

AL-RAIDA

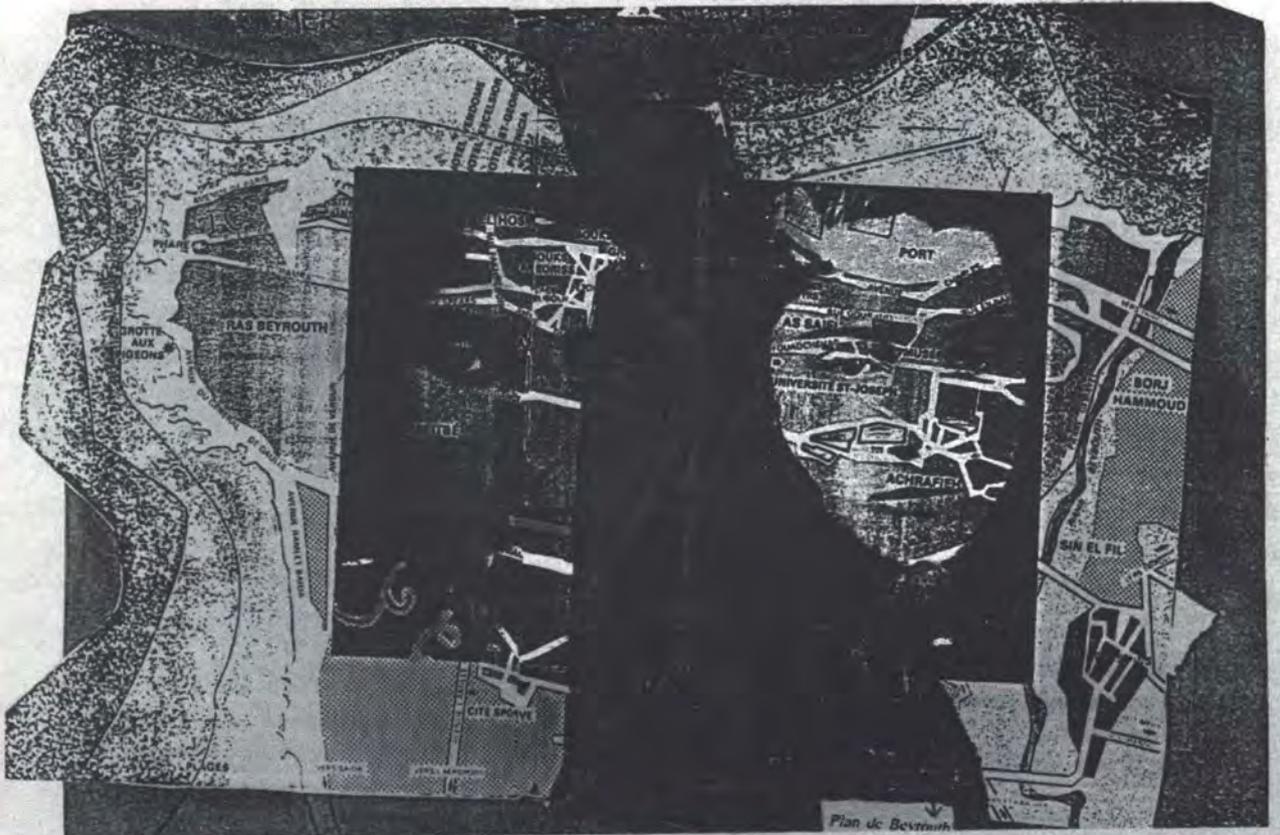
A quarterly journal

The Pioneer

الرائدة

Special Double Issue

Women in Post-War Lebanon



The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was established in 1973 at the Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College). The founder and Director of the IWSAW is Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr. Initial funding for the Institute was provided by the Ford Foundation.

Objectives: The Institute strives to serve as a data bank and resource center to advance a better understanding of issues pertaining to Arab women and children; to promote communication among individuals, groups and institutions throughout the world concerned with Arab women; to improve the quality of life of Arab women and children through educational and developmental projects; and to enhance the educational and outreach efforts of the Lebanese American University.

Projects: IWSAW activities include local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures and films; and educational projects which improve the lives of women and children from all sectors of Lebanese society. The Institute houses the Women's Documentation Center in the Stoltzfus Library at LAU. The Center holds books and periodicals. The Institute also publishes a variety of books and pamphlets on the status, development and conditions of Arab women, in addition to *Al-Raida*. Eight children's books with illustrations, and two guides, one of which specifies how to set up children's libraries, and the other which contains information about producing children's books, have also been published by IWSAW. In addition, the Institute has also created income generating projects which provide employment training and assistance to women from war-stricken families in Lebanon. The Institute has also devised a "Basic Living Skills Project" which provides a non-formal, integrated educational program for semi-literate women involved in development projects. Additional IWSAW projects include The Rehabilitation Program for Children's Mental Health; Teaching for Peace; and the Portable Library Project. The latter project was awarded the Asahi Reading Promotion Award in 1994. For more information about these or any other projects, write to the Institute at the address provided above.

Al-Raida is published quarterly by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) of the Lebanese American University (LAU), formerly Beirut University College, P.O. Box 13-5053/59, Beirut, Lebanon; Telephone: (01) 867-618, ext. 288; Fax: (01) 867-098. The American address of LAU is 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1846, New York, NY 10115, U.S.A.; Telephone: (212) 870-2592; Fax: (212) 870-2762.

Purpose and Content: *Al-Raida's* mission is to enhance networking between Arab women and women all over the world; to promote objective research of the conditions of women in the Arab world, especially conditions related to social change and development; and to report on the activities of the IWSAW and the Lebanese American University. Each issue of *Al-Raida* features a File which focuses on a particular theme, in addition to articles, conference reports, interviews, book reviews and art news.

Reprint Rights: No unsigned articles may be reprinted without proper reference to *Al-Raida*. Permission to reprint signed articles must be obtained from the IWSAW.

Submission of Articles: We seek contributions from those engaged in research, analysis and study of women in the Arab world. Contributions should not exceed ten double-spaced typed pages. Please send a hard copy and a diskette. We reserve the right to edit in accordance with our space limitations and editorial guidelines. Submissions will not be published if they have been previously published elsewhere.

Subscription: The annual subscription fee for *Al-Raida* is US \$30. Subscriptions begin in January and end in December.

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Al-Raida

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The quarterly journal of the Institute for Women's Studies in
the Arab World
Lebanese American University
P.O. Box 13-5053/59
Beirut, Lebanon
Telephone: (01) 867-099
Fax: (01) 867-098

Founder: Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr
Editor-in-Chief: Laurie King-Irani
Design: Ghina Doughan
Assistant Editor: Ghena Ismail
Advisory Board Members:
Dr. Mona Amyuni
Dr. Nadia Cheikh
Ms. Adele Khudr
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Editorial

Soon after the Fourth International Conference of Women concluded in Beijing, an acquaintance asked me, with a touch of exasperation in his voice, "What good did that conference do? A lot of women got together and just talked for two weeks, but now the world's attention is focused on other matters. What did those women really change?" This comment reflects a widespread and incorrect belief that the Beijing conference was merely the culmination of three years of planning, discussions, and re-draftings of the Conference document, *The Platform for Action*. Yes, processes begun years ago did indeed culminate in Beijing. But the point of the conference was not just to discuss, debate and draft a report, the ultimate aim is yet to be achieved: to encourage governments throughout the world to realize the goals and live up to the ideals embodied in *The Platform for Action*. Those goals and ideals, if pursued seriously and implemented with commitment by all the nations of the world, would improve the lives not only of the world's women, but the lives of men and children as well.

The final draft of *The Platform for Action* does not consider women as separate from the social, cultural and political contexts in which they live. Rather, it depicts women's lives as lived in common with men and children. The theme of the Fourth International Conference for Women, "Equality, Peace and Development", did not stress that women should be given more rights, different rights, or better rights than men, it simply demands that age-old forms of discrimination against women be recognized for what they are: pernicious forms of injustice which harm not only women, but ultimately, the entire human race.

Two particular forms of injustice to women received considerable attention at the Beijing conference: the growing impoverishment of women throughout the world, and increasing violence against women, whether in the form of domestic violence or political violence occurring during wars. The feminization of poverty, which is increasingly apparent in (though not limited to) the developing world, and violent attacks on women, whether mounted by husbands, fathers, brothers, boyfriends, or enemy soldiers *qua* rapists, did not receive as much attention or mobilize as many activists ten years ago at the Nairobi Conference. But then, in 1985 there were not (as there were in 1995) 52 different wars raging in 42 different countries. Although men comprise the overwhelming majority of combatants in these wars, women and children usually pay the biggest price during periods of violent conflict and political upheaval. As noted recently by Amnesty International, women and children comprise 80 percent of the world's rapidly growing refugee population.

Remedying the poverty and violence currently afflicting so

many of the world's women and children will first require curing the various forms of political dysfunction spawning so many wars throughout the world, and second, devising new forms of political power-sharing and more just means of distributing economic resources in order to lessen the factors leading to wars. Women, most of whom spend the greater part of their adult lives caring for and nurturing others, certainly have the experience and qualifications needed for forging healthier political and economic structures for the coming millennium. If our current century is any indication of the feasibility and benefits of political structures devised solely by men, women could not possibly do worse!

Women's suffering as a result of the multiplying conflicts in the world is not just a feminist issue, it is a *human* issue, as the interviews in the File section of this special double issue of *Al-Raida* attest. To mark the twentieth anniversary of the start of the Lebanese war and the fifth anniversary of its cessation, we focused on women's memories of war, their views concerning the war's impact upon and meaning in their lives, and their assessments of the conditions confronting Lebanese women in the post-war period. The observations and conclusions of many of the women we interviewed echo the recommendations of the final draft of the Beijing Conference's *Platform for Action*: women must be better educated about their legal rights and the means of defending them, women should play a greater role in decision-making at all levels of their society, women's economic contributions to family and society should be recognized, and women's gifts, talents and capabilities should be valued equally with men's. The women we interviewed, all of whom are respected leaders in their fields, also offered sage words of advice to their sisters in war-torn Somalia, Bosnia, Sri Lanka and Chechenia: "You are the creators and nurturers of life, so avoid and resist those who wish to create death and destruction. Do everything you can to prevent your husbands, fathers, brothers and sons from participating in the dirty business of killing." In the hope that the women of other war-ravaged countries can learn something from Lebanese women's experience, we are sending copies of this issue of *Al-Raida* to non-governmental organizations responding to the needs of women and children in Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Chechenia.

Laurie King-Irani
Editor

Long-time subscribers to Al-Raida will note the addition of two new features in this issue: an Opinion column (page 3) and a selection of interesting quotations concerning women's issues culled from other publications, entitled "Quote/Unquote". We encourage our readers to send in their own contributions to the Opinion column, and to share with us any interesting articles (in English, French or Arabic) on issues affecting Arab women.

AIDS And Us

Conservative groups in various countries throughout the Arab world continually protest against the low moral standards of the West. The priority on their cultural agenda is the rejection of the immediate and long-term threats posed by the indiscriminate importation and adoption of western secular values. Western-bashing and the upholding of our own superior ethical mode of life have thus become favorite topics of conservative discourse, which usually warns everyone about the catastrophes our culture will experience if we import these foreign values into the East.

In the past few months, two compelling stories made the news in Lebanon. What they had in common was the dreaded disease, AIDS/SIDA. The first story concerned a family in a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon; the other took place on an Egyptian Air flight scheduled to depart Cairo. The first story related the sad tale of a young Palestinian man who had contracted AIDS. Of course, the man's family received the news with shock. Despite the Lebanese Ministry of Health's insurance program, and kind offers to treat the young man in his home, so that he could stay in his family's bosom during this trying period, the family's rejection of their son was complete and brutal. The tragedy is that the rejection was not only based on fear arising from misinformation about the manner in which AIDS can be spread; it was much more thoroughly rooted in unreserved shame, the most shameful kind of shame that our culture can produce.

The second story concerned an Ethiopian worker in Egypt who was diagnosed with AIDS and thus sent back to her own country. Having been the employee of a well-known Egyptian artist, her story circulated in all the magazines. Once aboard the plane, some people recognized her as the infamous AIDS sufferer. The all-too-concerned passengers on the Egypt Air flight to Ethiopia made such a fuss that the pilot was prevented from taking off until the Ethiopian woman had been removed from the plane. Not only did the Ethiopian worker have to suffer the double shock of the diagnosis and expatriation, she also had to undergo the more direct insult of her fellow passengers' behavior, which was not only symptomatic of the pervasive atmosphere of misinformation surrounding AIDS, but also illustrated the furious condemnation and punishment of all those who dare to contract the disease.

The ways that we have responded to AIDS in public and private in the East are, by any moral standards, outrageous. Of course, there are some notable exceptions, but they are rare indeed. The official policy of a large group of Arab countries has been to deny the "local" existence of AIDS, upholding the myth that the disease can only be imported. Some countries even require an HIV test for those seeking visas. The popular response, as witnessed in the examples above, has sunk into severe denial, and when confronted with the harsh reality, government officials and popular opinion have inhumanely rejected it.

This attitude has been quite visible in recent weeks

to all Lebanese TV viewers through the short documentary in the series on LBC/C33 entitled *Lubnaaniyaat* ("Lebanese Women"), which was commissioned by the Lebanese National Preparatory Committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women. In this piece, Badriyya, a young Lebanese woman who contracted AIDS from her husband, relates to whomever cares to hear her absolute loneliness and isolation, and the solitary and painful path she will have to travel until the end.

Badriyya, of course, is not the only one. Recently the Lebanese Ministry of Health (which alone deserves praise for its active campaign for AIDS awareness and compassion for AIDS victims), issued a frank public warning to Lebanese women, informing them in no uncertain terms that they are at increased risk of contracting AIDS, not through any fault of their own, but through the irresponsible and immature behavior of their philandering husbands. This new form of patriarchal victimization goes unnoticed, as usual. Our eastern society has little to say to these men (whose sexual exploits are even admired and encouraged in some sectors of our society), unless, of course, the men themselves contract AIDS. Then, the condemnation and punishment are absolute.

The ways that individuals, communities, governments and religious leaders throughout the Arab world are dealing with the AIDS crisis leave a lot to be desired. The violent rejection of AIDS victims which permeates all levels of our society does not correspond with the noble values of mercy and compassion of which we claim to be the trustees. To the contrary, AIDS, being associated with sexuality, automatically becomes a "western" disease, and thus, there is all the more reason to deny HIV sufferers any help or humane concern. The value system in which we operate seems to be highly selective: not only are women excluded as soon as suspicion brushes anyone's mind concerning her moral qualities, it is now becoming obvious that the circle of shame and exclusion keeps on enlarging itself. Perhaps it will not be a bad idea to turn to the West and borrow some ethics which operate on a large social scale, especially those ethics reflecting more humane ways in which the weak and the sick are treated. At the very least, let us in the East stop bragging!

*Dr. Nadia Cheikh,
Professor of History
American University of Beirut*

Al-Raida encourages readers to submit articles for the Opinion page. If you have a point you would like to make about women's issues in the contemporary Arab world, send us your two-page, double-spaced typed article for publication. (Views and ideas expressed on the Opinion page are not necessarily those of the Al-Raida Editorial Board, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, or the Lebanese American University.)

Perspectives on women's issues in the Arab world excerpted from various publications

From *The Nation*, Vol. 261, No. 7, September 11, 1995:

"The question of who controls women's bodies — men, the state, the church, the community, or the women themselves — was one of the most important underlying issues of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994. Although women have, traditionally, been identified with the body, they have not been seen as *owners* of their bodies. The fact that at the ICPD, the traditional viewpoint was forcefully challenged by a large number of Muslim women indicates that Muslim women are ready to stand up and be counted. The primary interest of the Cairo conference was on "population" issues focusing on the body, rather than "development" issues focusing on the whole person. My hope is that at the Beijing conference women in general and Muslim women in particular can shift from asserting autonomy over their bodies in the face of strong opposition from patriarchal systems to speaking of themselves as full and autonomous human beings who have not only a body, but a mind and a spirit as well. What

**From *Elle Magazine (French Edition)*,
August 21, 1995:**

Elle published a special report on "The Conditions of Women in the World: Something Out of the Middle Ages?" Some of the facts published in the report include the following:

Political Power

"There are only seven women heads of state in the world, and they are from Sri Lanka, Ireland, Iceland, Nicaragua, Turkey and Pakistan."

Work

"Women perform two-thirds of the work in the world, but earn only one-tenth of world revenue! Who gets the other nine-tenths?"

"If women's unpaid housework and farm work were compensated, world production would increase by 20 to 30 percent."

"The rate of women's unemployment is higher than that of men's in every country in the world."

"In Algeria, a man who does not approve of his wife working can legally force her to quit her job."

do Muslim women — who, along with Muslim men, have been designated as God's vice-regents on earth by the Qur'an — understand to be the meaning of their lives? Reacting against the Western model of human liberation no longer suffices. The critical issue that Muslim women must reflect upon, prior to and at Beijing, is: What kind of models of self-actualization can be developed within the framework of Islam that take account of Qur'anic ideals as well as the realities of the contemporary Muslim world? I believe strongly that feminist theology (or a study of Islam's primary sources from a non-patriarchal perspective) can empower women to combat gender inequality and injustice....My hope and prayer is that there will be enough women and men of vision, courage and commitment at Beijing that, despite all the difficulties and darkness that surround them, they will light the way to a world that has a greater prospect of justice for all."

— *Dr. Rifaat Hassan, Director, Religious Studies Program,
University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky, U.S.A.*

Property

"Only one percent of world property belongs to women, this includes land, real estate, and enterprises."

World Conflicts

"In all wars, women become victims. According to Amnesty International, during the First World War, civilians represented only five percent of all war victims. Women's fatality rate during wartime rose to 50 percent during the Second World War, and in the 1990s, it has reached nearly 80 percent....From 1981 until 1993, the number of refugees in the world more than doubled, reaching 20 million, 80 percent of whom are women and their dependent children. Currently, there are nearly 100 million women and children displaced inside the borders of their own countries." [In Lebanon, nearly one-sixth of the population is still displaced from their homes as a result of the war, which ended in 1990. — Editor]

Rape

"The Nuremberg Charter, established in London in 1945 between France, Great Britain, Russia and the United States, did not consider rape as a war crime, contrary to the Tokyo Tribunal, which considered it as such since 1946. Only since 1992, following disturbing revelations about "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia during which up to 60,000 women may have been raped, did the International Tribunal decide to consider rape as a crime against humanity. This decision was officially adopted by the court only one year ago, in 1994. In the Arab world, rape during war-time was most pronounced during the Gulf War (when many Kuwaiti women were said to have been raped by Iraqi soldiers), and during the recent conflict in Algeria, during which women not conforming to strict Islamic dress codes have been raped and/or murdered by the Islamic Salvation Front. [In Lebanon, on the other hand, despite sixteen years of civil war, there were scarcely any cases of rape- Editor.] In Bangladesh, a 13-year old girl was sentenced by a religious tribunal to 101 lashes in public because she was unmarried and pregnant as a result of rape. The girl, unable to find four witnesses to confirm that she had been forced to have sex against her will, was judged by the tribunal as being guilty of illicit sexual relationships."

Domestic Violence

"The United Nations has recently published a report stating that 'the most important facilitator of violence against women is without any doubt the inaction of governments towards crimes committed against women, especially domestic violence'. Even if laws against domestic violence do exist in a given nation, the report continues, most countries invoke local customs, traditions and religion to justify their occurrence. In many countries in the Arab world, domestic violence is neither reported nor punished. It is considered a private family issue. In Egypt, for instance, a man may kill his own wife if he witnesses her in an adulterous act and he will not necessarily be prosecuted or punished, as he can defend the killing as in keeping with the "code of honor." In India and Pakistan, women without sufficient wedding dowries often die in 'cooking accidents' resulting from being doused in kerosene and set on fire by their husbands or in-laws in search of a better dowry."

Genital Mutilation

"Clitoral excision still exists in forty different countries in the world, most in Africa. In Egypt, 91.8 percent of all women are genitally mutilated, and each year 1300 girls, aged less than ten, perish as a result of these operations performed under unsanitary conditions. Genital mutilation is unjustly associated with

Islam. It is a practice dating back centuries before the Islamic conquests of the African continent. However, the problem is that clitoral excision is perpetuated and performed by women who believe that it is an essential rite of passage for girls to become women. In Asia and Africa, there are 100 million women who undergo genital mutilation, and in Sudan, the painful and dangerous practice of infibulation is still performed on young girls."

Legal Code

"In Sudan, women who do not follow the modesty code can receive up to 40 lashes as a result of the new penal code, instituted by the military government in 1991. In Iran, this has already been the case for a dozen years. In Algeria, the family code voted into law in 1984 casts women in the role of perpetual minors from a legal perspective. They are not permitted to travel, to marry, or to work without the consent of a legal guardian, whether father, brother, husband or son."

Health

"In developing countries, life expectancy for women is only 43 years, while in Europe, most women can expect to live well into their seventies and even eighties. Each year, approximately half a million women (30 percent of whom are still adolescents) die as a result of complications of pregnancy or childbirth. In these less developed countries, women are 16 times more likely to die while pregnant than are women in industrialized countries.

Except for Tunisia and Zambia, abortions are not permitted in Africa. A Nigerian woman would be sentenced to 14 years imprisonment if she was discovered to have had an abortion. In Iran, an abortion is considered homicide. In Turkey, a woman may terminate her pregnancy only with the permission of her husband.

In China, India and South Korea, women often use ultra-sound tests to determine the sex of their unborn babies. If the baby is a girl, many women feel pressured to abort it. This practice is already leading to a shortage of females in China. By the year 2000, 70 million Chinese men will not be able to find wives."

Education

"There are 948 million illiterate people in the world, and 66 percent of them are women! UNESCO does not foresee a decrease in that figure until the year 2000. The average number of years during which girls attend school in the developing world is 2.7, half as much as boys."

