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Never married Women



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The Private/ Public Dichotomy

Research on women in the Arab World range from gathering statistics on their status to analyzing cultural and social factors defining and influencing the conditions of women.

According to Amal Rassam, there isn't enough data for the construction of a general theoretical framework, and Arab women's status is best understood in terms of the social organization of power, the ideological and institutional means of controlling women's sexually and the sexual division of Labor⁽¹⁾.

The literature includes the Private/ female and Public/ male Dichotomy. According to this dichotomy, status, role and power of women are predominantly in the family and the household, i.e. the private sphere. In this sphere, the power of a woman is directly related to her achievements as a mother, a wife, a daughter or an aunt. Quality of achievement is commonly seen in terms of degrees of conformity to the relevant roles. Even wide exposure of Arab women to education, work and travel has had little impact on evaluating women in terms of their personality rather than in terms of their roles. Whereas, status, role and power of men exist in public life. The power structure of society is concentrated in the public walks of life such as in the economy and the market, politics and law and others. Consequently, it would seem that women and their private sphere are powerless.

However, if we examine social processes of interaction in society rather than social structures, we notice that the private sphere, i.e. women are far from powerless. The reciprocity of influence and interaction, of a man with his wife and vice versa, within the confines of the private world or the family indirectly delegates power to women.

However, this line of reasoning implies a ceiling for women's development and participation in the public mainstreams of society. Consequently, this dichotomy is problematic. According to Rassam, «It is essentially de-

scriptive and of limited use when one is attempting to explain the observed variations in women's status and historical change»⁽²⁾.

Arab women, keeping in mind socio-economic and class determinants of development, are taking a moderate position, i.e. family and employment. To a large extent, Arab women are engaged in the so-called public spheres of life. However, the article «Arab Women's Contribution to Development» (page 7), confirms that the family is still a priority over work for women. This means that the public world is still to a large degree the power arena of men, and the traditional female roles of daughter, wife, mother and aunt consistent with the private sphere, persist.

What is the fate of women who are not part of this private/ public duality through marriage? In this issue of *Al-Raida*, Miss Rose Ghurayyib, a never-married woman herself, discusses the lives, motives and conditions of never-married women. Women who have sacrificed marriage (one locus of private power) for the care and support of parents. Other women, who refrained from marriage because they explicitly entered public life to become career women (exiting the private sphere by so doing). They became the pioneers of women's independence in the Arab world.

These women experience power and independence during their productive years but pay the price of ending up alone later in their lives. When they age, they find themselves with limited material reward from retirement and with no private nucleus to fall upon. In other words, no one to take care of them, to support them and to inherit the glory of their achievements- except the general public itself. ●

Randa Abul-Husn

(1) Amal Kassam, *Towards Theoretical Framework for the Study of Women in the Arab World.* » *Women in the Arab World*, UNESCO, 1985, p. 122-137.

(2) *Ibid*, p. 125.

Never Married Women

By Rose Ghurayyib

Success and happiness do not depend on marriage nor on single life, but on the ability of the individual to acquire a strong, balanced and self-relying personality.

The tribal tradition which imposes marriage on both men and women for the purpose of insuring reproduction and survival of the tribe or the family, still exists in many communities of both Eastern and Western countries. It is particularly prevalent in developing and undeveloped communities where parents with a low income depend on children for protection and support in old age. The tradition persists in developing countries as well where marriage offers psychological advantages such as companionship and opportunities for growth through good fellowship, exchange of ideas and mutual help.

However, there are exceptions to every rule. Men and women deviate and remain unmarried. This article will deal with the topic of never-married women today, with specific emphasis on Lebanon and the Arab East. The absence of data or studies has obliged me to rely mainly on personal experience, while using a book⁽¹⁾ written by an American author, Barbara Levy Simon, as my literary guide. This book has been most enlightening and has allowed me to draw certain conclusions and comparisons between American and Lebanese and other Arab never-married women.

The author of the book says that the number of never-married women has recently increased in the United States. In 1980, the proportion of never-married women among college graduates, born in 1950, reached 22% versus 9% in 1930. The causes for this increase are: economic independence of women resulting from an increased rate of their employment; use of contraceptive pills permitting casual sex; the influence of the Liberation Movement, which favors women's independence; and finally, higher education, which has made women more choosy of marriage partners.

In Lebanon and other neighboring Arab countries, we have no statistics on this topic. Judging from statis-



tics depicting an increase in the ratio of female to male in the population, we may assume that an increase in the number of never-married women has taken place during the last thirty years as a result of women's growing interest in higher education and employment. The number of men has also decreased because of emigration or military involvement. Furthermore, the economic depression created by the war caused a shortage in lodging accommodation and a rise in prices making marriage very costly, thereby discouraging young couples.

