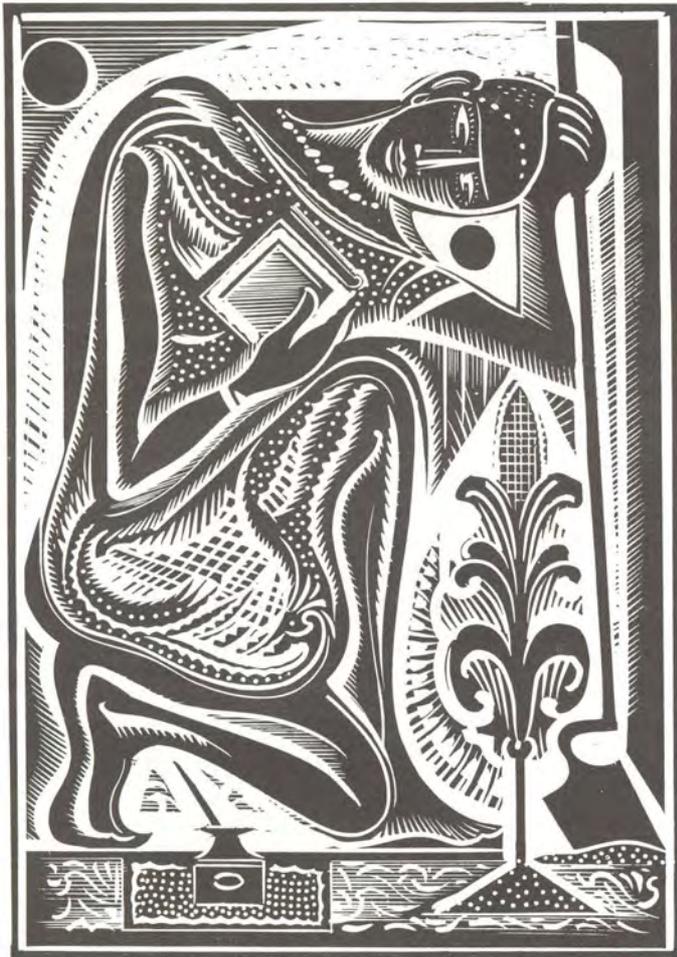


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LEBANESE WOMEN



*Illustration by Stephen Alcorn
Taken from Ms. Premier Issue 1990.*

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Who Should Define Freedom For University Female Residents?

The war produced many observable changes in Lebanon. One obvious change is the deterioration of the country's infra-structure, such as tele-communication, roads, public transportation and socio-political demography. These facilities, if we may call them as such, acted as stimuli for other changes, positive changes?!

Thus, the rural regions of the country grew and developed to become, or try to become, self-sufficient because links with the capital, Beirut, are trying. Villages have grown into towns and towns into small cities. They have expanded their markets, their goods and services sectors, their hospitals and medical facilities and their schools.

However, Beirut remained the most efficient gateway to the outside world especially in terms of its institutions for higher learning. Consequently, Beirut-based universities such as the American University of Beirut and Beirut University College are the most sought for institutions for higher learning.

For students living in Beirut, attending classes is not a problem. But for those living in the peripheries and beyond the city limits, commuting on a daily basis is dangerous, expensive and exhausting.

The dorms seem like the better alternative. But the dorms are not home, neither in terms of their facilities nor in terms of their atmosphere, and last but not least, not in terms of traditional upbringing, especially for daughters.

Hence, the dorms do not guarantee the security blanket of parental guidance over daughters. There are two ways of looking at the issue of parental guidance. The first is actual guidance resulting from the physical presence of the parents'. The second is the shield from label and gossip which the parents' presence provides. In the latter case, the responsibility to conform and maintain a «good» reputation rests primarily on the parents.

However, daughters who live away from home and namely on campus bear the entire responsibility for proving that they are actually conforming to the conservative values of our society. Consequently, the demands and role-expectations placed on female university residents are high. On one hand, because of assumed liberty and freedom, the girls have to make an extra effort in order to prove conformity. On another hand, some of these residents are tempted to use this new-found freedom to lead the life of the liberal woman portrayed by the West (which is itself a stereotype of promiscuity for traditional societies⁽¹⁾).

Only recently, the female residents of Orme-Gray Hall of Beirut University College (BUC) raised the issue. Their concern was how to deal with the misconduct of some of their peers and how to correct the «bad» image society imposes on them.

The parental guidance of the College's administrative body gave them a vote of confidence. They reassured them that achievement and high educational status is the strongest weapon they (the female residents) have against these rumors and labels. In the meantime, they should ignore them, lest they become destructive.

What is interesting is that the core issue in question here is **freedom**. Society, parents and the students themselves misinterpret freedom for sexual permissiveness. A young man may go and come unsupervised but even a supervised young woman's behavior is doubted and questioned.

Any issue that has sex as its denominator is taboo in society. Freedom for the youth has sex as its middle name. Everybody thinks it but nobody says it. The problem does not lie in the sexual values of society but in the absence of an explicit definition of freedom for the youth. Freedom goes beyond the question of sex. **Freedom entails responsibility**. It is responsibility towards oneself. Responsibility to take good care of oneself and to be mature and constructive. It involves avoiding temptations which could lead to stagnation, loss of identity and failure. One could probably visualize it better if we were talking about freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of nations and so on.

