

Laure Moughaizel: "Political participation of women during the war: political parties and syndicates."

Fifth Session

Family and Society

Yoland Houry: "War and delinquency."

Marie Thérèse Khair-Badawi: "Sexuality, women and war: sexuality put to the test."

Zeinab Raja Makki Tabbara: "Relationship between women and men through comic strips published during the war."

The full text of the conference papers can be obtained from the offices of the Arab League. Below are brief comments on some of the topics discussed.

Although women were the pillars that kept the country from disintegrating, they did not play an active role in the war and were misinterpreted in the media. They were shown either as socialites, social workers, or tragic figures mourning their dead. The ordinary Lebanese woman who faced the everyday problems of a country at war and who kept her family together, whose courage, loyalty, integrity and work both inside and outside the house (as a breadwinner) was not portrayed.

On the other hand women writers who dealt with subjects of women's emancipation, modernization and the struggle to prove themselves before the war became less personal in their literary writings and dealt with problems of their society at large becoming the voice that cried out the grievances and problems of the people. A similar experience was found among painters who mostly portrayed anguished images of a suffering people and expressions of aggression and destruction.

Children's drawings expressed their fear of war and disgust of violence. Research revealed themes most frequently drawn by children were houses, fire, ambulances, explosions, blood, death and soldiers.

The influence of war on mother-child relationship questions the impact of war on the role of women as mothers. Mothers played a pivoted role in keeping the family together and more so during duress. The great responsibilities and duties that motherhood imposes on women often deter them or conflict with their desire for self fulfillment in other spheres of life. A question which is being debated by women all over the world was posed: is motherhood now a handicap to progress since many modern women would like to combine motherhood and a career.

In Lebanon co-existence and tolerance among the various religious communities and sects had always set an example to the rest of the world. However, confessionalism was used during the war as a tool to try to disintegrate the country and break Lebanon into statelets. To solve this problem it was suggested that education particularly civic education and mixed marriages may put an end to confessionalism.

What then was the status and role of women during the war? Women took the initiative and played a major role in the rehabilitation of the country. It was women who managed to locate housing or found jobs for their unemployed husbands and adult children. In most cases women themselves took part-time jobs to enable them to sustain their families especially when the husband or father was killed and the woman found herself the sole breadwinner in the family. Women's main task however, remained vigil by restoring confidence to their shattered families providing comfort in most uncomfortable circumstances.

The paper presented on women and work, stated that women represent 18.4% of the Lebanese work force, indicating that one woman to every four men has a job, excluding the domestic service in the rural areas. The majority of working women are below 25 and single. Only 9% are married. According to the author the majority of women do not consider that exercising a profession is a necessary option but an answer to an economic need. Professional women are confined to a limited number who are offered junior posts. A large number of Lebanese women work in services (56.4%); industry (20%) and agriculture (23.6%). The majority are exploited and do not benefit from social security nor are they protected by the Lebanese Labour Law as they often fail to be registered.

In political participation women were totally absent in the executive branch of the government. Women do not occupy key posts and are therefore absent from participating in decision making positions. There is only one woman ambassador, 18 consuls and not a single member of parliament in Lebanon. However, women are widely represented in public schools and hospitals. Women's participation in political parties is limited to their student years at universities. Few join syndicates and the majority leave such activities once they are married.

Speaking of family and society, it was pointed out that marriage is the aspiration of most young Lebanese girls. Once married having children becomes an overall duty. For married women the war posed problems of survival on two levels:

1. Survival caused by the economic crisis;

2. Physical and emotional survival caused by security problems. Many husbands were forced to leave their wives behind. This meant physical and emotional separation from their spouses which in turn invited both parties to look for consolation or company outside wedlock. Economic needs also drove many women to take up prostitution for a living.

To sum up the main point of this conference, it was evident from the papers presented that Lebanese women were witness to war. They were active in all walks of life but not in warfare. Their courage, endurance, responsibilities and work are taken for granted. However, when the call came for this conference Lebanese women were given the chance to be heard, they broke the barriers of demarcation lines, sectarianism, confessionalism, political parties and slogans, to meet, discuss and present their experiences concluding with a set of resolutions and recommendations.

We would like to mention here that two of the speakers namely Mrs. Irene Lorfing, a sociologist, is a former IWSAW staff member, and Maitre Laure Moughaizel has collaborated with the Institute in the Basic Living Skills Project. The Institute has also published a book by Mt. Moughaizel entitled **Women and Law in Lebanon**.