Consequently, war is one of the two main causes which lead to the increase in the number of never-married women. War is an old plague, which has caused more devastation than any other calamity. The modern worldwide wave of protest against war may help reduce negative effects on marriage, such as divorce and separation. The other cause for the increase in the number of never-married women is women's desire for independence. Independence means, in the first place, financial independence. It was denied to women in the past mak-

ing marriage the only choice for those who did not choose convent life. In fact, the vast majority of women all over the world still depend on marriage for sustenance, i.e. for food, lodging and other material needs. This situation reinforces the domination of men as sole providers or money earners in the family. Women's work, no matter how important or voluminous, is undervalued because it has no commercial or monetary value.

In marriage, a woman has to accept her husband as the head of the family, to fulfill his wishes, to bear and raise the children who would carry his name, to perform all the household duties and to take care of the sick and ailing members of the family, all in exchange for food and lodging. If the husband is wealthy, his wealth goes to his children after his death, while the wife gets a small share or nothing at all. As Adrienne Rich says in her book *Of Woman Born*⁽²⁾ «a woman's life is a sacrifice for her husband and children». Nowadays, women who have achieved financial independence through profession and work and who have become conscious of the injustices imposed on them by traditional marriage, hesitate before accepting «just any man» as a spouse. They require an open-minded husband whose level of education is at least equal to theirs. In marriage, they require a degree of independence equal to that enjoyed by the husband, i.e. the right to work outside the home, freedom to spend money as they wish, the right to share in family-planning decisions, the right to practice their hobbies and to enjoy a social life with friends and acquaintances. In short, the women of today refuse to lose their freedom in marriage, or else they refrain from marriage, and consider divorce if married.

When we speak of **independence** as a general goal for never-married women we have to discuss, in some details, the circumstances which led them to choose this life. Interviews arranged by Barbara L. Simon with 45 women give us a clearer idea about the attitude of the modern Western woman towards marriage⁽³⁾:

- (1) 18 out of 30 of the women interviewed considered paid work as central in individual freedom.
- (2) 26 out of 30 of them mentioned their devotion to a job or career as an alternative to marriage.
- (3) 7 out of 30 of the women preferred the intimacy experienced with friends over that offered by marriage.
- (4) a small group, moved by religious motives, decided to join religious orders.
- (5) 12 women interviewed were single, involuntarily, because they sacrificed themselves for the sake of aged parents who needed their care.

- (6) 4 of the women had physical disabilities and gained their living through work and enjoyed a rich social life.
- (7) a good number of them were moved to remain single by ideological motives: serving a political or a religious organization, devoting themselves to a spiritual and passionate social service, seeking self-realization as members of humanity as a whole, discontent with the predominance of male privileged in marital relations.



The reasons the women give for singlehood are related to 19th and 20th century ideologies. They speak of a humanitarian philosophy, (replacing medieval ideas) which advocates a universal equality between individuals, regardless of sex. This philosophy is reinforced by some modern mystics, who affirm that «all the children of the world are our children and all creatures on earth are brothers and sisters, who should live together in perfect harmony».

Does this ideology apply to never-married women in our Eastern culture? Probably! yet on a smaller scale because only few Middle Eastern women are completely independent. Thus, family traditions, here and elsewhere in the world, act as important factors influencing the marital status of women.

Family traditions in our Eastern countries remain imperative. If the desire for independence prevents some of our women from marrying, the lack of independence imposed on others lead them to involuntary singlehood. This happens when the parents monopolize the right to speak for their daughter when a groom asks to marry her. Over-protective and over-demanding parents tend to hinder the chances of marriage for their daughters when they insist on a rich son-in-law. The same thing

may happen when poverty or avarice prevent them from giving her a dowry and again when needy parents refuse to give their daughter in marriage because they depend on her work for sustenance.

On the other hand, strong **attachement to the family** may induce some women to remain unmarried. In Barbara L. Simon's report, this attachment plays an important role in the lives of these women. Most of the women interviewed reported daily contact or extended phone calls with parents or siblings. Companionship offered by family members, namely sisters sharing one apartment, acts as a form of compensation for the women who decided to lead a single life. Familial demands in case of long sickness or old age of family members are among the causes for women's single status in this country and elsewhere. Traditions expect women to make filial sacrifices which **are not** expected from men.

When family members are not available as substitute companions for never-married women, they may resort to long lasting friendships with women of their age or who share their likes and dislikes. Among the 50 interviewed by B.L. Simon, 15 lived with a friend, sharing a room, an apartment, home or residence in a retired family. On the whole, these women claim that their lives have been enriched by friends and intimates. Sharing life with another woman relative, sibling or friend, is especially recommended for unmarried Eastern women because traditions do not offer them the alternative of living alone.

If companionship and friendship are recommended as assets for never-married women, **work** stands as a necessity. It is imperative for achieving economic and social independence and may be the goal for which these women sacrifice marriage. Work is most enjoyable and profitable, giving them prestige and social status and allowing them to perform creative and essential tasks! to many of them, work, like marriage, is a vocation to which they may devote their lives. Most of them, however, complain about a limited choice of occupations. Female occupations seem to be concentrated in six main fields: secretarial work, household tasks, book-keeping, elementary teaching, salesgirls and waitresses.

