



RESEARCH PROJECTS ON WOMEN'S STATUS: A PRESSING NEED IN THE ARAB WORLD

General information and sweeping statements are no longer compatible with the mentality and demands of our present age. It would be easy to say in a casual manner that illiteracy in the Arab World reaches high proportions, especially among women, but we cannot impress people by general, superficial statements. Only when statistics and figures tell them that the proportion of women illiterates in Arab countries reaches an average of 75-80% and that it is, in most cases, twice its proportion among men, then will they be convinced of the existence of the problem and the necessity of treating it.

When we talk in daily conversation about how poorly we meet children's needs in our Arab countries, how much injustice and exploitation may be involved in family relationships, many might retort by affirming that Eastern people consider children as the most precious gift of God and the family as a sacred and highly venerated institution. Only a deep, objective study of children's textbooks, as presented in No. 4 of Al-Raida, has revealed to us the great neglect and the commercial interests which dominate the production of textbooks for children. A similar study would reveal the defects of reading books and the urgent need for a well-planned and a well-produced library for them.

A similar research project would also prove the existence of bitter conflicts and hidden tragedies among members of the same family who live in apparently complete harmony. It would prove that our traditional family relationships based on selfish interest or parasitism need a complete revision.

The image of woman in the press, in school books, remains hazy, even unknown. Dr. Ilham Kallab's study has clarified it in part by showing how traditional and retrograde it appears in school books and how much this rigid image is likely to impress our children with the tradition of male dominance, sex discrimination, and underestimation of woman's role in society.

Women's liberation movements have been diffusing heaps of publicity material. They nevertheless admit that "actions speak louder than words", that achievement is more important than mere talk. Production of educational material for the semiliterate, of new literature for children's Textbooks', with a new attitude toward women, all these activities are worthy of our best efforts but, in the meantime, we have to prepare the way for them by documentation and research.

With this principle in mind and in accordance with its initial objectives, IWSAW has recently planned a new set of research studies dealing with the Arab woman; one, in collaboration with ILO, will have to do with "the Working Woman, her conditions and problems in eight Arab countries"; another will form a new link of a series on "the Image of Woman in Children's Textbooks".

If we add to these projects the studies already executed by the Institute, the Documentation Center which we are trying to develop and the English and Arabic bibliographies which are being prepared, we hope to pave the way for the Women's Studies Program which will be added to BUC curriculum in the near future.

In this issue of Al-Raida and in a former number (no. 2, p. 11), some information has been given about the progress achieved by Women's Studies programs in the universities of U.S.A. and of the Far East. By introducing such a program, BUC expects to meet a need in the Arab World for research studies on women performed at a university level.

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Formation and Development of Women's Studies in the United States

In 1969, the number of courses in women's studies given in the United States were less than 100. Within two years (1971), the number rose to 610, then to 2000 in 1973, 5000 in 1975, the Woman's year. In 1976, the number of universities offering the Women's Studies program grew to between 250 and 300.

In order to understand the causes of the rapid development achieved by these studies within a very short period, we should recall the student power erupting in the 1960's that brought about the disruption of the oppressive atmosphere created by McCarthianism and its encroachment upon many universities in the States. "Arising from the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, the students protested against cooperation by universities in the war. They criticized the contents of the courses given at universities by saying that they could not give any proper answer to the problems students were confronting. Meanwhile, the Black Power Movement came to shed light on the black people's history and requested that black studies programs be set up at universities."

Women's studies were born at a time when the university reform movement and the women's liberation movement coincided. During the fifties, the slogan, "Woman's happiness lies in the homes" contributed to reduce the number of women in universities; the average marriage age of American women became younger than 20. Around 1955, 60% of the female students dropped out of universities in order to marry. The result was that more frustration and alienation came to be felt among women confined to the role of housewife. An increase was noticed in the number of female neurotics. In the late sixties, a number of radical women's liberation movement organizations were formed; their activity spread into university campuses where a campaign was organized for the elimination of sexism at universities and the creation of women's studies courses. The aim of these courses was to shed light on women's history which had been slighted by men historians.

At Cornell University, some male students took the women's Studies courses in 1971. Their number everywhere is increasing year by year. Since 1972, magazines dealing exclusively with women's studies have made their appearance; they are getting increasing circulation. In the early seventies, the Federal Government of the United States, undertook a series of law revisions to eliminate sex discrimination; one of them was the "Sex Discrimination in Education Prohibition Act" of 1972.

In 1976, the National Women's Studies Association was formed. It had its first convention at San Jose State University, with about 600 representatives attending from all over the United States.

The functions of women's studies may be condensed into the following:

First, to help female students reform their consciousness, i.e. realize clearly their own social position and liberate themselves from existing fixed ideas about women.

Second, to encourage research on women and shed more light on the roles played by women in past and present society.

Third, to seek modification of stereotypes of women's roles established by historians, and to revise biological determinism concerning women's psychological properties.

Finally, women's studies by no means intend to create "men-like women." They aim at effecting social change which would truly improve women's status and fashion a society where both men and women could live in a more humane way.

Condensed from an article on this topic by Kazuko Tanaka, which appeared in "A report on the activities of the Center for Women's Studies, Tokyo Woman's Christian University, Tokyo, Japan, 1978.)