Maha Samara



Ilham Kallab, Zeinab Raja Makki, Laure Moghaizel and Yoland Khoury.

Recommendations made at the Paris Conference

1. Refusal of Lebanese Women to allow religious affiliations to interfere with their loyalty to the state.
2. Condemnation of Lebanese women to the use of religious differences as a political weapon in preventing co-existence and tolerance among the Lebanese communication.
3. Confirmation of Lebanese women to help encourage and arouse national and civic consciousness among the people.
4. Utmost consideration should be given to the living and economic hardships facing the population as a direct result of 13 years of war.
5. Confirming the awareness of the participants to the danger of dislocation and demographic segregation on the social fabric and unity of the Lebanese State.
6. Protecting and promoting a Lebanese national culture instead of a religious confessional culture.
7. Calling on Lebanese Women to help break the demarcation lines and other manifestations of division in the country.
8. Calling for the immediate implementation of law and order in the country.
9. Belief in the sacred right of the individual to exercise his religion and freedom of thought, speech and writing without harassment and intimidation.
10. Promoting awareness of Lebanese women to their role in society as peace makers for the peace to come.

The Aunt of Rafiq (a short story)



Ying Pan „Mystical Pemi” 1984

The following story was published in **Women and the Family in the Middle East**, edited by Elizabeth Fernea. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.

Abridged by Leila Fawaz

Daisy Al Amir is a well known Iraqi poetess, novelist and short story-writer. She was born in Iraq but lived a good deal of her life in Lebanon, first as a student at the American University of Beirut and later as a diplomat. She was the Press and Cultural Attaché at the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut from 1970-1985.*

* *Al Raïda*. November 1985 Vol. VIII, No. 34

Tonight was the last night she would spend in this strange country. The mineral baths and the massage had ended in the morning and the attendant had smoothed the last heavy application of black mud onto the ailing parts of her body.

The doctor said in the strange, broken language of this country that she needed physical, mental, and emotional rest.

“Physical rest! Mental rest! Emotional rest!!!” he repeated.

She told the doctor she would be unable to obtain any of these rests that he prescribed.

“Why not?” he had asked.

She could not respond. How could she make him understand who she really was? How could she explain the responsibilities that rested on her shoulders, on her head, on her arms?

She had tried to conceal her real identity in this strange country, tried to disguise herself so no one would know she was here, resting her body, her mind, and her emotions.

It was the doctor in her own country who had decided that she was near collapse and needed a retreat where there would be no work or responsibility, only relaxation, sleep, and a pleasant atmosphere. Her brother had nodded, but said after deep thought and careful consideration, “And who will help me while she is gone?”

The strange doctor had continued to question her. “What do you do that causes such total exhaustion, such great tension?”

She had been puzzled how to answer. Should she have explained the nature of her work? Should she have said that she is the sister of her brother? In the end, she had said nothing.

When she had left to go to the strange country, her brother had told her not to speak of her work to anyone. “If the Arab tourists recognize you,” her brother had said, “they will say, aha, the militants behave in a bourgeois manner even though they say they

are the militants, the leaders, and the fighters. They will say you are the sister of the militant, the sister of the leader, and the sister of the fighter. Thus you must not behave like a bourgeois.”

And he continued to tell her, “Remember, the feeling of fatigue is a bourgeois trait. The collapse of the body in the face of responsibilities is a bourgeois trait. And the frailty of nerves in the face of exhaustion and wakefulness is a bourgeois trait.”

Her brother had, after all, devoted himself totally to the cause. He had been infused with enthusiasm from the first moment he became aware of the concerns of the homeland. He was the only son in the family, she was the younger sister. She was influenced by his strong personality and began to voice his opinions and repeat what he said. Then he began explaining the cause to her. She soon found herself engaged in a major military operation. Her brother made her a comrade in the struggle. This increased her commitment to the cause and she spent all her time working.

But her brother —. Despite his enthusiasm and his struggle for the cause, her brother, managed to find another comrade, a comrade of a different kind. The new comrade entered his life through an easy door and became a pampered wife. She, his sister, remained his comrade in struggle.

Other people knew this perfectly well. They knew that she, his sister, was truly his confident, that every major secret was told to her alone. They knew that behind her brother's unique, captivating personality stood his sister — a solemn pledge to the cause, consulted before all his speeches were made, before all his policies were announced.