They also complain about the discriminatory treatment which makes their salary lower than that of men performing the same job. They are engaging in new vocational and training possibilities, assuming more responsibility in the executive fields and enjoying increased pay and more opportunities for promotion.

The complaints and demands mentioned above are

common to all working women, regardless of whether they were married or single, Eastern or Western.

While it is true that work may be a form of enslavement or exploitation at the hands of a dictatorial boss, a working woman usually finds compensation in the money she earns. On the other hand, if she is completely dissatisfied with the treatment she receives, she may look for a more satisfactory job elsewhere. While in marriage she is tied to one man for life.

The problems caused by **aging** and **retirement** affect never-married women just like married ones. Having practiced self-reliance since early childhood or youth, "these never-married women are wonderfully able to adapt themselves to the needs and demands of old age" says B.L. Simon⁽⁴⁾. They rely on personal savings, social security, pension obtained from long service, public assistance. Fifty one percent of the interviewees did part-time work after retirement. As far as residence is concerned, 42 out of 45 lived with other women friends or family members.



Conclusion

The phenomenon of never-married women has existed since the dawn of civilization. The circumstances and motives leading to this status varied, including physical and mental impairments, devotion to a sacred mission like priesthood, sisterhood, guardianship of the hearth fire in the Temple of Vestor, the Roman goddess. Today, the Women's Liberation Movement has awakened women's desire for independence and has contributed to an increase in the number of never-married women.

Single life for women is not a disaster as traditional people tend to believe. The interviews of B.L. Simon show that singlehood was frequently voluntary and that it does create some discontent, but not for long. Having been brought up in an atmosphere of submission,



women whose circumstances forced them to remain single, manage to overcome their difficulties and accept their lot as the will of fate.

Discussions regarding who should take care of the elderly may arise among family members. Never-married women frequently, either take or are given, by default, responsibility for old and dying family members. Most of them express bitterness over the insensitivity of siblings, especially brothers who refrain from sharing such tasks.

While we acknowledge the existence of problems in single life, we should remember that those presented by traditional marriage are not less exacting. Success and happiness do not depend on marriage nor on singlehood but on the ability to acquire a strong, balanced, self-relying personality. Here I like to quote one of the fifty women interviewed by B.L. Simon who said «I had a nice life... I've just done the thing I've wanted to do, money permitting. If I wanted to travel, I found a way. If I got lonely, I made new friends. If I wanted youngsters around, I found some. There was never a big deal about happiness. You either make it yourself or you don't»⁽⁵⁾.

In Arab countries, the writings of Sigmund Freud and his followers about women's sexuality have had little influence. Our women still live under the influence of Christian and Moslem teachings of respectable womanhood, which preach chastity and sexual control. Hence, the respect which society shows to nuns is also projected on never-married women who devote their lives to a career or to the care of ailing parents. While it is true that public opinion as a whole considers single life as an unfavorable deviation from the norms, yet since every

never-married woman has her particular reasons for not marrying, people should have an understanding attitude.

According to B.L. Simon, the recent increase in the number of never-married women in America may continue in the future. The same increase will probably take place in other countries for the same reasons prevalent in America. The International Movement of Planned Parenthood and the Malthusian Theory requiring birth control in order to avoid over-population, may be considered as an additional stimulus for the expected increase.

To prevent an excessive or harmful deviation from the norms, we should turn to the initial causes and try to remedy or eliminate them. First, war has to be completely abolished. Second, marriage and family relations must undergo an evolution. It means creating better understanding between parents and children and more democratic relations between the spouses. It also postulates encouraging young men and women to attend social gatherings, perform common tasks and form lasting friendships based on mutual respect and understanding instead of materialistic and physical interests. These recommendations apply particularly to our Lebanese and Arab society. ●

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- (1) Barbara Levy Simon, *Never Married Women*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987
 - (2) Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York: W.W. North, 1976.
 - (3) Simon, *Ibid.* p. 30-62.
 - (4) *Ibid.* p. 161.
 - (5) *Ibid.*, p. 15
- (☆) Illustrations from *International Women's Tribune Center (IWTC)* feminist emblems.

Arab Women's Contribution to Development^(☆)

The popular western media image of the typical Arab women has changed little in decades. According to the «fiction» these heavily veiled figures are seen but rarely heard as they scurry through the corridors of opulent eastern palaces. The legend records that these women have no rights and opinions. When - in the privacy of the perfumed boudoir - they cast off veil and chador, a sexy Shehrazade emerges, whose main aim in life is to please her man. The absurd myth that grew from roots set in harems of Ottoman sultans centuries ago - and even then was far from typical - refuses to go away. The truth is, if there ever was a «typical» Arab woman this person no longer exists⁽¹⁾.