We approached students in the BUC campus and asked them to tell us what freedom means to them. Some of the replies were: «It is the ability to do whatever a person wants, taking into consideration social and physical constraints.» Another student said that «society has, sometimes, the right to trim some of the freedoms we have, such as sexual freedom.» Others understood freedom in terms of «freedom of thought, freedom of speech and the freedom to learn.» One student said «freedom to learn and use this knowledge within society and to go to other societies which suit my definition of freedom.»

Hence, as long as the issue of freedom is not defined, it will remain a source of frustration for the younger generations of changing societies like Lebanon •

Randa Abul Husn

(1) «A New Arab Woman?», *Al-Raida*, No. 51, November 1990, p. 8.

Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in Beirut, 1990^(☆)

By *Natalie Chekaibe*

Research problem

Although, universally, the most visible change in the economic status of women during the second half of the twentieth century has been the increase in their participation in the labor market, the Arab region is still characterized by very low female economic participation. Finding a job outside the home is not part of the sex-role socialization of Arab females. To become a wife and a mother is what generally occupies the soul and mind of a typical woman in this part of the world.

But, societal changes have been taking place. Inflation, the costs of industrialization, the high rates of small migration from labor surplus countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and so forth to the Gulf states, have made it difficult for families to survive on the man's salary alone.

In Lebanon, the above variables are assumed to increase women's traditional propensity to join the labor force. Furthermore, the war also introduced additional socio-economic changes such as inflation and demographic changes such as displacement. All of these variables seem to act as a force driving women into the labor market and into the economic mainstream.

Consequently, the aim of this research was to examine, specifically, the factors determining economic participation of Beiruti women. Are factors related to poverty and economic need the key variables which encourage women to join the labor force? Or, do other factors related to demographic changes and the socio-economic characteristics of the respondent (woman) such as marital status, educational level, age and so on, determine whether women work or not? To what extent does working influence/affect perceptions and attitudes (of the women themselves) towards the image of the working-woman and her social role in society?

Research design

The study identified two dependent variables. The first was economic activity or inactivity of women; the second was the attitudes of women in Beirut towards their social role. The independent variables assumed to influence women's propensity to join the labor force, were also identified, namely: socio-economic status (identified in terms of education, income, and profession), age, religion, rural versus urban background, marital status, fertility patterns, husband's and father's educational and professional level.

Ten hypotheses were suggested. They proposed that female economic participation rates in Beirut would be high if women were single, had high educational level, had liberal rather than conservative attitudes towards issues regarding women, had few children if married, and whose fathers and husbands had high educational levels. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that most of the working women do so because of economic need, while women who have high educational levels are working for personal satisfaction.

The sampling frame was based on an area sampling design which divided the capital into two geographical divisions: East and West Beirut, excluding the suburbs. The non-probability quota sample was the chosen sample design. This led to the stratification of the sample into regions and socio-demographic variables. In testing the data, contingency table analysis was used, whereas, testing for significance was done using chi-square statistics.

The field work took place between November 1989 and January 1990. The sample size was 278 women. The questionnaire was the survey method.

Findings

The results reflected a spectrum of cultural, religious, demographic and economic factors. Some of the results were interesting and showed that a new trend of female labor force participation may be evolving. For instance, although women who work in the Arab world are generally young and single, nearly half of our sample in Beirut turned out to be married and of reproductive age. Furthermore, in Beirut, the number of Christian and Muslim working women is equally high, contrary to the common notion that Christian women in this part of the world almost always have higher labor force participation rates. Sect and education appeared to be important determinants of female labor force participation among married women. The respondents supported the right for women to work, irrespective of whether they, themselves, were working or not, or whether they were educated or not.

Finally, this study showed that economic conditions do play an important role in determining whether women work or not. Financial support is a primary factor which drives women into the labor market. According to our sample, higher educational levels and achievements of Lebanese women are other factors which lead to increased participation in the labor market •

(☆) Natalie Chekaibe, *Determinants of Female Labor Force Participation in Beirut, 1990*, M.A. Thesis, Social and Behavioral Sciences Department, American University of Beirut.

The Effects of The War on University Education of Lebanese Females^(☆)

Again and again, Lebanon is seen through the spectrum of the war. How did this war affect its demography, its economy, its social structure and most of all its educational status.

Even under the crippling influence of violent shelling and street battles, Lebanon is known for its progressive instinct for survival. The survival of women and men alike, their ability to cope and move on has amazed the world including the Lebanese people themselves.

The effects of the war on university education of Lebanese females, is among the main concerns of scholars and social associations trying to examine post-war society. Consequently, Dr. Aisha Harb Zureik⁽¹⁾ conducted a field survey on the subject, which was sponsored by the Lebanese Family Planning Association. The survey is based on interviews with 100 female university students attending various branches of the Lebanese University, the Arab University, the American University of Beirut, Beirut University College and St. Joseph University. The sample respondents are residents of Beirut and its suburbs. Here are the initial observations of Dr. Zureik.

According to Dr. Zureik, two variables affect enrollment of Lebanese females in the universities: (1) economic/financial cost of education, (2) safety against sudden war activities. Together these variables determine the females choice of a university.

Hence, twenty five percent of the sample chose the university on the basis of proximity to home irrespective of the major/field of study. However, other findings in the same survey, do not confirm this observation. Although sixty percent or more of the female students sampled in the different universities live near campus, sixty seven percent of the total sample said they are enrolled in the major they are interested in.

Furthermore, seventy five percent of the sample are residents of Beirut, keeping in mind that the main branches and campuses of these universities are Beirut-

based. Consequently, this sample bias does not allow for definite conclusions correlating location with enrollment.