NOTICE

DUE TO IRREGULAR MAIL SERVICE ONLY A FEW OF OUR READERS HAVE SO FAR RESPONDED TO OUR NOTICE CONCERNING THE PAYMENT OF SUBSCRIPTION. THEREFORE, WE HAVE DECIDED TO EXTEND THE OPPORTUNITY OF PAYMENT TO ALLOW ALL OF THEM TO GRADUALLY PAY THIS SMALL SUM, DESTINED TO COVER MAILING EXPENSES. PLEASE INFORM US OF ANY CHANGE IN YOUR ADDRESS.

Women's Studies in Ewha Woman's University

Women's liberation movement takes form in various cultural activities: clubs, research centers, conferences, papers, magazines and other mass media. These activities crystallize in what are called "Women's Studies," a series of courses at the university level, given in universities of the United States since the beginning of the 1970's i.e. since the start of woman's lib in America.

These studies made rapid progress in the States and found quick response in other parts of the world. The idea was adopted at various Asiatic universities in India, Korea and Japan. Plans were made for including women's studies in their programs. Probably the most successful step toward the realization of this project was made by Ewha University in Seoul, South Korea.

Ewha University is considered the largest women's university in the world. Founded in 1886 by an American Methodist missionary, it developed from a tiny girls' school into a women's college in 1910 and, in spite of the Korean war of 1950, it continued its development until it became a university with 8000 women students, 10 colleges and fifty departments, granting master's and doctoral degrees in history, medicine, pharmacy, politics, art, and literature. This rapid development prepared it to start in 1976 a "women's studies" program under the direction of the Korean Women's Institute. It was a pilot project which, in many ways, caused a reevaluation of some fundamental issues: "How to bring the women's movement back to university students; how to translate the Women's Studies paradigm to Korean culture; how to confront problems of personal change in student consciousness-raising; and a questioning of the basic assumptions about the old women's liberation."

A study group was formed, consisting of an ad hoc 20-member committee of men and women recruited from the various disciplines (psychology, biology, theology, education, literature, history, political science and sociology). Its aim was to develop a core resource group, an interdisciplinary teaching-research team which would work towards developing the first Women's Studies' course. Then a 3-credit course was established, given in the form of lectures to under-graduates for one semester with no prerequisites.

The project involved some innovations. The method of interdisciplinary teaching was a relatively new idea at the University. Another innovation was the use of discussion groups. The 150 students taking the course were divided into 5 different discussion groups, each with a graduate student as discussion group leader. Another experiment was used to encourage students' active participation in the course. A series of "assignments in life experience," to be recorded in student journals, replaced the conventional reading or research paper assignments. For example, one assignment was to "observe one day of advertisements or drama on television, record the images of women versus those of men as portrayed in the mass media" or

"interview 2 working girls, one factory girl and one Ewha graduate."

After major outlines of the course objectives, organization and requirements were completed, there remained the task of designing course content. Basic research began by reviewing the women's studies program in the United States. Members of the project team considered about 80 programs and 400 course syllabi and submitted course proposals. After careful analysis a "14-week Semester Course I" syllabus was designed, to be followed by a revised Women's Studies Course II; both will be turned over to the University to become part of the routine curriculum. In preparation for this, the Women's Studies steering committee carefully evaluated its initial results through a series of questionnaires monitoring lectures, discussion groups, and, finally, workshops.

The results of the questionnaire indicated a high rate of success in changing attitudes and teaching about Korean women's problems. The overall rating of the discussion groups on the questionnaire was not high, due to the fact that students found it difficult to work in discussion groups. On the other hand, the quality of the discussion group leaders was rated "very successful" by the steering committee members. The "life experience" assignments, which replaced conventional homework, were evaluated by the workshop as "useful." Their frequency was considered advisable. This technique, together with the discussion groups, were most experimental and set a precedent at Ewha University.

Conclusion:

The main concern in a women's studies program is not women's education, nor is it mere information on women's history or psychology. "Women's Studies program should be a consciousness-raising activity and must therefore be highly experimental-psychological in its methods and personal in its form and content. A successful course will not only inform, it will provide a basis for change in attitudes and values; it will raise many more questions than it can ever answer. Furthermore, for consciousness raising to become a basis of action, theories and content must be culturally translated. Issues which are peripheral in Western society may be vital in Asian cultures: women's identity and nationalism, sex segregation (its problems and advantages), arranged versus love marriages, religion and sexual morality. Whether the discipline is history, biology or literature, a great deal of study of new and abundant theories will have to be done."

(Partly condensed from a lecture by Soon Young S. Yoon, visiting assistant professor of anthropology and research associate, Korean Women's Institute, presented at the Asian Women's Scholars' Seminar - May 1978)

Contemporary Arab Feminine Poetry

Feminine poetry is not a product of our age. Women poets appeared in ancient as well as in modern times. The Ancient Greeks and Hebrews produced women poets and those who practised certain arts akin to poetry: the priestesses and the prophetesses. Arabic literature counts at least 200 women poets in pre-Islamic and Islamic periods, but unfortunately most of their poetry has been lost.

The period of Arab awakening which started around 1800 witnessed a revival of Arab poetry among both men and women. In the latter part of the 19th century there were at least four women poets who wrote poetry of the traditional type.

In the early twentieth century, which produced neo-classical literature characterized by social consciousness, women writers were more numerous than women poets. The period saw the rise of distinguished women essayists and journalists like May Ziadeh, Salma Sayegh, Marie Ajami, Malak Hafni Nassef, and many others who devoted their pens to the promotion of social reform in all its forms. While they claimed woman's emancipation from ignorance and harmful traditions, they also claimed national independence, educational reform, social justice, eradication of poverty and misery. They identified their own needs with those of their respective countries and were more interested in general welfare than in their own feminist demands.