Prior to the discovery of oil and the consequent economic boom of Gulf states, women were the acting heads of the household. While the men went away for fishing and pearling, women fed the children, built the houses from mud, weaved threads and sew the family's clothing and fed the herds⁽²⁾. In agricultural areas like Egypt and Yemen, women worked with men in the field. In conflicts such as the Struggle for independence in Algeria, the besieged refugee camps in Lebanon and the Palestinian intifada, «we saw that the hand which rocks the cradle also cradles the rock»⁽³⁾.

Today, more than ever before, the Arab world is experiencing social, economic and political changes such as the unification of the two Yemens, the women's protest in Algeria, Egypt, and notably Saudi Arabia, and last but not least the impact of the war in the Gulf.

Noticeably, women are eager to play an active role, rather than a marginal one, in development. Arab women are not just recently participating in development. They have always been a part of development, ranging from keeping the family fed and clothed, enter-

ing the economic mainstream to participation in national struggles.

Hence, the nature of work is changing and the forms of production are different from what they were. New technologies have substituted the market for home-made forms of subsistence. Women are tackling new educational levels and new professions which extend beyond the traditionally acceptable occupations for the female gender such as nursing and teaching. Women are executives in leading banks and finance houses in the Kuwaiti stock exchange, in Arab government offices and embassies around the world. Omani women are serving in the local police⁽⁴⁾.

Nevertheless, traditions persist. Arab women express an attachment to traditions in their lives. Wafa Al-Rasheed, a dynamic young executive at the Kuwaiti stock exchange is willing to give up her job and career should it interfere with the well-being of her family.

«For centuries, women have organized their lives in this way. Men have a way of making their work sound



Illustration from *The Tribune*,
IWTC Quarterly No. 42, June, 1987

more important. Women perform all domestic and maternal duties and many hold down a full-time job, yet without making a fuss». explains Egyptian feminist and writer Leila Badr⁽⁵⁾.

These changes contribute to a «new shift in emphasis from treating women as marginal or complimentary in the working of Arab society, to one that sees women and their activities as integral constituents of the system»⁽⁶⁾.

Yet, women are still facing hardships despite mobility. A large proportion of Arab women remain illiterate. Parents in rural areas are still reluctant to educate their daughters lest they aspire to work rather than get married. Employers lay off women before men and women earn less than men, i.e. 25% less in Egypt and 15% in Jordan.

Consequently, one of the major challenges to Arab women is to ensure that they do not lose ground, says Leila Badr.

A conference on Arab women's contribution to development sponsored by the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) in co-operation with Arab League states and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), was held in Cairo in the summer of 1990. The conference focused on the participation of women as an essential human resource⁽⁷⁾. At the conference, Leila Badr stressed that «it is time Arab women's efforts were recognized, we have been full partners in the region's development right down the line». Dr. Mohamed Nour, UNDP's Regional Director for Arab States pointed out that the role of women in planning and implementing development is usually neglected and overlooked. Consequently, Dr. Nour, proposed a slogan for women's contribution and participation in development in the 1990s. «NO WOMEN, NO DEVELOPMENT». ●

(☆) Extracts from: Pat Lancaster, «Arab Women - Meeting the Challenges of the 1990s», *The Middle East*, August 1990, issue # 190.

(1) Ibid.

(2) Rose Ghurayyib, *Adwa' Aala Al-Haraka Al-Nisa'iyah Al-Mouaasirah*, Beirut: Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1988.

(3) Lancaster, Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Amal Rassam, «Towards a Theoretical Framework for the Study of Women in the Arab World.» *Women in the Arab World*, UNESCO, 1985, p. 123.

(7) Lancaster, Ibid.

Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation

The success and effectiveness of social work and development programmes in the countries of the Middle East are often linked to support from the political regime or political leadership in question.

In a previous issue of *Al-Raida* (Women: Where, When and How?) we ran an article about the spectacular tasks of the General Federation of Iraqi Women. The article implicitly noted the support of President Saddam Hussein as one of the major causes behind the success of the relevant programmes.

Other success stories appear in Egypt where Mrs. Mubarak founded Children's libraries, librarian workshops and sponsored other social work programmes for women and children⁽¹⁾, and in Jordan with the Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation in Jordan.

Political power and available fundings are the precedent for sophisticated programmes and wide spread coverage. The charisma of the leaders plays the primary role of motivating professionals as well as the masses to participate constructively.

«The Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation was created by a Royal decree in 1985 to coordinate and oversee the many projects and programmes which Queen Noor has helped establish or which she personally supports in the fields of culture, education, social welfare and human and community development. the Fundamental mission of the Foundation and its programmes is to mobilize human skills needed for development»⁽²⁾.

The Queen has performed the vigorous task of establishing more than twenty one social programmes along with their facilities and professional bodies. The programmes address the needs of children, women and rural development.

The children's programmes are the most elaborate. They include a centre for Early Childhood Education, the Royal Endowment for Culture and Education with emphasis on gifted students, Day of the Arab Child and International Day of the Child, Arab Children's Con-



gress, Children's Clubs, the Children's Heritage and Science Museum, the Queen Noor Award for Children's Literature, the National Hospital for Children, Health Communications for Child Survival Programme, the Institute for Child Health and Development, SOS Children's Village, the National Music Conservatory, Theatre in Education, the Jubilee School and the Mobile Life and Science Museum.