Still, on the basis of these data, Dr. Zureik suggests that branching of the universities lead to an increase in female enrollment at the university level. She adds, on the other hand, that this branching lead to a sectarian, territorial and ideological homogeneity of student bodies unlike the pre-war mixture.

The effect of the war on parents' attitudes towards educating their daughters is interesting but also needs more quantification. Interviews conducted by Dr. Zureik reveal the parents feel that it is more urgent to give their daughter a university degree than it is for their son, because a financially rewarding occupation can sustain a man and his future family even in the absence of higher education. However, a university degree for the daughter is essential for three reasons: it offers better work-opportunities, it offers qualifications for a 'better' husband and a degree acts as a tool a girl can use to secure a better future (should her marriage fail or should she remain single). Such attitudes suggest quite a turn in events. However, the validity and reliability of the data is questionable because the number and the status of the interviewees (mother or father) are not specified. It would be interesting to conduct more in-depth interviews on this matter.

According to Dr. Zureik, the financial factor plays an important role in the education of Lebanese females. Hence, twenty two percent (of the female students sample) are of the upper class, sixty seven percent are of the middle class and eleven percent are of the lower income bracket. The latter group have full/time or part/time jobs in order to secure tuition. Many attend the Lebanese University because it is free of charge. It would seem that economic difficulties do not force the females out of the university. Instead it allows and motivates them to work in order to manage tuition fees or other related expenses.

Dr. Zureik's survey offers interesting initial observations about females' aspirations and access to a universi-

The Role of Women in 19th Century Mount Lebanon

By Nada Awar

ty degree. The ratio of female to male university students is quite high, i.e. above fifty five percent in various faculties of the Lebanese University and above forty four percent at the American University of Beirut. (time scale: 1986-1990).

In summary, Dr. Zureik's survey offers significant food for thought and future research on the issue of female university education. Many of these initial findings are ambiguous. Therefore, more in-depth research is essential to confirm the suggested trend towards higher education among Lebanese women.

One thing seems to be evident: Lebanese females have access to a university education. The restrictions and limitations caused by the war are important intervening variables but not crippling. On the other hand, it would seem that the economic crisis (created by the war) has been a catalyzer for higher education of the Lebanese woman since education is seen as a financial asset •



Nineteenth Century Mount Lebanon consisted of an agricultural village society. Communication between the villages was difficult because connecting roads were very narrow, unpaved and in primitive condition. Donkeys were the popular means of transportation. The donkey driver, **Mkari**, acted as a means for communication and a post-man between the villages. People who could not afford the Mkari's fees or who did not own a donkey walked from one village to another whenever necessary.

The social unit of village society was the nuclear family. A family was lead by a male headmaster whose duties were to protect his wife and children. The ideal wife was a hard-working woman who could bear more baby-boys than baby-girls. Thus, a male child was the bearer of his father's name and assurance of the continuity of his family, while a female child was expected to marry at an early age, to go and live with her husband who would give her his name.

The marriage of a girl was decided by her father. In other words, marriage requests were accepted or rejected by the man of the house. A cousin was the preferred suitor. Being a virgin was (is) the most important prerequisite quality for a girl in marriage. If ever she dared to loose her virginity, she was to be slaughtered by her father, her brother, her uncle or her cousin. The shame she had brought upon the family honor, **'aard**, is washed away with her blood. Besides virginity, the beauty of the girl, her health and her working abilities were other qualities the suitor looked for when picking a wife.

After marriage, a woman was expected to fulfill her duties both inside and outside the house. She was to clean, cook, wash, bring water from the village fountain, feed the hens and cocks, feed the sheep, feed the silkworms, sew all the clothing for her family and herself, spin wool threads using a primitive hand spinning wheel, and knit woolen clothes for her family and for herself. She also had to take care of her baby or babies.

Hence, in the early morning, a woman began her duties by feeding the sheep, cleaning its place and bathing it in the fountain of the village. Each family bought a sheep in the beginning of May and slaughtered it in

(☆) Dr. Aisha Harb Zureik, **In'ikasad Al-Harb Aala Al-Tahsil Al-Jami'i (the Effects of the War on University Education)**, Beirut: 9th Conference for Evaluating the Conditions of Lebanese Women, 10 and 11 December 1990, Family Planning Association.

(1) Dr. Aisha Harb Zureik is a Professor of Education at the Lebanese University.



Still Life With Blue Vase 1989 32,5 × 95 cm Mixed Media

November. The meat and grease were conserved in clay jars and subsequently used for cooking throughout the year. Feeding the sheep was manual and took two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. The woman whose sheep was the healthier/fat was proud and envied by the women of the village. Feeding the silkworms was a second important job for the woman because silk season was a major source of income for the family. Silkworms were usually raised in the farmer's household. Silkworm food consisted of chopped black-mulberry leaves, three times a day. Then, cocoons were sold to factory owners. Many women worked in the silk-factories too.

The second morning duty of a woman was to feed the hens and cocks, and to collect the eggs. However, before feeding the hens, the woman would breast feed her baby, then give the child a kind of drug to put him/her to sleep all day to make sure that her work would not be interrupted. The drug was prepared by drying a seed known as «Khash-Khash» (a kind of narcotic), crushing it and mixing it with jam. After going to sleep the baby was tied to his small wooden bed or to the floor.

Cleaning the house, cooking and making bread were other tasks to be done before the woman went out to fetch her water supply in her clay jar from the village's fountain (the pipe-line system did not exist in that era). Consequently, a woman also had to carry her dirty laundry all the way out to the village fountain, where she would light a fire for washing.

