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WOMEN

Where

When

and How??!..



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CONTENTS

Conferences

The First World Summit:
Women and the Many Dimen-
sions of Power

The Fourth Interdisciplinary
Congress on Women. by Irene
Faffler

Bahrain: Eradication of Ille-
teracy by the Year 2000

Lecture

The Role of Women in the
Making of Peace

Articles

A New Arab Woman?
Iraqi Women Preserve
Gains Despite Wartime Prob-
lems

Female Singers in the Arab
World: Cultural Symbols in a
Traditional Society by Nada
Awar

For Your Information
Madam, Women's World
Banking

Pioneers

Laila Shaheen DaCruz by
Rose Ghurayyib

Dorayah Aaouni

Art Exhibit

Saudi Arabian Talents

The First World Summit: Women and the Many Dimensions of Power

**Palais de Congres de Montreal
Quebec, June 3-8, 1990**

The first World Summit on Women and the Many Dimensions of Power brought female delegates from all around the world together. It brought them together to discuss the issues condemning women and keeping them from exercising power in their societies. The multitude of issues, ideas, opinions and suggested plans of action prompted heated debates and sometimes disagreement between the delegates. The atmosphere would flare up on issues like the ban on abortion in the West; how to secure a better future for poor women; the crucial need for economic influence; female scarcity in the top levels of news media; the need for more female politicians and how to change the rules of power; women in medicine lacking clout; women's knowledge and values that can save the environment; religions and their status-quo values towards women; legitimate recognition of prostitutes; and many other controversial matters.

Danielle Debbas, President of the host group, F.R.A.P.P.E. (Femmes Regroupees pur l'Accessibilite au Pouvoir Politique et Economique, i.e. Women for Access to Political and Economic Power) ardently monitored the debates, panels and workshops. She fiercely countered any potential complications in the proceedings and goals of the Summit.

Debbas concluded the First World Summit on a positive note saying: «We know women are oppressed - It's time to go to something positive. To change things you have to put women at the top of the pyramid⁽¹⁾».

Hence, the First World Summit ended with plans for another one in 1994.

About the First World Summit

The First World Summit came in celebration of the 50 years of Quebec women's right to vote. As mentioned above, it was organized by F.R.A.P.P.E and sponsored by **Voice for Women Canada** and **Women for a Meaningful Summit International**.

The main purpose of the Summit was to provoke worldwide collective action to enable women to perme-

ate all spheres of power in the hope of bringing about a new vision. To achieve this goal, the Summit committed itself to the fulfillment of the following specific objectives:

- Comparing experiences, while taking into consideration the cultural, social, economic and legislative differences of the respective countries
- Exchanging at the international level, the information on strategies carried out by women in their respective countries and developing new ones in order that women gain access to positions of power, prestige and high profile
- Creating an international network of mutual aid, exchanges and communication
- Developing proposals in order to enhance women's integration into the many dimensions of power
- Organizing international summits on women and power, every two or three years in a different country.
- Creating an international permanent secretariat made up of representatives from several countries, in charge of coordinating the holding of future summits and following up towards proposals stemming from the various workshops⁽²⁾.

Approximately 110 women from 39 countries attended this summit. For four days, they roamed, spoke, argued and suggested action towards the empowerment and emancipation of women in the various fields of power. Pannels, luncheons and workshops filled the Palais de Congres de Montreal. The many dimensions of power in question were:

- Power and Politics
- Power and the Economy
- Power and Art
- Power and Education
- Power and Reproduction Choices
- Power and the changing of the Guards
- Power and Civilization
- Power and Ecology
- Power and Language
- Power and Peace



«Simone de Beauvoir once wrote 'One is not born a woman, one becomes one'.

- Power and Religion
- Power and the Media
- Power and Law
- Power and Health
- Power and Work
- Power and Handicapped Women
- Power and Sexuality
- Power and Unions
- Power and Senior Citizens
- Power and Science

This highlights of these talks were:

Economy: **Michaela Walsh- US- Women's World Banking⁽³⁾**

Media: **Michelle Cotta- France - The Power of Women in the French Media**

Therese Sevigny-Quebec - Women and Power, What Power?

Ethics: **Marilyn French- US- Beyond Power.**

«Women have nothing to gain by a conquest of power as it exists in our societies, for it is but a synonym of control and domination. Women must aim for the power to create, to speak and to restructure their lives in harmony with nature and other human beings⁽⁴⁾.

Gisele Halimi- France- Ethics and Politics: New Citizenship for Women

«Women, men, how to share everything?» was Halimi's fundamental question. «The conquests of women are the conquest of democracy. »

Representatives from the Arab World

Dr. Julinda Abou Nasr, Director

Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World

Dr. Abou Nasr's contribution to the Summit was her participation in the workshop on **Power and Education**, organized by Arpi Hamalian, president of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute of Concordia University, Canada.

Dr. Abou Nasr reviewed the background of women's education in the Arab World; Contemporary developments and progress; and the obstacles women face in getting higher education. She emphasized that in the past «social traditions did not allow for women's admission to the existing institutions of higher learning in the Arab countries». However, «through missionary, revolutionary and social movements demanding emancipation and social reform, women made significant progress in academics». Nevertheless, various obstacles still persist and hinder the access of women to higher education. but two main obstacles were highlighted. The first lies in the «socio-cultural traditions and rituals of our society which maintain the status of 'the second sex' for women, i.e mother, sister or daughter»; the second being school curricula, which «reinforce sexual stereotypes, promote drop outs and provide poor vocational training».