Other programmes incorporated in the Foundation are: Women and Development Project, Al-Noor Project for Development in Rural Areas, Handicrafts Development project, Salt Handicraft Training Centre and the famous Jerash Festival of Culture and Art.

Queen Noor travels throughout the world to secure funds for the Foundation's projects. She heads out to explain the need for social assistance in her country and the purpose of the programmes. According to Her Royal Highness, she wants to introduce the Arab culture to the West. «The Arabs know more about the

West than the West knows about the Arab people. It is our duty to introduce the peaceful and romantic culture of the Arabs» the Queen insists.⁽³⁾

To many, Queen Noor is a credible link between East and West. Of American birth and from Arab ancestry, she converted to Islam when she married King Hussain. This conversion, she says, came after extensive thought and research of various religions in the world. Consequently, Islam occupies an important place in her life. She discusses the faith with her children at length in order to uphold its true principles and avoid misconceptions. She is earnest to clear up many of the misconceptions of the West which link terrorism and hostility towards women to Islam.

When asked (in an interview with the French magazine ELLE) if Islam protects the rights of women, the Queen replied «Absolutely». She said that according to Islam, the protection of women is the responsibility of the husband, father or brother. She also insisted that, in principle, Islam encourages women to defend themselves, seek an education and even to govern. She is concerned that extremists have distorted the principles in their discriminate treatment of women in the Islamic world.

About the status of women in Jordan, the Queen insisted that all the doors are open. Women occupy seats in parliament and the senate. They nominate themselves for elections. They run industries and enroll in universities. «In fact» the Queen noted «There are more females than males at the university. We try to assist the poor students and the women who have difficulties attaining their freedom. We also try to devise action plans to help them find jobs and earn their living»⁽⁴⁾.

Obviously, Queen Noor Al-Hussain is neither a radical nor a strict conservative. She would seem more like a liberal. Her thoughts, her work and her Foundation purpose the preservation of culture and the correction of misconceptions. These tasks seem to represent the founding grounds for the development of human skills needed for self-sufficiency, autonomy, and progress for the Jordanian people. In addition to relief and development programmes, there is a clear emphasis on nurturing the potentials of the younger generations. Hopefully, this will be a successful long-term endeavour. ●

Has Feminism Failed?

Twenty years have passed since the movement began. The relevant questions today are: «What have they (women) done?», «Where do they stand today?» and «What is the outcome in Africa, in Europe, in Asia and in America?»

Cons

In East or West, it seems that women still have to fight for their rights. While women in some areas have achieved more than their sisters in other areas, the overall outcome seems to fall short of the goals of the Women's Movement. There seems to be no guarantees for women anywhere, still. In many parts of the world, women are still victims of traditions, religions, myths and ideologies.

For instance, male births are still preferable in China, where females are considered an invaluable addition to the population. In Tibet, women are forced to abort, even during the eight month of pregnancy. In India, twenty five percent of girls are ill-treated and killed before the age of fifteen because they are a financial burden to their parents who have to cover the expenses of marriage. In Africa, financial bankruptcy affects females for they are the first to be taken out of schools and put into the labor market.

In Africa, the ritual of female circumcision is still practiced. In the East, the pressure to wear the veil and its role-expectations are perpetuating. In Algeria, «every girl who goes out at night is killed» says a young Algerian. Furthermore, girls are separated from boys in schools because «women love to dominate, manipulate and destroy men.» One student said that she had to submit to wearing the veil before she was admitted to class⁽¹⁾.

Often, women end up paying the biggest price for political change. For instance, the unification of North and South Yemen had the happy outcome of ending the struggle between brothers. But the unified status of Yemeni women soon clenched a heated controversy (see Al-Raida, vol. IX, No. 50, p. 8). Southern women demanded the long-adopted democracy of their Northern sisters and refused to yield to Islamic fundamentalism, notably the veil. Eventually, however, they found themselves forced to wear the veil although their call for

(1) «Suzanne Mobarak», *Al-Raida*, No. 38, November 1986, p. 15.

(2) The Queen Noor Al-Hussain Foundation Brochure.

(3) Women's Sections of *Al-Diyar* Daily newspaper, Beirut.

(4) *Ibid.*

democracy was answered. And to top it all, their husbands gained access to taking additional wives from the North⁽²⁾.

The Western model of freedom has been transmitted as the ideal formula for women all over the world. Women think that all it takes to earn freedom, New York, London or Paris style, is financial independence. But are they aware of the problems women in the West face? Research has it that these women earn thirty percent less than men.

Which brings us back to the original question: «Has the Women's Movement produced positive or negative results?»