During the last forty years, a new outburst of poetry took place, including both women and men poets. The contributing factors may be condensed as follows:

In the first place, we may mention the cultural influence of foreign schools and institutions in countries placed under foreign mandate or foreign control, like Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. In 1948, Maurice Sacre, who compiled an anthology of Lebanese authors in the French language, was able to count 500 Lebanese writers in French in and outside Lebanon. No less important was the literary production of Lebanese and Arab authors in the English language, although most was produced by emigrants.

In Iraq, which remained only a short time under British control, a direct contact with English literature was possible to the students of the Higher Teachers Training College of Bagdad. As a result, an original type of poetry, strongly influenced by modern English poetry, came into being, creating a poetic school which influenced the rest of the Arab world.

A second factor in poetic development has been the popularization of free verse and prose poems, which freed poetry from classical rules and made access to it easier,

though to certain experts this new poetry seemed more difficult than traditional poetry.

A third factor has been the spread of culture among the various classes of people and the dissemination of political and social ideologies which mobilized for their publicity all forms of mass media including poetry.

Contemporary women poets of the Arab world count about fifty, but it would be a vain effort to try to reach them all or to get hold of all their works. So far, we have at the Institute for Women's Studies the complete or incomplete works of 30 of them. The topics treated by these women are most varied. The traditional topic of love occupies a large portion of their poetry, but it is treated in a non-traditional manner and takes on various forms: romantic, passionate, erotic, mystic, clearly showing the desire of these poets to assert their freedom and defy modern public opinion by declaring their sentiments without fear or disguise. Fedwa Tukan, an outstanding Jordanian poet, devotes to love her best poems. The same is true of May Murr, the Lebanese poet who writes mainly in French, and of Edvick Shayboub who published two volumes of Arabic prose-poems. The women mentioned adopt a positive or favorable attitude toward love in its romantic or erotic form, but there are those who, like Venus Khoury, revolt against passionate love that drives lovers to despair and suicide, or take an ironic attitude toward pseudo-romantic love in which lovers repeat to each other commonplace, imitative expressions.

There are also those who rebel against fetters imposed on love. Hoda Adib says in one poem:

A man and a woman
with fastened wrists
Are swung like bells,
They bleed from the chest, from the back;
Their bodies are laid on the wheel of torture
Patients are burned, so the disease of love may
not spread ...

Samia Tutunji attacks in her French poems, "Multiple Presences," the traditional education of women which prepares them to be sexual objects and to serve as mere tools for child-bearing. She denounces the matrimonial virtues which impose on the wife obedience and faithfulness to a domineering and unfaithful husband.

Revolt in feminine poetry does not attack only traditional attitudes and practices connected with woman. There is also revolt against war, against traditional methods of education, against religious rituals and superficial forms of worship, against unjust treatment of illegitimate children, against corruption and injustice in all their forms.

Revolt in this poetry takes sometimes a form of escape from reality to dreamland. May Rihani, a poet of rebellion in her first collection, resorts in her second one to the fanciful world of childhood where people do not grow; time is motionless; fire does not hurt; grass does not thirst. That dreamland is free from disease, the inhabitants use singing instead of speech; to them reality and dream are one. Nadia Tuéni, who has published in French several collections with a surrealistic tendency, is another poet of escape who sings her nostalgia for the dreamland of childhood. She longs for the land which has no sun, no waking, no sky overhead, only trees and singing birds. Nohad Salameh, poet and journalist in the French language, seeks relief and happiness in self-denial, service and philanthropic work, like Martin Luther King and other humanitarian mystics.

A few of these poets express in their poetry certain philosophical ideas. Nazik al-Malaika depicts man's vain struggle against time. She longs for the road that has no end, for the visitor who never comes, thus showing that expectation of an event carries more pleasure than its realization.

Andrée Chédid, a Lebanese poet and novelist in the French language, devotes about ten collections of poems to an analysis of the message of poetry in which she sees the salvation of the world. "It is the art that opens unlimited paths to deeper self-knowledge, self-discovery and endless personal enrichment." Her poetry carries an

enthusiastic call to persistent search in the realm of the unknown, to an optimistic faith in life in spite of its shortcomings.

Another Lebanese poet, Hoda Naamani, who has published four Arabic collections between 1970 and 1978, draws her inspiration from Oriental mystic poetry. She uses mystic prayers and symbols, combines mystic expressions with surrealistic abstruseness, to convey progressive ideas of worship, justice, sexual equality, social reform, and universal brotherhood.

Though rich and varied in content, this poetry is still limited in scope. It consists mainly of a negative revolt against existing wrongs but fails to indicate positive ways of action. It fails to show what feminine liberation really means, what potentialities qualify a woman to lead her own independent life, to create a new personality which would not be a slavish copy of masculine models nor a repetition of past feminine patterns.

Finally, if this poetry has a good many defects as to content, it shows on the other hand a high degree of success in form. Those who write in French or English reveal a mastery of the language, fluency, and originality of style. Poets of the Arabic language are equally successful in creating original imagery and handling the new forms inspired from western poetry. One of them, Nazik al-Malaika, is the initiator of a new form of free verse, based on the use of irregular meter and rhythm, contrasting with the regularity of traditional poetry.

Hang Him with a Moonlight Ray

One of several poems decrying war, written by Venus Khoury, a Lebanese poet in the French language.