In conclusion Dr. Abou Nasr suggested primary corrective steps needed for women to develop their potentials in the Arab World.

- Promoting compulsory education

The First World Summit

(continued)

- Changing existing school curricula
- Eradicating traditional stereotype images of women in the family, books, the media and at work
- Providing women with opportunities for self-identification and self-realization.

Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi (Egypt)

Arab Women's Solidarity Association

Dr. El-Saadawi's contribution to the workshops was on **Arab Women and Power**. She discussed the various demises of women in the Arab World touching upon their social, economic and political status. Her emphasis was that women are still «a marginal minority in most political parties and organizations». For instance, Arab women have obtained what is called 'political rights' (voting, nomination and election) but have not become a political force.

For women to become a political force, Dr. El-Saadawi suggested:

- The creation of independent women's political organizations in each Arab country.
- Arab women should re-read their history with a critical mind. Heritage is a tool, which women should use for their own interest.
- Arab women should be active politically in parliaments, political parties, syndicates, labour unions, professional associations and so on.
- Arab women should communicate with other women all over the world.

Note: Membership to F.R.A.P.P.E. and copies of the original texts of the participants in the summit may be ordered by writing to: F.R.A.P.P.E., 822, rue Sherbrooke est, bureau 322, Montreal (Quebec) Canada H21 1K4, tel (514) 521-0152, Fax (514) 521-7686 ●

- (1) Bagnall, Janet, «Women's Conference President Knows the Business of Power», *The Gazette*, Montreal, Saturday June 9, 1990, page A5.
- (2) Booklet of the First World Summit «Women and the Many Dimensions of Power», prepared by F.R.A.P.P.E Women for Access to Political and Economic Power.
- (3) See page 12.
- (4) Marie Claude Lortie, «Le Gazon Pousse Meme dans les Betons», *La Presse*, Jeudi 7 Juin, 1990.

The Fourth Interdisciplinary Congress on Women

By Irene Faffler

New York: June 3-7, 1990

Over 2,000 delegates from 104 countries answered the Roll-Call in the Hunter College auditorium, led by Keynote speaker Jeanetta Cole, President of Spellman College. Beginning with Algeria and Argentina, down the alphabet she went and delegates rose to their feet to proudly represent their countries. It was an emotional moment for me as I stood to represent Lebanon.

Speaking of the choices that face today's women, from what to cook to which strategy to take to win the next victory, Dr. Cole pointed to some important choices: «With whom shall we stand?» «Shall it be with the poor and powerless - with their poverty and sweatshops?». And finally she asked the question we all expected, «my sisters, what are we doing about racism?» Dr. Cole pointed out that there are no national boundaries to prejudice and ignorance.

«The decision is in our hands.» she urged. To illustrate this point, Dr. Cole told the story of a wise, but uneducated woman, Fanny Lou Haver. Several arrogant young boys saw her on the street one day and thought they would trick her with a question she could not answer. One of them was chosen as the spokesman. «Old woman,» he said, «this bird that I hold behind my back, is it alive or dead?» He had already agreed with his friends that if she said «Dead», he would raise his hand and the bird would fly away; if she said «Alive», he would crush it and it would be dead. The old wise woman answered, «Why, my son, the answer is in your hands.» Dr. Cole ended her speech with this poignant plea, «My sisters, the answer is in your hands.»

Challenged by this key note address, the delegates went out to attend panel discussions, lectures, film presentations, exhibits, etc., prepared by more than 800 participants on topics ranging from «Women, Land and Agriculture in Jamaica,» «Pioneer Canadian Women Scientists» and «The Right to a Healthy Life» to «Paid Work and Unpaid Caring for Disabled and Frail Elderly Relatives» and «Intimacy and Violence: a Cross-Cultural Examination of Homicide within the Family.»

The theme of «Women as Active Protagonists Instead of Subordinates» followed the delegates throughout the week. Over and over again we were urged to encourage women to go into science and technology, to take grea-

ter control of our environment, to devise programs that will be processes of empowerment to women, to make sure that we have resource sustainability, to get women to attend meetings on women, to organize support groups for women who are in leadership positions, and to emphasize the importance of coming together in groups, for it was felt that it is through groups that we can affect social change.

The plight of women was stressed in both developed and developing countries. Women with heavy work loads, working longer hours than men, their earnings crucial to family survival, was a picture drawn by many presenters who came from countries where illiteracy among women was as high as 75 percent. On the other end of the continuum, women struggled in developed countries to learn skills of competitive behavior in male-socialized network. A lonely task, that women in leadership roles also felt because of the lack of women role models, the difficulties of gaining hearings in committees or obtaining enough appreciation from their colleagues to maintain their self-esteem.

Throughout the conference there was a sense of waxing and waning of the emergence of women into society. Surely the struggles of the sixties and seventies should have brought more gains. Have we taken one step forward, only to go back two steps? One was reminded of leaders from the past with similar heavy hearts; for example, in 1935 Olga Knopf wrote, «A few years ago one could easily have taken it for granted that the battle of the 'independent woman' would end in success... It is not quite so easy now to be optimistic over the progress of women. One is bound to feel that advances are yet stable.»

As we heard time and again, there were many gains. Indian delegates, for example, reported that recent studies show some change in traditional self-concepts to a more liberated self-perception. Reforestation there is being undertaken by women in rural areas and is viewed optimistically as a major step forward, so much so that the Asian Women's Institute has adopted the theme of «Women and the Environment in an Age of Technology» for its 1991 conference.