Sewing and knitting clothes were also on the village woman's list of duties. Ready-made clothing was not available and the village dress was simple and uniform. The clever sewer and knitter was quite famous among her peers who asked her advice or assistance.

Conservation of food for the entire year took time and hard work. One of the items was **bourghul**, i.e. crushed wheat. The woman prepared bourghul by washing large quantities of wheat, boiling it, drying it under the sun and then manually crushing it using a

primitive stone called **Jarouch**. From bourghul a popular village dish similar to porridge, **Kishk**, was prepared. Kishk was considered a full meal for the farmer. Its preparation, the woman's job, involved mixing Bourghul with home-made yogurt and «Labneh», i.e. dried yogurt. The mix was left to dry in the sun for a few days and then crushed into powder, i.e. Kishk. Cooking the powder was the final process and produced the final product.

A woman also conserved a kind of cheese that she prepared herself. She also prepared raisins from dried grapes, fig-jam from dried figs boiled with **dibs**. Dibs was made by boiling grape juice for several hours until it turns into a sweet syrup identical to honey. The woman also conserved dried beans and vegetables for winter.

Outside the household, a woman was expected to assist her husband. She took her basket to the grape garden to pick the fruit. She also picked figs, beans, cucumbers and other vegetables. During the (wheat) harvest, the wife joined her husband in his tent in the field. She took her baby, her hens and her sheep with her. In the field, the woman helped in irrigating and harvesting the wheat, on one hand; and gathered huge amounts of green grass, dried it and put it in bags as winter food for the animals, on the other hand.

To conclude, a woman raised in accordance with traditional peasant norms and customs, accepted and cooperated with a male-headed society. She assisted and obeyed her father, husband, brother or cousin. Her role was very vital, either as a mother or as a daughter. Her fate was fully decided by men and she lived as a second class individual who was expected to do hard labor for the sake of self-sufficiency for her family.

The twentieth century brought about many changes for women. Agricultural peasant society witnessed progress and development of tools and technology, which relieve women from the painstaking duties such as feeding the herds, washing at the fountain, and conserving food. Hence, the duties of women are changing ●

Lulu Baasiri

«Between 'role' as artist and 'status' as woman, she (the woman artist) experiences a provoking undercurrent of tension engendered by the polarized forces of freedom and (traditional) restriction that exist in her life»⁽¹⁾.

This «provoking undercurrent of tension» is quite strong in Lulu Baasiri.

Miss Lulu Baasiri held an exhibit in December 1990, in Dar Al-Nadwa in Beirut. It was her third solo exhibit and featured thirty paintings. We found Miss Baasiri's art and character to be an inspiration as far as female artists of our generation are concerned.

Lulu Baasiri's **role as artist** is criticized:

«The paintings are academic, why did the artist forget to discuss the war?»

«Just because I did not include blood in my paintings does not mean that I lack realism and have not experienced the horror» she replies. «In fact, I remained in my apartment when everybody else sought refuge in underground shelters. But my intentions are to keep the war, its ugliness, its corruption and its death out of my art» she explains.

Hence, her paintings stay away from typical modernism or folklore, and away from typical nostalgia or agony. They are neat and simple colorful portraits of families and arabesque settings. The flower pots, the arabesque furniture, instruments and tapestry, the bathrobes hanging on bamboo sticks all seems to emphasize «home».

Yes, home! which brings us to her **status as woman**. Lulu Baasiri's status as woman has much to say. On one hand it is daring and willful, and on the other hand, it is a cause of frustration forcing the artist into seclusion.

She is single and lives alone with her sister in a Beirut apartment, much to the displeasure of her parents, who would prefer she lived at home like all single girls are expected to. She explains that the privacy of living on her own is a necessary part of her work.



Her parents objected her decision to become an artist. They insisted that it was not a financially rewarding career. They advised her to choose a hard line profession and to paint **on the side**, which outraged her. Determined as she is, Lulu Baasiri insisted and persisted in becoming a painter.

Her status as a woman artist, vis-a-vis society in general, has been an additional source of frustration for her. She has repeatedly experienced Helen Khal's reported attitude of people towards women artists: «**They (women) don't have to worry about earning a living; most of them are supported by husband or family, have servants to do their housework, and can afford the luxury of being artist without any of the hardships**»⁽²⁾.

For Lulu Baasiri, this is not the case. She has made painting a fulltime profession and career. She gave up a promising career as Art Editor for leading local magazines after nine years of experience. She continues to refuse offers «you cannot refuse» as she puts it. She is



Still Life With Au'd 1989 60 × 83,5 cm Mixed Media

stubborn when it comes to her work and will uphold it against any social and financial odds.

She works in her apartment and has maintained a daily working schedule for four years. Hence, she finishes her cleaning and cooking (herself) before getting to work, to make sure that nothing distracts her or interrupts her. «Even my family and friends are careful not to visit or call when I am painting».

Consequently, she is outraged when people under-rate her line of work. «Imagine» she says, «I am often asked 'what do you do in life?' I say Painting; 'We mean what do you do next to painting?' again I reply 'Painting, it is my profession,' 'Oh, really?!' and they get that confused look on their faces...»

«Another thing people are concerned about all the time is why I am not married». She seems to feel that her singularity not only intrigues people but affects her role as an artist. She noted that married artists' use of their husbands' connections for exposure and recognition, makes it difficult for a single artist to move as freely.