Do you know that deserter
 Who took the horizon for a road?
 He had run away from the shrieks of hatred,
 From threatening fists,
 From the blood-covered hands of freedom,
 Blood bespattering the crowds
 Leaving its stains on the cheeks of the innocent.
 Those emaciated faces were nothing but pale hosts,
 Those deserted streets, only empty naves,
 So the great nations might play the game of war!
 Whether it be called Black Congo,
 Or yellow Vietnam, no importance,
 Since blood with its rancid smell
 Still flows to the sea
 Where it is white-washed and used to deck
 The colors of sunset.
 Should they shoot him? drown him? bury
 , him alive under a dune?
 This unfortunate soldier, this deserter of time
 Who was not intoxicated by the hot smell of blood?
 Nay, hang him with a moonlight ray,
 This dreamer, this miserable dreamer.

(Translated from the French)



May Ziadeh: a Biography of Conflict

From a convent atmosphere at the Visitation Sisters' School in Aintoura, Lebanon, May Ziadeh moved, at the age of 22, to the boisterous literary circles of Cairo, Egypt, in 1908. There she came in contact with high-brow Egyptian and Lebanese society. She was able, however, to adjust to the new environment by refining her knowledge of Arabic and starting a successful correspondence with leading Egyptian magazines of the time. She confidently took the initiative of founding a literary salon which was frequented for a long time by Egyptian and Lebanese intelligentsia.

Yet the impact of the convent years continued to mark May's life and thinking. Her social contacts were dominated by reserve and moderation. Of this peculiarity, Taha Hussein (a leading Egyptian literary figure who was May's friend and a regular habitué of her salon) says: "May's literary life had a dual aspect which reflected a dual influence on the Arab literary life of her time. In the first aspect, she was the open-minded, non-conventional literary woman who successfully led literary meetings attended by men and women from various intellectual classes; she participated in their discussions with an able and dignified manner. She directed this salon for over twenty years and made it a source of cultural radiation in Egypt and other Arab countries." "The other aspect of May's life," he goes on to say, "was that of the woman who loved seclusion and indulged in meditation. This trait developed and exerted a determining influence on the last years of her life when she broke all relationship with the outside and refused to meet people except by appointment." A similar opinion was given by her other friend, the essayist Abbas Mahmoud al-Accad, who said that May practised austerity to a point which was harmful to her health and well-being. In his opinion, May had a melancholy nature that was accentuated by her religious training and deep Christian faith.

It is easy to see in her writings the influence of her divided personality. There is shrewdness, mirth and irony in her social criticism while her personal essays are passionate and gloomy. Her Christian devotion contained a large share of tolerance toward other faiths and a strong sense of universal love. Her national loyalty was divided between Egypt and Lebanon, but deep in her heart, she longed to belong to a truly independent and progressive homeland which she failed to see in Egypt, in Lebanon, or in any other Arab country.

"In the wide dancing-hall of life", she says in one of her essays, "I mixed with the dancers, but kept my own

identity and refused to be carried off by the tide. I listened to the contrasting voices, joined in the controversial activities, partook of the varied aspirations and experiences, but I was everywhere confronted by questions that had no answer: Why do we toil and suffer? What is the meaning of life?"

Tormented by the romantic search for happiness and the desire for social justice, she wrote her long essay on "Equality" in which she made a review of the numerous social systems and political regimes. But she finally came to the deceptive conclusion that no system has proved its excellence or superiority over the rest and that the instauration of social justice and welfare is only a dream.

Her attitude toward woman's liberation favored a middle road between two extremes. She pleaded for woman's freedom, claimed equal opportunity with man in education and work, attacked traditions which imposed on her the mourning practices from which men were exempted, but she did not admit a woman's right to violate the sanctity of marriage and break the bond that ties her to a husband whom she does not like.

In her private life, she was discreet and introverted. Though she had many men friends among those who attended her salon, she had no romantic connection with any of them. She probably sought an ideal love which she failed to find. Of this type was her love for Gibran whom she knew only through his writings. She carried on with him an intellectual correspondence and, though in one of her letters she alluded to the love she felt for him, she received no response. It became clear to her that Gibran admired her, confided in her, and appreciated her friendship, but was too much occupied with his art, his health and his writings to give any heed to matrimonial questions. Her love for him remained platonic and ethereal.

May's biographers, trying to analyze the causes of the depression which carried her off at the age of 55, attributed it to the conflicting influences that shaped her and to the pains she suffered when she lost her parents and many of her friends at short intervals between 1930 and 1935. While their conjectures may have some foundation, there is nevertheless, the argument that many other women were afflicted by similar or worse troubles which they were able to overcome. The latest statements of scientists and researchers concerning causes of nervous depressions, affirm that knowledge about them is still so vague and meager that it is impossible to give any definite and scientific explanation of this common disorder.

WHAT IS FEMALE IMAGERY ?

Should we judge women's artistic production by man-made criteria or by those inspired from its intrinsic qualities? Should a woman artist try to imitate men's work and vie with it, or is she called to express herself and create her own style? The following paragraphs are excerpts from a panel on the topic, conducted by 5 women artists and art critics.

It is supposed that Dorothy Richardson, the English novelist, invented the stream of consciousness style at the beginning of this century and consciously set out to create a female style and imagery, the quality of female existence in a certain time and place. She captured a middle class English woman's experience and sensibility. That is female imagery, not something Jungian, pre-determined and absolute.

Female imagery is not specific image, iconography or subject that has to do exclusively with women. It has more to do with process or modalities of approaching experience. It has to be invented like iconography.