Translated from French by Wafa Stephan Tarnowski

Equality, Peace and Development Highlighted at Conference

In preparing for the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) organized an important national meeting, sponsored by Lebanese First Lady Mona Al-Hrawi at the Riviera Hotel in Beirut on August 12 and 13, 1995.

The primary objective of the conference, which was organized in cooperation with the Lebanese Committee, '95, was to examine problems related to "Equality, Peace and Development" in Lebanon, as well as to discuss and evaluate the methods and techniques used to achieve these aims.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of IWSAW, stressed an increasing concern about women's reality which she described as "the reality of society as a whole." She also called attention to the unstinting efforts of the IWSAW in improving women's status in Lebanon. Mr. Shawki Fakhouri, Lebanese Minister of Agriculture, praised the heart-felt contributions of Lebanese women and disapproved of the various injustices inflicted upon them. Lebanese Deputy Habeeb Sadek hoped that women would successfully present their recommendations at the Beijing Conference, and that they would find new incentives for exerting efforts on behalf of the women of Lebanon. First Lady Mona Al-Hrawi then asserted that all the debates, seminars and conferences that are currently being held reflect a growing awareness throughout society about the seriousness of the issues confronting women, not only in Lebanon, but throughout the world.

After the opening speeches, three workshops were convened. The first workshop addressed the topic of equality. Participants stressed the necessity of signing and implementing the international agreements condemning all forms of discrimination against women. They also called for the establishment of an elective civil law for personal matters as well as other laws ensuring the progress of Lebanese society. One of the participants expressed her annoyance with the current Lebanese laws, recounting that, when she attempted to get a divorce in Lebanon, "I really felt humiliated, because I had to translate the Cypriot divorce laws in order to have a divorce in my own country, when both the judge and I were Lebanese!". The second workshop focused on the issue of peace. Its participants urged that all concerned parties maximize efforts to secure the release of all Lebanese hostages currently being held in Israeli-run prisons and concentration camps. One of the interesting points raised during this workshop was stated by one woman, who observed, "If the large amounts of money that we now spend on weapons, airplanes and submarines were instead spent on human needs, the problems of humanity might all be solved". The third workshop addressed the issue of development. Experts emphasized the sad fact that both the environment and

agriculture are in real danger in Lebanon, and stressed that effective action must be taken immediately. The participants also recommended that the issue of development be adopted as the issue of utmost concern to women, especially since the world is now undergoing dramatic transformations, politically and economically. It was also suggested that women's organizations should organize a major conference for the specific purpose of evaluating development policies and their impact on women.

Finally, resolutions reached by workshop participants were announced during a press conference. Key resolutions stressed the necessity of:

- * signing and implementing the international agreement condemning all forms of discrimination against women.
- * encouraging rural women and highlighting their important potential economic role in Lebanon.
- * increasing and broadening social awareness of issues confronting women.
- * Implementing needed changes in the educational curricula and promoting and enforcing compulsory education for girls throughout the country.

The proceedings of the conference and workshops were recently published, in Arabic, under the title *Musawaa, tan-miya, salaam* ("Equality, Development and Peace"). This publication is being distributed by the IWSAW.

Mune, Traditional Lebanese Food Conservation, Highlighted in Ethnographic Study

An ethnographic study, *Mune, La conservation alimentaire traditionnelle au Liban*, by Dr. Aida Kanafani-Zahar, has recently been published by *Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris*. In the ethnography, which is based upon field research conducted in Lebanese villages in the 1980s, the author illustrates that traditional methods of conserving and storing food constitute an art form performed by women, who are largely responsible for the nourishment of the social group throughout rural Lebanon. Kanafani-Zahar also discusses the ways in which images and symbols of the community's life process are expressed in the art of food conservation, illuminating the ways that women and their daily work mediate important life passages of birth, marriage and death in rural Lebanese communities.

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World provided assistance for Dr. Kanafani-Zahar's research, and is now helping to distribute the ethnography in the Middle East.

Academic Journal Focuses on Women and Gender in the Middle East

The Summer 1995 issue of *The Middle East Journal* (Vol. 49, No. 3) was a special issue devoted to the topic of "Women and Gender in the Middle East." Articles included "Modernization and its Discontents: State and Gender in Kuwait," by Drs. Mary Ann Tetreault and Haya al-Mughni, and "Reform of Personal Status Laws in North Africa: A Problem of Islamic or Mediterranean Laws?" by Dr. Ann Elizabeth Mayer. For more information, contact The Middle East Institute, 1761 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036-2882, U.S.A.

IWSAW Activities (1994-95)

As in previous years, the IWSAW was actively involved in different kinds of activities in 1994-1995, all of which aimed at improving the quality of life for women and children in the Arab world while promoting social awareness of their reality. Activities included research, documentation, training, publications, conferences, community outreach and action programs geared to women and children in Lebanon and the wider Arab world. 1995 was a special year, however, since extra efforts were required to prepare for the Beijing Conference on Women. The following report gives a glimpse of the Institute's activities throughout the academic year 1994-1995.

IWSAW introduced several courses in Women's Studies into the LAU curriculum in 1994. These courses include the following: "Issues and Debates in Feminist Theory," "Women and Economic Power," "Psychology of Women," and "Representations of Women in the Arts and the Media." The Institute also published four issues of its quarterly journal, *Al-Raida*, featuring File sections about the following topics: Battered Women, Women's Health, Women and Education, and Women in Management. It is worth mentioning that the issue on Battered Women was the most well-read issue in the history of *Al-Raida*. In addition to *Al-Raida*, the Institute issued publications about "Arab Women and the Environment" and "The Conflict Control Program Children's Manual." Furthermore, the Institute was involved in wide-ranging research activities. It carried out research for updating the bibliography published by MANSELL, a study of the contribution of married women to family income; two surveys of women in the garment indus-

try; and research on women in higher education. It also hosted a study on the well-being of war widows and the wives of kidnapped people in Beirut, and it participated in an exciting international project of world-wide monitoring of women's issues in the news on television, radio and newspapers during an "ordinary day."

In addition to its academic activities, the Institute has created a number of action programs for women. It administered workshops to teach displaced women skills which will help them earn an income in areas that are in demand, such as sequin embroidery, secretarial studies, hair-dressing techniques, professional sewing, and factory sewing. Institute staff also devised literacy programs which designed and distributed reading materials for newly literate people. Twenty manuscripts have been completed and tested on 30 women to ascertain the material's effectiveness.

In collaboration with the Lebanese Management Association, the Institute organized a Regional Conference on "Arab Women in Management." The objectives of the conference were to plan strategies which will ensure women's career advancement to the highest levels of management. Institute staff also attended several international and local conferences related to children and women.

In celebration of International Women's Day, the Institute prepared a program that consisted of sketches depicting the changes in women's roles and images throughout history. Also, it held an exhibition where all new books recently received on women were displayed.

Since many people were focusing on the Beijing Conference this year, the Institute organized several gatherings - formal and informal - in order to share with the public some of the main issues to be discussed at the conference. In preparation for the Beijing Conference, a coalition between the Institute and four other influential governmental organizations (NGOs) has been formed. The activities of the Lebanese Committee, '95, as the coalition is known, included lectures which addressed the main themes of the Beijing Conference: Equality, Development and Peace.

The activities of the Institute also focused on the Arab child's needs. This year, IWSAW organized seminars and workshops that aimed at training teachers to use different tools for education such as reading, rhythmic, and music. Another children's program, the portable libraries, won the IBBY-ASAHI Reading Promotion Award last year. This year, 40 libraries containing a total of 4800 books were distributed, in addition to 1200 books that were provided to centers without the portable wooden boxes. The Institute's programs for children also included a "Puppet Theater for Children in the Private and Public Schools" and the "Conflict Control Program" (CCP).

The first program aimed at promoting reading among Lebanese children and exposed them to quality theater performances which provide alternative models to those of the fighters they may have emulated during the war, while the latter was directed at youngsters in the fourth and fifth elementary grades and concentrated on social skills for reducing aggression and for promoting cooperation and mutual respect for rights and feelings. Traumatized children are also of profound concern to the Institute. Therefore, IWSAW hosted Dr. George Awad (American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology) who presented a series of training sessions for social workers, teachers, parents and counselors in three different regions of Lebanon, namely, Saida, Beirut and Aintoura. These training sessions addressed important topics such as behavioral disorders, hyperactivity, autism, sexual disorders and deviance.



Friend of IWSAW, Mr Nidal Gharzeddine, Al-Raida Editorial Assistant Ghena Ismail, and IWSAW Program Officer Hania Osseiran prepare for a presentation by author Emily Nasrallah.

Filipina Maid Has a Brush with Death in the UAE

Within the same week that the UAE representatives attending the Fourth International Women's Conference committed themselves to taking action to protect children from exploitation, a death sentence was passed on Sarah Balabagan, sixteen-year-old Filipina Muslim maid.

Sarah is but one of thousands of poor women and children who immigrate yearly from their own countries to secure a living for themselves and their families in the Arab world and the West. Are such women and children aware of all that awaits them in foreign countries lacking laws to protect their basic

human rights? Probably not, but even if they are aware, one has to wonder what other choice they have, since most are escaping conditions of extreme poverty.

What awaited Sarah, however, could not possibly have crossed her mind. Overnight, she found herself almost raped, and threatened with execution. Despite her protests that she only killed her employer because he attempted to assault and rape her, the judges dealt with her harshly. The court decided that attempted rape could not be proven, because the finding of the court-appointed physician was that Sarah was still a virgin. The court also argued that Sarah is not sixteen years old, as she claimed to be, but rather, ten years older, as the papers she submitted to enter the UAE indicated. Here we should note that the Philippines' Government must also be blamed for allowing a sixteen-year-old child to forge papers in order to be able to work abroad.

One cannot but wonder whether a judge is really incapable of distinguishing between a sixteen-year-old girl and a twenty-six-year-old woman. One cannot help but wonder whether a girl has to lose her virginity in order to prove that she was the victim of a rape attempt. Sarah's lawyers re-appealed her case, and petitions were sent to the UAE from different humanitarian organizations throughout the world requesting Sarah's release. Her final sentence, however, was recently announced: one year imprisonment and one hundred lashes!

In response to the Balabagan case, the IWSAW sent the following letter of protest to the UAE Government:

His Excellency Issa Faleh al-Gurg, CBE
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates
30 Prince's Gate
London SW7 1PT

10 October 95

Your Excellency:

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) wishes to express concern about the death sentence recently passed on Sarah Balabagan, age sixteen. Our Institute aims to improve the quality of life for women in the Arab World through educational and developmental projects. We were distressed to learn that a death sentence was passed on Sarah. This death sentence is particularly alarming, as it comes within the same week that the UAE representatives attending the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing committed themselves to taking action to protect children from exploitation. The conference also agreed on a *Platform for Action* which condemns all forms of violence against women.

Thus, we respectfully urge you to reverse Sarah's execution and allow her to return home to her family. Also, we bring to your attention the importance of establishing laws to ensure the safety of female domestic workers in your country from such countries as the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Respectfully Yours,
Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World
Lebanese American University
Beirut, Lebanon

Ghena Ismail

Beijing & After

Much has been written about the Beijing Conference since its conclusion just four months ago. Yet very little of what has been written was reflective of the reality. In an effort to communicate the importance of the Beijing Conference from the perspective of women who were actually there, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World organized an informal gathering entitled "Beijing and After."

Ms. Linda Matar, President of Women's Rights Committee and a member of the official governmental delegation to the Beijing Conference, gave a historical account of the four world conferences for women which took place in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen ('80), Nairobi '85, and Beijing '95 respectively. Ms. Matar pointed out that all the conferences raised the same motto: "Equality, Peace and Development." At the Beijing Conference new issues related to poverty and violence were actively discussed.

Dr. Kallab, a professor and a researcher on women's issues and a member of the official delegation to the Beijing Conference, praised the increasing participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). "The NGOs' presence is very important as it affords an opportunity to express the true concerns of the people. As you may already know, the Lebanese national delegation was composed of members who served on both the governmental and the NGO planning committees. Consequently, the Lebanese report was the result of coordinated work between both groups." Dr. Kallab enthusiastically asserted that "this cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations was a new and very good experience!" She then expressed her disappointment with the bad media coverage in Lebanon. "People did not understand the purpose of the conference. They were often wondering what we were doing in Beijing." She then explained that the Beijing Conference was a sort of a carnival in which all the women of the world met to exchange experiences and to finalize the agenda of the international report, *The Platform for Action*, which had been in process for three years. In other words, the main work was done before going to Beijing. However, no one seemed to understand this, thanks to the insufficient media coverage. Dr. Kallab added that the media highlighted only provocative topics, such as lesbians' demonstrations, instead of trying to reflect the real suffering of women in Third World countries. "Such demonstrations seemed to be much more attractive to the media!"

Nazha Sadek, a researcher affiliated with the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, commented on Dr. Kallab's views concerning the coordination between the NGOs

and the formal delegation. Contrary to what Dr. Kallab asserted about its being positive, Ms. Sadek thought that it was rather negative. "When the NGOs and the formal delegates are together, the pressure of the NGOs is not as effective as it can be." She then explained that the voice of the NGOs was not heard even before they reached Huairo, the NGO conference venue. All the effort that the NGOs exerted, including letters, telexes and demonstrations, in order to have their residence relocated closer to that of the formal delegation, was to no avail. Even those members of the NGOs who were official consultants, and hence obliged to be directly connected with the formal delegation, were not able to perform their job as well as they should because of the difficulties in transportation. Moreover, the NGOs did not have the opportunity to take part in the lobbying at the political conference. Ms. Sadek commented that ever since the cause of women's rights was raised and laws were established by the United Nations to protect these rights, these laws have not been properly applied in many countries. "Our governments often plead that we should respect our cultural particularity. Of course, these pleas very often distort the content of the rights issues." Hence, she hoped that the United Nations will form international groups to monitor the application of these decisions so that women can truly benefit from them.

After the speeches were delivered, the audience members were very eager to voice their questions and concerns regarding the difficult situation of the Lebanese women and to ask whether the Beijing Conference had led to a plan to improve this situation. The issue that seemed to disturb the audience most was the issue of violence against women.

Dr. Nazik Yared, Humanities Professor in the Lebanese American University, started the informal discussion by stressing that violence in Lebanon was not only political and economic, as it is often presented, but is also physical and social, occurring within the family itself. "Just read *An-Nahar*, and you'll know about the father who rapes his daughter and the brother who rapes his sister. Such problems exist not only in the West, but also in our country. However, we dare not mention them!" Ms. Tina Nakkash, an activist concerned with the issue of domestic violence in Lebanon, angrily inquired why the National Committee which went to Beijing did not address this topic at all during its preparatory meetings.

Ms. Linda Matar's reply was that a discussion of this topic would be viewed as a direct attack against the Personal Status Laws (see explanation below), which are considered a "red line" in Lebanon right now, as everybody knows.

After expressing their deep discontent with the situation of the Lebanese woman, exemplified by the infliction of violence against her, killing women for crimes of honor, and depriving her of the right to grant her own nationality to her children, the audience raised the following question: "Has the National Committee or the NGO Forum reached a certain plan or strategy to continue the work done so far?" or, in other words, "What is the Lebanese woman supposed to do after the Beijing Conference?"

Dr. Kallab replied that the National Committee has now been dissolved. She added that they were waiting to see if there would be a formal governmental intention to call upon them and the other groups so that they could design a post-Beijing plan. "Regarding our committee," she stated, "each of us is forming her own plan. However, no formal plan has been designed up until now, although in Beijing there had been a request for formal mechanisms to follow-up on women's issues."

Having been enlightened on the situation, the audience started to make suggestions to help in continuing the work begun in Beijing. One of the suggestions was to call for a parliamentary committee of women that would follow-up on the Beijing report and all the work done so far, in order to design the strategy and define the objectives for any future work. Such a comprehensive strategy would involve all legal, social and economic matters related to the Lebanese women. Then, follow-up responsibilities would be distributed in an organized manner so that by the time the next international conference is held in 2005, we will be able to measure our improvement objectively.



Linda Matar responds to a question from the audience during the "Beijing & After" Panel discussion.

A third suggestion related to increasing public awareness regarding women's issues. In order to have the proper impact on people, a concerted campaign should be mounted on a national level so that the media will talk about women's issues on a daily basis.

The Personal Status Code was held responsible for much of the Lebanese woman's suffering. Although the speakers agreed with the audience on this fact, they frankly stated that this code was a taboo that could not be easily discussed right now. Here, one cannot but wonder how we can ever find solutions to our problems if we are not allowed to examine their root causes!

Ghena Ismail

Personal Status Code

- A man who kills his wife or sister because he witnessed her in an act of adultery benefits from an exempting excuse, whereas if he kills her because he witnessed her in a state that arouses suspicion of adultery he benefits from an extenuating excuse which reverts the punishment from a death sentence to a one-year imprisonment. It is worth noting that in other cases an extenuating excuse reduces a death sentence to life-time labor or temporary labor, *i.e.*, 7-20 years.
- An adulteress is punished whether adultery was committed in the marital home or in any other place, whereas an adulterer is only punished if adultery was committed in the marital home.
- According to Islam, a man generally inherits twice as much as a woman does. One main difference between the Sunni sect and the Shi'a sect is the following: In the Sunni sect, if a father dies leaving only daughters, most of the inheritance is transferred to his brothers and nephews. In the Shi'a sect, daughters can inherit all the money themselves.
- Lebanese nationality can only be transferred by the father. It cannot be transferred by the mother. The children of a Lebanese mother and a foreign father are not Lebanese, even if they were born and brought up in Lebanon.
- Lebanon has not yet signed the agreement on the "Abolition of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" which was propounded by the United Nations on January 18, 1979. This agreement guarantees women full rights to voting, participating in shaping the government policy and implementing it, representing the government on the national level, and participating in the work of all national organizations.
- If a woman who works in the diplomatic external field marries a foreigner, she is automatically transferred to the administrative branch no later than three months after her marriage.

If you are interested in learning more about Lebanese women from a legal perspective, please see the 1985 IWSAW publication, *al-mar'a fi at-tashree' al-lubnaani* ("Woman in Lebanese Law"), by Maitre Laure Moghaizel.

Emily Nasrallah's Novel, *Al-Jumr Al-Ghafi*, Discussed at LAU

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World organized a panel discussion of Emily Nasrallah's latest novel, *Al-Jumr al-Ghafi* (Sleeping Embers) on 21 November 1995. In her appreciative introduction, the journalist and author Layla Horr praised the author's impartial attitude during the war years. She stated that Nasrallah never involved herself in the conflict, and commented that the reader can always sense the beauty of the Lebanese village in Nasrallah's seven novels and five sets of short stories.

Dr. Latif Zeitouni, Professor of Arabic at L.A.U., observed that the author has dealt with village life in a realistic manner far removed from the romance affecting most other authors when describing rural life. The village of Jourat-as-Sindiyan, as portrayed in *Al-Jumr al-Ghafi*, is afflicted by social and political subjugation. Layya, the main female character of the novel, marries Abdullah, an elderly man who has been living abroad, but who has returned for a short visit in order to find a young bride. The significant age difference between Abdullah and Layya has been compensated for by Abdullah's wealth and Layya's dreams of travel. Abdullah, however, is impotent, and the witness stationed near the newlyweds' bedroom to attest to the bride's virginity (and hence, her family's honor) gives up and leaves after six days. Humiliated, Abdullah beats Layya, who returns to her parents full of shame, although she is innocent of any wrong-doing.

Dr. Zeitouni explained that subjugation, as portrayed in this novel, is nothing but the harsh side of ignorance, and ignorance is but one of the results of the prison formed by the village community. The author chose the woman as the core of the novel because she wanted to show the amount of injustice inflicted upon women and the corresponding amount of awareness and courage she needs to fight this injustice. Hence, awareness is the solution offered by this novel to the continuing problem of subjugation.

Emily Nasrallah asserted that Layya has always lived inside her, ever since she started to pay attention to the problems of women and all other people who are oppressed. However, she never allowed her to emerge. But to her great surprise, Layya emerged while Nasrallah was in Cairo. Nasrallah found herself wondering: "What made Layya suddenly emerge? What made me depict the village in this realistic manner while I was away from the village and from Lebanon?" Her only explanation was that when people are far away from a place, "it becomes engraved deeper in their souls; the image becomes clearer." Nasrallah added that there is more than one Layya in our society, and that last week she read a story that is even worse than the one she wrote, because the victim in the news story was

murdered in a cruel fashion. Finally, Nasrallah said that her ultimate aim is to enlighten society and to encourage women to arise from their long sleep and liberate themselves, so that they do not become the source of their own daughters' subjugation.



Emily Nassrallah explains the sources of inspiration for her recent novel.

Workshop on Writing for Children About Environmental Issues

The Goethe Institute and the Austrian Embassy's Commercial Section, in cooperation with IWSAW and the International Board on Books for Young People-Lebanon (L-IBBY), organized a writing workshop emphasizing "Environmental Issues in Children's Literature" in late October in Beirut.

Two distinguished experts in the field of Children's Literature, Mrs. Renate Raecke of Germany and Dr. Lucia Binder of Austria, worked with 24 candidates in groups and one-on-one. The workshop included practical work and lectures. Mr. Assad Serhal lectured on environmental issues in Lebanon, and Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, IWSAW Director, collaborated with Mrs. Aida Naaman in presenting a lecture entitled "Landmarks and Trends in Arabic Children's Literature."

As a result of the event, books and television scripts were written by the various candidates. IWSAW hopes to publish and present these scripts in the near future.