But women are assumed to be more talkative than men and people tried to follow her, to ask her questions, direct and indirect. She had passed the test, however, and remained steadfast, not answering any of the tantalizing questions, until her brother's supporters and followers called her “the sister of men”. They had honored her. They had given her a rank, the rank of those who are known through their brothers!

Soon she recognized that the cause was more important than all human desires and to give it total attention she dissociated herself from the world of women. No visits to the hairdresser or the dressmaker, no trips to the market or morning social calls. For such visits wasted time. She needed the time for the cause.

When her brothers' wife bore a son, Rafiq, her brother became known as the father of Rafiq. She found this preposterous. She also found it strange that her brother began to spend part of his time evaluating his son's toys, while her own responsibilities to the cause increased. And she came to be called the aunt of Rafiq. They had elevated her to a new rank, that of the aunt of Rafiq. She was no longer called "the sister of men". Had men suddenly become little children?

What if she had been called the mother of Rafiq? The idea had not occurred to her before. She remembered an offer of marriage, long ago. She had been engaged very young to a man whom she did not see except through the gifts that his mother and sister gave her... Then her father had decided that her fiancé was not suitable and she had returned the gifts.

She had asked, "Why wasn't he appropriate? Why had he been appropriate at one time and not now?"

Her father never answered this question, neither when she asked him herself nor when she sought an explanation from her mother. "Your father thinks this is best for you," was all her mother would say.

She wondered what had happened to those gifts and who was wearing them now.

She asked once what would happen if she stood before the mirror admiring herself as her brother's wife did.

Her grandfather said. "She is a wife, and must make herself pretty to please her husband. But as for you, are you making yourself pretty to please your brother's friends? And what would people say if one of them got interested in you?"

Her brother added "What if, God forbid, one of them loves you? People would say that I allowed you to participate in a national cause in order to find you a

husband. Your proper behavior makes you immune to criticism and your pride in being 'the sister of men' is enough for you." Her brother had laughed merrily. "Isn't that so, aunt of Rafiq?"

This was her last night in this strange country, and she had never explored the night life here. She had gotten to know the streets leading to the sanatorium, the massage room, and the room for mud applications. What had she seen in this strange country other than the mineral baths?

Night was another world, a new world with which she had not been familiar during the three weeks of her exile. Had the long quiet nights studying political books in her room rested her and made her happy? Was the restaurant forbidden, so she had dinner in her room? Why had the world of the night frightened her? Wasn't she the fighter, sister of men, aunt of Rafiq? Was she more courageous during the day? Why had she eaten her lunch every day in the infirmary restaurant, which was filled with the old, disabled, and sick? And why had she limited her breakfast to the mineral water from the drinking fountain in her room?

She knew why she had kept to herself. But she could not believe that she actually had passed long weeks in a medical program that claimed to have given her rest physically, mentally, and emotionally! It was time to return home. To the cause. To the work. In her country, night would connect with day once more and women and men would be considered equal.

Men and women, men and women. She seemed to hear her brother say, "Have you forgotten that you are the sister of men, the aunt of Rafiq?"

After all this struggle and self-denial and sacrifice, why had she still not reached the point of being called by her name?

Was it not an honor to be a woman? A woman **only**? Why is a woman always the sister of men, the aunt of a child.... Why was she not at least the **wife** of a man?

She had finished eating her dinner and had not noticed that the sweet had been placed on a plate in front of her.

She looked about the restaurant... At some table sat men, at others women, and at a third both sexes sat together. And she... she alone of all the people in this room could not say, if asked, to which table she belonged.

A voice rang out. She realized after a moment that it was her voice calling. The waiter came to her. She asked him for a glass of wine. He stared at her in astonishment and disapproval. She repeated her request.

He said, "You want wine now, when dinner is over? We are in a restaurant attached to a hospital, the time has passed for ordering wine with dinner."

He paused and pointed outside. "The bar is on your right as you exit from the main door. They can serve you wine until the sun rises tomorrow."

He left before hearing her reply. Had the waiter provoked her deliberately? Did he know who she was? Even though she had disguised herself these weeks, that did not mean that she was nobody. There, in her own country, a thousand and one individuals desired to talk to her, "the sister of men" to learn something about her or her affairs or the affair of... of... of her brother.