There is a scale of negative and positive physical charges in men and women. Somebody said that man is sixty percent positive physically, — projected out toward the world — and forty percent negative, mentally. Woman is just the reverse. So together they form a bond. Then there are many combinations of masculine and feminine. In order to be an artist at all, you have to have, physically, a certain kind of momentum. It would be very difficult on this level for the superfeminine inward woman to do art work because she would need that physically charged energy.

Women's art is characterized by female sensibility which is hard to define. Why did women make their art? The quality of people's lives has a lot to do with the art they make; hence the lives of artists should be explored for this purpose. If women artists act out male artists' life styles, that is an enormous danger to their sensibility.

Female imagery first used to mean sexual imagery, another term for female sensibility. The second term is preferable because it is vaguer. There is a lot of sexual imagery in women's art: circles, domes, eggs, spheres, boxes, biomorphic shapes, a certain striation or layering, a certain antilogical, anti-linear approach.

Creativity does not necessarily mean art-making. It may come through political action. Feminism should not be an interpretation of this world but a transformation of it. Female consciousness is more important than female sensibility, but it is still in the process of being structured, in the process of becoming. Therefore it is possible to talk only tentatively on a particular stage of

it, female imagery for instance. According to Susana Torre, an architect, women are less removed from spatial experience than men and more able to find closer correlation between spaces and biological and cultural rituals.

Linda Nochlin, art historian, says that her studies often make her see women's styles as being partly conditioned by opposition, as having meaning in the context of being opposed to existing styles. Painter Florine Stettheimer, for instance, declined both the academic and the avant-garde modes produced at the turn of the century, and went on to invent something of her own, something "feminine". The same is true of Gertrude Stein who, though very different from Florine Stettheimer, shares with her the effort to invent in opposition to what is prevailing.

Joan Snyder, abstract painter, thinks that women tend to be more autobiographical in their work than men. "My work is an open diary" she says. "That is what I often miss in men's work — an autobiographical or narrative aspect. Men talk about art a lot, women talk more about life."

Snyder goes on to say that women's art shows a kind of softness, layering, a certain color sensibility, a more expressive work than any man can do, and a repetitiveness — use of grids, obsessive in a way. "When I look at women's art, I look for ideas and images that not only move me visually but tell me something about who the artist is, what she is, what she is trying to say."

"I feel that women are more interested in people, and care more about variety than men," remarks Lucy Lippard, an art critic. "We play so many roles in our lives, while most men play only one or two... Before the women's movement, women were denying their identity, trying to be neutral. When somebody said, "You paint like a man" or "You write like a man", you were supposed to be happy. Now we're bending over backward in the other direction, insisting that there are clichés that define women's art. Women now make "Women's art" instead of "men's art" or "neutral art." It may be easier to find out what women's art is, or what female imagery is, quick, this second, because the work of women who've been isolated and closeted, which has come out in the last three years, is personal; it still has the blush of innocence on it. I want to catch those ephemeral moments before we all move into a different and, I hope, more powerful and clearer level.

(Condensed from a panel conducted by 5 women artists and authors, published in "Women's Studies", Ewha Women's University, Seoul, Korea, Dec. 1977)

“Evolution of the Structures of the Arab Family”

BY DR. ZUHAIR HATAB – BEIRUT 1976

Dr. Zuhair Hatab, author of this study of 288 large-sized pages, holds a doctorate in sociology. In handling his topic, he uses the sociological approach based on objectivity and extensive research. He studies the roots of the Arab family from early pre-Islamic days and tries to show that its evolution through the ages has resulted from definite structures developed by society throughout a long march. In other words, “the author places the problems of the family at the center of the socio-historical evolutionary process experienced by the Arab world.”

In the introduction he says: “We have to distinguish between two kinds of laws: those related to faith, which have the character of dogmas and therefore have the right to stability, and those defining human relationships and hence are liable to change by means of progressive interpretation and speculation.”

From this standpoint which draws a line between stable divine laws and flexible social regulations, the author exposes in detail the history and evolution of the Arab family from pre-Islamic days to the present time, showing how the way of life of societies and their relationships, whether established by religious or by civil authority, have always been affected by environmental conditions and have reflected the characteristics of the period.

Pre-Islamic Society

In pre-Islamic society, the Arabs were in constant struggle for existence and this struggle was a factor of evolution. Some scholars assume that the matriarchal system dominated the early pre-Islamic period, the history of which is totally enveloped in darkness. They try to prove their theory by economic and social factors while their opponents find other factors to disprove that theory.

We know for sure that the patriarchal system prevailed in the late pre-Islamic period which produced great classical poetry and other literature that throw some light on the period.

In pre-Islamic society, monogamy was practised in tribal society and endogamous marriage of cousins was required as a means of keeping the common property within the family.

The tribe was the social unit and it had subdivisions of which the smallest was the family. All the members of the tribe had to submit to tribal laws which were enforced by the chief and the tribal council. Marriage was a tribal affair and several forms of it were allowed: Monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, promiscuity, temporary marriage, exchange marriage, etc. Besides the various forms of marriage, there existed also various forms of divorce all of which confirmed the privileged condition of males and the oppression of females. Only in Mecca,

which was a flourishing commercial center, did women enjoy certain privileges due to their wealth or the fact that they belonged to wealthy families. We know, for example, that Khadija, a wealthy widow from the powerful Khorash tribe, owned a trade and conducted business. She arranged her marriage with her business manager who belonged to the same tribe and who later became the prophet Muhammad. Though much younger than she, he never married a second wife during her life-time.