Recovering Women's Voices in Post-War Lebanon

Two important historical landmarks passed with scarcely any notice in Lebanon this year. April 1995 marked the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of one of the longest and most devastating civil wars of the twentieth century — or indeed, of any century. The Lebanese war killed more than 150,000 people (most of them civilians) out of a total population of three million. Fighting in various regions of the country led to the displacement of more than 80,000 people, representing approximately one-fourth of the country's population. Thousands of people were permanently physically disabled in the course of the war. Although no accurate statistics exist concerning the percentage of the Lebanese population emotionally damaged by the conflict, it is safe to assume that anyone who experienced even a portion of the terror, brutality, injustice and absurdity of the war is deeply scarred in some way. It will take many years to determine the extent and depth of the war's impact upon the thousands of children born between 1975 and 1990.

October 1995 marked the fifth anniversary of the end of this merciless war without winners. After a decade and a half of carnage, in which every sect and faction fought first against each other, and ultimately among themselves, not a single economic, political or ideological gain emerged which could even begin to compensate for the suffering of the Lebanese people. Interestingly, neither the anniversary of the war's beginning nor the anniversary of its conclusion were officially observed in Lebanon. Half a decade after the end of a futile war which exacted so many sacrifices and consumed so much time, most people prefer to forget about the sixteen years of anguish and move on as if nothing happened. This is an understandable response, but not a wise one. The Lebanese need to remember and come to terms with the war for two reasons: first, to prevent its reoccurrence, and second, to transform its costly mistakes into valuable lessons which might prove useful in hastening the end of other civil wars throughout the world.

To contribute to this process of remembering, learning and healing, the File section of this special double issue of *Al-Raida* examines the Lebanese war and its after-effects through women's eyes. We attempted to take a sounding of the war's impact on Lebanese women of all ages from a variety of backgrounds. Thus, we designed a set of interview questions focusing on women's experience of war, changes in women's political and economic status as a result of the war, the differential responses of women and men to the conflict, women's views on national, confessional and gender identity as a result of their war-time experiences; and Lebanese women's advice to Bosnian, Somalian, and Rwandan women currently experiencing the humiliation, horror and hardships of war. We chose to interview women leaders in various fields, as well as a selection of young college women who were born just as the war began.

In addition, we've included a compelling ethnographic interview of young Lebanese woman conducted by anthropologist Suad Joseph.

In spite of many distinct differences in the points of view expressed by our interviewees, a few common themes emerged which have implications for Lebanese women's social, political and economic roles in the future, most notably Lebanese women's increasingly important participation in the work force. The findings presented in this File section may prove useful for those involved in economic development planning among the worst affected sectors of Lebanese society, particularly the displaced and the physically and emotionally disabled.

During the war, Lebanese women's voices became more prominent than they had ever been before. Women novelists such as Emily Nasrallah, Hanan Al-Shaykh, Daisy Al-Ameer, Etel Adnan and Evelyn Accad (1) transformed the cold statistics and daily sufferings of the conflict into moving stories of humanity's capacity for degradation, compassion, and rebirth. Separated from one another by militia barricades and partitions, these women artists were struggling to make sense of the war from their own particular perspectives — geographic, ideological and sectarian — on the margins of a society and a war in which men, occupying the center, held decisive positions of power. Hence, the literary critic Miriam Cooke described this group of women writers as "The Beirut Decentrists" (2), and considered their literary productions to be not only important documents of the Lebanese civil war, but also a significant development in the history of Arabic literature.

Meanwhile, in the social and political domains of war-torn Lebanon, women such as lawyer Laure Moghaizel, educator Iman Khalifeh, and surgeon Amal Shamma' spoke out bravely and eloquently against the evils of war — often at great risk to themselves, their families and their communities — in their unending search for a resolution to a conflict which killed thousands of innocent women and children. Early in the post-war period, two compelling and frank memoirs about the war experience appeared, both written by women. The first, *Beirut Fragments*, by LAU Professor of Humanities Jean Said Makdisi, offers multiple views of the war's insanity through the varied perspectives of the author, a gifted writer who is wife and mother, intellectual and educator, Lebanese and Palestinian. The other memoir, *Come with Me from Lebanon*, by Ann Z. Kerr, tells the tragic story of the assassination of American University of Beirut President Malcolm Kerr through the eyes of his widow, thereby combining Malcolm Kerr's academic analysis of the war's causes with his bereaved wife's testimony to its costs.

With the exception of the discussion of the recent Beijing conference, women's voices have been relatively quiet in post-war Lebanon. Following the resurrection of the state government and the reconstitution of a central authority in Lebanon, the voices most often heard in public fora are those emanating from the center, and these voices invariably belong to men. In spite of their crucial war-time contributions to the survival of the basic unit of Lebanese society, the Lebanese family, women are

still at the margins. Whether they are activists in non-governmental organizations, scholars, lawyers, artists, writers, educators or physicians, very few women occupy positions of power in the decision-making ranks of post-war Lebanese society or government. Considering the sacrifices they made, the hardships they overcame, and the experiences they gained during the war, women's exclusion from power in the post-war period is a waste of their talents and a loss for Lebanon as a whole.

Although women were often the victims of the war, they were very rarely participants. While men were fighting, women were continually mending and remending a fragile social fabric tattered and torn by massacres, snipers, car-bombs, shelling and displacement. It must be emphasized that, in the vast majority of cases, it was indeed men — Lebanese men, Palestinian men, Syrian men, Israeli men — who were wreaking brutal havoc on Lebanon's civilian population. An honest account of the Lebanese war could, indeed, be subtitled "man's inhumanity to women, children and the elderly," for these vulnerable groups formed the bulk of the war's victims.

The Lebanese war was a war without winners; thus, it was a war without heroes in the conventional sense of that term. It was not, however, a war without heroines. In this special issue of *Al-Raida*, we are proud to present the recollections, views and suggestions of several heroines of the Lebanese civil war. These dynamic, resourceful and courageous women, who are but a representative sample of a much larger group, have a great deal to offer to Lebanese society as it emerges from a long nightmare of death and destruction. These women may also have much to impart to the women who are now picking up the

shattered pieces of Bosnian, Rwandan and Somalian society. Their voices must be heard. Therefore we are placing them where they deserve to be, in the center of our publication.

Laurie King-Irani
Editor

Editor's Note:

Each of the women interviewed in this issue was asked the same set of questions in an effort to facilitate comparative analysis and interpretation of women's views and experiences. Some interviewers chose to present the results in article form, while others utilized the standard interview format.

Footnotes

(1) See *Those Memories*, by Emily Nasrallah; *The Story of Zahra*, by Hanan Al-Shaykh; *Kawabis Beirut (Beirut Nightmares)* by Ghada al-Samman; *Sitt Marie Rose*, by Etel Adnan, and *The Foreman's Fortress*, by Layla Usayran for examples of literature by the Beirut Decentrists.

(2) Miriam Cooke (1987) *Women Write War: The Centering of the Beirut Decentrists*. Oxford: Center for Lebanese Studies.



Photograph by Hayat Karanouh

“The War was Unforgivable”

An interview with Maitre Laure Moghaizel Conducted by Hania Osseiran

Hania Osseiran: Could you describe your overall life situation before the war began in 1975?

Laure Moghaizel: I was born in 1929, married in 1953, and when the war started, I had already had my five children and was practicing law. I started my elementary education in Jounieh, then continued in Aley. My father was an important law officer, and due to his work, we were constantly moving from one area to the other. I was born in Hasbayeh, so, as you can see, we lived all over Lebanon. So the slogan “united Lebanon” is not just a slogan; it means a lot to me. We actually experienced it. We lived in Jounieh, Aley, and Baalbeck. I received my secondary education in the Aley National School where we received a secular, progressive Arab education. Then we moved to Beirut and I continued my studies at the Besancon which was considered one of the best schools at the time. We were aware of the social difference between us and the other students, and that was an incentive for us to excel in our studies. I continued my studies at the University of Saint Joseph at the Institute of Oriental Studies and got my degree in philosophy in Arabic, and later studied Law at the same university. I met my late husband Joseph during a national students’ demonstration, and this demonstration continued all through our life together.

HO: What was your vision or plan for your life before the outbreak of war? How did you expect your life would unfold?

LM: Obviously, I was well-established in my life when the war started, socially, politically and on the personal level. I had already chosen the public domain as a career and I had already been involved in the women’s movement. Before meeting Joseph, during my first year of Law School in 1949, I had already met with the pioneers of the women’s movement, like Laure Tabet, Mirvat Ibrahim, and Najla Saab. I had already committed myself to law and to women’s issues in particular. In 1948, I established The Women’s Party inside the Phalangist Party in an atmosphere which was not very encouraging of

women’s issues. I was the Secretary General. The Phalangist party was a youth party at that time. I left the Phalangist Party in 1958, and this was perhaps the only ideological change in my life, due to the fact that I did not approve of some of their nationalistic views and especially their confessional ideas.

When I left the Phalange party, I established, along with my late husband Joseph, Emile Bitar and Bassam El-Jisr, The National Progressive Movement and later the Democratic Party, which was established with Fouad Butros and others. Later, we founded the United Reformation Front of Lebanon with Najeeb Abu Haidar. All of this was before the war. So, as you can see, I had already developed my solid principles and had a strong conviction in what I was working for, and I have maintained my principles and convictions throughout my life,

although with difficulty. The war in 1975 was a shock for all of us, but we maintained our beliefs and principles. During the war, we formed several other movements, such as the Non-Violence Movement and the Human Rights Association.

HO: What did you do during the war years? Did you spend most of your time in Lebanon?

LM: Definitely; we remained in Lebanon throughout the war. We as individuals and as a party were against the war for all reasons. Until today, I permit myself to judge people by their view of

the war, because the war was unforgivable. First, as individuals, we carried on our normal life activities, and that is due to Joseph’s attitude. He was optimistic by nature, and believed in the individual. We continued, during the war, attending to our careers and we kept on sending the children to school. We stayed in Beirut, living on the “greenline” on the 6th floor (which is the roof), with five children. We believed that staying in one’s home is a form of resistance against the war.

Our commitment to public life and our belief in a united country and in human rights helped us overcome fear and kept us going. My concern was with the country as a whole, so we undertook several efforts, like the Peace March on the 6th of May with Beirut University College (now L.A.U.). We were twenty-two persons from different regions. We formed a movement with the Labor Union and the handicapped, and we supported the Labor Union demonstrations, in addition to organizing a sit-in in front of Parliament, where we covered the walls



Laure Moghaizel receives an award for her outstanding service to Lebanon from Lebanese First Lady Mona Al-Hrawi

along the greenline with the UNESCO poster calling for peace. We initiated another campaign, which we called "The Document of Civil Peace", and we collected 70,000 signatures from Lebanese citizens who were against the war. We were a group of people working together, like Nawaf Salam, Iman Khalifeh, Hani Feghali and many others. I can't say we stopped the war, but even though we were a minority, it helped us overcome the war.

HO: How did the experience of the war affect you (positively and negatively) as a person and as a professional?

LM: It affected me from the national point of view, for if I want to sum up my life and Joseph's life, I will sum it up with one word: commitment. We are and were committed to the public welfare. But the war did not alter my beliefs at all, to the contrary, they only became stronger. On the personal level, we lost a daughter during the war. You are going to think that this is the reason I cannot forgive anyone who participated in the war. Of course, I cannot forgive because we, the Lebanese, killed our own children. During the war, while hiding on the stairs, I used to write for *Al-Nahar* [Lebanon's largest daily newspaper] and sometimes I would make public announcements on the radio, *Sowt al-Watan* [Voice of the Nation], saying that we, the Lebanese people, are killing our own children; whenever one child is killed, we kill another one in retaliation and both of them are our children.

Our daughter was killed on the stairs of our building. I don't believe that the mothers of the war can ever forgive those who participated in the war. They cannot forgive, not only for patriotic reasons, but also for humanitarian reasons. Such atrocious deeds must be accounted for in history; there must be a public referendum about it. Religious forgiveness is something else. My daughter had a doctorate from the Sorbonne in Linguistics, and had come to spend Christmas vacation in Beirut. This is an example of the thousands of parents who had their children killed during the war, which is against the laws of nature, to have children die before their parents.

I had a close friend whose son was killed during the war while fighting with one of the parties. I used to tell her, 'at least you can console yourself knowing he died fighting for a cause which he believed in'. This was a problem we faced while raising our children. We felt as though the war was eroding all of the principles we raised them to believe in. They had to question principles such as nationalism, confessionalism, and secularism, due to the contradictions that prevailed at the time. I would have been more deeply hurt had any of my children committed themselves to a certain faction; I would have felt that all my dedication and effort had been wasted. I remember, during the year 1958,* we organized a movement against the incidents of that year. I recall that one of the decisions we took in that movement was not to give our children names that indicate a particular sect, and that is why I gave all my children neutral, Arab names. I believe that my strong attachment to and con-

viction in these principles helped me overcome and survive the terrible war we passed through. Three weeks after my daughter Jana's death, I had a meeting to prepare for the handicapped demonstration, and I attended it. I believe one has to be committed to certain principles, like God, beauty, and the arts, in order to overcome the personal miseries one is bound to pass through in life.

HO: How did the war experience influence your views on national and confessional identity? Your views on power and powerlessness? Your views on Lebanon's role in the region and the world?

LM: Definitely, the war did not affect my views on nationalism or confessionalism, otherwise, I would have given up a long time ago. But I believe that confessionalism is deeply rooted in people's minds now, much more so than before the war, taking as a measure the civil code. Before the war, we prepared a project for an optional civil law, which was adopted by Mr. August Bakhos, a parliamentarian. Mr. Bakhos had the courage to present it to the Parliament once, and then it was kept in a drawer thereafter. Now it is much more difficult to achieve any progress with respect to this issue. It is not only my opinion, but Joseph, too, felt the same way during his appointment in the cabinet. He believed that applying a civil law nowadays, even if it is an optional law, is much more difficult than it was before the war.

Powerlessness is not an outcome of the war. As activists in the NGOs, we were always made to feel as if we were asking for charity from the government, and the government feels as if they are the donors. One feels there is a state of powerlessness towards the legislative power; for example, the issue of the nationality of children. We were working, through the Association of Human Rights, for the right of Lebanese women married to foreigners to give the Lebanese nationality to their children, at least after the husband passes away. The first reaction from the government was, "we don't want to encourage the settlement of foreigners in Lebanon." In the last meeting with the Minister of Justice, I explained that we are also against the settlement of foreigners in the country, and that we, too, care for the good of Lebanon.

I feel very sorry about the current regional and international role that Lebanon is playing, although I believe in the individual and this belief is the basis for my political views and non-violent thought. During the international conferences before the war, we used to feel that we derived our strength from our country. Now, we no longer feel that strength. To the contrary, we feel we are representing a sick and weak country. We are no longer highly regarded, we lost some of our image.

HO: Did women, more so than men, play an important role in preserving and sustaining Lebanese society during the war years?

LM: Women did not participate in the hostilities, not because they are less violent, but due to the absence of women in both the government and the militias. They didn't refuse the war as such, but they were not in decision-making positions. Did women suffer more than men? I do not believe so. But definitely, they faced many difficulties in maintaining and providing for the basic needs of their families and daily life. I believe that life was more of a burden for women who lost their husbands and had to assume the financial responsibility, especially women who were not prepared or vocationally trained to do so. Moreover, we should not forget the responsibility of caring for the handicapped. As a result of this terrible war, it was usually women who took care of this. In addition, women don't have the upper hand in family decisions nor do they have financial independence. But women had one privilege during the war: they were rarely kidnapped. Is it because she is *harim* (protected, forbidden)? Or is it a matter of honor? Or was it because women are considered second class citizens? It would be interesting to study this one day and find out.

In other countries, such as Europe and America during World War II, war forced women to go into industry, which caused an alteration in their lives; it had an impact. But in Lebanon, maybe because it was a civil war and both men and women were hiding under the stairs, most men did not participate in the war. The war had an impact on the economic aspect of women's lives; there has been an increase in the percentage of working women due to dire economic need. We have an increase in the number of women in universities, but I don't think that is necessarily a result of the war. However, I don't see any improvement in the way society looks at women. Women were powerless, and still are, in all domains: in the trade unions, in the municipalities, in politics, even in the family. As long as the Personal Status Code is not altered, women will remain in a subordinate position. But now, due to women's growing economic independence, the situation within the family may change with time.

From the legal point of view, there was no improvement in women's status due to the war. We started working on a program in 1949 to ratify the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Before the war, we amended several laws, such as equality in inheritance, the right to choose one's nationality upon marriage, and so forth; but, the situation remained stagnant. It was only after the war ceased that we resumed the work and were successful in amending three laws.

HO: As a woman and as a professional, how do you view the post-war period? Socially, politically and economically speaking, have women made gains or suffered losses since 1990?

LM: If we want to see where women made gains, there is no doubt that there is a change in the political power structure. We now have women representing us in the Parliament, although their penetration came about in a traditional way, *i.e.*, the

women deputies in the Parliament are representing either a brother or a husband. But we can say that the road has been paved for others to follow. Women's political role is still weak; we still do not find many women in political parties or in syndicates, neither during the war nor after it. We don't find women in municipalities because there have been no local-level elections since the 1960s. It is not women as such that are in a weak position, but rather, all those outside the political arena, the intellectuals, the workers and the students. So, from the political point of view, there is little hope for improvement. We have to work on different fronts to increase the level of participation.

From the economic side, there is an increase in the percentage of working women. There is an increase in the level of participation of women in the public sector, for example, the percentage of women lawyers and judges has increased. Is it due to the war? I do not think so. There are other reasons, too; maybe fewer men choose to be judges now, due to the low wages.

HO: How would you evaluate the performance and policies of the Lebanese Government in your field of expertise since the end of the war? If you could give a word of advice to the executive and legislative branches of the Lebanese Government, what would it be?

LM: The government is more than ignoring the situation, the government is in a state of hostility. To start with, not even once has the modification of any law concerning the improvement of women's status been issued with a decree from the legislative power or out of logical conviction. It was always due to tremendous efforts and persistence, in addition to the constant distribution of memoranda. It is an unacceptable situation! One example is women's legal and public testimony. Until now, some notaries still do not accept the testimony of women. I was told that a *mukhtar* (leader) in one of the wards of Beirut has underlined the words "male witness" on government forms in red, and does not accept a women's testimony, although there is no law to support such a mentality! We put so much effort into presenting the case for women's rights with all the logical reasons and necessary documents, in addition to making a comparison between our laws and the laws of other countries, even Arab countries. Still, you feel government officials are only willing to discuss the situation because of the respect they have for the personal relationship that exists between us, not out of conviction, nor out of any sense of duty and responsibility to women, half the citizens of this country.

* In the year 1958, Lebanon witnessed a brief civil war between Christians and Muslims.



“Seventy-Five Percent of Any Society Comes from Women and Her Efforts”

An Interview with Rabab As-Sadr Charafeddine Conducted by Adele Khudr

Rabab As-Sadr Charafeddine, who is well-known in Lebanon as “*Sitt Rabab*”, was born in the city of Qum in northwestern Iran, a famous pilgrimage site for Shi’ite Muslims. The daughter of a Lebanese father and an Iranian mother, *Sitt Rabab* first came to Lebanon in 1962 at the age of 15. At age 16 she was married to Hussein Charafeddine, an educator and scholar, and had four sons.

Sitt Rabab’s involvement in social and developmental work began soon after she arrived in Lebanon and got married. Her initiation into this domain came through the efforts of her brother, Imam Musa Sadr, the President of the Higher Islamic Shi’ite Council, who was a pillar of his community and a respected social leader until he disappeared mysteriously while on a trip to Libya in 1978. In the 1960s and 1970s, Imam Sadr had undertaken systematic studies of the social, economic and educational conditions of Lebanon, and was very concerned about social and developmental issues for Lebanon’s poorer classes. *Sitt Rabab* did not want to spend her life attending social gatherings and making visits, nor did she want to lead the life of an ordinary housewife. Thus, she was given the responsibility early on for planning and managing a variety of women’s programs and activities through the auspices of the Imam As-Sadr institutions. *Sitt Rabab* therefore considers that her involvement in social work was not a reaction to the Lebanese civil war that erupted in 1975, nor an outcome of the war’s aftermath. Rather, it was a consciously planned intervention in social and development work born of a serious needs assessment undertaken by Imam As-Sadr under normal conditions of livelihood in pre-war Lebanon.

Nevertheless, the Lebanese civil war certainly increased and intensified *Sitt Rabab*’s work and led her into new and different directions. *Sitt Rabab* believes that when the Lebanese war began, nobody really knew how it would unfold. The stronger ones always assumed that they would be the winners. However, the war served to disrupt the social structure and thereby upset the traditional equilibrium in Lebanon. Because of her belief in the need to raise women’s awareness about the war, *Sitt Rabab* stayed in Lebanon throughout the entire war. She

often had to move from one area to another, seeking shelter and security for herself and her family, exactly like all other displaced Lebanese families. Her two main “stations” were Beirut and South Lebanon.

Under the guidance and the directives of Imam As-Sadr, *Sitt Rabab* tried to raise the awareness of Lebanese women, be they mothers, wives, or sisters, to prevent and forbid their sons, husbands and brothers from getting involved in the fighting. Her role, as she defines it, has been one of guidance, offering directives and providing services.

Throughout the years of hostilities, *Sitt Rabab* never stopped moving among the different Lebanese regions, irrespective of political or confessional background. She was not halted by shelling, kidnapping or threats. When asked whether this was possible because she was a woman, *Sitt Rabab* replied that this was not the only reason; it was also due to the fact that women, according to *Sitt Rabab*, are more persevering than men. They have more patience; their selfishness is less. If a woman confronts failure, she does not fall into despair; she simply waits for a while, and then gets on with her work again. This patience and perseverance have helped *Sitt Rabab* play the role of a coordinator, not only among confessionally-based groups, but also within her own community.

Sitt Rabab feels that the Lebanese woman played a very important role during the war. She had to bear all the consequences of the war on her shoulders. Indeed, she had to cope with many more problems than most men. Men used to leave their houses without knowing if or when they would ever return. Women, on the other hand, were the ones to unite and nurture the family. They were the ones responsible for providing the necessities of life; such as water, food, fuel and a sense of normality and stability. Nevertheless, *Sitt Rabab* feels that women could have been even more active during the war. Specifically, women should have taken a firmer stand and prevented their men from getting involved in the fighting. *Sitt Rabab* adds that women were prevented from playing this role because they had more important preoccupations to attend to, namely, the many endless daily tasks of survival.