According to American, Kay Ebeling, a free-lance writer and member of the feminist generation (also known as the Experimental Generation), **Feminism has failed**⁽³⁾. Ebeling explains that «the message of Feminism was: woman, you don't need a man. It was a philosophy that made divorce and cohabitation casual and routine. It made women poor and saddled them with raising children alone.» Ebeling remarks that «Feminism made women disposable. The reality (today) is a lot of frenzied and overworked women often abandoned by men.»

It seems that what Ebeling is really saying is that «Feminism is lonely.» However, although more women lead a single's life and may be lonely, there is no denying that more women are integrated in economic, political and other spheres of public life.

Pros

The following are direct quotes taken from Time Magazine⁽⁴⁾ highlighting the achievements of the Feminist Movement.

... The efforts of women around the world to see that their rights are respected... involve a struggle to share information. If knowledge is the currency for power, images of change bring opening and inspirations....

... Although there remains corners of the world untouched by the revolution... some themes are becoming universal, namely the desire for women and men to achieve their goals without sacrificing their nature...

... The dreams transcend old boundaries though they vary from place to place... economics may be a primary goal in one country, support for families in another, protection from violence in a third....

... As feminism moved from theory to practice, it brought surprises: among the first nations to elect female heads of government were those that seemed least likely to do so, such as India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan... In Eastern Europe's emerging democracy, women may be getting a chance to share real, not cosmetic power.

Indeed, prior to the revolution, the world beyond was not aware of the existence of rituals like circumcision, crimes of honor, abortion and killing of female siblings, denial of women's right to divorce or work, abuse, white slavery, rape and other injustices.

After the revolution, victimized women learned that they actually have **rights**, which they can claim and protect. Consequently, women's groups, regardless of how powerful or powerless they are, began to emerge almost everywhere.

Indeed, women are slowly transcending old boundaries. Probably, one of the greatest boundaries that they have transcended is that of silence. For the sake of example, five sisters broke the vow of silence against their father who had abused them since childhood in the French suburb of Angier.

Another achievement of the movement is its success in linking women's rights to human rights issues. Women issues were incorporated into larger matters concerning the world community, such as literacy, hygiene, health, education, violence, politics, work and others. For instance, the illiteracy of women, although still comparatively higher than men, has become a concern for relief organizations, social associations and governments, and not only feminists. Contingently, human

rights groups may be more effective where women's groups are not.

Higher on the hierarchy of needs and rights, the Women's Movement has gained strongholds in the media, this century's most powerful weapon. Not only was information communicated to the world, but voices were raised, pressures were made and changes were achieved. For example, Ireland elected its first female President of the Republic, Ms. Mary Bronson. Ms. Sharon Brat Dickson is Mayor of Washington DC, the capital city of the United States of America; and Ms. Anne Richards is Governor of the State of Texas⁽⁵⁾. Ms. Margaret Thatcher was premier of Great Britain.

The biggest surprise was what happened in Saudi Arabia. Hence, Saudi women were motivated to speak up when glimpses of western cultures, embodied in the armed forces, came to Saudi Arabia. In the past, Saudis would indulge their «western» behaviors while away from home, and submit to strict traditions and laws in their homeland. With the coming of the Americans, they found themselves face to face with the fact that eleven percent of these forces are women sharing the front with the men.

Conclusion

Here we have two extremes trying to evaluate each other. Women in the traditional parts of the world are overburdened with male domination. While, women in the West complain from singularity and alienation. Does this mean that the Women's Movement should be aborted because it has substituted alienation for submission?

Maybe it is time that the Movement be re-visited and re-evaluated. It stands to reason that after twenty years of trial and error, a more profound understanding of equality should be reached. After all shouldn't women and men be equals not competitors and not have a slave-master relationship? How can the Women's Movement preserve sex-roles and emphasize equality? How can the movement avoid the pitfall of sounding negative because of its «aggressive and patronizing» tone? Maybe «Moderation is the best policy.» ●

(1) **Al-Diyar** daily newspaper, Thursday, November 29, 1990 (Arabic reference).

(2) Ibid.

(3) Kay Ebeling. «The Failure of Feminism», **Newsweek** November 1990, p. 9

(4) «On The Move» (special section) **Time International**, December 3, 1990, p. 47-59.

(5) Ibid. Al-Diyar.

Dr. Nasrine Kamel Ghaddar The First Arab Woman to Hold a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering from M.I.T.

She wears a veil on her head and a serene smile on her face. She is the first Lebanese woman to hold a Ph.D. in Mechanical Engineering (Thermal and Fluid Sciences-Computational Fluid Dynamics and Heat Transfer) from M.I.T. She is the fourth woman to graduate in this field in the history of MIT.

Dr. Nasrine Kamel Ghaddar is a Lebanese and a former resident of Kuwait. She is married and has one child. She completed her Bachelor's of Science in Mechanical Engineering at Kuwait University (K.U.) in 1980 and completed her graduate and post-graduate studies at M.I.T., Massachusetts institute of Technology, in 1985. Upon her graduation, she returned to Kuwait and joined the faculty of Mechanical Engineering at Kuwait University. When Iraq invaded Kuwait in the summer of 1990, Dr. Ghaddar returned to Lebanon and plans to conduct research and teach at the American University of Beirut (A.U.B.).