Islamic reform of family laws

Among other reforms, that of the family had an important place in Islam. It ordered the good treatment of parents and of relatives, established laws for marriage, divorce and inheritance. The mahr or dowry was to be paid by the husband; divorce was submitted to certain restrictions; a woman had a share in inheritance equivalent to half of a man's share, while a man became obliged to support the aged, the minors and the women of his family.

These regulations were considered progressive because they maintained positive customs of the pre-Islamic era and abolished negative ones like the burying of baby girls alive and the deprivation of women from inheritance. Polygamy and divorce were restricted; the right of women to divorce was recognized; the way was prepared for further change required by new circumstances, even for the discovery of reasons requiring the change in this particular field (p. 106).

Islamic law helped to strengthen the unity of the family and weaken loyalty to the tribe by converting it into loyalty to God and His prophet. The tribe was no more obliged to wander about in search for water and livelihood. It had a stable abode; its members obeyed laws which all other tribes had to obey. No single tribe could keep its independent law and modes of behavior. The new religion gave a number of women the chance to show their talents by sharing in various leadership roles.

This was during the early years of Islam and the early part of the Omayyad period when prominent women like Sukayna Bint-al-Hussain and Aisha Bint-Talha mixed freely with men and presided literary discussions. With the spread of conquest and the development of the empire, the Arabs indulged in luxurious living, kept large numbers of women slaves, and imposed on their wives a strict observance of the veil.

The family, a factor of stagnation

In the Abbasid period, the family appeared under three forms: the tribal family, the extended family, and the compound aristocratic family.

The tribal family or clan developed in the desert or in suburbs where living involved hardships and tribal solidarity was a necessary means of protection and mutual help.

The extended family spread in rural areas where solid relations were maintained between relatives and kinsmen for the sake of material and social help.

The compound aristocratic family grew in aristocratic groups who claimed descentance from the Prophet and were tied together by the desire to protect their rights and ranks.

Clannish solidarity of the family led to 1) the maintenance of property within the family through the inheritance system, 2) the persistence of social and moral traditions inherited by succeeding generations, like land and possessions.

Thus the family became a factor of stagnation and persistence of traditional ways of life and thinking, including the concept of man's domination and woman's inferiority, especially, in rural districts where the family forms the basis of the peasant's life. In such an environment, the favorite wife was one who was young and capable of breeding a large number of children who could help till the land and insure its inheritance. The larger the land, the more the man was ready to marry several wives who would increase the number of his helpers.

Though men greatly depended on women as house-keepers, co-workers in the field, mothers of their children, women continued to be regarded as an inferior sex, either because men were physically stronger (hence capable of beating women), or because they owned the land or were in charge of it. Moreover, a man was by tradition the head of the family who could use when he pleased his right to divorce and polygamy. Like the sword of Damocles, he held that right over his wife's head.

In the period of Arab decline, 12th-19th C., no significant change occurred in the conditions of the Arab family. The Ottoman rule (16th-19th C.) endeavored to keep the status quo both socially and economically.

In spite of the commercial and industrial development which occurred as a result of commercial agreements between the Ottoman rulers and the European Mediterranean states, traders and merchants suffered from restrictions imposed on them by the government. Opening a shop was a privilege which had to be bought. Each trade had its own special market. The same rule was applied to the various industries. Censorship, exploitation and confiscation of goods were common forms of oppression.

The restrictive conditions which characterized economic life were reflected in the family. In time, the following traditions came to be known as permanent traits in the Arab family:

- 1 - Arranged marriage.
- 2 - Domination of the father whom all other members of the family must obey.
- 3 - Hierarchical character of the family and differentiation in the scale of kinship.
- 4 - Hero-worship of males and degradation of females.
- 5 - Imposing the veil on women.

6 - Polygamy.

7 - Illiteracy and ignorance.

8 - Spread of superstitious beliefs and practices.

Modern Evolution

The 19th century was a period of awakening which gave rise to radical changes carried out by great reformers: Muhammad Ali and his sons in Egypt and neighboring Arab countries, Daoud Pasha in Iraq, Bashir II in Lebanon, Sultan Abdul-Majid who proclaimed a series of reforms called *Tanzimat*. To these reformers' achievements, we should add the activities of the French scientific mission which Napoleon Bonaparte brought to Egypt in 1798 and the efforts of foreign missions in the field of education, printing, translation, writing of books, and publication of manuscripts.

The reforms had varied aspects: agrarian, fiscal, political and cultural. They did not fail to affect family conditions in the following ways:

1. New classes of officers and employers appeared and acquired wealth. They competed with landlords, thus inducing the latter to sell their lands and seek wealth through trade, industry or professional training.

2. Foreign companies multiplied and created increased demand for trained employees. The way was thus opened for young employees to achieve financial independence and to create their own families independent of parental control.

3. With the spread of education among both men and women, new categories of working women appeared: the employee and the professional woman who helped support her family and, acquiring economic independence, prepared the way for her social independence.

4. The nuclear family gradually replaced the extended family. Though the tribal family persists in some rural areas, it is hoped that the eradication of illiteracy and the spread of education will lead to its disintegration.

5. Arranged marriage is no more the rule. The right of the girl to choose her husband independently from the parents' influence is recognized more and more.

6. Family planning associations are multiplying. They have been active in helping couples plan the number of their children and solve family problems.

7. Our age has seen the retrogression of polygamy, especially in more developed Arab countries like Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt.