When asked if women's relatively limited role stemmed from a lack of awareness on their behalf, Sitt Rabab answered that, in Eastern societies, women have not been brought up or trained to play an active role. According to her, we cannot blame only men for this matter. Women begin in our society in weak positions, and men simply take advantage of this. Women, in their turn, do nothing to complain about this state of affairs. The mere acceptance of such conditions has prevented women from further advancement. Sitt Rabab asserts that "rights are not given to us; they are to be taken by us. It is only by practicing your rights that you acquire them. No one will just give women their rights; as long as a human being is productive, he or she can express his or her opinion. No matter what the status of a woman may be — veiled or unveiled, married or single — she can play her role and take her rights."

Yet, Sitt Rabab expressed concern about some developments associated with the changing role of women. Her chief concern is that women may become too harsh and too "manly". According to Sitt Rabab, "a woman should never drop her role as a mother. First, she has to take care of her children, and during the rest of her time, she can get involved in work outside her home. Seventy-five percent of what a child becomes is a result of what his or her mother teaches him or her. Only twenty-five percent comes from the father. Accordingly, 75 percent of any society comes essentially from women and their efforts." Sitt Rabab reiterates that a woman is a very strong creature and not a weak one. Any woman who has to put up with a man having a difficult character is a strong person, because not all individuals can cope with such conditions. Commenting on the relations between a difficult husband and a patient wife, Sitt Rabab said: "it may be very easy to dispute and argue with her husband, but it is much braver and stronger to bear him silently. Eventually, her example will lead to a positive change in his character".

Sitt Rabab believes that Lebanese society has changed as a result of the war. Among these changes, one in particular impacts upon the role of women: Women have become much more educated, more involved in political life (even if this initiation into politics arose more from family links than personal efforts), and more involved in social work. Concerning the latter point, Sitt Rabab adds that a significant part of women's involvement in social work arises from political reasons, rather than from professional interest. This often leads to wasteful duplication of efforts,

non-specialization, and, in some cases, fraud in management of NGOs. A stronger role should be envisaged for the Lebanese Government to coordinate the efforts and the foci of these NGOs. To support her argument related to the prevailing non-coordination of work among NGOs, Sitt Rabab cites the preparations that took place for the Beijing Conference, which she considered to be a failure.

Another important change in post-war Lebanese society is the growing need for social and psychological counseling services. Although our society is a traditional one in which the individual does not disclose his or her problems and feelings to a stranger (such as a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist or social worker), Sitt Rabab feels that there is room for change. She cites many examples of situations in which she had to play the role of a counselor. According to Sitt Rabab, all of these changes are part of the normal change that takes place over time in any society.

Sitt Rabab strongly urges the Lebanese Government to move in the direction of economic autonomy for women, especially housewives. She argues that "there are so many women who have experiences that should be taught and shared with others; we have to learn how to benefit from their experience. This diffusion of knowledge is part of the change process in any society."

If Sitt Rabab were given the opportunity to speak with women in other societies currently experiencing conditions of war, the first thing she would tell them is to benefit from the Lebanese lesson. They should strive to play a more assertive role in their family and community and forbid their husbands, brothers and sons from participating in the fighting. Women have an important power instrument that they are not using. Moreover, this more active role for women cannot be "parachuted" in from outside; rather, it has to emanate from within their own society.

Sitt Rabab hopes that women will gradually realize their innate strengths and capabilities. A great future awaits women in the next twenty to thirty years. Women, however, should never forget that they have traits which are very different from those of men. She strongly urges women to preserve their femininity, which, according to Sitt Rabab, is not a matter of beauty or seductiveness, but rather, a matter of strength of character, ethical behavior and awareness. If women lose this, they will be committing a big mistake.

“In War, I Discovered the Resilience of People”

An Interview with Dr. May Majdalani, Psychologist Conducted by Hania Osseiran

Hania Osseiran: Could you describe your overall situation before the war in 1975?

May Majdalani: I left Lebanon before the war began, in 1969. I had married a U.S. citizen and we went to study and live in the U.S.

HO: So, your reason for leaving the country was not due to the war, but due to marriage?

MM: Yes.

HO: Can you tell us something about your educational background and socio-economic status?

MM: I was born in 1945, and started my education at the College Protestant until the third intermediate, after which I continued at Nazareth until the Baccalaureate. I entered AUB in 1961, where I received my B.A. and M.A. in Psychology. I started working as the director of a school for mentally retarded children after graduation. Four years later, I got married and moved to the United States. My husband was accepted at Yale, and I was lucky enough to do my internship there. I wanted to resume my Ph.D. work, but at that time I was told that getting a Ph.D. was necessary only if one wanted to pursue a career in academia, rather than getting into clinical work. For the latter, I was advised that I should get my internship and supervision and I chose to do so. I studied child and family therapy under the supervision of a Yale professor of child psychiatry.

HO: What was your vision or plan for your life before the outbreak of the war? How did you expect that your life would unfold?

MM: The war didn't really influence my plans, because I was not here. When I came back in 1981, I believed that Lebanon was still the same. However, upon my return, I discovered that I couldn't get adjusted to the community. I am not sure if the war had anything to do with it, or if my difficulties stemmed from the fact that I had lived abroad for such a long time and married an American. In retrospect, I guess the war had a lot to do with it, because it upsets the values of people. I reconsidered for a long time whether or not it was better for me to stay abroad. This definitely affected my career in Lebanon.

HO: You never considered living in Lebanon?

MM: Yes, I definitely considered living in Lebanon! My husband and I had gone to the US to finish our studies with the

intention of coming back to settle here. But circumstances and the war decided differently.

HO: How did the war affect you, both positively and negatively, as a psychologist and as a person?

MM: As a person, experiencing the war was a puzzling and disappointing eye-opener. I couldn't understand or accept the violence that I saw around me. I still can't; I couldn't understand the logic. I saw myself and my family, like many others, constantly running, hiding, and being scared. I couldn't accept that people could do that to each other. It always seemed to me that there had to be reasons much deeper than the confessional and political ones on the surface.

A positive effect, if one can call it that, of the war was that it clarified my interests and goals. It gave them direction and made them more tangible. I have a hypothesis that I am still working on: Peace starts within oneself, then spreads to the immediate surroundings, *i.e.*, the couple, the family, then the friends and the community, and eventually, if a whole community feels at peace, the risks of war erupting will be significantly diminished. This hypothesis led to my involvement with movements of peace, with movements working on domestic violence and its effects on each member of the family unit. My profession helps me greatly in this; I believe that working for peace is more than non-violence. While the latter is a negation of something, the former is a useful and active approach.

The war also had a positive effect in that I learned a lot from something terrible; I wish the war had not happened and that I had still learned all that it taught me, but I am sure I would have learned things in a different way.

HO: In your experience, did women react to war differently than men did?

MM: I saw women during the war essentially concerned with the survival of the family, and thus, helping in every way they could. If men were not fighting, often they would brave the dangers of the bombing to go to their jobs and make sure the family was provided with the necessities of survival. I think each one of the genders did as much as they could in their respective traditional domains in order to achieve a common goal: survival.

Although I work on issues connected with domestic violence and I think that women are often the underdogs, I do not tend to view the situation rigidly, *i.e.*, men *versus* women. We are all human beings; each of us is born with certain capacities, personalities, strengths, weaknesses, reactions, etc. I think that war showed me that I do have certain strengths, but it also helped me recognize different kinds of strengths in others. I never thought I could experience fear in such intensity, some-

times in ways that made me react irrationally. But I also never suspected that in spite of very dark moments, I could keep up hope so strongly and help others to do so. I suppose I discovered first-hand the resilience of people, the many capacities they have which they do not use, or which we do not notice in them at other times. One day, I did something foolish. I just could not go on waiting out the bombing passively. So I decided to take my car and go through the autostrade to Ras Beirut, where life was more active. I can't describe my fear crossing the empty autostrade where the electric poles were lying in the middle of the road, near the craters left by the bombs. I could hear nothing except the sounds of the bombs. I got to the port area where the regular road was detoured. I kept losing my way and I started panicking, until I saw a soldier. I drove straight to him and started shouting, my voice and hands were shaking and the most extraordinary thing in my life happened. The man looked at me, smiled and said 'Calm down now and tell me about yourself.' No words could have had a more sobering effect! Without any effort or training, that soldier displayed such know-how on how to deal with the situation. I think this had a lasting effect on my way of looking at people and their potential.

HO: What impact did the war and its after-effects have on your views concerning national and confessional identity? Power and powerlessness?

MM: The war experience awakened me to the meaning of a nation. And I felt that in fact, despite all the patriotic songs we have, we do not behave in a way that shows that our allegiance is first to the nation. I may be wrong in my perception, and hope you can convince me otherwise!

As for our confessional identity, my previous beliefs were shattered, too. It seems to me that people were free to worship in their own way, according to their convictions. I couldn't understand how people could kill in the name of God, and I am convinced that this is not the real reason behind all the killing, although it might appear to be.

As for power, it can mean different things to different people. Similarly, it can also manifest itself in different ways. The power of the strong, it seems to me, is silent and calm; it resides inside a person, it requires few movements or words. The power of the insecure, on the contrary, is usually just a "show of muscles", as they say. This kind of power manifests itself with noise, shouting, speeding, threats, aggression. I remember a particular experience during the war; we were stopped by a 14-year-old kid with a gun who asked for our papers. My companion wanted to joke him out of it, referring to the age of the kid. The kid got ready to shoot and he would have if we had not quickly changed our attitude and showed him respect and obedience. He was powerful. But, is that power? I suppose it is a kind of power one needs to take into consideration, after all, it can kill!

Powerlessness, in my opinion, is one of the most destructive feelings anyone can experience. Imagine the feeling of being caught in a situation that does not coincide with your principles,

values or aspirations in life and sensing you can do nothing to escape from it. Imagine knowing that you will not be listened to and that your needs will not be taken into consideration. I think this is a shattering experience which can have profoundly negative consequences on an individual's self-esteem and behavior, and thus cause depression and/or anxiety.

HO: In your view, have women's roles changed as a result of the war?

MM: Yes, the roles of many women have changed for a number of reasons. One, because they were asked to carry certain responsibilities and duties during the war, and having seen that they could carry them successfully, many women continued with them. Family and society, which used to object to women having some of these duties, lost reasons for their objection because women performed these responsibilities well in a time of need. Secondly, the economic consequences of the war demand that women share in the financial responsibilities.

HO: Do you think that the war had any impact on women's role in the power structure of Lebanese society?

MM: Obviously, there are more women in the political arena now than before, but unless I am mistaken, their investiture was not the result of a political program. But at this point, I feel very uncomfortable discussing the political aspect of the question. I would rather focus on the economic and social aspects. From the economic viewpoint, I see more women in the work arena, making good salaries and contributing significantly to their own and the families' well-being.

As for the social aspect, I feel that we are now at a very important cross-roads in Lebanon: there are two currents, and the one that prevails will shape the future. One current is for women, as a specific sector of society, to start facing the reality of their existence, what they want, and deciding what price they are willing to pay to achieve their goals. Another current is to go the more traditional way, accepting and exploiting the role of woman. These are two extreme currents, and people seem to choose anything in between as long as it satisfies their needs. I suppose what I am trying to say is that what is needed is an attitude of fulfilling potential, facing reality and taking responsibility, *versus* an attitude of avoiding, depending, and hiding behind false excuses.

HO: If you could sit and talk with women in other war-torn societies, such as Bosnia, Rwanda or Chechnia, what would you advise them about surviving a war and its after-effects?

MM: I don't know. I guess I would tell them 'Take situations as they come and make the best of each moment. Don't fall prey to discouragement and don't worry about possible future misfortunes. Be prepared as much as possible, but then trust that each moment of time will take care of itself. One never knows where good fortune comes from and when it will come. But if it doesn't, one can still be satisfied knowing that he or she did his or her best.' But most of all, I suppose I would advise them to never become skeptical or lose faith in human nature.

“A Capable Woman is Fought all the Way”

An interview with Dr. Zeina Saba Conducted by Myriam Sfair

Myriam Sfair: Dr. Saba, can you tell us a little bit about yourself and about your life before the war began?

Zeina Saba: I'm married, and an obstetrician and gynecologist. I studied in Boston in the US, then came back here to Lebanon to work just before the war, at Rizk hospital in Ashrafiyya. I have been there ever since. My husband is also a doctor, a neurologist, and we have one child, a son.

MS: What was your plan for your life before the war broke out? How did you envision your life unfolding?

ZS: I have always been ambitious, and so I focused a lot on my career. I was married for five years before I had my first and only child. I envisioned myself becoming a successful gynecologist, not just financially successful, but professionally as well. I wanted the respect any well-trained gynecologist expects to get. It was a challenge for me to [pursue my career] in Beirut, because the milieu is very difficult. People still do not accept a woman surgeon very readily; they do not trust a woman surgeon [as much as a male surgeon].

I am a graduate of the American University of Beirut Medical School, and I could have worked there, yet I chose a private clinic because it was very difficult at that time for me to work at AUB, since doctors who work at the American University Hospital are also expected to teach. I personally do not feel that I have the talent for or interest in teaching. I teach my patients how to take care of themselves, but I don't think I would be very good at teaching medical students. It's something you either have or don't, and I suppose I just lack the patience. I chose a professional career because I wanted to have control over my own time, rather than be someone's employee. My father was a professional, an engineer, so I guess I was influenced by him. I have been working at Rizk Hospital since 1972. During the war, I was living in Ras Beirut, but I often used to come and sleep at Rizk Hospital so as to be available when my patients needed me.

I consider myself to be a successful doctor, and I think that one of the key reasons for my success was that the men in my life helped and encouraged me a lot. My father always encouraged me to be a physician, and my husband has been extremely understanding; he didn't get upset when, during the war, I would have to leave him and my one-year old son in order to come to the hospital at night to attend to my patients. My moth-

er, on the other hand, was against my decision to become a doctor. She told me I should get married and have children, not pursue a challenging career.

In the beginning, I think that a lot of my patients refused me because of my gender. I have worked in the US and in Beirut, and, contrary to what most people think, the American woman prefers and trusts a woman gynecologist. Here, on the other hand, people think that because this is a fairly conservative country, women would rather go to women doctors, yet the actual situation is just the opposite. Lebanese women seem to be uncomfortable about being examined by a woman gynecologist, as if there is something sexual about it! This is a strange way to think, but unfortunately, some women seem to feel this way. I think that attitudes are gradually changing, however. When I was young and in college, beginning my medical training, I always followed the progress of other women doctors' careers to see how they were faring. I quickly saw that very few Lebanese women gynecologists succeeded while staying in Lebanon. Those who went to the US to specialize and then stayed there did very well, while women doctors who stayed in Lebanon were intimidated. I have never yet heard of a woman being a general surgeon in Lebanon. General surgery was my first choice, but my professors at AUB actively discouraged me, saying "who is going to visit you?! No patient will come to a woman for consultation!" I love surgery! When a doctor trains to be a surgeon in my field of specialization, he or she trains in both gynecology and obstetrics. My colleagues in the US are always surprised when they hear that I am still doing both gynecology and obstetrics, for in the US, they practice both for about five years, then they usually practice only gynecology, because it is less demanding, mentally and physically. The first few years after I came back to Lebanon from the US were discouraging. If I had stayed in Ras Beirut, at the AUH, where the milieu is different, I would have had a huge institution behind me, and people might have been more ready to accept me as a woman doctor if I had been on the AUB staff. Instead, I was working in Ashrafiyya at Rizk Hospital, starting my own private clinic, coming back new to the country after so many years in the States, wearing jeans, a pony tail and no make-up. Patients, I quickly discovered, prefer elderly professor-physicians and like to visit them for consultations, rather than coming to a young woman doctor with limited experience. When patients used to come to my clinic, they usually would look around and then ask me "Where's the doctor?" I soon found

that, as long as there were no complications, the patients were satisfied with me. But if a patient would have to undergo a cesarean delivery, they would usually ask me the name of the surgeon I would be referring them to! They just didn't think that I, a woman, could be a capable surgeon; they automatically assumed I was some sort of a mid-wife. It was quite demoralizing, in the beginning, because every time I had to go to perform an operation, my patients always wanted a man to be present, whoever he was. Surgery and gynecology is an art, and it has nothing to do with the doctor's gender; men and women can both be good doctors. I recall that, when I was in medical school at AUB, the first time our class saw a cadaver, ten of my male colleagues fainted, but all three of the young women present, including me, did not faint!

Nowadays, there are more and more women gynecologists in Lebanon, and AUB is giving them support and privileges, and hence, the community's mentality towards them is gradually changing.

If I have been successful in my work, it is due to the fact that I have sacrificed a lot. I have only one child; I wasn't home often enough to become pregnant!

MS: How did the war affect your life and your career plans?

ZS: The war years were tough and challenging for me, but at the same time, they also helped me to launch my career. In a sense, I became the only gynecologist in Rizk Hospital, and I made myself very available to my patients. On the other hand, because of the war, many women left Ashrafiyya to flee to quieter areas, and I lost many of my patients. As the war progressed, it became the fashion, especially among upper class women, to leave the country to deliver their babies abroad. The Lebanese began to realize that their passport was almost worthless and those who had the means left so that their children would have an additional citizenship and a more valuable passport. So, my career as an obstetrician and gynecologist fluctuated along with the war and its events. Had these circumstances not taken place, I would have been fully booked all of the time, and my career would have progressed steadily and incrementally. Now, I feel that I am starting all over again, meeting new patients and establishing a clientele. I have a lot of foreign patients. Also, with the end of the war, a lot of Lebanese doctors are returning, including some gynecologists, so competition is increasing. The country is full of gynecologists now, and due to the small Lebanese population, work is becoming more and more scarce. This is an especially difficult time for the new doctors; people are used to their own doctors and don't want to try visiting a new, younger doctor, and this is sad for the young physicians who have worked so hard to get where they are.

I have a lot of younger patients, and I see a change in the mentality among the young Lebanese women. The new generation, these college girls, ask a lot of important questions and inquire about issues related to contraception and sexuality. These young women seem to feel more comfortable discussing their questions and concerns with a woman gynecologist. From my own experience, and from what I have heard from various patients, male doctors tend to ignore women's questions, especially those asked by young women; it seems they just don't have the time, or they don't take these girls seriously. I consider myself not only a physician, but also an educator of my patients. I want to enlighten my patients, give them information and advice on how to take care of themselves and assume responsibility for their sexuality.

MS: How did the experience of war affect you, positively and negatively, as a person?

ZS: I was giving much more of myself during the war. I had a lot to cope with, as a doctor, a wife and a mother. I had to balance between the needs of my son and the needs of my patients. Of course, my son was very distressed whenever I left under the shelling to attend to my patients. It was hard for me to go, yet my husband was very supportive all along, urging me to go and telling me that he will take care of our son. A few times, my son was sick and my husband had to take care of him alone while I was on duty. My husband always used to remind me that if I did not go and attend to my patients, even if there was shelling, I'd get a bad reputation for neglecting patients and then I'd be finished as a practicing physician. Moreover, he would remind me that I had taken an oath and that I was bound not to neglect any patient. He would say "You chose this profession, so now you must bear the consequences by working hard."

I don't regret being a doctor and studying so hard for so long, but there is only one thing that I wasn't able to do: spend more time with my son. I tried very hard to give him as much time as I could. The only consolation I have is that the reason I couldn't be there for him was because I was spending my time doing something equally important. However, I think I could have spent more time with him. I would hate to think that I did this for ambition only! Doctors must be prepared to shoulder the responsibilities of their medical career all the way, and if they are unable to do so, they should quit. For example, when I was at AUB, if there was a male patient to be examined by a female doctor, it was customary that she would ask one of her male colleagues to examine the male patient's genital organs. In my case, I refused to have someone else do my job. There was nothing to be embarrassed about, in my opinion; I was just doing my job as a physician. Many of my colleagues and pro-

fessors used to be shocked by my attitude, and I know that many people talked, for once I overheard them criticizing me, but who cares?

MS: In your view, did women, in general, react to the war differently than men? Can you give some examples from your own experience?

ZS: They definitely reacted differently! Women have the ability to tolerate more than men can. They have the tenacity and ability to endure through suffering. I know of several women who lost their children during the war, and I know that they have coped with this awful loss much better than their husbands. During the war, many more men than women were taking drugs and tranquilizers and becoming alcoholics. This is a general, overall impression I have, from talking with colleagues, patients, friends and family. Although there are hysterical women, you can also find hysterical men, and to me, the latter is much more pathetic. Women in Lebanon in particular have not been given credit for anything. Women always have to excuse their gender, for example, "I am a woman surgeon — sorry for that! I'm going to perform the delivery and administer the medication!" My lawyer is a woman and I chose her because she is a woman. She is brilliant! There are many brilliant professional women in Lebanon; women are honest and they treat you sincerely. However, you also have a group of women who are very silly and superficial. Their sole aim in life seems to be to meet as many people as possible in one day, go out to a popular restaurant, where they can be seen by all, play cards, and gossip.

MS: Did the war change your views about yourself and your capabilities as a woman? Did it influence the way you view gender roles for yourself and others?

ZS: The war changed a lot of my views. I saw what Lebanese people do in dire circumstances and how they act. Lebanese always view themselves as smart if they don't pay their income tax, smart in cheating the government, and according to them, the smartest one of all is he who packs up and leaves the country. My husband and I could have left anytime, for we had so many offers to go back to the US, yet we agreed on staying in our country, and not leaving it when it needed us the most. We thought of leaving only if things got better. I only considered leaving for the sake of my son, who is my only child. I thought it was unfair to put him through all of this while we had the means to leave. Yet, my husband used to tell me that our son is like all the other Lebanese children who have to cope with the war. I came to Lebanon when I was nine months pregnant to deliver my son here, for I wanted him to be a Lebanese citizen.