«Herein lies the contradiction in her dual function, a contradiction which remains an unconscious irritant and is often a trying obstacle in the fulfillment of her professional role»⁽¹⁾. Lulu Baasiri's conflicts are verbalized in what she constantly refers to as «the dirt» that envelops society, especially a war society. She has chosen to stay away from the stress of wheeling and dealing with peo-

ple, first by giving up a career in the media, and second by being very selective of her friends and acquaintances. She does not like to socialize too much and prefers to invest her time, effort and energy in painting. Do not misunderstand Lulu Baasiri, painting is not an escape from society. On the contrary, limited interaction with society would seem as her way of defining and preserving the identity of her style.

... It may be precisely the presence of this conflict that generates the creative energy of the woman artist... In technique, women artists generally are more meticulous, more patient, in their attention to detail and finish of work. They are aware of and have a respect for the physical properties of the medium and seek to investigate all its possibilities...⁽⁴⁾

Looking at Lulu Baasiri's paintings, we notice the clarity of the portraits, the symmetry of the shadows, the interplay of mirror images and the maturity of colors. Everything is organized and in its place. There is no reference to ugliness, only beauty.

Maybe, this is Lulu Baasiri's personal revolt against the chaos that plagues her society ●

- (1) Helen Khal. *The Woman Artist in Lebanon*, Beirut: Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1987, p. 21.
- (2) *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- (3) *Ibid.*
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 34.

'Women and Education' The National Council of Lebanese Women

Beirut, November 2, 1990

In preparation for its twelfth National Summit, The National Council of Lebanese Women organized a round table to discuss the issue of women and education in Lebanon. The purpose of the round table was to raise the problems women face in earning an education and putting it to proper use, and to propose potential solutions and plans of action. A number of distinguished education and media specialists, as well as members of cultural, educational, social and feminist associations were invited to contribute to the panels.

The agenda consisted of three consecutive panels over a period of seven consecutive hours.

(1) The Role of Women in Education and Culture

The panelist and the audience discussed the need for women to make time, away from domestic chores, for reading and acquiring general knowledge. The panelists also urged women to expand their academic and professional horizons beyond the scopes deemed acceptable and preferable for them in our traditional society. Hence, redefinition of the traditional boundaries would be a first stepping stone in overcoming the inferiority status assigned to women by society.

(2) The Education of Women.

The second panel reported statistics showing that the number of Lebanese female university students is becoming equal to the number of Lebanese male university students. According to the panelists, the ratio of female to male enrollment is approximately 50/50. One of the relevant suggestions for further emancipation is to work towards emphasizing the importance of educating females. Another important suggestion was to get all social groups and forces to support and encourage women to get into decision-making levels in society.

(3) The Role of Women in the Media.

This last panel commended the success of women's participation in the media, keeping in mind the difficulties of managing both a home and the steep demands of a career in the media. The quality of women's contribution and dedication to the media has earned them the added respect of their male colleagues.

However, one media specialist pointed out that women should play a more active role in trying to eliminate the sexist overtones from advertisements.

The National Council of Lebanese Women concluded this seven hour event with a cocktail and promises to tackle the various points which were raised. The Council's main objective is to encourage all women associations to pay more serious attention to what can be done for the development of Lebanese women after fifteen years in the abyss of war •

The Lebanese Association for Human Rights

Beirut, December 5, 1990

The Lebanese Association for Human Rights held a press conference to remind the Lebanese Government of the outstanding claims of women's rights in Lebanon.

Maitre Laure Moghaizel, President of the Association, surrounded by activists from the various Lebanese women's groups, called upon the government to live up to its commitments to protect human rights including women's rights as dictated by Lebanon's membership in the United Nations Council for Human Rights.

Maitre Moghaizel noted that for many years Lebanese women have demanded the cancellation and amendment of certain discriminatory laws. Yet, nothing has been done to this effect.

Maitre Moghaizel summarized these demands.

- A. The amendment of the following laws.
 1. The laws requiring women to have permission of husband in order to work or engage in commercial deals.
 2. The law stating that the credibility of a woman's testimony is equivalent to only one-third that of a man.
 3. The linkage and subordination of social security pensions for married women to the husbands' pension.
 4. The reduction of the sentence and the acquittal of perpetrators of crimes of honor.
- B. The Association demanded that women be incorporated and admitted to the decision-making levels of the government, municipalities, syndicates, and other socio-political and socio-economic offices. Maitre Moghaizel added that qualified women are abundant.

- C. Women be allowed to take part in representing Lebanon at international, regional and national conferences. Once again Maître Moghaizel referred to the insult Lebanese women had to endure when a man was appointed to head the Lebanese Delegation to the Conference of the International Year of Women organized by the UN in Mexico in 1975.
- D. To reinstate Lebanon as a member of the United Nation's Committee for Women's Conditions.
- E. Lebanon to ratify the agreement drawn by the Arab League and the United Nations calling not only for equality between the sexes but also for the inclusion of women in development and peace. Thus far, Lebanon is among the last few Arab countries who have not ratified this agreement.

Following the press conference, the ladies proceeded to take their demands directly to the President of the Republic, Mr. Elias Hrawi. The President commended the humanitarian role of the Lebanese women during the war. He praised their ability to cope with the difficulties and their instinct for peace. President Hrawi stated that the success of the second Lebanese Republic lies in the hands of the women as well as the men. He urged the women to prove themselves and to participate more aggressively in national reconstruction and development. He encouraged women to compete with men in the various fields and offices.

Will these demands be taken into real consideration and produce action or will they be stacked along with the previous claims on women's rights in Lebanon? ●

Women in The Lebanese Red Cross

By Rima Zankoul

The majority of us are familiar with the Red Cross and the Red Crescent's leading international paramedic services to humanity. They reach out to help people victimized by wars, poverty, malnourishment and other physical and social handicaps.