Aside from the above progressive changes, we may mention the disappearance of the veil, the development of mixed marriages, i.e. outside the family, the spreading of the idea of civil marriage, delaying the age of marriage, and claiming for women equal sexual rights with men.

This modern evolution is, according to the author, a natural result of new circumstances and will continue as long as interaction goes on between circumstances and society.

With this optimistic note, Dr. Hatab concludes by saying that "a new treatment of the problems of the Arab family should emanate in the first place from the belief that these problems should not be considered as normative developments but rather as an expression of the evolutionary process which includes society as a whole."

Progress Reports from Bahrain

Reports issued by the Social Development Section, Directorate of Social Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Bahrain, 1977.

1- "Social Indicators for Bahrain", published in Arabic and English, contains the latest statistics on population growth, housing, health, education and culture, employment, social development and welfare, situation of women. Some of the diagrams include comparative statistics about the various Arab countries.

The following figures quoted from the statistical tables serve as examples of the rapid growth achieved in female education and developmental work:

Percentage of females between 7 & 14 attending school:
In 1959: 37 %
In 1971: 66 %

Females participating in labor force:
In 1959: 3 % of the whole
In 1971: 5.4 %

Females in secondary general education:
In 1965-66: 28.4 %
In 1974-75: 54.3 %

quarterly publication reporting on activities and achievements of the Social Affairs Directorate, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

Published by the "Research and Social Statistics Unit", this number (no 15, 1978) contains reports from: the Directorate of Social Affairs, the Social Development Section, the Local Social Activity Unit, the Social Development Projects Unit, followed by statistical tables and texts of lectures and studies dealing with the social and economic needs of the Bahraini women.

3- "Directory of Local Welfare Associations."

Of the eight associations in existence, five are women's societies, the other three are mixed or including only men. The Red Crescent Association has the largest membership: 650 in 1977. The other associations deal with family planning, child and mother welfare, literacy and cultural programs, help of the needy and handicapped, establishing friendly relations with Arab and foreign women residing in Bahrain.

4- "Recent Social Projects"

In an introductory word published in the above mentioned directory, Mr. Jamil Jushi, director of social affairs in Bahrain, gives the following

account on new social projects started by the Ministry, with the help and coordination of the Local Social Welfare Organizations:

1) One of the projects, started in 1977, is that of training families with a low income in productive activities which would help them improve their financial conditions.

2) Social service has been extended to rural districts through the use of movable units conducted by social workers and home economics experts.

3) Another project is the establishment of social centers where workers are trained in various fields of development and social welfare. Affiliated with this project is one which trains women pioneers in child care and house-keeping for a period of 5 months, after which they are required to communicate their experience to families in their respective districts. Already 21 pioneers have been trained and it is hoped that in 1982 their number will reach 100.

4) A complete program for the rehabilitation of the handicapped, planned by a group of experts, has already been implemented in Issa town. Also an old people's home and a child welfare center are included in the development plan for 1978-1982.

«Dowry is a Society Cancer»

This is the title of a short article written by Mrs. Usha Francis and published in the section "Indian Women in the News" of Newlink,⁽¹⁾ April 1978. "The war on dowry," she says, "is a national necessity, as essential as the war on hunger, poverty, illiteracy and growth of population. Social service volunteers have to take up the task of eradicating dowry. The masses should be educated to curb this social evil which is spreading like cancer, heading society toward decay. It is the root cause of the misery of millions. This dowry virus seems to be immune to social criticism, and the right type of vaccine is not used to prevent its onslaught... We call upon both men and women, young girls and boys, to participate in an anti-dowry drive to help the nation overcome this evil of "selling" girls at the time of marriage."

This forceful appeal by Mrs. Francis deserves support and adherence from all those who have experienced the evils of this firmly established institution but dare not denounce it. In the Arab countries, selling girls works

both ways. A girl in most cases has to "buy" the bridegroom through the money allotted her by her parents or the money she has earned or is planning to earn from her job or her profession. In other cases, the bridegroom buys the girl by paying a mahr, i.e. a sum of money he gives the parents in return for the girl or keeps in her name by a promissory note or bank deposit.

In both cases, marriage becomes a bargain, a business affair based on purely material interest. It is doomed to failure if the transaction fails, i.e. if, in one way or another, the money disappears or fails to satisfy the greed of the husband.

This tradition is very difficult to uproot as it requires a complete change in mentality and in character. Only by implanting in the young an attitude of honesty and the understanding that interested, selfish love is no love at all, can we hope to build a new and sane attitude toward marriage.

(1) *Isabella Thoburn Coll., Lucknow, India.*

A Study on "Image of the Egyptian Woman in Mass Media"

BY AWATEF ABDEL-RAHMAN⁽¹⁾

The author introduces her study with a general foreword about the Egyptian woman's role in development. She says that in spite of the large increase in the number of literate and working women in Egypt, their actual participation in the developmental process remains highly limited. Repeated claims from international groups and conferences, emphasizing the necessity of allowing them more effective participation, have met with little success.

Since 1956, women's right to participate in public affairs and development activities, on the same basis as men, has been recognized. Their political rights were officially proclaimed in 1956. The July Revolution of 1956 gave them equal rights with men in government employment. Between 1966 and 1970, the number of working women in the various industrial enterprises increased from 4% to 6% or more. Yet their contribution to national development is checked by various factors: 1) The level of their wages remains comparatively low because of inadequate training. 2) The law of equal salaries for equal work is not always applied in the private sector. 3) Responsible officers in administration-production sectors are hesitant about appointing women to leadership positions. 4) Modern public nurseries for the children of working women are scarce. 5) There is a lack of orientation centers which would help students choose their professions in conformity with local needs. 6) Feminine organizations, in spite of persistent efforts, have not realized all the necessary progress in reaching the laboring and rural classes. 7) The law of personal status by giving the husband the privilege of divorce has limited woman's freedom of action and development.