I also thought about my elderly parents, whom I could not leave behind, in addition to my relatives, friends and patients. During the Israeli invasion in 1982, I stayed for three months without seeing my husband or son, for he couldn't leave AUH, where he was chairman of the neurology department. Whenever the situation cooled down, we hoped it would be for good, yet [the war] never ended, and we never left. Our decision to stay here was not entirely due to our love of our country; I had been very lonely in the US, for my family and friends here are very important to me. In the US, everyone is so busy all the time, and even though I had a lot of friends there, no one has time to be there for you when you need them. Once I got really sick while I was in the States, and no one asked about me or came to visit me. All my friends sent me "get well" cards and that was it. I felt so alone! I had only my husband to take care of me, so I decided to go back to Lebanon, to my family and friends.

MS: How did the war affect your views on national and confessional identity, your views on power and powerlessness, and your views on Lebanon's role in the region and in the world?

ZS: In Lebanon, the right people have never been recognized or given a chance. Although there were families that produced politicians generation after generation, most of them were unfit. Rarely do you find people in power who have national pride. You can't help but respect a person who values his national pride. Our politicians' sole aim is to make money out of their positions. There is corruption to the point that it is nauseating, and to tell you the truth, I am not very proud of being a Lebanese any more. I used to be, and I used to defend my country before those who criticized it, but now I'm shy to do so, for those Lebanese in high positions are corrupted. Imagine — I once saw, on the main highway, a patrol car of the internal security, and one of the officers in the car opened his window and tossed out an empty can of cola! So, what can one expect from the citizens when they see something like that!? If those tasked with taking care of the citizens and the environment can act like that, what more is there to expect? On the other hand, you can still meet a lot of people for whom one can have great admiration, yet these people are in the minority. People in power here are useless. In my opinion, we are not improving. Improvement never occurred, neither before the war nor after it. Yet, before the war, corruption did not seem to be as prevalent and obvious. Now, people in power don't give a damn about the citizens, and they forbid expressions of personal opinion.

MS: Do you think that women, more so than men, played an important role in preserving and sustaining Lebanese society during the war years?

ZS: No, not more than the men. Here, you have to define the Lebanese person. It has nothing to do with gender. Many women didn't panic during the war, and they stayed in the country and "stuck it out", even those who could afford to leave often stayed. Some women sent their children out and stayed here with their husbands, refusing to sacrifice their children for a hopeless cause, and I understand them.

MS: As a woman and as a professional, how do you view the post-war period? Socially, politically and economically speaking, do you think that women have made gains or suffered losses since 1990?

ZS: The right people, whether men or women, are never given a chance. Even though we have some women in the Lebanese Parliament, they all got there by inheritance, through a brother or father or husband. A capable woman is fought all the way. It is a male-centered society. If a capable woman excels in her field and succeeds against all odds, then, in my opinion, she has made a great achievement. Each year you see more and more women on the staff at the American University Hospital. In my time (twenty years ago), it was unheard of. But in many other fields, the status of women has not changed at all, although people try to give you the impression that it has.

MS: If you could sit and talk with the women of the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Chechenia, what words of wisdom would you give them about surviving war and dealing with the aftermath of war?

ZS: I would tell them that they should stick to their husbands and children, and give them the moral and physical support needed. Don't leave your country! Dealing with the aftermath of war is difficult. What can you tell a woman who has lost a child in the war? In such a case, there are no "words of wisdom." The love of country can compensate partially, but never totally, for such personal losses.

MS: What are the biggest obstacles you face as a woman in your field?

ZS: The main obstacle I faced was being intimidated about what people said about me. The only thing that changed, over time, was my own self-confidence, which grew with the passage of years. Before, I used to be overly careful with my patients, and I was always scared of saying the wrong thing, for I wanted them to like me and to trust me. Now, however, I no longer care so much. There is a general impression that I am strict and unsmiling. But that is not true; I am very kind to my patients and give them all the time they need during consulta-

tions. Patients used to come and tell me "my neighbor told me to do this, my friend told me to do that," and in the beginning, I was patient with them, and told them not to listen to neighbors and friends, but after a while, I got fed up and informed those ladies to go see their neighbors for medical consultations instead of coming to see me. I didn't study for nothing! Moreover, I have a reputation for being frank and honest with my patients. I tell them clearly and straightforwardly what they are suffering from, and don't hold back anything. Hiding things from a patient is very unprofessional, in my view. If one of my patients has cancer, I tell her right away; I hate to mislead my patients. I treat them as mature individuals capable of handling anything I tell them. Initially, I used to be quite affected by what people said about me, but now I could not care less. What I am sure of is that I have never neglected a patient. I don't lie to them if their child dies; I don't tell them the child was already dead in the womb. I admit that sometimes we are late or that it was due to a misjudgment. My patients appreciate my honesty and know I am telling the truth.

MS: What are the greatest satisfactions you experience in your work?

ZS: Satisfactions come from solving a problem or a complication, such as infertility. Many times I have solved problems without medical intervention or effort, because all that the patient needed was some loving care, encouragement and a boost to her self-confidence. Many of my patients unable to conceive suffer psychological abuse from their husbands. All I do is try to understand them and advise them not to concentrate on getting pregnant. Women here face a lot of sexual problems due to psychological abuse from husbands who accuse them of being frigid, unfeeling and worthless. All I do in such cases is give these women back their needed self-confidence.

MS: What are your hopes for the future of Lebanese society, and for Lebanese women in particular? How do you see the situation for Lebanese women in the year 2005?

ZS: Lebanese women should fight for their rights. They shouldn't be intimidated. Unfortunately, I'm not optimistic; I think we still need a lot of time to improve. No one else is going to fight for our rights, so we should put all of our personal effort into achieving our goals. I know many professional women who are capable in their careers, and had they only been in positions of power, they would have improved the lot of women.



“The World is in Need of Women’s Qualities and Skills”

An Interview with Mona Khauli Conducted by Laurie King-Irani



Mona Khauli is the National Director of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) in Lebanon. The YWCA, which has been active in Lebanon since 1900, currently operates eight regional centers in the country. Among the YWCA’s most important efforts in Lebanon is its Leadership Training Program for Women. The following interview with Mrs. Khawli was conducted in her office in Beirut on November 2, 1995.

Laurie King-Irani: Could you describe your overall life situation before the war?

Mona Khauli: Before the war began, I was a very happy housewife! I was also very involved with volunteer work; I grew up in a volunteer family — my mother was one of the founders of the YWCA in Lebanon — so we grew up with the spirit of volunteerism. Also I had majored in psychology in college, so naturally, I enjoyed working with people. During my single years, I worked with youth, but after marriage, I concentrated on sexual counseling for youth, which was *avant garde* for that time, but I saw a need for this [type of counseling]; it was lacking, not many people could go into this area and the young adults felt comfortable with me, so I started giving my time to the YWCA in that field, providing counseling in the schools, in the business girls’ clubs and among young adults between the ages of 25 and 40. I also worked with children, mainly physically handicapped children, in the field of developing clubs and then matching clubs between handicapped and non-handicapped children in order to develop the spirit of vol-

unteerism between the community’s children and those children who were facing physical difficulties. And, of course, I was giving time to the YWCA through my volunteer service on the Beirut Board and with the vocational school. I was very happy because I could choose my time; I was committed, but I had more time for my family, and basically, I am a family person. I like to give my children time, I like to cook, to clean, all these things that most career women think are secondary or demeaning, but this gives me relaxation from all of the mental work and the social work. So my time was full, and I never felt that I was not working; I was always doing something and staying busy.

In 1977, at the outset of the war, the job that I am now occupying, that of the National Executive Director of all of the YWCA branches in Lebanon, was just then being relinquished by the person who had been in this job for 50 years. She was retiring and had not trained a younger person. At the same time, many qualified young people were leaving Lebanon because of the political situation, so they convinced me to take a staff position and train a younger person to take over. So that was my plan: to train this person for two years. Unfortunately, we never knew when the war was going to end, or how bad things were going to get, so that initial two year position has now stretched to eighteen! I succeeded in training five or six different persons, who have all since emigrated and left the country, either because they did not want to live with such fear and risk, or because they wanted to pursue higher degrees. Some never came back, and if they did return with a doctoral degree, they weren’t very satisfied with a job here because the salaries we offer are not what they can earn elsewhere. Many young professional women are giving us their time and their expertise free of charge as volunteers, and this gives us the responsibility of giving them leadership training, channeling their time and coordinating their efforts. We now have 800 volunteers: 600 adults and 200 youths spread throughout the country, working with the eight centers. Our job now is to coordinate this large network, and to respond to requests for new centers. We have two more requests for new centers, in the Mountain and in the Jounieh area, because women who are not involved in a paying job, and who worked in the past, feel a need to get involved, to serve, and to do something to develop themselves and their society. So that is our focus, to help these women to help others.

LKI: How did the war, and all the phenomena surrounding it, change the expectations you had for your life and for your children’s lives?

MK: I can say that, in the seventeen years of war, we stopped only about three times to consider the question of whether or

not we should leave. Very early in the war, when my parents were still living, I went to my father who was Professor of Physics at AUB (and who really had a tough time acquiring his university education, because he was from a poor family and he had to walk to the campus at the beginning of each semester from his village in the Koura district with his mattress on his back!). He was a man who really valued his education and the fact that he was able to give each of us the chance to get a good university education in spite of all those hardships. When I felt that the war was heating up, I went to him for advice. "Baba," I said, "what do you think? Should we pack up and leave?" You have to realize that the shelling of Beirut was really intense at that time, 1977-78. It was very frightening; we had close hits in the building where we live, near the American University Hospital, which was the real target of the shells. And he said to me, "I have lived through two world wars which were much worse than this. The famine and starvation we experienced during World War I was much worse, compared to what you have seen so far. So I advise you to stay here, to hold your ground, because this will pass. But don't disrupt your life and the lives of your children by uprooting them and dropping them into a new community and a new culture, because you'll never know what that will do to them. It's much more stable to stay here with the security that they have within their society and their family." So that was our decision: to stay in Lebanon. My husband and I had a very good understanding about this. We prayed a lot about it. I must say that I have the privilege of faith, a very strong, living faith in God. So we prayed together and asked for a number of signs that would help us to make a decision. One [sign] was for a stable job that would give us a living, and a second was a ministry that the Lord would use us for, and the third was our decision that as long as my parents lived, I wouldn't leave, and if the war got really bad, he would take the children away and I would stay, and that we would never blame each other for any decision taken by either of us. If something were to happen, I would never say to him "It was all your fault!" or vice versa, because we realized that there was no way to make a perfect, stable, mature decision in such circumstances. On another occasion, when we were visiting in the US with friends, people there started pleading with us, "don't take your children back there! Don't let them risk the chance of living through that war!" We looked around and saw what was happening to their family life there, in America: the break-up of families and divorces — even in very conservative Christian families in the Baptist south — the alienation, the drugs, free sex, permissiveness — all of that really shocked us, so after seeing this, we gave up on the idea of leaving [Lebanon], and we came back here. We felt we had to choose between two kinds of death: the physical or the cultural. Here, if it's God's will that one of our children should die of a bullet, it is in God's hands, not in ours. We will all die anyway, physically. In the West, it would be a slow, tortuous cultural death. We would see our children drifting away from us, we would start making all kinds of allowances, and there is no way of

bringing them back. So we decided to take our chances with physical death. Two of our children went overseas when they were older, after their values were developed and they were more mature, so they were safe from some of the more dangerous cultural aspects of the West.

“War usually makes people more apathetic, but here, they became more empathetic. They never gave up, or said ‘khalas’ !”

LKI: How did the experience of the war affect you as a person and as a professional, both positively and negatively?

MK: I can say that it was mainly positive, because it gave me more determination, it made me more tenacious, more committed to stick it out and make the best of a bad situation. And apparently, this is the natural outcome of investing in a bad situation. The more you give to it, the more you think: "Now, I'm going to pack up and leave?! No way! I am going to sit right here and see the fruits of my labors, my family's and my community's labors!" So, it made us very obstinate. At the same time, I also became very hopeful, because the war made me see the basic goodness of people on an everyday basis, such as the people who give us services, like the vegetable peddler and the butcher and the man who sells us bread. I also saw the goodness when people from lower and middle income families, who had just been stripped of everything because of the war, showed up here in Beirut looking for shelter and jobs, and I was also in touch with the more affluent members of society, who were active in volunteer work, so I saw how warm and sensitive people were to each other, how empathetic, how generous. People did not lose their sensitivity. War usually makes people more apathetic, but here, they became more empathetic. They never gave up, or said "khalas ! (enough!) — I've given enough of my time and money; I won't give anymore!". I also saw that, in spite of the length and destructiveness of the war, with so many armed militias roaming the streets, so little inter-personal aggression took place. A person like me, a Christian living in West Beirut and walking back and forth across the city every

day to my office, should have been mugged at least twenty times! It never happened, though. There was something about these Lebanese fighters, they knew us and we knew them. They had respect for women and girls. It's not like what happened later in the war in some of the suburbs (of Beirut), where foreign mercenary fighters were involved. They were strangers among us, and they really were ruthless to women and children. But if you want to talk about the small, daily wars and battles that were going on all the time inside the city, none of the crimes that happen during peace time in the West ever took place here in our neighborhood, because of the young men's respect for a woman; she is like a sister or a mother to them, so they won't touch her. I could shout at and scold the young militia fighters in our neighborhood — *'wa lou! `aib ash-shoum alaikum, ya shabab!* Shame on you boys! you've been shooting all night! Won't you finally give us some peace now and let your neighbors sleep?" — and they wouldn't talk back to me.

LKI: So you actually had some authority and control over the situation, in spite of the danger and chaos?

MK: Exactly, because it is in our religion (both Muslim and Christian), and a part of our family upbringing, and this gave me hope: In the worst situation, you could talk to an armed militia man who was in your area, like a mother to a son.

LKI: But do you think the same would have been true had you been a young single woman, rather than a married woman with nearly grown children?

MK: Yes. After so many years of war, I can say that 80 percent of what we saw, in both East and West Beirut, was the basic goodness of people: the sensitivity, the cooperation, the sharing — even the sharing of a single, last loaf of bread. Once during the war, we went to visit a relative, who is a nun in London. There was a general strike at the time, and consequently, a bread shortage. So the nuns were baking bread and sharing it with their congregations and the people there started asking us, after two or three days of the strike, 'How did you survive in Lebanon with not only a shortage of bread, but also the water shortage, electricity shortage, no garbage pick-up, *etc.*, How did you manage?' And we told them simply, 'We shared. Friends and family members shared'. And their response was 'If a war like this happened in London, everyone would have died of hunger, because here, after just three days of a bread shortage, no one is sharing except these nuns!'

Of course, my experience of the war was not entirely positive! There was a lot of fear, a lot of uncertainty, a lot of anger and disappointment with the local and world leadership, but never with the people. The leaders are only ten percent of the population, but unfortunately, they are the ones who have the power.

In the post-war period, I am still seeing the good in people, but

if people are not giving as much now as before, it is because they are tired. We are drained physically, financially and emotionally. We carried a very big load during the war, as women and as Lebanese citizens. Each one of us was fulfilling at least five jobs instead of just one. I can give myself as an example: my husband was working and living in East Beirut much of the time, so I was in full charge of the house, which meant I had to do all of the chores at home — not just housecleaning — but running the electrical generator, getting the fuel, taking care of bills and finances, plus the additional daily burden of pumping up water and carrying it up several flights of stairs. Also, I was taking care of the pets and looking after the gardens of several people who had fled. Another job was maintaining my YWCA duties, and in an emergency situation, it got worse! We were the only people working full-time and delivering services; businesses and government offices were obliged to be closed because of the fighting, so many people were out of work, but we in the NGO sector went fully "into the marketplace" — our workload increased by at least 200 percent, especially because of all of the displaced people in need of our services. Later, when my son left Beirut, I had to take over all the tasks that he had been doing: helping and visiting the parents of his friends, taking them bread, fuel and water. There were so many aging mothers in the neighborhood who were more or less alone, because their children were all outside, so we neighbors had to bear their burden on a social level, a financial level and a personal level. Also, all contact and communication was by foot, since the phones and postal service weren't working. I must say, I was physically more fit in those days! Moreover, I took charge of a small weather station after my father died, *Marsad Nikula Shaheen*, which he had set up when AUB closed down their observatory. This voluntary service, of recording rainfall and daily weather conditions, was the only source of reference concerning the weather in Lebanon during the war.

But now, we are tired. We are aging; we need a younger leadership to take over, to come back home to Lebanon and to take the burden from us. The younger generation is still abroad, more or less; there is a big generation gap in the leadership ranks. So many years of war have frayed our nerves and taxed our health, yet we are still carrying the load, which hasn't been taken over by anyone else. You just have to let some things in your life go. In my case, it was my social life. I just say 'no' to superfluous and leisurely activities, because I have to focus on those who are ailing, lonely or dying.

LKI: Do you think that women reacted differently than men to the war experience? Did women handle the war any better or worse than men, in your opinion?

MK: I think that there were men and women who handled the war badly, and men and women who handled it well. Women tend to be more emotional and sensitive than men, and that makes them more apprehensive and concerned about the safety

Women can do important work for society that men cannot do.

of their families. Women were often accused by their children of being 'paranoiac'. But now that these children have their own children, they say, 'Mom, please forgive us for what we did to you! You survived the risks that we lived through and subjected you to!'. So, in that sense, women are more emotional — they cry more readily and jump at any loud sound — but they were braver than the men during the war. The men were more exposed to being kidnapped or murdered in retaliation for attacks on either side, so the women were forced to take on more and more responsibility, on the home and the business fronts, and they did, because men had to stay off the streets. So our emotions, which make us overly sensitive, also make us braver and more outgoing and able to do what we had to do to protect our families. This, of course, put additional burdens on us during the war because we women frequently had to cross the Green Line [the military demarcation line separating East and West Beirut] to bring supplies to displaced families. Also, the YWCA is situated in eight different regions of the country; when one of the centers was under attack someone had to get there with the money, supplies and leadership. When the crossings were completely sealed and very risky to pass through, it was we women who loaded up the supplies and drove to the other side. And we got through *because* we were women! None of the armed men manning these checkpoints stopped us; they did not feel we were a threat to them. We would smile at them and say '*allah ya`ateek al`afieh*' ('God grant you health'), in a nice, pleasant tone of voice. Men cannot do that; going through the checkpoints, they were always frowning and scowling, and always felt they had to say something rude to the militia men about the way they were inconveniencing us. We women did the quickest deliveries to Ashrafiyyeh and the south when these areas were being shelled, because no one ever stopped us and pulled us over to see what we had or to take a 'cut' for themselves. We were getting more supplies through to people than was the official Lebanese governmental relief service! So, in this sense, the war forced us to be braver and more aggressive than usual; we didn't choose to be — we had to be. I can tell you that each time a woman made such a delivery, she trembled with fear. Whenever I did it, my bowels were like jelly! But it needed to be done, and I counted on the Lord to see me through, because no one else was going to do it!

LKI: It's interesting to compare women during the Lebanese war to women now caught in the war in Bosnia. Here, women could pass untouched through gangs of militias, but there, unfortunately, women were subjected to the horrors of the rape camps.

MK: Yes! And this hurts a lot! As women activists, many of us

are now voicing our outrage: the men start the war, the men do the war, and the women end up paying for the war! Why? Why don't men attack the men?! Why don't they rape the men? We're saying this in world conferences, in international forums. Come on! Let's get a discussion started here! Why don't men leave the women alone and just fight each other? All the important daily work behind the scenes during war is done by the women — and then, when the war is done, women are the targets of all the peace education and conflict resolution programs! Why? Why should we always be the ones to clean up their mess? Let the men go learn about peace themselves. We women have other things to do! Women are not the ones who need peace education and conflict resolution techniques. These programs should be inflicted and imposed on the Lebanese men — the militia leaders, ministers and deputies of Parliament (who are all one and the same people these days!) — we women should all march up there to the Parliament building and say 'We have a peace studies course for you, and you are all going to study it and learn it well before you start leading this country!' And they should also make sure that their sons attend. Did the son of even one war lord risk his life fighting in the streets during this long war? Tell me! Women have been left with too many of the dirty messes made by men during the war, and I think we women should all back off and say *khalas!* (enough!) fix it yourselves, since you are the ones who broke it!

LKI: I notice that Lebanese women were extremely strong, responsible and mature during the war, but I don't understand why women in the post-war era don't band together and make demands for the improvement of social, economic and educational conditions which are really having a negative impact on women and children now. How can women who were so brave and strong during the war seem so submissive after the war?

MK: It's not really submissiveness, it's actually a sense of wisdom! We know what our men are like; we know the system they come from. The men we have lived with — the village man, or the educated urban man — show a lot of respect for women, especially their mothers. A man with a Ph.D. will trust his mother more than his male colleagues. He has faith in her sixth sense and he trusts her wisdom unquestioningly, because she loves him unconditionally. So, he will naturally ask for her advice whenever he makes a big decision.

The fact that, politically, our society is so feudal and so narrow means that even in the *men's* world, most men have no power. Very few *men* have a say in matters, even if they band together. Take the labor unions as an example: even if they all join together, what power do they really have? This is not a matter

of male or female; it's a matter of *power*, and in our society both sexes are lacking in *power*. Unfortunately, during the events [the war], Lebanese society became, from within and from without, more of an autocratic than a democratic system. So the wise thing is to step aside, for now, do whatever you are doing and do it well, and what we at the YWCA have in mind is to begin to prepare women for power. We believe that women do have potential. We feel that God has created us equal with men, and we feel that women have even been endowed with *more* than men (but we keep this to ourselves!). So, we need to empower women, to train those who have a knack for politics, give them courses, workshops, and special programs, so that they will know how to act and what to do if and when they reach a position of power. Nowadays, if a woman reaches power, she cannot do anything but officiate, appear at cocktail parties, cut ribbons, *etc.*

At this stage, women are more useful in an administrative position, such as Na'amat Kan'aa'n in the Ministry of Social Affairs. Such women should know how to avoid getting caught in all of the red-tape of the government system. But the present time is a very depressing and exhausting period to be in politics. We can be more effective and have our voices heard by issuing reports and working in the NGO sector. If women in the West cannot reach even one half of all public offices, then it's still ineffective. Men can always out-vote them. If that is the political reality for women in the West, what do you expect from our Eastern society? What we are doing here, in each of our eight centers, and in cooperation with other NGOs, is training promising young women for leadership positions.