It was Flannery O'Connor who said «Knowing who you are is good for one generation only.» This knowledge of an on-going struggle can be seen in the title of some of the presentations: «I'm not who I was when I started on this journey,» «Growing Visible: Women's Participation in Presidential Struggles in Mexico City», and «Rural Women and Welfare Reform: Becoming Self-Sufficient.» There are too many titles to mention.

The wealth of scholarship being accumulated in many areas of women's lives is heartening. Already research is

being undertaken to present at the Fifth Congress which will be held in Puerto Rico. Each contribution will lead to a clearer picture of women's lives and to equity which «speaks softly and wins in the end.»●



Dr. Irene Faffler, Phd in Drama and Speech is known as a pioneering, creative and leading member of the Beirut University College (BUC) Community. She came to Lebanon in 1959 as a professor of Literature and Drama when the College was still an all-girls institution (Beirut College for Women - BCW).

Dr. Faffler was the first to establish Children's Theatre in Lebanon on the stages of the College. She served as the Chairperson of the Humanities Division from 1964 until she was appointed Academic Dean of the College in 1982. It was unfortunate that Dr. Faffler had to leave Lebanon in 1987 upon the orders of her government (USA) for security reasons. She had stayed in Lebanon for many years despite the heavy fighting for she was dedicated to BUC and loved her students.

During her stay at the College, Dr. Faffler redesigned the curriculum of the Communication Arts department to introduce new fields and new talent. she is noted for delegating responsibilities to students in order to aspire innovation and excellence with the hope of elevating play-production to a professional level. She is said to have compassion for people, for art and for awakening hidden talents in students.

Bahrain: Eradication of Illiteracy By the Year 2000^(☆)

Manama: July 23-24, 1990

In celebration of the International Year to eradicate illiteracy the Ministry of Education of Bahrain held a conference to discuss strategies of work among its citizens by the year 2000.

The objectives of the conference were to introduce the national plan of action, to look into the problems of primary education and their impact on illiteracy, and to discuss the role of Family Associations in this struggle against illiteracy.

In the opening statement, the Director of Training in the Ministry, Mr. Ali Abdel-Khalek reported that illiteracy in the Arab World is as high as 50 percent, i.e. there are 80 million illiterate Arabs including 70 percent female illiteracy and 21 million children who do not receive any kind of formal schooling.

Abdel-Khalek concluded by emphasizing that Bahrain aims to remove 'this seige on education among its citizens' by the year 2000.

Mr. Mohamad Al-Abbas Al-Imadi, the Director of Administration of Adult Education, spoke of the programs, strategies and progress done by the Ministry of Education in combating illiteracy. Thus, in collaboration with social and family planning associations, the Ministry has introduced important teaching methods to its literacy projects. Furthermore, the Ministry has successfully dealt with many of the problems which hinder the enrollment of adults in its adult education programs; and continues to do so.

According to Al-Imadi, illiteracy in Bahrain for people between 10 and 44 years of age was 6,218 males (9.1%) and 20,506 (19.05%) females. However, by 1989, illiteracy has been reduced by 7.5 percent for the age bracket in question. Thus, illiteracy has gone down to 3.4 percent among Bahrain males and to 11.6 percent among Bahraini females.

Al-Imadi also stated that a new plan devised by the National Council of Bahrain to Eradicate illiteracy has the remaining illiterate sectors of the population as its target. The council is also introducing new educational and occupational strategies and incentives in its adult education program ●

The Role of Women in the Making of Peace



From: Al-Safir- October 27, 1990

Beirut, October 26, 1990

Once again, the lecture hall of the Alumni Club of the American University of Beirut (AUB) filled with lecturers and an audience ranging from scholars to students, journalists and lay-people.

The Middle East Council of Churches in collaboration with the Cultural Committee of the AUB Alumni Chapter invited four distinguished female scholars to discuss the Role of Women in the Making of Peace.

It was four in the afternoon, shortly before the fall of darkness. Instead of hurrying home to take care of the children or to take refuge from the awe stricken streets of the city, approximately fifty men and women attended an intellectual panel. The attendance was relatively high by war standards. I had been under the impression that people had become too tired to listen to «heavy» intellectual lectures especially those dealing with women. Fortunately, I was proven wrong. It was a good sign that women's issues have not been completely over-ruled by other political and economic problems which plague Lebanon.

The panel began with the welcoming note of Dr. Mary Mikhael on behalf of the Middle East Council of Churches. The emphasis of her opening statement was the need for women to participate at the decision-making levels of society in order to bring peace and prosperity. Then Dr. Mikhael introduced the panelists and their specific areas of concentration in the context of women and peace-making: Dr. Suad Hakim, a specialist in Islamic Studies, concentrated on the role of women in society. Dr. Nour Salman, a writer and education specialist, discussed the role of women in education

(☆) Source: *Al-Anwar* Daily Newspaper. July 7, 1990, p. 7.

as well as the role of education in promoting peace. Mrs. Edvick Shayboub, a media specialist, dealt with the role of women in media and their efforts to propagate peace. Maitre Laure Moghaizel, a lawyer and long time feminist, discussed the need for women to participate in politics and political institutions in order to implement peaceful strategies.

1- Dr. Suad Hakim, on the Role of Women in the Making of Peace through society, pointed out that «Women have an instinct to be peaceful without being weak, and strong without being violent». «However, because of cultural, social and economic hinderances, women in Lebanon have not effectively participated in our war history» she claimed. Hakim insisted that women should play a dynamic role, lest they remain subordinate to men.

She concluded by calling upon women to continue preaching the language and logic of peace, and to find means of communicating this language to people and able associations in order to have them implemented on a massive scale.