Image of woman in mass media

In handling this project, the author chose three representative

Egyptian papers: Al-Ahram, Al-Akhbar, the women's magazine Hawwa' (Eve); studied the contents of the woman's page in 10% of the issues between 1965 and 1976.

In Al-Ahram, three samples were studied:

Sample I: representing the first 3 months of 1965.

Main topics: women's social activities, fashion, make-up, food preparation, health and sports.

Main interest: middle class woman.

Sample II: April, May, June 1970.

Smaller space given to woman's page.

Emphasis on family problems: school examinations, woman and old age.

More room to woman's charitable activities in rural districts.

Sample III: July, August, September 1975.

More interest in woman's activities in economic and cultural fields.

Same interest in traditional topics: fashions, make-up, etc.

Increased space for advertisements

imposed decreased space for woman's activities.

Comments: The working woman is badly neglected, advertisements occupy the larger space.

Woman's page in Al-Akhbar: similar to the one in Al-Ahram.

Hawwa' magazine

Samples taken from 1971, 1972, 1976 issues.

Permanent topics: women's problems, around the world with women, horoscopes, fashions, short story, ads, aesthetics, health, letter from Europe (disconnected after 1973).

New topics: meeting prominent figures, social work, education, family laws, problems of the working woman, problems of motherhood and childhood, abnormal behavior of youth.

New topics occupy 10% of the entire magazine.

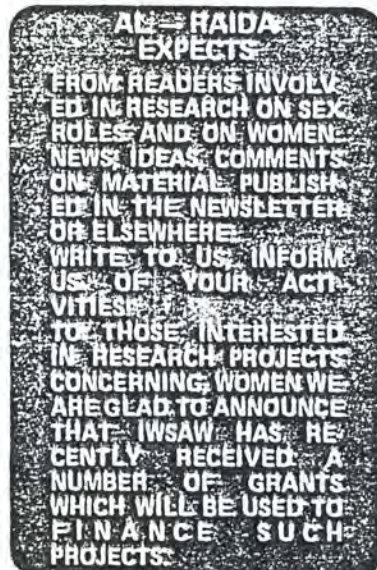
Comments:

Contents concentrate on interests and problems of urban society and middle class women.

High proportion of space given to advertisements, cosmetics and beauty products.

The working women in the small and middle bourgeoisie, including 10% of the whole working class among women, are now faced with the problem of adjustment between housework and outside work. The press should try to solve the problem of these women by inducing a change in men's mentality, so they may agree to share house duties with their working wives. It should also claim amendment of family laws, mainly those which discriminate between husband and wife in the rights of divorce, custody and inheritance.

(1) Instructor of journalism, School of Information and Media, Cairo University.



1. "Indigenous Midwives in Lebanon (Eng.)

by Mary Chamie and Jamal K. Harfouche

submitted to Smithsonian Institute, Jul. 31, 1976

Photocopy of a study of 222 pages, analyzing the background characteristics of Lebanese "dayahs" (indigenous midwives), their training, delivery practices, child care and family planning techniques; containing figures, tables and an appendix illustrating and demonstrating the various topics.

2. A Report on the activities of the Center for Women's Studies -

Lectures and Seminars - (Eng.) Center for Women's Studies, Tokyo Woman's Christian University, Tokyo, Japan, 1978.

3. A summary of two studies (Eng.) on "Women in administrative posts" and "Women in industry" in Pakistan,

prepared by Dr Sabeeha Hafeez, assistant professor of sociology, University of Karachi.

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"Population Studies"

No. 43, Apr.-June 1978

Arabic-English quarterly review

Issued by the Supreme Council for Population & Family Planning Cairo - ARE.

Two facts emerge from the latest population studies presented in this issue:

1 - Egypt is experiencing a heavy rural-urban migration trend. Population pressure on the land is a main cause of out-migration. Urban centers are growing at a much faster rate than the rest of the country (p. 35).

2 - Egypt is one of the countries where the death rate is dropping without being accompanied by a corresponding decline in the birth rate. This has led to a stage of population explosion which creates grave economic and social problems. (p. 37-39).

The following conclusions are obtained from a study prepared by Dr. Wafa Hussein el-Zomar, associate professor of sociology at Cairo University and published in this issue:

Even with a very rapid fertility decline, the population of Egypt will continue to grow.

If the average fertility patterns that are currently becoming commonplace on the developed countries are achieved in Egypt by the end of this century, the population will double in size and it might reach 2.38 times its 1975 size by the middle of the next century. Otherwise if the present fertility rate continues, the population will be 5 times its present number by the year 2065.

Mortality will continue to decline.

Eventually an average family size of two children will be the norm.

Once the two child family norm is attained, the corresponding level of fertility will be maintained.

Socio-economic development plays a role in demographic transition. There is on the one hand the Malthus theory which says that economic development promotes fertility. On the other hand, there is the Thompson and Davis school which asserts the contrary. Studies have shown that if the Malthus theory is true during the early stages of socio-economic development, it does not apply to the later stages when development succeeds in effecting the decline of both death and fertility rates, thus confirming the Thompson and Davis theory.

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