LKI: How do you do that?

MK: We have our Leadership Training Programs, which make each of us capable of becoming a parliamentary deputy, because we follow the parliamentary system and we train our younger members to lead, to take the initiative, to plan agenda — all the things that are so important to working effectively in an institutional structure. As a result of these programs, we have women who are quite capable and who have definite potential for political involvement. We will support them to run for seats in government, and hope to have several women running simultaneously to give them strength. Why not encourage twenty or thirty? Every month, as part of our Leadership Training Program, we have a presentation about women and the law in Lebanon. This month's topic is about the law in the work-place. We don't just focus on the current law, but look at ways it can be changed and improved, and then encourage the young women to work for change by putting pressure where it counts. As a result of this, we can see who is good at politics and then encourage them to go for further training. Recruiting and training our volunteer leadership is also key. We need expertise, fund-raising, financial support in the form of scholarship funds for our young trainees.

Currently, we are losing some of our volunteer work force to the wage-labor market, which I find distressing. I am against women working just to make more money. If they have ample financial support, I would much rather see them in the volunteer sector, because that is an area that gives so many social and emotional returns, and they will have more time for themselves and their children. Also, this is something that no government, even the best governments in the world, can give: the quality of social services from volunteers is high. It arises out of the community itself, so it is effective, culturally sensitive, and has a lot more legitimacy than government-designed programs applied on a community from outside. A volunteer component is always needed. It also assures that assistance programs will have an important element of personal empathy and concern; it is not like a mere "hand-out" from the government.

Women can do important work for society that men cannot do. Men are not as sensitive and nurturing as women; it's just not in their nature to be so. This is because women are mothers, they have an instinct to give and nurture; the maternal instinct is there, whether they bear children or not.

Of course, during the war women had to accommodate themselves to new situations, they had to train themselves, their minds, their hearts, their genes, to do what men usually do, but this doesn't mean they wanted to do so for the rest of their lives. I believe in a life of complementarity and partnership between men and women. I believe that God has endowed men and women with specific traits for specific tasks, which cannot be disregarded or ignored if a proper balance is to be maintained. In this respect, I feel that the women's movement has really erred by telling women that they should be more like men. What the world needs most now is patience, love and understanding. That is what turns a person around, whether in the work-place, the community or the family. So maybe we should share some of our womanly traits with men and encourage them to be more like us, rather than the other way around! This would help make the world a more sensitive and loving place, and then perhaps fewer wars would happen, because when you love your neighbor, rather than fight with them, it will drive them crazy! You cannot have a war with them if you love them! Even if they try to start a war with you, you just don't respond to it, and that puts an end to war before it can even begin. So why should we try to make women tougher, why militarize them and make them aggressive? Even the terminology used by the feminists — aggression, competition, confrontation, rebellion — communicates this attitude. And then women talk about making peace! If you are being aggressive and confrontational, then how can you possibly be an instrument of peace? This is why I can say with confidence that the women of our Arab society have the advantage of the respect accorded to them by their children and family. This is where the power of the Arab woman truly lies: investing in her men folk, building up women's awareness of their own powerful

“We really need to be in the field more and in seminars less!”

position in the home and their capacity to effect important changes there. Whether it's an environmental effort, such as solid waste management, or an economic improvement, such as household financial management, women have considerable power and should know how to use it. Women should be trained to be leaders in their own homes first and foremost, and this is what the YWCA attempts to do in many of its programs.

In our volunteer training programs, we also bring up the important issue of how to raise sons and daughters on an equal basis; how to provide equal access to education to both boys and girls. They both have God-given gifts and rights, and who knows? , maybe your daughter rather than your son will end up supporting you in your old age. We also try to inform and train women about marital relationships and how to go about educating their husbands about the welfare of the whole family, daughters as well as sons. This is our main work: to make each woman capable of being a good leader in her home and in her community, regardless of her academic or professional background. We are very proud of the wide variety of people in our membership. For example, here at Ain Mreisseh, we have the Mothers' Committee for the Day Care Center. At any given time, you will have on this same committee the illiterate maid, who has her child here; the belly dancer who entertains in the night-club next door; and top executive secretaries working in the biggest governmental ministries. There women sit together on one committee as equals to plan the welfare of their children. Even those who may not have had the privilege of higher education may sometimes have more wisdom and more common sense than those holding advanced degrees. Discovering this gives them a sense of self-esteem, and perhaps this experience of serving on the committee will make the belly dancer, for instance, consider looking for a new and better job, and if that is what she wants we at the YWCA can be instrumental in training her for a better job. Maybe she likes her job at the night-club. If she does, who am I or you to try to change her mind? We are not here to tell women 'Work in this field!' 'Don't work in that job!'. That would be imposing on women, making decisions for them. In other words, falling into that same trap of men making decisions for women. Instead, let's train these women, let's inform them and prepare them, let's make sure that our organizations are open and available to rehabilitate them, teach them skills in whatever they need. Let's keep all their options open. Why force a woman to go out to work, where she has to be under the mercy of a factory director or office manager, when she could also work and earn an income in her own home? Why not facilitate income-generating projects that women are comfortable with? You cannot have a narrow view or attitude regarding anything connected with devel-

opment. Development is a matter of sharing with people their rights, their talents, and their resources, and letting them make decisions about how to coordinate these in the best way for themselves. I don't have much confidence in the pre-packaged programs brought in from the West, where we sit in a seminar room together for three days and listen to foreign people who don't know what it means to live in a post-war country, who don't understand our basic needs and priorities. I much prefer going on a picnic with women in their own regions and hearing about their lives and concerns and then offering advice about how we can help them to help themselves. We really need to be in the field more and in seminars less! This is another reason why it is so important for an organization like ours to have a large contingent of capable volunteers: they provide discernment and interpretation of realities at the local level that would be unobtainable otherwise. These women know better than any expert what is most needed. Thus, we don't have to conduct lengthy research projects and needs assessment surveys.

LKI: In your view, did the war and its after-effects have any impact on the traditional power structure of Lebanese society — in the home, in the community, in the work-place?

MK: Even before the war, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World conducted a study among working women to discover who actually controlled the finances in the Lebanese home. Through our networks and contacts with working women all over Beirut, we helped distribute the survey and we were surprised that the results showed that over ninety percent of largely illiterate women held the purse strings in their homes. They cashed the family's salaries, they kept the money, and they decided how it was to be spent. And this was more than 20 years ago, before the war! Now, I am sure that even more women are making the bulk of economic decisions in their homes, this is especially so since many women lost their husbands and fathers during the war to death, injury, immigration and divorce. So, in a sense, this was an adverse way of getting economic power. During the war, more women were involved in providing social services, so this was a form of power. Of course, some of these changes in the economic sphere may have happened anyway, whether there had been a war or not. Since 1930, we at the YWCA have graduated so many women into the work-force, so I know that, for 60 years, women have been working, have been highly respected and quite influential in their professional positions, mostly as executive secretaries. It's these women who change the system; they are in key positions of power. As we say, *iza rajul ra's al-mara, al-mara raqabtu!* ('Though a man be the head of a woman, a woman is

“I am realistic, I suppose. As King Solomon said, ‘there is nothing new under the sun’.”

the neck of a man’). This does not imply manipulation, but rather, a woman’s ability to guide and counsel her husband, to bestir him with wisdom. Every man has a woman behind him who wants to discuss his job with him. If a man isn’t discussing his job with his wife, he is probably discussing it with his secretary! He needs to spill it all out. A woman needs to draw a man out like this to understand what he is doing in his work to make sure he is not oppressing anyone or doing something wrong, morally or environmentally; to make sure that he is considering the health and well-being of his employees. A woman, unlike a man, has a good eye for detail. She will see problem areas and potential solutions that a man doesn’t see. If something is wrong in the work-place, maybe it is because the women aren’t getting more involved; they should point out what is wrong and suggest ways to correct it.

This role for women, that of guiding and advising, is connected with the issue of professional ethics. Every year, we have a full week of classes on professional ethics for our vocational students. We teach them how they can make positive changes in the work place, we inform them of their legal rights, warn them about sexual harassment, teach them how they should treat the families of their employers, *etc.* The full year’s training has a fee, but girls in need receive scholarships and this is where our fund-raising component comes in.

LKI: How would you evaluate the policies and accomplishments of the Lebanese government in the field of social services in the post-war era?

MK: I give them a big zero! The only person we admire in the Ministry of Social Affairs is Na’amat Kan’aan, but I think she went into the government too early and hence, she is caught in a lot of bureaucratic red-tape. It will take years to change that system for the better! Most NGOs don’t even want to be in partnerships with any of the ministries; the paper-work is unnecessarily complicated and time-consuming. What we desperately need are more people in government with sensitivity, vision and a deep commitment to change the system for the better; what we don’t need are more people entering government simply for the prestige. We need lots of new, clean, professional people to invigorate this government. Although most women don’t care to assume the mantles of governmental leadership, since they know it will take a lot of time and effort, women leaders are really needed today. They tend to be more committed and less corrupt. Also, they are not as interested as

men are in personal prestige.

LKI: If you could sit and talk with women in the former Yugoslavia, or in Rwanda, Chechenia or Somalia, who are currently experiencing the violence of war, what words of advice would you give them about surviving a war and dealing with its aftermath?

MK: I am glad you asked me that! I have often wanted to reach out to these women somehow; I wish I and other Lebanese women could go on television and speak to them directly! I would tell these women two things. First, don’t let the war get to you! Don’t let your men — fathers, sons, husbands, brothers — get caught up in this dirty business of killing and fighting. Secondly, commit yourselves to a big cause which will have a benefit for all human-kind. Keep in touch with other positive and constructive people; don’t give in to isolation due to communication break-downs. Don’t let hopelessness set in! Plan for both the short-term and the long-term; follow-up and develop your projects. If you are killed in the shelling tomorrow, then someone else will carry on your work and all will not be lost. Never lose hope. Also, if the men want to make war, then let them take the brunt of the military retaliation! Lock yourselves and your children up somewhere safe, far from the fighting, if you can.

LKI: How do you see the situation for women in Lebanon in the year 2005?

MK: I am realistic, I suppose. As King Solomon said, “there is nothing new under the sun”; I don’t foresee any dramatic changes. I do have a hope, though. I would like to see more of the young Lebanese people who are abroad come back to their country. The repatriation of our talented Lebanese youth is so important, because they are sound, well-educated people; they have good ethical values, they must return and help rebuild the country.

CORRECTION: In the last issue of *Al-Raida* (Vol. XII, No. 69, “Women in Management”) we erred in identifying Ms. Cynthia Taha and Ms. Diane M. Smith as representatives of the Canadian Government. They are not. Both of these women attended the conference on “Arab Women and Management” as representatives of the Canadian Bureau of International Education, a non-governmental organization. We appreciate their contributions and apologize for our error.

“The emotional bond between the citizen and the land has disintegrated.”



**An interview with Wafa Hamzeh
Conducted by Ghena Ismail**

Ghena Ismail: Could you describe your life before the war began in 1975?

Wafa Hamzeh: I was still in school, a very ambitious girl, so eager to enter college and later the field of work! I was never influenced by the pressures which orient girls towards marriage, probably because my parents were open-minded, and of course, I was very persistent to continue in my studies. During the war, I went through an important change. I left my parents and went to live in Beirut on my own in order to study agriculture in the American University of Beirut. I did not think of stopping my education like so many people.

GI: How did the war and its related phenomenon affect you? Did it influence any of the decisions you made?

WH: I'm from Al-Bekaa valley, and I love village life a lot. Unfortunately, though, I was deprived of living in it because my parents lived in Beirut. However, when the war broke out we had to move back to Al-Bekaa. I lived there during my high school years only, as I had to go back to live in Beirut to enter the university. Nevertheless, during the short period I lived in Al-Bekaa, I was able to sense the beauty of life there. I felt that living in the rural areas made you go “back to your roots.” Consequently, I thought it would be nice to study something connected with the land and its original inhabitants. That feeling was enhanced when an instructor came to our class and gave us a lecture about agriculture and explained to us that it was a good major to study. Thus, I can say that war has indirectly helped me to take an important decision in my life.

GI: Did you face any opposition from your parents when you took this decision?

WH: I didn't face any real opposition, but my parents, just like any other parents, preferred to see me in a field that was more

promising, such as medicine or pharmacy. Since agriculture in our country is very poor and marginalized, my parents were worried that I might not find a decent job after graduation. Nevertheless, I was left to make my decision on my own without any interference.

GI: War affected you and your brother differently regarding education, for while you were determined to continue despite the difficult circumstances, your brother left school. Can you relate this to a gender difference in reaction to the war?

WH: Perhaps. A woman, whether single or married, is more stable in her nature. In addition, she has to follow the social and traditional customs which, very often, restrict her movement and freedom of choice. On the contrary, a man is free to take decisions regarding movement or any other issue. In this respect only, the reaction of women differed from that of men.

GI: Were the reactions of men and women during the war similar concerning the kind of responsibilities they held within the same family?

WH: The roles of a husband and wife, as I see them, were integrated. Both had bigger responsibilities during the war. As for the rural woman in particular, it can be said that the scope of her responsibilities widened due to several factors, such as the pressing financial need, the travel of her husband, and widowhood. In cases where women had to work, they discovered their skills in the field of labor. This is based on a study I've made and have discussed in many international conferences. Many conferences are examining the value of the rural woman in the protection of the environment and natural resources, as well as in the process of development. As we all know, the percentage of women-headed households has increased tremendously during the war. Women found themselves in charge of their families on their own for the first time in their lives.

GI: What did you do during the war years?

WH: In the beginning of the war I was still a high school student, as I told you. I was active, in the sense that I joined student clubs and the scouts team. Later, when I entered the university, I was involved in the student movements and was even an active member in one of the political parties. Now, of course, my activities in that political party have decreased, due to the new responsibilities I have towards my family. Moreover, I started to devote my efforts to my professional field. After the Israeli invasion of Beirut in 1982, my parents left for Cyprus and made me go with them. However, I couldn't stand it for long, and I insisted on coming back to Beirut. I just couldn't imagine myself staying away from Beirut while

the war was on. After I graduated, I started to work in aid agencies on a voluntary basis. Also, I worked with a number of NGOs, such as the Family Planning Association, where I took care of issues related to rural women, and I also worked with organizations that were concerned with the environment. A turning point in my professional life was when I started to work in an agriculture publication for Arab women. I was the editorial secretary and the executive manager of this publication which was issued by the Arab Association. My devotion to this magazine was a main reason behind my staying in Lebanon in spite of all the difficult circumstances of the war. While working, I trained myself outside Lebanon in a number of European countries, such as Spain, Germany, and Italy. I taught at the American University of Beirut and worked in publications as well. Then I moved to the public sector. I felt that I should work and contribute to society. I didn't care about my personal gain. As a matter of fact, if I mention how much my salary is, you'll probably laugh! Contributing to society and working for the group were things that I believed in, because if you only work for yourself, you'll actually be doing nothing. This probably goes back to the way I was brought up. Hence, I started to teach at the Lebanese University as I felt there was a need there. Then I entered the Ministry of Agriculture where I worked in projects related to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). I acted as a coordinator, which is a role that almost doesn't exist in Lebanon. This role helped me a lot in gaining experience mixing with different people. In addition, I took care of the rural women's activities, as they were totally neglected. In Lebanon, unfortunately, attention is paid only to needy women who have a certain social problem such as displacement, poverty or widowhood. However, no one seems to notice women who have certain skills or abilities, in order to make use of what they have.

GI: Why do you think that the role of rural woman in Lebanon was neglected?

WH: The reasons for this neglect as I see them are as follows: First; no one is aware of the importance of the role the rural women play. Second, there is a general neglect of the developmental aspect in the rural areas. You notice that there are a lot of architectural reconstruction projects in Beirut, whereas very few projects are carried out in the rural areas. Third, if you go back to history, you'll discover that the importance that has been given to women's issues in general is very recent. Fourth, few women are in decision-making positions. If we had more women in such positions, things would be more likely to change, because a woman is certainly more sensitive to the problems of other women. Now we are trying to change this and bring more women into the Ministry. Although I'm in a senior position, there are not many other women. Perhaps the last two years were better. If you go back to earlier times, you won't find female agriculture instructors, for example.

GI: Why did you move to the public sector? Did you find work-

ing in it more productive?

WH: No, not necessarily. However, when you work in the private sector, you will be working for a certain institute or organization. Actually, working in the public sector was a turning point in my life. There, I met my husband, who is the Dean of the Department of Agriculture in the Lebanese University. Since my husband and I were in the same field, we were very supportive of each other. A woman needs to have her husband's support, because if she doesn't, she'll either have endless problems with him, or she'll have to quit work. As for me, it was essential that my husband be open-minded and accept my work, because I wasn't willing to stay at home. It is not that I'm against fulfilling the roles of a wife and a mother; a woman can play a double role in society. If we're looking for integration, we should neither ask a woman to quit her work and stay at home nor encourage her to work and forget completely about her family. In this way only will we advance. I, for instance, have always thought that I would have to stay at home for a certain period of time after I had a baby. However, what happened was that I only stayed at home during the maternity leave.

GI: How did you manage?

WH: I got help from my family, and I was able to go back to work after three months. During my pregnancy, I didn't stop working at all. I even recall that on the day of my delivery, we had a press conference in the Ministry of Agriculture. After the conference was over, I called my mother and told her that I was going to go to the hospital. My mother told me: 'I have just seen you on the T.V!' I always remember this incident, and I feel good about it. Being able to perform two roles at the same time is just great. However, it is often at the expense of something else.

GI: At the expense of what, in your case?

WH: My personal comfort. My daily program is really tiring. I go to work at 8:00 a.m., I come home at 3:00 or 4:00 p.m., and I stay working at home until 10:00 p.m. This is the case with most of the women who work, especially if they have children and aren't upper-class. A lower-class woman who is definitely working for the sake of money will not hire a baby-sitter, for instance. After all, we're all working for money. It's true that I don't earn a good income from my work at the Ministry, but I work as a consultant on many projects which are financially more rewarding. When working, you need to be satisfied financially as well as spiritually in order to be able to continue.

GI: Do you have time to see your daughter and sit with her everyday?

WH: Of course I do. In fact, my daughter is supposed to be with me right now, but I have sent her to her grandmother's house for the sake of this interview. Everyday, when I come back at 3:00 or 4:00, I stay with her unless I have some urgent work to do. If even for one day I don't give my daughter enough attention, I feel very guilty. I guess this is the case with

all working mothers. When their children make any mistake, they immediately blame themselves for it. However, I personally believe that a working mother is capable of bringing up her children in a better way since she is more experienced. Moreover, a non-working mother doesn't necessarily give her child full-time attention, either.

GI: In your field of work, have you ever faced any obstacles as a woman?

WH: No, not really. Perhaps, there were times when a committee was established and I was the only female participant. I could feel then that I was treated differently. For instance, men were telling me when I wanted to talk, 'Oh, you have the right to talk since you are a minority'. I often replied that I wanted to talk because I was always present with them and neither because I was a woman nor because I was a minority.

GI: Has war had any effect on your views of yourself and your capabilities as a woman?

WH: It had a rather positive effect. I, like most of the Lebanese women, felt that I was capable of accomplishing great things and that my role during the war shouldn't be marginal. As I said earlier, during the war, most of the women in Lebanon had the opportunity to discover a lot of their skills and hence felt that they were more self-reliant. Since women are more responsible for the family, they often had to deal with their children's needs and problems.

GI: Does this mean that you consider women's role in sustaining Lebanese society during war to be more important?

WH: No, not at all. I believe that women and men's roles are integrated, rather than simply equal. Everyone has a different role, especially in our society, which is an Eastern one. Men and women played an equally important role in sustaining the Lebanese society. Moreover, the difficult war experience brought spouses closer to one another. This is perhaps due to the strong family bonds we have in our society.

GI: According to you, what is the difference between integrated roles and equal ones?

WH: Oh, there is a big difference! Saying that I want to be equal to men is degrading. Why should I look at man as if he were a perfect figure with whom I want to identify?

GI: Usually what is meant by being equal to a man is having equal rights and opportunities with him. Don't you think that being equal to man in this respect is necessary?

WH: "Equivalence of opportunities" is a better term to use when referring to opportunities. Perhaps the term "equality" applies with respect to the issue of rights. However, when speaking about distribution of roles, "integration of roles" is a better term to use. A woman should be given the opportunity to educate herself. However, we shouldn't force her to do that. At times, she might be incapable. However, when she is capable,

she should definitely be given the opportunity. Overall, I'm for women's liberation. However, I'm against the approach of some women's groups who consider men as their targets and start complaining that men are the cause of all of their suffering. We should always remember that our problem is not with the man. Our problem has a lot of social and historical background. I know women who attended a lot of lectures and went back home filled with antagonism against their husbands.

GI: How did war influence your national and confessional identity?

WH: War has enhanced my conviction that a human being has a value by him/herself. He/she should be judged by his/her actions rather than by his/her sect. Unfortunately, though, this is not the case in our country where we have 17 different sects. Each of these sects has a great authority and value in the lives of the Lebanese people. This, I believe, is a major problem, and if we were able to solve it, we would solve many of our problems including those related to women. A woman will definitely be more able to participate in decision-making process if the person's qualifications, and not one's sect, gender or any other factor, are given top priority.

GI: As both a woman and a professional, how do you view the post-war period?