These organizations are apolitical and acultural. They are posted all over the world. Their system of operation in Lebanon and worldwide is based on seven general principles: humanity, volunteer work, non-discrimination, neutrality, internationality, independence, centrality of headquarters.

The Lebanese Red Cross (L.R.C.) was established in Beirut in 1945. When we took a closer look at it we noticed that **the majority of the staff, especially at the higher levels of administration, are women.** In fact, the

President of the L.R.C. is Mrs. Alexandra Issa El-Khoury and has held this post since 1964. Furthermore, heads of sections and administrative staff have a sliding majority of women.

Why so many women?. We wanted to investigate if there is any discrimination against men or women in this organization.

Mrs. Issa El-Khoury has been incapacitated by illness for some time and Mrs. Hind Saba is the Acting President. Mrs. Saba was eager to speak to us but could not get away from her busy schedule. Nevertheless, we were generously received by Mrs. Arslan of the Media Section. Mrs. Arslan confirmed the abundance of women in the establishment. She insisted that the Lebanese Red Cross has opened its doors for women to fulfill their natural aspirations for humanitarian services. She insisted that the volunteer status of the staff is the main reason for the supremacy of women over men. She explained that women can afford volunteer work more than men who have more imminent financial concerns and responsibilities in our culture. Men cannot afford to invest five to six hours of daily volunteer work and still manage to make a decent living for their families.

«Another point I want to stress» said Mrs. Arslan «is the great interest of women in humanitarian work. By virtue of their personality, women tend to be geared towards jobs which aim at helping and lessening the pain of people. Thus, the Lebanese Red Cross is filled with women working in its sections such as the blood bank, the youth section, the pharmacy, first aid and so on and so forth.»

We asked Mrs. Arslan if the women of the Lebanese Red Cross encounter any discrimination when dealing with institutions run by men. «No» she said. «The women of our establishment have earned themselves a good reputation for their accomplishments. They have proved to be highly qualified and are, therefore, treated with due respect and admiration.»

The dedication of the Lebanese Red Cross women is exemplified in the gigantic job they performed throughout the years of war in Lebanon. They dared to face crises and the dangers of strife and shelling, and have even lost colleagues in the violence. They insistingly stress the absence of any kind of discrimination in their operation. Mrs. Arslan concluded our encounter by saying «our achievements are due to our deep sense of duty and obligation to the service of mankind in Lebanon. We follow one basic principle: service, help and alleviation of sufferings. All other considerations are irrelevant to us.» ●

The Demonstration of The Saudi Arabian Women^(☆)



History teaches us that every crisis produces positive and negative side-effects. Maybe one of the positive side-effects of the Gulf Crisis is the unexpected outburst of seventy Saudi Arabian women demanding a simple and basic right: the right to drive in public.

According to Saudi laws, women may not appear in public except if accompanied by a male chaperon; and not just any chaperon, but the husband, father or brother. They cannot drive and are not allowed to board a car without a male chauffeur at the very least, in spite of having legitimate driver's licences from the Western countries in which they were schooled.

On November 6, 1990, approximately seventy Saudi women, of the upper class, sat in their Mercedes Benz or Buick and ordered their chauffeurs to take them to the central market of the city of Riyadh. There, they ordered their chauffeurs to get out of the car and took the wheels themselves. They drove their cars, alone, through the market. This outraged public opinion throughout the country.

Saudi women, in spite of the demonstration, are still bound to these laws. Whereas, Bedouin women in Saudi Arabia are given driver's licences to drive their cars in pursuit of their goat and sheep herds⁽¹⁾.

According to the Saudi demonstrators, the demand to drive does not contradict the codes of honor dictated by Islam. Hence, at the time of the Prophet, women were allowed to ride horses and donkeys. Therefore, what is the difference between a horse and a car?, said the

commentary⁽²⁾. In fact, the car is much more conservative because it is closed. On another hand, at the time of the Prophet, women went to war with men. (just like the Americans do today). They carried swords, and sustained injuries during battle.

In spite of all these claims, the Saudi government's response to the demonstration was to arrest these women and warn their husbands of harsher punishments if they should conduct any other public protest. Once again women's bondage to men was emphasized. The moral argument of the government was that for women to drive would contradict the codes of behavior of the Saudis who are protective of their honor (women).

Never mind!! an immediate outcome is not to be expected. For the time being, «many other Saudi women, while they are generally sympathetic to the cause, doubted that such odd demonstrations are really the best way to change men's minds. One woman said 'Many of us believe that it is better to work with the system than against it'»⁽³⁾.

Nevertheless, and maybe, the act of speaking up, for the first time, is in itself a step ahead for Saudi women. Things are eventually bound to change ●

(☆) «About the Demonstration of Saudi Women», *Newsletter, Association of Arab Women Solidarity*, No. 3, November 1990, p. 29.

(1) Ibid.

(2) Ibid.

(3) «Backlash?» *Newsweek*, November 19, 1990.

Al Mar'a Fi Al-Islam (The Status of Women in Islam)

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World recently published the second (Arabic) edition of *Al-Mar'a Fi Al-Islam*, i.e. *The Status of Women in Islam*, written by the late Sheikh Dr. Subhi Al-Saleh.

About the book

The status of the Muslim woman in traditions and in personal status codes is the specific concern of *Al-Mar'a fi Al-Islam*. The book adopts an objective and academic approach to the various issues and makes reference to the Koran.