2- Dr. Nour Salman, on education, emphasized that, both, men and women have a much needed role in peace-making through education. She strongly demanded that educational methods and policies of the past and the present be modified to promote peace not wars. Salman presented the current shortcomings of educational policies in a critical note hoping to inspire change for a better future. She touched upon the increasing rate of illiteracy: alphabetic, cultural and social, after the war. Hence, she insisted that present education lacks the element of realistic knowledge, «If it is not realistic, if it does not coincide with the reality of our lives, it cannot bring about the needed changes and much needed peace.» Salman pointed out that school curricula should not stop short of sex-education. They should teach motherhood and fatherhood in their proper social and cultural perspectives in order to give way to knowledgeable and peace-loving future generations.

3- Ms. Edvick Shayboub pointed out that the success of women in bringing peace through the media is very

promising. She pointed out that it is within the physiological nature of women to be messengers of peace and love in addition to their instinctive inclination to become journalists. Shayboub bases her optimism on the increasing number of female students in faculties of communication arts all over the country, despite the difficult times.

«The efforts of women to make peace, in the past, through the media have always been sabotaged by the political conspiracy against peace.» Shayboub specifically referred to the Peace March which was organized by our colleague at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Miss Iman Khalife, on May 6, 1984⁽¹⁾. On the eve of the March, shells fell on the city crippling the thousands of women, men and children who planned to walk in the March, said Shayboub. However, she continued, the media coverage of the planned March and its sabotage was memorable and «gave women all the credit for trying to promote peace».

4- Lawyer Laure Moghaizel tackled the issue of the role of women in politics for making peace by asking three fundamental questions: Do women have a specific role in the peace process? Where were women and where were their political opinions during the war? What are the conditions needed to admit women into the political process for peace?

Moghaizel, basing her argument on previous research⁽²⁾, indicated that women are virtually non-existent in political parties, syndicates, unions, or other politically influential organizations. She concluded «the time has come for all the citizens, especially for women, to transfer their potentials from bearing the consequences of war towards building a peaceful society»●

(1) «No To The War, No To The 10th Year, Yes To Life - The 6th of May Peace March.» **Al-Raida**, Nov. 84 Vol. VII, No. 30, pg. 4, 5.

(2) «Participation of Women in Politics During the War.» **Al-Raida**, Aug. 90, Vol. IX, No. 50, pg. 3, 4.

A New Arab Woman?^(☆)

Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban discusses the image of Arab women in comparison to western feminism. Born and raised in Syria, she completed her BA at the university of Damascus. Then she was offered a grant to do post-graduate studies

Feminists in the Arab World were predicting great achievements in the region by the end of the decade. Yet, little in the way of real progress has actually been recorded.

The «new» Arab woman we would like to hear about refers to isolated examples, such as the Jordanian woman who was the first to fly a commercial Tristar jet; or the Kuwaiti woman who was appointed Dean of the country's Faculty of Law; or the Kuwaiti doctor who only recently became the first woman Dean of the School of Medicine; or a former Syrian minister; or Egyptian feminists. The fate of Arab women is still commonly portrayed in the role of eternal submission, driven from home by exile and war; commanded to cover her face with the veil and always obey her husband and father.

According to Syrian-born Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban, this is not what she found as she talked to Arab women when she set out to write her book - **Both Right and Left Handed**, in which Palestinian, Syrian, Algerian and Lebanese women speak of their own life experiences in the male dominated society of the Middle East. She found scholars and freedom fighters; poets and mothers of martyrs; intelligent, spirited and often angry women.

In an interview with Pat Lancaster, Dr. Shaaban made a cross-analysis between the status of Western women and the status of Arab women. She said that Arab women are far better off than the West perceives them to be. «Sadly the western impression is still very much that of somebody wearing the veil and buying up Harrods. They do not see Arab women as they really are: wives, mothers and homemakers, but also informed and enlightened people who frequently hold down responsible jobs in farming, education, politics and law.» Dr. Shaaban added that Arab women are extremely supportive of one another on a personal level, praising each other's achievements and helping one another when they can. «In the Arab World there is a lot of solidarity between women, but it is not organized. Whereas in the West, women have official workshops where issues are debated, there is a structure.» Shaaban also pointed out that Arab women need to work on this

*in Britain at Warwick University. She is author of the book **Right and Left Handed**, in which she reports some of the experiences of Arab women in the male dominated society of the Middle East.*

structural organization. Although there are women's unions and organizations in the various Arab countries, much is still needed in overall regional terms; «What we need most of all is a change of attitude. There aren't laws against women as such but general attitudes prevent them from attaining their potential.»

With respect to attitudes towards women, Dr. Shaaban believes that the archtypal image of the western feminist has had a counter-productive effect in the countries of the Middle East. For instance, she noticed that there is a general misconception, which is promoted by men, that western feminists are sexually promiscuous and irresponsible women who do not really care about the family or children. Therefore, any attempt to immitate them constitutes loss of morality; thus, reinforcing the prevailing role of Arab women as wives and mothers, sisters and daughters, rather than as productive and career-oriented persons.