WH: The war has been over for only five years. If what happened in our country had happened somewhere else, it would have devastated the society. The strength of our family bonds has definitely saved us. As for post-war women, they are much more aware of their rights than before. Just note the activities that were carried out in preparation for the Beijing Conference. These activities are a healthy sign that Lebanon has started to get over the war's impact. In previous conferences, we were too busy to mount such efforts. The NGOs, for instance, focused their efforts during the war on relief. Now, one can notice the shift in the NGOs' efforts towards developmental projects. Today, you can feel that the people have a greater sense of stability and security. They no longer have to worry about how to hide or protect themselves and their families from the bombs. However, I have to say that a new problem has arisen: an economic problem. We have a big economic class gap. One study shows that almost one third of Lebanese society lives below the poverty line. Before the war we had what is called a "middle class". Now, it is almost non-existent. Today, most of the society's members fall into one of two categories: very rich or very poor. This economic situation is really frustrating. There should be a well-devised developmental plan to solve this problem. The current reconstruction projects that are being carried out are great, of course; however, they don't solve our human problems which are just as important, if not more so.

GI: What about the rural woman? How do you view her role in the post-war period?

WH: In the field of education for agriculture, the percentage of women's enrollment has increased. Moreover, a lot of the female agriculture students are going for a Master's degree. In this period the number of colleges for agriculture has increased. Before the war, agriculture was taught only at the A.U.B. and at the Lebanese University. Now, agriculture is additionally taught at Kaslik University and Saint Joseph University. On the practical level, though, the percentage of agricultural workers, including women, has decreased. This is due to several factors. First, the emotional bond between the citizen and his land has disintegrated. The citizen no longer feels attached to his/her land. Second, concerning the women, in particular, they prefer secretarial to agricultural work. In addition to the fact that secretarial work is perceived as being more prestigious and less demanding, there is a great discrimination between male and female workers in the field of agriculture. The female worker is made to work for longer hours, yet she is paid less. Whereas the male worker earns a daily salary of 12000 L.L., the female earns a daily wage of 6000-7000 L.L. only for the same kind of work. Third, agriculture in general is facing a lot of problems right now. One has to bear in mind that during the war years and immediately after the end of war, there was no governmental support. It is only recently, *i.e.*, over the last two years, that the Government has started to give attention to agriculture. The Minister in charge right now is making a lot of efforts to support the farmer. He has set an agricultural calendar which determines the seasons for exporting and importing agricultural crops in order to protect the national production. However, this attention, as I have earlier said, is very recent. What was happening in the past years was a pity. Lebanon is potentially a rich country if only we know how to exploit the diversity of our crops. Also, we shouldn't forget the forests which have been neglected for so long. Can you imagine that only six percent of the forests in Lebanon are being farmed today? So, we have a lot of natural treasures of which we can make great use. It is a pity to see the farmer converting his land to a building area. In the past, Al-Bekaa valley was all green, now there are still green areas, of course, but one can also see the building projects which have started. In the mountains, you can see the forests diminishing, the trees are removed and the gardens are converted into touristic compounds.

GI: How do you think this problem can be solved? Obviously, the ordinary citizen, upon finding that his land is not generating a decent income for him, will automatically think of converting his land to another source of investment that will ensure him a decent living.

WH: Of course. The Government, however, should take measures to protect the farmer and encourage him to take care of his land. It can do this in different ways. It can orient the farmer towards types of agriculture which are profitable. It can also establish cooperatives and give loans to farmers. Moreover, the Government should enhance the role of women in the process of guidance, which is almost non-existent at the present

time. The woman should be involved in agricultural and other developmental projects. They shouldn't restrict themselves to traditional roles such as sewing. Sewing is important, of course, but obviously not all women should be involved in sewing.

GI: Since you are one of the few Lebanese women in a decision-making position, what have you done and what are you trying to do in order to advance the role of other women in the field of agriculture?

WH: In the Ministry of Agriculture, we are trying to establish a special unit for rural women. Working on this project was initially part of preparing for the Beijing Conference. The FAO in co-operation with ESCWA has set the idea for a project on which a network of seventeen Arab countries have worked. It was suggested to prepare a basic paper on the role of the rural woman in agriculture. I was the coordinator of this project in Lebanon. Starting from this point, we collected the information I have mentioned during the interview (regarding the lack of women's participation in the decision-making process, the developmental projects and the procedure of guidance as well.) We discovered that the rural woman plays a significant role. However, she is not adequately remunerated. The rural woman herself doesn't realize the importance of her role. We collected all the needed information and prepared a regional report about the rural woman. Finally, we handed in this report to the conference in the name of the FAO. So, now I can say that we have seen the drawbacks and shortcomings we have. We need to strengthen the role of the institutions which take care of the rural woman. Consequently, we decided to establish a unit for the rural woman in the Ministry of Agriculture. The main role of this unit would be to coordinate the work of all the units in the Ministry of Agriculture and to integrate women into all the agricultural projects. This unit shall also be responsible for coordinating the efforts of all the NGOs and all the other ministries. I'm working on this project right now. There are also other projects in the ministry. One of them is based on the project which was carried out by the FAO. In the beginning, we will form a small network that consists of a number of countries. The role of this network will be to orient the activities of the rural women in these countries and to get all the organizations, governmental and non-governmental alike, concerned with the rural woman involved. In this way, we will be able to assess the value of the rural woman's work, know about her problems and try to find solutions to them. There is also another project that is being carried out along with the World Bank. This project is related to education, rehabilitation and modernization, and it is being financed by IFAD, an organization concerned with the rural women in all parts of Lebanon. A unit related to this project should be established in the Ministry, and I'm planning to work on this project. We will establish a division for the rural woman, which will in turn support the unit and perform outreach in different parts of Lebanon. Once this project is implemented, we will have accomplished something. We have already talked to Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of the

Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and told her that we wanted an "executive agent" to implement the project in coordination with us as a unit. In this way, we will be benefiting from the wide experience of the NGOs because the ministries have just started to regain their past strength.

GI: Obviously, you have big responsibilities. How do you feel as a woman who has achieved so much at such a young age?

WH: In fact, I don't feel satisfied with what I have achieved. I even blame myself very often. Yesterday, for instance, while I was at work, a colleague was reading the newspaper and told me that a man who was only 33 years old was appointed as a General Manager for a big establishment. I became curious to see his c.v., which was presented in the newspaper. When I went through it, I found out that he has many degrees and a lot of experience. He also has two or three patents. When I read this, I felt really dissatisfied with what I have achieved!

GI: Do you believe a woman can make it solely on her own, without anyone's support in our country?

WH: Definitely. We have many examples of Lebanese women who have made it on their own. Of course, on the political level, we don't have access to many positions. We do not have any women ministers which is very shameful and ridiculous. Potentially speaking, we have many Lebanese women who are qualified to occupy important positions in the Government.

GI: If you could give a word of advice to the Executive and Legislative branches of the Lebanese Government, what would it be?

WH: I'm in no position to give the Government a word of advice. However, if I was to hope that the Government would take a certain measure, it would be strengthening the role of its institutions and recruiting qualified people.

GI: If you could sit and talk with women in the former Yugoslavia, Chechnia, and Somalia, what words of wisdom would you give them about surviving war and dealing with the aftermath of war?

WH: The most important thing is to have the will to continue and not be affected by the war. Women should bear in mind that war is temporary. When it comes to an end, only the strong people will appear. Hence, people shouldn't assume a passive role during the war. A person is only strengthened when he/she works and gets him/herself involved in life.

GI: How do you foresee the situation in Lebanon in 2005?

WH: I hope that our country overcomes the war effects. We cannot go on using the war as an excuse for our faults. We should design a plan that maintains a balanced development in all parts of Lebanon. Every necessary action should be taken. Unfortunately, what is happening right now is that we are not improving. We are going backwards in different aspects. The anarchy which was present during the war became part of the

ruling system after the war, and it extended into the institutions which should be strengthened now, because they play a crucial role.

GI: Does this lack of organization apply to agriculture as well?

WH: Yes. Despite the attention the government is giving to the field of agriculture right now, you can't yet sense real improvement.

GI: These are your hopes for the Lebanese society in general, do you have any hopes for the Lebanese women in particular?

WH: The woman, as a member of this society, is inevitably affected by whatever changes occur in it. However, as I said earlier, the woman has taken an important step by starting to ask for her rights. Now the woman should strengthen herself and become integrated within the society. I hope that after two years, I'll find more women participating in general lectures and not in those that are strictly about women. Then, I can say that the woman has really succeeded. If we're willing to be in decision-making positions, we cannot isolate ourselves from politics. A woman should widen the scope of her interests. We should have women in different fields. A woman should never isolate or remove herself from her major field to work exclusively with other women.

GI: Does this mean that you are not impressed by the activities of women's institutes and organizations such as lectures, seminars and awareness campaigns?

WH: No, of course I am impressed. But, what I mean is that these activities alone are insufficient. Along with these awareness campaigns, action has to be taken. Lebanon up until now has not signed the international agreement for the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women. There are a lot of considerations which make our society cautious when dealing with women's liberation.

GI: What is a possible solution to this problem, according to you? Is establishing a civil law a good solution?

WH: A civil law is a good solution, but it can't replace the current laws. If a civil law was enacted, it should be elective, at least for the time being. In the future, I'm not sure what scope we'll have for change. After all, we have seventeen sects, each one of which is authoritative.

GI: You have expressed your hopes concerning the future of the Lebanese society, to what extent do you expect your hopes to correspond with reality after ten years?

WH: Of course, we will not have a civil law, but certainly we will have accomplished great things. Why not? We are an open society. We will not have overcome all the war effects by then, of course. I still can't see the Lebanese people treating one another in a dignified and civilized manner. But, these things take time, as you know. I hope that things will change for the best.

“I was painting in dark colors because my spirit was feeling dark.”

An Interview with Helen Khal conducted by Ghena Ismail

Helen Khal, a respected American-born Lebanese painter, has been back in Lebanon for seven months now. Khal studied at the *Academie Libanaise Des Beaux Arts* (ALBA) with some of the most prominent artists in Lebanon, and at the Art Student's League in New York City. Before leaving Lebanon in 1976, she served as an art critic for both *The Daily Star* and *Monday Morning*. She also taught at the American University of Beirut and worked in the Jordanian Information Office. About her art reviews, she recalls that “although they did not pay very much, I enjoyed writing them.”

In 1976, due to the eruption of war and after receiving a job offer in the U.S. from the Jordanian Government, Helen Khal left for Washington, D.C., where she stayed for nineteen years. There, she worked for the Jordan Information Bureau as a publications consultant. Khal explained that in the U.S., she was not known as an artist but still continued to paint. Although she was away from Lebanon during the war years, Khal came for a visit every year or two, and participated in several individual and group art exhibitions. Hence, she remained established as an artist in Lebanon, despite her residence abroad.

The war had no major influence on Khal's perception of life. She views all violent conflicts as very stupid and senseless. “War only reinforces my sense of the tragedy of life. It was painful to see the disintegration of Lebanon during the war, as it is painful to observe the human misery in countries like India.” But then she adds that even in the United States, where most people are provided with all the physical comforts, they are not much happier than in Lebanon or India. According to Khal, the whole world is in great turmoil. She sees the paradox of modern society pursuing a life of self-sufficient isolation in a world in which all people have become inescapably interdependent. People are not taking care of each other as they should; the system of international food distribution, for example, is very poor. “We have countries where they throw food away, and other countries where people are dying of hunger. We are a civilization that is ending. We are moving from one civilization into another. The whole world is in a transition

between the past and the future and in the present there is a great deal of painful confusion. There are many things we continue to do in the old ways, and they don't work anymore. The system of education, for instance, is obsolete for these times.” In spite of Helen's sense of the tragedy of life, she does not see herself as a pessimistic person. She is realistic and sees life just as it is. “Although I feel strongly the tragedy that is part of life, I do also know the tremendous joy that life can hold.”

Just as the war did not change Khal's perception of life, neither did it influence her sense of national or confessional identity. Helen strongly hates confessionalism and doesn't believe in the superiority of any religion. She sided, in the first year of the war, with the people in Ras Beirut who wanted to have the religion category blacked out from their Lebanese identity cards. The Lebanese War, to her, was never a confessional one. It was rather a political power struggle between groups. Moreover, it was part of the regional problem. “Had there not been the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we wouldn't have had a seventeen-year war,” Khal asserts.

In spite of the long war years, Khal believes that Lebanon will soon regain economic strength because of the remarkable skills and energy of its people. She also asserts that Lebanon will again become an important cultural center for the region, because there is more freedom in Lebanon than in any of the other Arab countries. Nevertheless, Khal can't see Lebanon becoming a strong national entity. “Lebanon is a country of individualists and businessmen. Despite all the public talk to the contrary, nobody seems to care about national unity. People here still have a tribal mentality; they lack any civic consciousness, and unfortunately, I don't see that changing easily.”

War did not have a major influence on Khal's art. The only slight effect, as she recalls, is that her colors became darker when she first went to Washington. “This may have been a reflection of my distress over the war. I was painting in dark colors because my spirit was feeling dark.”

As for women's general reaction to war, Khal thinks that it certainly differed from men's reaction. “Women were mostly concerned about their families, about providing their children with

“The Lebanese woman is just remarkable. She can do so much; she has done so much, and will continue to do much.”

love, care, and a sense of security. Khal can see that women in post-war Lebanon, nowadays, are much more active outside the home. Yet, she doesn't know if this change in women's role is to be attributed solely to the war. What she does know for sure is that a lot of young couples wouldn't be able to get married today if the woman did not work. Inflation and the high increase in the cost of living, along with the increase in educational opportunities for women and the impact of Western trends, are all important factors which can account for the changes in Lebanese women's socio-economic role.

Apart from war and as an artist, Khal commented on the difference between male and female artists in Lebanon. She said: “I find the woman artist here, as I commented in my book, *The Woman Artist in Lebanon*, much more daring in expressing sexual themes than the male artist is.” The reason behind that, according to Khal, is that men seem to be very secure in their feelings towards sex, while women are not. Men are conditioned to express themselves sexually, whereas women are conditioned to repress themselves sexually. Khal adds, “Women are more interested in exploring sexuality. They are very curious about the meaning of sex in their lives.” Comparing the art of male artists with that of female artists, Khal states that the work of men is more general and social, whereas that of women is more personally oriented. The greatest satisfaction that she experiences as an artist is the process of painting itself. “I gain much peace and sometimes joy, in the hours I spend painting.” Another satisfaction Khal experiences is when she suddenly sees a painting which she hasn't seen for years. “It's just wonderful to look at your old work and be able to appreciate what you've done.”

Khal does not expect the Lebanese Government to do anything in the field of art, because it has much more important priorities right now. In general, she doesn't believe that artists should look to the government for support. “In principle, I don't agree with this approach. Artists are professionals just like anyone else, and if they can make a living out of their art, that's wonderful. Yet, if they can't, they shouldn't be expecting the Government to support them.” When the Government has discharged the heavy responsibilities it has right now and has the time and means to support the arts, Khal thinks that such support should aim at providing society with a stronger cultur-

al environment, and at the same time help in providing artwork for the lobby of each building. This enriches the cultural environment, and at the same time helps in providing artists with opportunities for work.”

Khal has high admiration and hope for the Lebanese woman. “The Lebanese woman is just remarkable. She can do so much; she has done so much, and will continue to do much.” She asserts that the American women are not better off than Lebanese women professionally. “In Lebanon's Parliament, for instance, we have 3 women out of 90 members, whereas in the U.S. you have 4 or 5 women out of 250 members. And in art, a third of the Lebanese artists are women. You don't have that high percentage of women artists in the States.” She adds that if the American woman is more free, it is mainly because the Lebanese woman hesitates to confront the challenge of being free. “She wants to keep what she has and still be free, and you just can't have it both ways.” Nevertheless, Khal believes Lebanese women's attitudes are bound to change. “Things never stay the same. The most important step is to educate women. As for women's lib campaigns, I don't believe that they really help. Educate women, and you can be sure that change will occur.”

Khal hopes to be around in ten years to see how Lebanon has improved. She warns, though, that if the problems of environmental pollution aren't dealt with seriously, Lebanese society will be in bad shape. As for the Lebanese Government's accomplishments during the past five years, Khal is not impressed. “The Government could do much more, but unfortunately, there are still many people who are dishonest in their work. After five years, we still don't have enough electricity or water, for example, which is rather discouraging.” Nevertheless, Khal believes in the Lebanese people, in their energy, skill and intelligence. “Whatever happens, they will cope. If the Government doesn't fulfill its responsibilities, the Lebanese people will manage on their own, as they did during the war.”

(Helen Khal is the author of *The Woman Artist in Lebanon*, published by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in 1987. Copies of this informative publication are still available from IWSAW.)

“We are all responsible for what happened to Lebanon”

An Interview with Claire Gebeyli conducted by Wafa' Stephan Tarnowski

Claire Gebeyli is a household name among most Lebanese women. Readers look forward to her weekly supplement in *L'Orient-Le Jour* on medical news, fashion, beauty and women's affairs. She is also a writer and a lecturer in French Literature at the Universite St. Joseph in Beirut. Last June, Gebeyli was nominated a Member of the prestigious New York Academy of Science (founded in 1817) in recognition of her work propagating scientific news and information to the general public. For many years, Gebeyli also worked as a UN National Officer in Lebanon, heading the UN bureau in Lebanon and keeping it open during the worst years of the war under extremely challenging circumstances.

Her first novel, *Cantata For a Dead Bird*, is due to be published soon in Paris. It tells the saga of a Mediterranean family, beginning in an unnamed country in the mid-19th century and ending in the 1990s in Beirut. *Cantata for a Dead Bird* is a tale of migration and adaptation to a new life after leaving an old one. Gebeyli calls these people of mixed background, who grow up in one place only to be forced by the “winds of history” to live in another, “the birds of history.” Gebeyli should know something about this reality, since she herself is such a “bird of history.” Arriving in Lebanon from Egypt in the late 1950s, Gebeyli had to adapt to a new mode of life and deal with nostalgia for her former existence. Her husband, shattered by the loss of his roots, never recovered. Despite her training in the social sciences, Gebeyli went into journalistic writing, beginning with a column entitled “Historical Portraits” which appeared in the weekly magazine *La Revue du Liban*. These portraits quickly proved successful, and Gebeyli thus achieved literary recognition along with other intellectuals of that period, such as Naccache, Salah Stetieh, Berkoff, and most importantly, the poet Nadia Tueni, who became Gebeyli's closest friend until Tueni's death twenty years later. Describing her friendship with Tueni, Gebeyli says, “she was a second me; there was never any rivalry or hurt between us. She taught me the secret of belonging to poetry and to life at the same time. She still helps me to live and to face life,” she said with controlled emotion. “She taught me how to face suffering with the dignity of an empress.”

After writing her columns on “Historical Portraits,” and along with her job with the UN, Gebeyli wrote short commentaries about the war entitled “*Billets*”. Some were gathered into a book by a circle of French intellectuals, and later published under the title of *La Corde Raide* (“The Tight-Rope”). This

book was chosen by this circle of intellectuals as their book of the year. “The value of the *Billets*,” says Gebeyli, “was the fact that they were a spontaneous testimony of the war, like the shout of a wounded person. They were a cry against death, but now that the war is over, that person who cried out has recovered from her wounds and has to find another path. It would have been dishonest to continue with that trend, because it would have taken away from their specific value. I have to be faithful to my vocation as a journalist,” declares Gebeyli. “A journalist is a mirror of his or her time; he or she has to be responsible towards the readers and very humble towards the power of the word” Gebeyli says that she is always quite conscious of the consequences words might have and thus tries to be “judge and jury” of her own work.

Gebeyli commented that the greatest reward of her work comes “when I feel that people trust me; it gives me courage. My phone number is available to everyone and I get lots of phone calls from people who express appreciation. That is one of the greatest joys I experience as a journalist. What most interests me are human beings. I do not care about what a person's color or religion may be; as a journalist, I feel that I am a servant of this human being for whom I write. This is one of the reasons why I completely changed my style of writing since the end of the war. Now, I want to share with my readers what they most need at this point in time, and that is scientific knowledge.” This type of writing brings her a lot of satisfaction. She says she feels “at peace with herself” and “useful”.

Gebeyli's philosophy of life is that “life is a form of capital that we have to manage as carefully as we manage our money. We have to do the maximum with what is given to us. We have no right to disburse this precious capital lightly; we have a responsibility to use our intelligence and talent, not only towards ourselves, but also towards the force that created us. Life is an immense gift, a treasure that is given to us.”

Before the war, Gebeyli had a happy family life and a successful journalistic career. But inside herself, she always felt a sense of unrest. She was witnessing Lebanese society committing exactly the same mistakes which brought about the downfall of the Egyptian society she had known before coming to Lebanon. She was tormented by this idea, and tried to write about it, but those days were days of “euphoria and festivities, and general unconsciousness” she recalls. Eventually, her premonition that something bad was about to befall Lebanon led her to work for the United Nations in order “to try to do something for [Lebanon's] development.”

Prior to 1975, she had already written a series of reports in *L'Orient* newspaper concerning the underprivileged regions of Lebanon, such as Akkar, Hermel and the South, in order to awaken public awareness of the social problems existing in these underdeveloped regions. But no one paid any attention, "it was like a person shouting for help, and people saying, 'what a beautiful voice this person has!'" Gebeyli tried to disregard her premonitions until they were realized with the outbreak of fighting in April 1975. In spite of her intuition that something terrible was going to happen, she claims that she never could have guessed or expected the severity of the violence Lebanon experienced during the long war; not even in her worst nightmares had she anticipated such a disaster. She comments that she could never understand how such "smiling people were capable of such cruelty and barbarity."