Sheikh Dr. Subhi Al-Saleh explains that, in principle, Islam does not discriminate against women. He discusses the various dictates of the Koran which describe the human, social and financial rights and duties of women. He touches upon specific matters, such as marriage, inheritance and sex, which have been the source of controversy in women's rights arguments.

Beginning with a quote from Simone de Beauvoir's «the Second Sex», the author emphasizes the equality between the sexes inherent in Islam. The status of women as it appears in the Koran is also compared with the dictates of the Bible.

Written in simple Arabic and using contemporary as well as historical perspectives, *Al Mar'a fi Al-Islam* offers rich material. The mature, objective and sincere style of the author is grabbing. Unlike complicated scholastic and theological books, *Al Mar'a fi Al-Islam* is easy to read.

About the author

Sheikh Dr. Subhi Al-Saleh was the Vice-President of the High Islamic Council of the Lebanese Republic. He held a Ph.D. in literature from the Sorbone in Paris and the Highest degree from the Theological Institute of Al-Azhar Al-Sharif.



A scholar, author and religious figure, he taught literature and Islamic theology at various universities in Lebanon and throughout the Arab World. He was one of the respected officials and personalities in the Sunnite Islamic Court and Councils of Lebanon.

An advocate for peace, he was assassinated on November 7, 1986 •

To order the book contact or sent a check in the amount of \$3.00 plus postage to the order of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College, P.O.Box 13-5053, Beirut, Lebanon.

L'Excisee

By Evelyne Accad

1982. In 1979 Ms. Accad was awarded the Delta Kappa Gamma International Educator's Award.

David K. Burner is Professor Emeritus at Iowa State University. For the past fifteen years he has centered his attention and work (in the classroom and on the radio), upon contemporary writers from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

About the book

«Female circumcision (excision, rather, for one is speaking of the removal of the clitoris, the labia major and minor) is ugly to contemplate»⁽¹⁾. Some people do not know that the ritual exists. Most people, who do know, prefer to deny it and avoid the thought, lest they be overwhelmed with horror.

Evelyne Accad explicitly affirms it in her book, *L'Excisee*, which has been translated into English by David K. Burner. Including poetry in the text, she tells the story of E., an idealistic young woman, who escapes the domination of a Protestant father and goes on a journey through a world where women are also socially and physically excised by the tyranny of men. E., herself, is not excised but witnesses the operation on ten and twelve year old girls in the women's quarters of a desert village.

Accad describes the ritual in detail. She emphasizes the lack of anesthetic and proper sterilization, the pain, the profuse bleeding, and the sexual inertia of the little girls. She does not exclude the happy chants of the women who participate in the ceremony, nor the pride of the mothers whose girls are being prepared for motherhood.

Accad places this tradition in its social context by speaking of the seclusion of women in private quarters. She also points out the elite status of women who bear male offsprings, not to mention the blessing of not having a female child, who would eventually have to be excised.

L'Excisee is an outraging book about an outraging reality •

(1) Burner, David K. «Translator's Preface» *L'Excisee*, the first English Edition, Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1989. (ISBN: 0-89410-596-5).

About the author

Evelyne Accad was born and raised in Beirut, Lebanon. She has a B.A. in English literature from Anderson College, an M.A. in French from Ball State University, and a Ph.D in Comparative literature from Indiana University. She is currently a Professor at the University of Illinois, where she teaches French, Comparative literature, African Studies, Women's Studies, and South-West Asian Studies. Evelyne Accad is a close friend and supporter of Al-Raida and has contributed several articles to our newsletter. Her publications include: *Coquelicot du Massacre*, *Contemporary Arab Women Writers and Poets*, (published by and sold at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World), *The Role of Women in the Modern Fiction of North Africa and the Arab World*; *L'Excisee* was first published in French in

Those Memories (from the novel)^(☆)

Emily Nasrallah

Two years ago Hanan left her elegant home in Beirut. I still recall how she came to me on that cold morning, anxious and sinking in an ocean of confusion and bewilderment.

«Farid has decided to leave for London,» she said. «He believes that there is no future for his work in Lebanon. So he has signed a contract to work for a British company.»

Farid has been disillusioned with Lebanon for quite some time now. He was always criticizing the Lebanese society: the life-style, the manner of raising children, and the moral degeneracy. He yearned for the day he would escape from the «Human hell», as he called it, and take his children to a «Civilized world.» I would always confront him and try to persuade him to stay for the sake of Hanan - Hanan, who is deeply rooted in the soil of Beirut, who loves her country in all its beauty and all its ugliness. I would tell Farid «Hanan does not want to leave. You are forcing her to leave.» «She is free. Let her stay here beside her mother. But for my part, nothing will stand between me and my decision.» At that Hanan would lower her head calmly.

Two years went by. During the two years I received news of Hanan from travelling friends. I learned that Farid had bought an elegant house in the suburbs of London and was «making a fortune».

A woman follows her husband while he looks for work, the ladder of his ambition and his glory. Farid's work had led him to a plateau of wealth while his homeland was sinking into the abyss of misery. He would boast to his friends that he had anticipated the eruption

in Lebanon and had been able to rescue himself and his family at the right time.

This news reached me and increased my anxiety over Hanan. I know her well enough to understand that her silence does not mean content.

I would wonder about her fate and the fate of many friends who had left the country while shells and the horror fell on Beirut, isolating us in shelters and underground vaults where we spent our nights waiting for death. In those hard times I would ask myself, Do I wish to be away from my country at its dying moment? Do I envy Hanan and the others like her who ran away? My conscience evoked her reprimanding image, and I immediately regretted my doubts.