Hence, Dr. Shaaban discovered, in the course of her research, that although women have become professionals and politicians and have excelled in many fields, they are still considered the weaker sex at home. «In fact, the more successful the woman is in her profession, the greater is the pressure to prove that she is still a 'woman' with connotations of docile and feminine.» says Shaaban. Sadder still is the way many women react to this kind of pressure. «I found that these women, who, for the most part had rich experiences and valuable thoughts, were fettered by their own fears of seeming odd and ridiculous, or of jeopardizing their chances of a happy family life if they did not behave according to inherited social traditions. There is a widespread feeling in the region; just because women go out to work, to school or university, they are now fully liberated and independent. The aim is to make women feel grateful for the slight progress they have made and to stop them from going beyond this. Yet the real battle has only just begun» warns Dr. Shaaban •

(☆) Source: Excerpts from Darwish, Adel and Pat Lancaster, «The New Arab Woman: Fact or Feminist Fantasy,» **The Middle East**, February 1989, pp. 5-6.

Iraqi Women Preserve Gains Despite Wartime Problems^(☆)

Despite the pull of conservative tradition and the nation's goal, since the war with Iran, Iraqi women today have more economic and social opportunities than women in most other Arab countries. It can also be argued that Iraqi women have more opportunities and legal rights than women in many Western countries.

During the past 20 years, Iraqi women have entered practically every profession, including the army. In 1980, according to the statistics in **Iraq: The contemporary State**, edited by Tim Niblock, 37 percent of oil project designers working for the Ministry of Oil, and 30 percent of construction supervisors were women. By 1982, women comprised 46 percent of teachers, 29 percent of doctors, 46 percent of dentists, 70 percent of pharmacists, 15 percent of accountants, 14 percent of factory workers, and four percent of senior management positions.

How did Iraq do it? One might assume that it is the product of a feminist movement, as in the United States, or a struggle, as in Egypt. Actually, a number of unusual factors reinforced Iraqi women's efforts to transform political support into practical measures. The two main factors are:

The first is the country's geography. Modern Iraq is a large oil-rich country with a relatively small population of 17 million. Per capita income is approximately \$2,298. To solve its severe shortage of manpower, Iraq chose to train women rather than import huge numbers of foreign guest workers, as did Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait in their initial stages of rapid development.

The second factor that has simplified matters is the current regime's attitude towards dissent. Iraq's secular government, modeled on socialist principles, has unhesitatingly implemented measures at which a regime more sensitive to religious opposition would have balked. For instance, there is stress on education as «a matter of the elementary rights for women».

With the establishment of the General Federation of Iraqi Women, the current regime has carried out its promises energetically and methodically. The federation was founded by Nawal Hilmi, Manal Younis and Ramzia Al-Khairou, twenty-one years ago (April 4, 1969). It began as one office, the Baghdad office. Now, the federation incorporates five regional subdivisions which in turn are divided into 21 branches, one in each governate (except Baghdad which has four). Each branch has smaller subunits based in each province. More than

300,000 Iraqi women now belong to the federation.

Challenges facing the federation

One of the serious challenges the federation is facing is how to prepare women for the return of thousands of Iraqi prisoners of war. How to help the wives of men who have suffered immense psychological and emotional trauma, possibly including brainwashing, and how to reintegrate them into normal day-to-day life are the challenges facing Iraqi women. The federation's department of family assistance has trained psychologists on its staff, and many non-members, including men, seek counseling there.

The wives of «martyrs» also receive a great deal of attention from the federation. In addition to an acre or more land, cash stipends, scholarships for the children and a car, the federation offers driving lessons as well as adult education classes. The purpose is to train widows in marketable skills which help them become self-sufficient.

A second challenge the federation faces is changing attitudes about women's roles that have been ingrained in traditional Iraqi society for centuries. Thus far, they have changed the covers of children's books such that sex roles stereotypes are not reinforced. They also teach housekeeping and cooking classes to **both** boys and girls.

One of the federation's main activities is in the area of health education. Thus, federation members spend several months in rural villages in teams of two. Team members identify village women who possess leadership skills and train them to lead classes in basic hygiene, nutrition and health care. When team members are satisfied they move to another village.

The women's federation is also trying to help Iraqi working mothers balance between careers and their families by establishing nurseries and day-care centers at minimal costs throughout the country.

Hence, Iraqi women are not only basking in the support they receive from the government. They have escalated their efforts, activities and efficiency to put the skills of women into practical use •

(☆) Source: Andrea Laurenz. «Iraqi Women Preserve Gains Despite Wartime Problems.» **The Washington Report On Middle East Affairs**, July 1989, p. 4-5.

Andrea Laurenz is a program officer of the National Council on US-Arab Relations in Washington DC.

Female Singers In The Arab World: Cultural Symbols in A Traditional Society

By Nada Awar

The Arab's appreciation of female singers is largely due to the romantic character of their culture. Hence, there is an abundance of sentimentalism, nostalgia and religiosity. A song is perceived as a means to express feelings, spread values and norms, and get human beings closer to their creator once used in the spiritual context. Naturally, the singer secures a prestigious position among the people for using his/her voice, «a gift from God,» to spread the word of God, express loneliness, reflect patriotism, etc...

During the Jahiliyah era (before the coming of Islam) talented Jawaries, i.e. female slaves, were a prize for notables eager to entertain in their palaces. The Jawari, who were gifted in singing or poetry, were sold at higher prices than their non-talented sisters. With the coming of Islam, lead female vocalists in musical recitals of the Koran secured even higher prestige. A memorable example is the ancient Arab «Sallama» who is considered as one of the greatest singers in history. She lived during the transitional period between Jahiliyah and Islam. She was one of the most expensive Jawari. A notable who could afford her was envied by his peers and the common people who gathered around his castle every evening to hear her sing. When she adopted Islam as her faith, her popularity grew even more and she was ranked with the great male poets of her time. She sang Koranic verses to praise God, a practice commonly known as «Tajweed». Abdul-Rahman Al-Ghis, one of the most religious notables in Mecca during that time, fell in love with Sallama after listening to her Tajweed.