For the first time she asked herself to what had she dedicated her life? To the cause, or to her brother?

The waiter presented her with a bill. She signed it and stood up proudly, confident of her reputation in her own country. Tomorrow she would be at home, where people honored her and expected her to speak eloquently.

Music drifted out of the bar. She entered. The room was crowded and filled to the ceiling with smoke. She walked among the occupied tables to a small table in the farthest corner. She sat down. The table remained empty, and she was pleased that no one had recognized her.

She wondered if she should ask for a glass of wine? Did she want red or white? Which was known to give a person more courage?

She looked around but no one was watching her. She could ask for whatever she wanted and nobody would even give her a glance. Was that a comfort?

The light in the bar was faint and the clouds of smoke surrounded her. No one could see her in the semi-dark. Was that what she wanted? That no one would see her?

Someone stopped by her table. He gestured toward the empty chair. She motioned with her head that he could help himself to the chair and he did. His features resembled those of the natives of her country and so she turned her face away from him.

Your fingers are lean like the fingers of a man, her brother had said. She withdrew her hands and put them in her lap. The man sitting at her table was not looking at her, but turning his head this way and that. She followed his eyes to a statuesque blond girl with a beautiful face. The blond girl was carrying a tray with glasses and bottles on it.

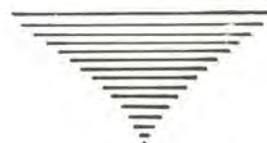
The "sister of men" looked attentively at the face of her table companion. In it was grief and longing. The waitress was near the neighbouring table but she turned and smiled at them. The waitress came over and whispered to her table companion. "The sister of men," the aunt of Rafiq, did not understand a word in the language of the people in this strange country. But the table companion was a stranger too; that was better. But.. why was that better?

On the next round, the waitress stopped for some moments and again on another round. Some minutes passed.

Her table companion turned and looked at her... She told herself he could not have recognized her. He was a stranger, and he did not know that she was "the sister of men," the aunt of Rafiq. He was looking at her directly, at her, herself. Then he looked down at the empty table before her, and then up at her again.

His eyes asked, "Have you finished?"

And she nodded, "Yes".



The Guides as well as five children's books (see **Al-Raida**, May 1987, Vol. VIII, No.40) are the result of a research project on Children's literature in Arabic, implemented by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and supervised by specialists in the field. This project was funded by the Kuwait Society for the Advancement of Arab Children — Kuwait. The main aim of the project is bringing quality books to Arab children and promoting reading among Arab children.

Guide for Writers & Illustrators of Children's Books

J. Abu Nasr, A. Nassar and H. Khoury

The first part of this book gives writers of children's stories characteristics of a good book; guidelines for selecting appropriate themes; basic elements in story technique and style of writing, with emphasis on values. It also includes the importance of children's poetry and how to present it to them. It stresses children's preferences and what is suitable to them at their different stages of development between the ages of 3 to 12.

The Book contains a vocabulary list and the appropriate language structure for each age group as well as general and Arabic sources of children's literature.

A part of the book is devoted to illustrators of children's books. It describes the characteristics of illustrations, how to prepare them and how to prepare the book for printing. It also provides sources on drawing techniques and designs for children's books.

Guide for Setting-up a Children's Library

J. Abu Nasr, A. Nassar and H. Khoury

This book is divided into three parts. The first part stresses the importance of reading in children's development, giving criteria for evaluating quality books for Arab children.

The second part explains how to set-up and administer a children's library from its inception as a building to equipping it and selecting books as well as cataloguing, record keeping and library membership.

The third part describes the important role the librarian plays in preparing creative programs. It provides a list of different programs and activities as well as techniques in story telling and story reading. It also stresses the importance of teacher-librarian cooperation.



AL-RAIDA, IWSAW QUARTERLY

LEBANON

P. O. Box 13-5053

Beirut University College

Beirut, Lebanon

Cable Address: BECOGE

Tlx: BUC 23389 LE

U.S.A.

Beirut University College

475 Riverside Drive,

Room 1846

New York, NY 10115

Director: **Julinda Abu Nasr**

Advisor: **Rose Ghurayyib**

Guest - Editor: **Maha Samara**

Layout: **Rima Khalifeh**

YEARLY CONTRIBUTION

Lebanon: L.L. 500 per year

Other Countries: \$ 15 per year

plus \$3 to cover postage