An outstanding student and dynamic scholar, she received a number of honors and awards from K.U. and M.I.T. She is a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineering (ASME) and the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA). At K.U., she was the editor of the Mechanical Engineering Newsletter and held administrative duties in cultural and scientific organizations. Not to mention that Dr. Ghaddar has a significant number of journal and conference publications.

She came to our Institute to inquire about children's books for her son. Hence, we grabbed the opportunity to ask her a few questions about herself and her experiences as a female scholar at M.I.T. and as a highly educated woman in the traditional societies of the Middle East.

She was frank and relaxed. The veil on her head did not veil her modesty, openness and progressive character, if I dare say so.



Dr. Ghaddar and Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, director of IwsAw (left to right).

1. Why Mechanical Engineering? and why a Ph.D.?

First, I am interested in this field. After finishing my Bachelor's degree at K.U., I had some field training which inspired me to nurture my interest and knowledge. A Ph.D. came also as a challenge for me as a female because women worldwide tend to turn away from higher education in this domain.

2. What was your parents' attitude towards your decision to go for a Ph.D.?

My father did not encourage me at first. But when I received a scholarship from the «Kuwait Foundation for Advancement of Science», he was happy to see me go for it. My father is a teacher and education is his mission in life. Therefore, when the financial means for my education were secured, he supported me. He feels that a woman should be independent and progressive. My mother also felt that I should not turn down an opportunity like this.

3. Did you encounter the traditional attitude that a Ph.D. and consequently, intellectual advancement for a woman would scare men away and get in the way of marriage?

What I encountered was «Why invest so much money on women if they abandon everything after marriage?».

I strongly disagree with this theory for a very simple and non-sexist reason. I believe that if a woman invests so much time, effort and money to get a degree, it becomes virtually impossible for her to sit idle at home. Her specialization becomes a part of her and of her life.

On the other hand, the idea that education scares men away is more prevalent in the Middle East than in the West. Over here, men have difficulties imagining a woman in engineering. Consequently, they resist accepting her and supporting her as a colleague. Whereas, I was always treated as one of the guys at M.I.T. although I was the only female in one of my lab classes. Sex was of no concern. What mattered was the work itself. The atmosphere was void of sex-roles and stereotypes and based solely on competition and achievement.

4. Well! did your Ph.D. cause any problems with men as far as your marriage was concerned?

No, I got married after finishing my graduate work and particularly during the last year of my Ph.D. I met my husband in Kuwait on one of my vacations. My husband is a Mechanical Engineer too.

5. Are there any problems or competition there?

No, my husband works in the field, i.e. applied engineering, whereas, I chose research and academics. Our profession compliments and strenghtens our relationship rather than exert pressure on it. I am a source of reference for him when it comes to solving field problems and he provides me with ideas to research and explore.

As far as domestic matters are concerned, he is very helpfull. We share household duties and he even takes time off from work to stay with our son when I am busy at work. ●

Women's International Day March 8, 1991

The Association of Makassed Women «The Participation of Women in Secular Society»

The Women's chapter of the Makassed Philanthropic Islamic Association held a panel to describe and discuss the participation of Lebanese women in the secular sectors of society. The panels discussed the participation of women in: (1) the public sector, namely in the Diplomatic Corps and the Judicial body; (2) the sector of social services, namely NGOs and other social work associations; (3) political parties; (4) the syndicates.

The panelists concluded that women's participation in the relevant sectors in Lebanon is still low and minimal. They called upon society and the law to take the necessary steps to encourage and increase women's active and decisive involvement in the development of the Lebanese society. Maitre Laure Moghaizel emphasized four general principles needed for progress: Equality, Development, Peace and Participation. ●

The Role of the U.N. in Women's Development

The Cultural Committee of the Beirut Alumni Chapter of the American University of Beirut organized a panel discussion on the involvement of the United Nations in women's development in the world. The U.N. Media delegate in Beirut, Mr. Nabil Abou Dargham discussed the U.N.'s international resolutions dealing with women's rights. He touched upon political rights, the right of citizenship for married foreigners (women),

legal age of marriage and non-discrimination laws against the female gender.

Mr. Abou Dargham also emphasized that the degree and quality of equality between the sexes has improved significantly thanks to the U.N. Decade for Women (1976-1985). Thus, the number of females enrolled in schools had risen from 37% in 1975 to 41% in 1985, and the number of women working in the public sector has risen from 31% in 1950 to 35% in 1985. ●

A Unified Plan of Action and Goals for the Lebanese Women's Movement

The National Council of Lebanese Women called for a general press conference to declare unified goals and a unified plan of action for the Lebanese Women's Movement which was approved by the majority of Lebanese Women's Association groups.