However, religious music and songs are not limited to Islam in the Arab world. The importance of music and the singer of religious songs is also evident in the church choir. While some of the famous singers emerged from Tajweed others started in the church choir. In this article we shall discuss two such female singers who are literally worshiped by their Arab masses: the Egyptian Um-Kalthoum who emerged from the Tajweed prac-

tice, and the Lebanese Fairouz who emerged from the church choir.

Um-Kalthoum

Um-Kalthoum came from a poor Egyptian village. Her family was very religious. Her father discovered her talent at a very young age. She learned Tajweed and trained her voice by singing to the people of her village. Accompanied by her father, she started going from village to village to give recitals. Her powerful, rich voice and charisma on stage won her popularity. Um-Kalthoum's first climb into the world of stardom came when Sheikh Zakaria Ahmed, a notable Arab musician composed a number of songs for her. Another step on her way to the top was when she played the role of «Sallama» in a movie in which she sang Koranic verses without any background music.

Eventually, talent, fame and politics got together to elevate Um-Kalthoum to the highest pedestal of fame for any male or female talent in the Arab world. During the sixties, she sang the songs of the great composer, Mohamad Abdel-Wahhab. Jamal Abdel-Nasser, President of Egypt, was personally impressed by the product of their combined talent, notably the Arab nationalist songs they produced together. Consequently, the Egyptian government created a local radio station in Cairo, which broadcasted the song of the famous 'lady', to her Egyptian audience. Whereas, «The Arab Voice From Cairo Radio-Station» broadcasted her concerts, live, to her audience all over the Arab world. The Arabs, old and young, poor and rich, were entranced by her voice, her songs, her presence on stage. The influence she had on the masses was so great that some dared to label it as «the opium of the Arab populace».

During the early seventies, Um-Kalthoum died. Millions attended her funeral. The reaction was one of devastation and profound mourning. Um-Kalthoum's legacy lives on.



Um-Kalthoum



Fairouz

Fairouz

Fairouz came from a humble district of Beirut. She started singing at an early age at home, at school and in church while attending mass with her family. At the age of fourteen she sang with the State's radio station choir after having been discovered by musician Mohamad Fulaifel. Fulaifel had discovered Fairouz in school during a tour in search of new talent. However, the father of Fairouz, a traditional and conservative man, forbade her to sing in public. But musician Halim Al-Roumi persuaded him to change his mind, which he did only under one condition: «That she be accompanied by her brother everytime she went to the radio station.»

During the course of her work she met the famous composers, Assi and Mansour Rahbani, and married the former. Consequently, a familial artistic group was created and Fairouz's younger sister, Huda, also gifted in singing was included.

Fairouz's voice and musical talent combined with the touch of culture of the Rahbani style caught the attention of government officials. Realizing their value as a national asset, the Lebanese Government invited the group to participate in the annual International Festivals of Baalabek. There, Fairouz, with a voice which inspires tenderness and strenght all in one, sang the folk culture of 19th century Lebanon, the village, the warm-hearted nature of its people, traditional values, patriotism and puppy romance. In Baalabek, the Rahbani brothers nurtured her talent as a lead actress in their musical theatre. Hers was almost always the role of the altruistic victim of love and justice in a village quarrel and sometimes in the fictitious monarchy of a vagabond king.

The singing style of Fairouz is being constantly changed and updated to meet the times by her son's, Ziad Rahbani, compositions and distribution. Ziad's modern style colors her songs with a new and more sophisticated touch. This change of style shocked some of Fairouz's loyal Rahbani fans, while it pleased others who advocate change and progress in Arabic music.

Nevertheless, the religious image Fairouz held was not overshadowed by the variety of performances, her busy schedule as an artist, nor as a wife and a mother. She continued to perform her annual Easter Gospel recitals in a church in Beirut.

Conclusion

After observing the experiences of these two female Arab artists we may conclude the following fundamental cultural characteristics: First, family support was essential for their start, i.e. Um-Kalthoum's father and Fairouz' brother and husband, as chaperons. Second, singing the sacred message of God to the religious culture of the Middle East gave both women a respectfull image in the eyes of the public. Third, both ladies had talented male sponsors, i.e. Sheikh Zakria Ahmed and Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab for Um-Kalthoum and Assi, Mansour and Ziad Rahbani for Fairouz. Fourth, governmental support and encouragement gave both singers authority and status. Fifth, both artists are considered cultural shrines by many of their extremist fans, not to mention that their voice and talents cannot go unnoticed and consequently, must be guided through the traditional channels of fame ●

For Your Information, Madam: Women's World Banking^(☆)

«With economic power, we're going to invest in something other than nuclear power and war games.»
Michaela Walsh.

As founder and president of Women's World Banking (W.W.B) until september 1990, Michaela Walsh confirms that the bank is dedicated to increasing the economic power of women worldwide. Walsh, a former Wall Street investment banker, founded W.W.B in 1980 along with a number of other women, after realizing that women were shut out of finance and unable to get loans or credit cards without a male co-signer. In the Third World, says Walsh, this problem continues to be especially pronounced, because many women are illiterate and lack experience with banks. Furthermore, these women have limited resources.

«Women have always had difficulty getting capital» Walsh adds, «males are the possessors of money and decision-making authority.» That cycle is just begining to change.