My doubts continued until one day I received a letter from Hanan written in English.

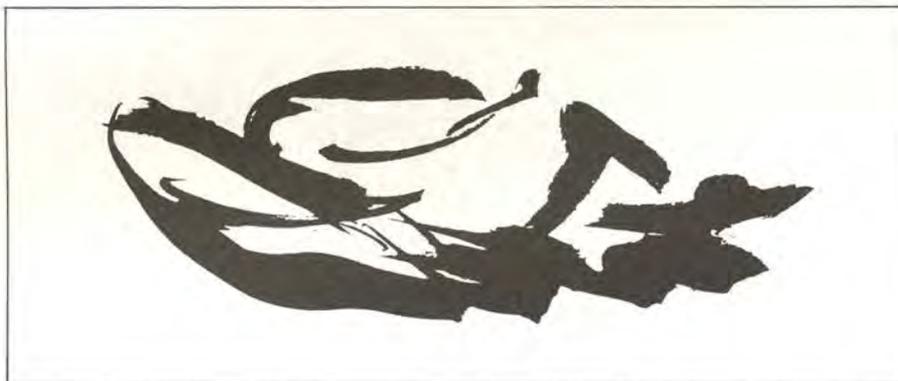
Dearest friend,

How I yearn for you, and think about you and miss you. I miss you a lot. How are you? What is occupying your thoughts, and who shares them during those hard times?

I need not say that I respect you and value and appreciate your good spirit, and often I wish that you were living near us in this small town in the suburbs of London.

Here we have many treasures of knowledge, for London is an important center of culture and it has much that nourishes the soul and mind.

I just finished reading The book of Mirdad in English. I believe that Mikhail Naimy is a great writer and his



book is one of the greatest books written in our age. Naimy's work offers a great deal of mental nourishment, but in Mirdad one finds nourishment for one's soul. Here our Lebanese writer has reached the level of the prophets. How much I regret that I did not have the pleasure of talking to this great man when I lived in the same city with him for years. Do you think I will have the chance again?

You know how much I yearn for inner growth. I am always looking for a way to realize that goal, to gain more wisdom and patience, so I may be able to survive in this frozen human environment. I miss our quiet visits and long conversations about what really matters in life.

I tell you, the more we learn and the less we care for material things, the better we are to understand life in some depth. Then we stand happily and freely, watching life pass by without allowing it to crush us.

I feel sorry that the «storm» that swept across Lebanon has taught people so little of what they ought to know. Some let emotions sweep and destroy them. So now as the war quiets down, they find themselves crushed, melancholic, empty, and broken-hearted.

My dear Maha, read the spiritual books. They are spring of inner tranquility and they give consolation and peace.

I want you to stay as I knew you, steadfast in the face of storms, preserving that inner calm. I want you to remain a pillar in your environment as you always have. I wish you all the peace in the new year.

Your friend,
Hanan

So this is how she spends her time! She tries to benefit from contemporary civilization. She reads Naimy in English in order to understand him better. Can that be a sign of Farid's total domination.

My friend was no longer an individual person. She has become a symbol. She represented the thousands of Lebanese citizens who have been led to the roads of dispora by the war.

Hanan, in her letter to me, was trying to defend a situation that she had been led into, with no regards for her own will, in total submission to the will of her husband.

When she chose to write me this letter, she was reassuring me that the expatriation had not severed relations between us and had not crased the memories of past days. She told me about all the confusion, desolation, and alienation that was oppressing her, but she had not specified her feelings.

I thought, How many times before had Hanan been lost on the roads of life; her new expatriation had increased her sense of loss, but it had added more strength and depth to our relationship ●

Translated from the Arabic by Mohamad Khazali and abridged by Randa Abul-Husn.

(☆) Source: *Woman and the Family in the Middle East*. edited by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985, pp. 183-186.

Marie Therese Arbid



Monday editions of «L'Orient le Jour» (daily French Lebanese newspaper) were the usual appointment of readers with Marie Therese Arbid's writings for the past twenty five years. However, on this January Monday, her readers read the news of her death.

Marie Therese Arbid, journalist and editor of the cultural page of L'Orient Le Jour passed away on Sunday, January 27, 1991, after a severe heart attack.

A leading journalist in the French-speaking press of Lebanon, she began writing for «Le Jour» in 1966 and joined L'Orient Le Jour when the two newspapers (L'Orient and Le Jour) were merged.

Her literary talent in French was admired by many. She held a degree in French Literature from the Sorbonne in Paris. Her hate for war and death lead her to write two books: «L'Ete 82» (Summer 82) edited by Express International and «Ma Guerre Pourquoi Faire?» (My War, What is it For?) edited by Dar An-Nahar. Both

books reveal her cry against the violent rape of Lebanon. She reminisces the golden days.

Marie Therese Arbid was one of the dynamic career women of the Lebanese press. Many a times she was interviewed and honored on the little screen of the Lebanese television. La Revue du Liban mourns her saying that journalism was her big love. A meticulous and passionate writer, says la Revue, she either loved or hated and she was either liked or disliked.

How did she die? She was struck by a heart attack on the staircase of her building while on her way to her art gallery in the underground shelter. Marie Therese Arbid had turned the damp room which was home for rats into a gallery of art and inaugurated it only one week before her death (January 16, 1991). The name of her gallery was «La Baraka» meaning the Blessing.

The friends and colleagues of Marie Therese Arbid, in the press and cultural art circles mourn her ●

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