The unified plan demands the elimination of laws and legislations which discriminate against women in modern society. The major demands of the plan emphasize: the elimination of laws regarding crimes of honor, the establishment of a law which acknowledges the testimony of a woman in court as full and independent of a male witness. Last but not least the unified plan calls for the establishment of a civil code which would be an optional alternative for personal status codes. We hope that the government and all the concerned and able members of society will contribute to these achievements of these goals. ●

The Sudanese Woman

Editor, Susan Kenyon^(☆)

The Graduate College of the University of Khartoum decided to publish this collection of essays about women in the Sudan, to mark the end of the United Nations Decade for Women. As the editor, Susan Kenyon, mentions that it is difficult to give a fully representative picture of the population in a country as big and as culturally diverse as Sudan. But this attempt is an important one, especially considering how very little is available on the topic. It should definitely be ordered by all universities and major public libraries interested in women and African material. It is an indispensable reference tool for anyone interested in these topics.

Chapter one is about «Women and Politics in Medieval Sudanese History,» by Hag Hamad Mohammed Kheir. The study is unique because no other historian has yet tackled that topic. A very interesting aspect of this study is about the Queens in Medieval Sudan. Chapter two by Griselda el-Tayi, deals with «Women's Dress in the Northern Sudan». It gives a socio-cultural, historical account of the basic items of dress. Chapter three, about «Food and Differential Roles in the Fetiche Household,» by Balghis Yousif Bedri, shows how wives sometimes manipulate unfavourable situations through food to change their husbands' attitude. Chapter four, «Women and Spirit Possession in Omdurman,» by Samia al Hadi al Nagar, looks at how women are involved in zar which is on the increase.

Chapter five, «Women in Sudanese Agriculture,» by Mahasin Khider el Sayed, describes activities of rural women in both traditional and modern forms of agriculture. Chapter six, «Women and Crime in the Sudan,» by Hatim Babiker Abdel Gadir Hillawi, studies the nature of criminality and criminals and how they differ from the men. And finally, chapter seven, «Women and Change in Hmr Oral Traditions,» by Asia Mahjoub Ahmed, part of a larger study of the tradition of a Baggara group, looks at the folk poetry.

All in all, this collection provides us with a deeper understanding of Sudanese society and culture as a whole. ●

(☆) Book review written by Evelynne Accad

Arabic Short Stories

Editor, Mahmoud Manzalaoui^(☆)

This selection and compilation of thirty-three short stories by thirty authors, beginning with a foreword by Dr. Sarwat Okasha, UAR Minister of Culture, a presentation by G.E. von Grunebaum and an introduction by the editor Mahmoud Manzalaoui; is an excellent work of reference for a Western reader interested in Arabic literature and who cannot read the texts in the original language. It also serves as a textbook for a class in Arabic studies and literature, and should definitely be ordered by all universities and major public libraries interested in Arabic material.

The short story is an interesting genre of writing. Not only does it embody many important aspects of culture, but also a variety of fields -- Anthropology, sociology, Political Science, History, Women's Studies, Ethnology, Religion and others. It is written in a narrative form which captivates the reader.

The authors chosen are mainly Egyptian: Tawfiq el Hakim, Mahmoud Taymour, Mohamed Kamel Hussein, Yehia Hakki, Suheir el Kalamawi, Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz, Rashad Rushdi and many others. Hence, one of the criticisms which could be made of this compilation, resides in the choice of authors. The book presents the Arabic short stories of a majority of twenty-four Egyptians in a total of thirty authors. What about Lebanese, Iraqi, Syrian, or Sudanese authors to name a few?

Nevertheless, the richness of material and the excellent contribution of the book to literature compels us to recommend it to interested readers. ●

(☆) Book review written by Evelynne Accad

Women Campaign Globally for an Equal Say at UN «Fate of the Earth» Conference

New York

Women around the world are campaigning for an equal say when «Fate of the Earth» decisions are made at the biggest UN environment and development conference ever held, to be convened next year in Brazil.

The 1-12 June 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) could draw summit-level delegations from as many as 160 nations. An additional 20,000 citizen activists also are expected in Brazil for a parallel People's Congress. Together, they will comprise the largest forum ever held for international, legal and other actions on such issues as climate changes, saving species, Earth ethics and financing sustainable development. The decisions taken at UNCED will affect life on Earth well into the 21st century.

To make sure women's voices and concerns are heard at UNCED and in the national and international meetings preparing for it, women activists-experts from around the world have mobilized for a World Women's

Congress for a Healthy Planet, to be held 8-12 November, 1991, in Miami Florida.

Congress organizers expect one thousand women at the five-day meeting in Miami, with the majority coming from developing countries. The Congress is open to all.

Congress participants will act as jurors, taking this evidence along with their own experiences to a series of workshops where they will develop recommendations and actions for a healthy planet.

Their Women's Action Agenda for a Healthy Planet will be presented November 12 to a Summit Meeting of women heads of government, top UN officials and other world leaders at the concluding session of the Congress. Among those expected to take part are Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, who led the influential World Commission on Environment and Development, and UNCED Secretary-General Maurice Strong. ●

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