Walsh's group does not lend money, but works with local banks to obtain loans for its clients, who are small entrepreneurs. It has guaranteed loans for as much as \$10,000 and as low as \$50, depending on the borrower's needs. The organization has 46 affiliates in 50 countries that manage loans for almost 45,000 borrowers.

W.W.B was incorporated in The Netherlands because the Dutch Central Bank agreed to grant it full financial institutions status. The head office is located in New York. There is an office in Nairobi but the rest of the representatives will go where they are needed. They consist of women who are educators, government officials, business people and anyone else willing to carry the standard.

Success Stories of W.W.B

1. **Centre Commercial De Mauritanie:** A three floors center in the central market of Nouakchot, (Mauritania) including 1,500 «boutiques», a day care center, a literacy training center, several crafts workshops, a safe deposit box service and a Turkish bath!

The idea was conceived by Ms. Sid' Ahmed. After consultations, Elizabeth Littlefield of W.W.B was able to get feasibility studies and help create the «**Groupment Commercial Feminin De Mauritanie (GCFM)**».

A tidy sum has already been raised for the center's construction. The 1,500 members of GCFM will own the center in less than two years once they repay the loan.

2. **East Africa.** It is said that solar energy will not reach the developing world until the 21st century. The fact is that all over East Africa, women, men and children are the beneficiaries of solar energy. Solar energy is even used to electrify rural women's home-based business. Seamstress Suzan Migori had her manual sewing machine «solarized». She is producing more dresses per day and her business is booming.

She heard about the solar facilities through W.W.B's regional network.

3. **A dentist chair.** The doctor, a «she», is grateful for the assistance she received from W.W.B. W.W.B was unable to give her a loan to cover the full cost of a chair, but it was able to negotiate with the bank on her behalf. The funds of W.W.B served as collateral on a bank loan sufficient to pay for a chair in full, including instalation in her office. With no time, the dentist was able to repay both loans. She now has a «good credit record» which facilitates getting future loans.

4. **A bicycle business.** Her husband was a bicycle repairman. She saw a limited future in the repair business. She proceeded to explore the kind of assistance she could obtain from W.W.B's first affiliate, W.W.B/Cali. Her contact gave her a loan and technical training in business management. She then decided to transform the family trade from repair to full production of new bicycles. Until they heard of W.W.B, they did not have the financial means to put the plan into action. Now, their bicycles are being ridden in Columbia.

These are but a few achievements of the Women's World Banking. WWB has pledged to assist women and help them participate in economic mainstreams. Therefore, Madam, if you should plan to open your own business enterprise or expand it, and need help and assistance, you may want to contact the people at WWB. For more information contact.

Women's World Banking, 8 West 40th Street, New York, NY 10018, USA.

Tel: (212) 768-8513, Fax: (212) 768-7519, Telex: 5101012670, Cable: WOMBANKING ●

(☆) Source; Languedoc, Colin. «Walsh Boosting Women's Economic Clout», **The Financial Post**, Canada, April, 13, 1989.

«Third World Businesswomen get credit. Sun-Sentinel, (Reuters) November 30, 1989.

W.W.B. News. volume 1, number, 1, April 1990.

Laila Shaheen DaCruz

By Rose Ghurayyib

A pioneer who took the publication of books as her career for more than twenty five years.

Laila Shaheen DaCruz was born in a happy family. Her parents had common interests. They both practiced teaching before marriage, enjoyed the company of friends and showed an interest in cultural activities beyond their school duties. After a few years' work in Palestine, the Shaheens settled in Beirut where Mr. Shaheen taught mathematics at the American University of Beirut (AUB) and studied for his Master's degree at the same time. His wife took care of her three daughters, Laila, Najwa and Mona. The Shaheens rejected the old-fashioned idea that the family is incomplete in the absence of sons. They were always proud of their daughters who finished their high school and college education with distinction and honors.

Like her father, Laila was talented in mathematics and sciences. She was also interested in extracurricular activities requiring leadership. Thus, for several years, she was an active volunteer at the YWCA, where she later held a responsible post after her graduation from the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Right after her marriage to Mr. DaCruz, Laila took charge of a publishing house called «Illustrated Publications» now «Intag». A scientific mind allowed her to acquire a high degree of poise, self-confidence and administrative skills. Through the help of professional colleagues, she succeeded in producing a proper Arabic

translation of the well-known American comics, «Superman» and «Little Lulu» by using a style which attracts young people.

Faced with the high price of paper during the war in Lebanon, she decided to reduce the size of the magazine without effecting sales. Hence, the publication has gone on regularly for over twenty five years.

A fluent public speaker in both Arabic and English, she was able to travel far and wide as a delegate to the various conferences held by YWCA in various corners of the world. As a publisher, her travels offered her opportunities to find new material for translation and publication and to market the work she had already published. The latter included reading material for young people, illustrated books and postcards featuring touristic sites in Lebanon and finally reproduced natural scenery from all over the world.

What I have mentioned about Laila DaCruz reflects part of the image I have taken of her when she was my student at Beirut University College (BUC), and when she was my associate in volunteer work at YWCA summer camps and when she succeeded in producing and marketing cassettes of children's songs.

To me she represents the daring Lebanese woman who knew how to blend the values of modern culture with those of our traditional heritage •

Dorīyah Aaouni^(☆)



From *Al-Shahid*, No. 57, May 1990

Dorīyah Aaouni is an Egyptian journalist. She has been writing in the Egyptian and Arab Press since the fifties. She is one of the first women in the world to become a foreign news correspondent in economics and political news. Most female journalist in the world concentrated only on women's issues at the time as she puts it. Dorīyah Aaouni speaks of her struggle as an Arab woman in a sexist and racist world. She tells of her journey from Egypt to France at a time when it was improper for a girl to travel and live alone and away from home. Although Paris was the city in which her career boomed and where she has lived all her life, Dorīyah Aaouni remains deeply attached and proud of her Arab heritage.

I was the only girl in my family. Living with two brothers taught me to deal with the role-differences between men and women in our male-dominated society. Women were submissive and obedient. Their true worth and their lives began only when they got married. Men were free to fulfill their ambitions without physical or social restraints. Despite it all, I did not want to get married and my dream was to get higher education in French in France.

My dream died with the death of my parents (I was eighteen). Consequently, my uncle, my legal guardian in the absence of parents, took me to Iraq to live with him. His aim was to get me married in order to relieve himself of his responsibilities towards me and to secure my future. Still I wanted to go to France and had no intentions of getting married.

During my stay in Iraq, I worked as a translator (from French to Arabic) for a French industrialist. Impressed

with my skills, he encouraged me to travel to Paris and even arranged a visa for me. I did not tell my uncle who was naturally against the idea. It was improper for a girl to travel alone or to live away from home. However, he did allow me to go to Turkey to visit relatives who had a 'suitor' arranged for me. As expected, the so-called suitor met me at the airport in Turkey. I immediately told him that I was already married. When he asked about my marriage, I replied that I was married to a cause; I was a devout Marxist at the time.

Shortly after my arrival in Turkey, I decided to visit Paris for two months and return to Cairo permanently. However, I never returned to Cairo and I have lived in Paris ever since.

My trip from Istanbul to Paris lasted three whole months. I visited various cities along the way learning about places and people. Bulgaria proved to be the most revealing, for it shattered my convictions in Marxism

when I saw the poor living conditions of people under a Communist regime.

Upon my arrival in Paris, influential friends I had met in Iraq helped me find a job to support myself. Meanwhile, Egypt was experiencing a revolutionary phase (1952), which forced me to stay in Paris indefinitely. Therefore, I enrolled at a university. Two years later, I was granted a scholarship to the Institute of Higher Learning in Languages and Translation in Paris. I was required to learn three languages other than my native Arabic, which was not in the curriculum of the Institute. When I suggested adding it, the Dean replied: «The Arabic language! I thought we were going to get rid of these people.» (The Algerian revolution was coming to its end at the time and the French government was under pressure in our part of the world). I answered him by saying that the future of France depended on Arab oil, which infuriated him even more.

Eventually, the Dean's discrimination against the Arabs culminated in his attempts to keep me from graduating from the Institute. After intensive pressure and persuasion, he allowed me to continue my term. In the process, I had managed to convince him to add Arabic to the curriculum by pointing out that if he did so, his name and his Institute would achieve a reputation in the academic world as being innovative. Since then, Arabic is one of the languages taught at the Institute for Higher Learning in Languages and Translation, in Paris.

Journalism

Upon my graduation from the Institute, I applied for a job at the French Press Agency (AFP). Some previous experience in journalism in Cairo and my fluency in at least three languages qualified me for the job. I had been working at the agency for seven months when I made my first professional contact with the Egyptian Press.

At that time, a delegation of Egyptian journalists was visiting Paris. The Editor in Chief of the prominent Al-Ahram newspaper (The Pyramids), the late Kamal Al-Mallah, learned of my presence: an Egyptian girl, work-

ing at the French Press Agency and living alone in Paris. He called me and asked me to help him contact some French officials, which I did. When he returned to Cairo, he wrote about me in his newspaper. Consequently, Egyptian journalists visiting or transiting in Paris always called me for assistance.

Inspired, I myself began writing in Arabic for the Egyptian press. My report and commentary on the visit of the Israeli Prime Minister, Levi Ashkol, in 1964, and specifically about his anger over the poor reception he received from the French government, was my breakthrough in the Egyptian press. From then on, my article and other writings were being quoted in the press all over the Arab world.

For the next seven years, I was the foreign news correspondent for a number of newspapers in Egypt and the Arab World, notably, AlMousawer, Al-Akhbar, Akher-Sa'aa, and Kuwaiti newspapers. In those days, there were very few women working as foreign correspondents, even in Paris itself. Female journalists concentrated on women's issues, and none reported news for their country from overseas as I did. Furthermore, female journalist in general were rare. thus, twenty five years ago, there were only five women who worked at the French Agency, today they account for half of the staff ●

(☆) Source: Tayyara, Anisa. «Robe' Qarn Bahthan 'An Khabar» («A Quarter of A Century in Search of News»). *Al-Shahed Magazine*, No. 57, May 1990. Translated from Arabic By Randa Abul-Husn.

Saudi Arabian Talents

Saudi Arabian necklace designs.

Designers: Two Saudi Arabian sisters, Hamida and Nadia Alireza, and hamida's daughter, Nada Alireza.
Main Workshop: Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

The three designers started creating their own necklaces in the early 1980s. Their designs are not only based on formal education in jewelry design, beeding and techniques, which they completed in Switzerland, the United States and England. They are mainly a product of insight, observation and appreciation of jewelry in

the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East and the Far East.

In the eighties, the three Alireza women-artists featured their work in annual charity bazaars in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and in privately sponsored exhibits in the Kingdom and in California, USA.

Today their designs are in exhibit at the **Alif Gallery**, in Washington D.C. (1204 31st Street, N.W., Washington DC 20037, USA; tel (202) 337-9670) under the direction of Ms Lama Dajani. Here are some of the designs on display ●



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