When asked why she did not leave Lebanon during the war, Gebeyli responded that "I'd chosen this country when I needed it, so I estimated that I had a debt towards it, so I stayed because I felt I had a duty to discharge. If I had left," she added, "I would have denied all my life's beliefs. So I stayed with my job at the UN, even after all the foreigners had left, protecting other people's jobs, Muslims and Christians alike. I later received a letter of recognition from the UN Headquarters in New York for my efforts in those days," she recalls.

Gebeyli feels that, on balance, the overall effect of the war on her, as a person and as a writer, was unique. On the positive side of the ledger, the war was a source of inspiration and a call for more profound thinking and mature action. On the negative side, however, the war created a big gap in her life. "So many precious moments wasted! One cannot recover from such a shock," declares Gebeyli, "especially our generation. In our souls, we have an area of ruin that each of us always carries. These ruins weigh us down. We were all responsible for what happened to Lebanon, because we intellectuals did not speak out enough; we did not do enough to stop the war."

In Gebeyli's opinion, women reacted to the war more positively than men did. "There was not one woman war leader, but there were a lot of women from different religious and social backgrounds who united for a peace march against the war" (see *Al-Raida*, Vol. VII, No. 30, Fall, 1984 for a discussion of the 6th of May Peace March organized by Lebanese women of all confessional backgrounds to call for an end to the war). "Each time there was a call for peace, it came from women," Gebeyli asserts. "This is due to the fact that women are more humane; they give life and know how to appreciate its value and fragility more than men do. There is also a solidarity among women as child-bearers which makes them reluctant to surrender to death after they have given birth." For Gebeyli, woman resembles the earth. She, like it, has humility. She, like it, receives seeds and brings forth fruit. She, like it, doesn't hold grudges.

Recalling the height of the war, Gebeyli asserts that she didn't live the war as an ideology, but as a reality. War became her life, a part she refused, but something that she had, by necessity, to experience. For this reason, she finds it difficult to describe the differences between her life before and after the war occurred. Even five years after the cessation of armed conflict, the war is still continuing on the intellectual level, according to Gebeyli. "Currently, we have a war against the after-effects of the war," she states. The war that Gebeyli now fights on the moral plane is less barbaric, but just as vigorous and as essential. This is the struggle to prevent a repetition of what happened before, a campaign to tell others about the sacrifices made and to guarantee that those sacrifices were not made in vain.

For as long as she can remember, Gebeyli says that she has been on the side of the weak and the powerless. It is part of her personality not to envy people in power or to desire power for herself. She finds the all-out competition for power difficult to comprehend. Gebeyli's views of contemporary Lebanon are disheartening. She believes that the country is deteriorating and wasting its assets just like an immature and spoiled child. She cannot understand this, especially after all of the clear lessons provided by the long war.

Concerning women in particular, Gebeyli feels that they were much more heroic during the war than they are now. Then, they waited for hours under the bombardments to pick up their children from school. They went out to shop for needed bread and vegetables, despite snipers, car-bombs and roving militias. Now, however, most women are busy preparing big banquets and shopping for superfluous luxury goods. "For whom are all of these banquets, new restaurants and fancy boutiques?", she asks. "For a couple of hundred fortunate individuals who have invested their capital abroad and come to Lebanon just to party and to be seen at big cocktail parties!?" In Gebeyli's view, women's role in post-war Lebanon has lessened considerably as a result of the conflict. There have been no major socio-economic reforms in favor of women following the war. Women's status has not evolved, whether professionally or socially, and this is apparent among all of Lebanon's religious groups.

As for her particular field, journalism, Gebeyli does not find the post-war environment encouraging. She believes that the freedom of the press is not as strong nor as assured as it used to be; consequently, there are many social problems which are not being addressed adequately by the press.

Finally, if Gebeyli were to address women living in other countries torn by war and violence, such as the former Yugoslavia, Chechnya and Somalia, she would tell them "Don't forget that you are women; you give life, so resist whomever tries to destroy life. It is your mission as human beings!" As for the future of Lebanon, Gebeyli hopes for a re-awakening of conscience and consciousness at all levels: from schools to universities, from families to communities to government.

“One Person Alone Cannot Defy an Entire System”

An Interview with Na'maat Ken'aan conducted by Myriam Sfair

When the Lebanese war broke out in 1975, Na'maat Ken'aan had already been married five years and was the mother of two daughters. Her third daughter was born during the war. Ken'aan had been working since 1960, the year she graduated from Beirut College for Women (now LAU). Later, she enrolled in the American University of Beirut, where she obtained her M.A. Later, Ken'aan was appointed Director General of the Ministry of Social Affairs, thus becoming the first Lebanese woman to hold such a high ministerial position.

Recalling her experiences and impressions of the war in its beginning stages, Ken'aan said that “when the war began, no one believed it was going to last that long. We thought it would be a short-lived conflict, like the 1958 crisis, and this idea kept us going. Every now and then the war used to stop and we assumed it had to end, yet it didn't. Looking back now, I wonder: had we been able to foresee the future, would we have been able to endure the war?”

“I was a risk-taker during the war. I lived in East Beirut and my parents lived in the West, and the idea of artificially dividing the country into these two parts was intolerable to me. It was not something affecting only me or directed against me personally, of course, but I could not accept the idea of not being able to see my family and friends, and I constantly struggled to overcome this situation. I used to go every weekend to the West, no matter how bad the situation was, so I risked my life a lot. Once, I crossed the barriers to go see my parents and while coming back the fighting became really terrible, so they had to close the barrier quickly. I was trapped inside; I couldn't go back and couldn't cross the barrier. I felt that it was the end, and that I was going to die. But fortunately, and as usual, my husband was waiting for me at the barrier. I started banging on the doors, hoping that they'd hear me, and I heard my husband say ‘Open up! That's my wife!’. I hate remembering that day; it was the worst day in my entire life. Then and there I realized that I was struggling for a futile cause, risking my life, the life of my husband and the future of my family for nothing. I knew I couldn't do anything to change the situation,

because one person alone cannot defy an entire system. Yet, I still didn't give up, and each weekend I continued to visit my parents. I knew I was risking my life yet I couldn't help it or resist it. The idea of Beirut's partition was really distressing to me; it almost became an obsession.

“The war period, though long, seemed to pass quickly. There were many things one could have done had there not been a war. Maybe I would have done my Ph.D. if we had been at peace all those years. Also, while we were trapped in our homes the rest of the world was progressing. So many conferences, seminars and events were taking place all over the world while we were stuck in our shelters. We could have improved our programs in the Ministry and done so many things if not for the war. Yet when the war ended, we Lebanese quickly picked up the pieces and started all over again.

“What affected me most during the war was that thousands of Lebanese immigrated, thus abandoning their country when it needed them most. It hurt to see how easily some Lebanese shed their nationalism. Many Lebanese people lack the attachment and love any citizen is supposed to feel towards his or her country. They never stopped to ask: to whom are we leaving our country? I hated listening to women saying ‘Thank God, we are leaving this country!’ Many Lebanese also took up new nationalities, as though their own nationality was an unpleasant burden they wanted to be rid of. I was profoundly hurt by these people and felt let down. I think that the Lebanese should have endured more. Furthermore, you could sense a lack of solidarity; everyone was striving only for him or herself. The Lebanese were selfish; all they cared about was saving their skins and that of their families; beyond that, they could not have cared less about their country. These things really affected me. I never left the country during the war, not even for a vacation. I was scared that if we left maybe we wouldn't be able to come back. My husband agreed with me, so we stayed and brought up our children here. The family is a child's ‘first school’, and my children grew up to love their country and not to fear the war. I believe in fate: when your time comes, you will die, whether you take risks or not.

“I also tried to preserve some sense of national solidarity through my work. Since the Muslims had left the East and

I unequivocally believed in myself and in the cause I was fighting for

gone to the West, I had to divide my time between the two sides. I never tolerated hearing anything bad spoken by one side against the other, and used to defend the Muslims when the East Beirutis complained and defend the Christians when the West Beirutis complained. I refused to accept this unnatural division in any sector, especially in my work, *i.e.*, the administration of the Ministry.

“During the war years, the Ministry of Social Affairs was among the very few government offices that continued to function. I had a very devoted staff of capable people who had similar ideas to mine and who didn’t fear the war. So, wherever I went they used to follow. Our department was in charge of emergency relief for war victims. The Prime Minister oversaw this program. I was in charge of distributing the goods and materials sent to us from other countries. Due to my work I had to visit the East and West of the city, and also roamed over all the Lebanese areas during the war. We worked very hard during the war catering to the needs of the people. It was an awful period; the government was weak and those working in the government even weaker. I used to project an aura of power, even though I had no one to back me up — not even the government. Even the citizens renounced the government because of its weakness. I defied the militias frequently, yet they always understood my point. I was really very fair in dealing with people during the war. I never sided with Christians against Muslims or with Easterners against Westerners. Once, a certain militia attacked one of our basements and took a lot of our supplies, so I threatened them by saying ‘I’ll report what you did to everyone and I’ll close down the supply distribution and go on strike!’. I suppose it was crazy of me to threaten the militias when I had no one to back me. Fortunately, that particular militia returned everything they stole. This experience strengthened my conviction that if you are honest and work with devotion everyone will eventually appreciate you and even those who are not honest cannot help but respect you.

“The war affected me positively; my experience grew, and with it, my personality and contacts. Due to my responsibilities during the war, I had to adopt a mode of dealing with people in an honest and respectful manner. I’m very glad that I was appreciated for the work I did. My name came up several times when they wanted to choose ministers, not because I’m a woman, but

because I’m hard-working. My husband used to worry a lot about me, yet he knew that it was my will and I was acting according to my own will and convictions, and he knew that he couldn’t change me. Throughout my life I always chose to do things correctly and give them my fullest effort. During the war, my primary focus was on my humanitarian obligation towards the people. I never thought of ambition or power. Being Director General of the Ministry was never an incentive to make me work harder. I did so for humanitarian reasons and because I unequivocally believed in myself and in the cause I was fighting for. In my opinion, the job does not make the person; on the contrary, each person molds the job he or she is handling according to their personality, goals and values. If a weak and unqualified person attains a very high position he or she will ruin it, and the job and position will become worthless. I have never changed my style of work or my way of dealing with people since I started working until now. No matter how small the job I had, I was proud of it and tried to make the most out of it. Whenever I got promoted I worked with the same attitude and knew that my post was growing and I was doing it with a lot of hard work and dedication. I always felt [at the Ministry] that I was part of a big family. In my opinion one will never succeed unless one adopts this attitude.

“Women definitely did not risk their lives during the war like men. But maybe they did something even more important: they tended to the family and protected it. Of course, many women left the country with their children. In my opinion, women affect their families and husbands a lot. If they are brave and decide to stay in a country at war, their children will enjoy their support during the difficult war period. However, if a woman is weak, she’ll complain constantly so that her husband will send her and the children abroad, leaving him behind to cope with everything alone. The war led to a lot of divorces because so many women and children left and when the husbands wanted them to come back, they refused.

“In general, before the war Lebanon was a leader for all the other Arab countries in terms of culture, education, and economics. This may have been a contributing cause of the outbreak of the war, since there was a lot of envy and jealousy. In my opinion, we Lebanese learned a good lesson after the war, and that is that no one else will help us or save us but ourselves.

We should have more confidence and solidarity and work harder to improve our country. As long as your country is strong and has power, everyone respects you, yet the minute something goes wrong everyone becomes your enemy. The Lebanese are natural leaders, yet the pronounced individuality in this country is what is retarding Lebanon's overall improvement. Everything private is important (*e.g.*, companies, enterprises, *etc.*) while everything public is bad because we don't have a dedication to our nationality and our country. Nationality and love of one's country is reduced to mere commerce. The "profit motive" way of thinking is very prominent and it appeared on a larger scale during the war, thus making the most of one's position (in terms of accruing money and prestige) is the only aim. After all those years of war, we should realize the importance of our country and work hard to defend it and protect it. We should think of our country first and only later of other things.

"In the Lebanese war, as in any crisis situation, there were gains and losses. The primary gain for the Lebanese woman is that she found her place alongside men in the workplace. The losses, unfortunately, are more numerous. Many women lost their husbands, brothers, parents and children. Many are handicapped due to the war. Many are homeless and displaced. Women suffered a lot, as did all Lebanese citizens. Women felt more shattered and the losses affected them more deeply because they used to stay at home, whereas the husbands had their work to think of. Women usually worry and suffer more than men. We should have learned from our war experience and now we should pick up the pieces and strive to bring up a generation that appreciates the country. We should try to encourage solidarity between our fellow citizens and between all the sects and religions in Lebanon.

"If I could sit and talk with women in other war-torn countries, I would tell them that the most important thing is solidarity among the family members. These women should encourage their children to love each other and to love one's country the most. Also, these women should teach their children to be patient and strong, for no war ever lasted forever. Nothing lasts forever, and the important characteristic one has to have is the will to survive and the perseverance to endure.

"In spite of all that I and other Lebanese have been through, I can say that I have many satisfactions. My greatest satisfaction is that I'm appreciated for what I do and I'm considered a successful administrator in the ministry. I should work hard to be

"If she truly wants to, the Lebanese woman is able to work alongside her male partners in any field."

successful, for my failure will affect all my women colleagues. I thus have an obligation to pave the way for the women who will follow me so that they can also become Director General. I also feel an obligation towards the Lebanese Government, which should help other women in their climb. Whenever I see a woman in administration, I always encourage her and push her to fight for what she wants. Yet women colleagues of mine never did that for me. Rather, they seemed to be jealous — which is, of course, a human trait. Although I've always worked in the same domain, each time I was promoted I improved my department. In fact, the last department I was in charge of before taking my current position now requires four employees to replace me! I derive a lot of joy from planning things and I have considerable initiative; whenever I come up with an idea or plan, I start dreaming about it at night and executing it during the day.

"If she truly wants to, the Lebanese woman is able to work alongside her male partners in any field. The Lebanese woman has a role these days in the Parliament, and I hope she'll also have an increasing role in the ministries. Women play a crucial role in contributing to the family income. You can even find a number of women in the Lebanese armed forces nowadays. Lebanon really needs its women, and Lebanese women have to fight for what they want. Both women and men must support each other in the hard fight to regain our leading role not only in the Arab World but internationally."

“Women today want to be financially independent”

An Interview with Wafa Yunis Conducted by Myriam Sfair

Wafa Yunis, a professional woman from a middle class family background, received her B.A. in business from Universite St. Joseph in Beirut. Soon after her graduation, she began working in Bank Audi as a trainee and she has been there ever since. Today Ms. Yunis is Manager of Bank Audi's Verdun branch in West Beirut.

Wafa Yunis describes herself as a single, successful professional woman. According to her, had she been married she could not have devoted the necessary time to her profession. As a bank manager, she usually works 18 hours a day. Yunis related that she never realized that she liked banking until she started working in Bank Audi. After working there for two years, her superiors recognized her skills and qualities and began to entrust more and more responsibilities to her. During the war she assumed a lot of important responsibilities, which doubled after the war. Although some may have assumed she would be replaced by a man in the post-war period, this did not happen. To the contrary, she managed to brush aside her competitors, all of whom were men.

Yunis stated that her ability to reach a position of power is due solely to her personal efforts. She never felt intimidated by the fact that she was a woman in a male's domain. She has been working in the bank for fifteen years, and asserts that she has never faced any problems, either from her superiors or from her employees, whether male or female. “I've never been a domineering boss; I've always treated all my employees like friends. I'm doing well and I'm very happy with my job.” Yunis believes that in addition to personal effort, one also has to take the right decision at the right time. For example, a financial decision should be made at the right time and with the right clients. “I have never taken a wrong decision up until now in my career, because the mistake committed by a woman is not treated lightly. When a woman makes a mistake everyone attacks her and says ‘we told you she wasn't fit!’, just because of the mere fact that the mistake was committed by a female. One has to be very

cautious in this business and make sure not to commit errors, if possible.”

When she first entered university, Yunis knew that she wanted to become a career woman. “I never thought about marriage when I was young ; I always knew that I wanted to be independent. I hated depending on anyone, even on my parents.” Yunis feels that one has to love one's career in order to be successful. She never felt she was just an employee in Bank Audi. Rather, Yunis felt that she was part of a family. She felt a part of the institution and thus worked with devotion as if it were her own bank. Yunis added that she was also fortunate to be dealing with excellent and caring people. “I've always felt that my employers were my family; they never made me feel that I was just an employee. Good treatment helps you succeed. I would never have stayed at Bank Audi had the treatment not been excellent. I also felt that I was going to get there, *i.e.*, to the top. I came to the Verdun branch a year and a half ago and I've done a lot of things for the bank in that short period. No one initially expected that of me. Our branch is the best in credit exchange, and the third in deposits.”

When questioned as to the effects of the war on her professional and personal life, Yunis responded that “the war did not affect my plans, it just delayed everything. Seventeen years of war delayed us a lot, especially since we never expected it to last that long. Each year we thought it was over, yet it never ended when we expected it to. Now we are all running to catch up with the lost years. There are a lot of things we could do for the banking sector had there not been war. Yet now, step-by-step, we are catching up. However, during the war we never failed to serve all our clients. I never left the bank and never left Lebanon except on brief vacations. They opened a branch of Bank Audi in France and asked me to work there, but I refused. I told them I'll never leave Lebanon.

“The war affected my profession in the sense that we weren't up-to-date and progressing like all the other countries of the world. Now we are trying to measure up to

European and American progress, especially in the banking sector. During these last five years we have been working a lot, holding seminars and introducing our employees to new advanced technological changes. We are trying to make up for all the missing years.”

Yunis commented that women dealt with the war experience better than men. “Women are more patient. They dealt with the war calmly and could hold back their fears and anxieties better than men. Many women’s movements arose during the war and they had an active role because they worked hard and protested loudly. Women were not more active than men during the war, but they appeared on the scene at that time and protested. I don’t know, though, if that was due to the war or if it was merely due to the rise of a feminist movement. Women did not actually fight on the battle fields and enroll in the militias and political parties, yet they had an active role. They brought up the youth in the best possible ways (given the circumstances) and encouraged their male partners to go on. Instead of packing up and leaving, they stood by their families. “

When asked if women were able to access and exercise more power during the war than before or after it, Yunis stated that the issue of women achieving power is more significant now in the post-war period than it was during the hostilities. “Maybe women had more power during the war, but since the end of the war we see a very interesting new phenomenon: nowadays, no woman wants to sit in the house after graduation! After the war, women have realized that work is important and a career, necessary. Poverty or economic need provided a big push for many women to work, yet from my experience and from what I see, all young women want to work after graduating, no matter how wealthy they may be. At the bank, we accept 65 students each year from A.U.B. to work in the money and banking sector. Most of these young students are women. Women these days, in my opinion, want to be financially independent and no longer want to rely upon husband or family. So, I feel that women made gains after the war. Approximately 60 percent of the banking sector’s personnel are women; wherever you go today in Lebanon, you quickly notice that women are working in all sectors. In my bank we are mostly females, and this is true of all Bank Audi’s branches. As employees, women

“I believe that the country is improving economically. Everything in this country is improving.”

are more persevering; they are very loyal and capable.”

Wafa Yunis would give the following advice to women in other war-torn countries: “I would tell them to be patient and never leave their homeland. It is very important to stand by your own country. We Lebanese survived the war and always had hope that the war would end tomorrow, or next week, or next year. Hope is what keeps people going. And again, one must never leave one’s country, for it is during the war that your country needs you the most. I had a lot of offers to leave Lebanon, yet I never did. I always advised other people not to leave, because in the West you become just another number among many other numbers. You are only appreciated in your own country. Wars always end and in my opinion, we have to “hang in there” until it ends, for everything bad or good has an ending.”

“But after the war ends is the hard part. After the ending, one has to pick up the pieces and work hard to get back to where one was before the war. Nothing comes easily and hard work is a must after 17 years of war! I would tell all these Bosnian, Rwandan and Somali women to strive and persevere in order to overcome the actual war and its after-effects.”

Wafa Yunis has an optimistic view of Lebanon’s future: “I believe that the country is improving economically. Everything in this country is improving. We in the banking sector are always working for the future, so of course we have plans for the year 2005. Women are gaining more and more with each passing year in all spheres; in my domain, women are becoming more and more powerful in the banking sector in general and in Bank Audi in particular. The young female generation has a rosy future to look forward to, especially in the banking sector.”



I Could Not Be as Much as Myself: A Woman and the War in Lebanon

Suad Joseph
Professor of Anthropology
University of California-Davis

Francine was a 28-year old single woman, living with her mother and unmarried siblings in a village not far from Beirut. A Greek Orthodox, she was one of seven children. After completing her high school degree, she had taught for three years in a local elementary school before deciding to change careers and work in a financial institution. I became acquainted with her in 1994, and saw her almost daily for a number of months during that autumn, and frequently again during a subsequent visit to Lebanon in 1995. I interviewed Francine in 1994 as part of a larger project on women and war in Lebanon. To convey her voice to the greatest extent possible, I have provided an excerpt from an interview, and then follow this with discussions and comments about women's reactions to the long war in Lebanon. (Comments appearing within brackets are the author's explanatory remarks. Comments in parentheses are transliterations of Arabic.)

Suad Joseph: What do you feel has been the specific impact of the war upon you?

Francine: Mostly, I got behind in my education. I wanted to specialize, but things turned around against my ambition. It feels like freezing. Even if I did something other than what I wanted to now, I could not reach [where I want]. I would be lost. I would not be as much as myself. I did not feel the impact of the war socially, because my family stayed together. There was no distance between us. We were always talking, taking care of each other.

I also feared depending on any person who might come forward [as a potential husband]. I didn't know how to make decisions about my future. The same thing happened to all the youths. I feared meeting a man who might have one appearance and a different reality. The war made me realize that I had to take my relationships seriously.

SJ: What impact do you think that the war had on women younger than 25 years of age?

F: These girls got lost. They became disorderly (*faw-dawiyi*). They had no value for things. They are wild (*tayshareen*). Some began to see life as just appearances, rather than life as beautiful or life as character (*shakhsiyyi*). The girl acted as she wanted, did only what she wanted, accepted no advice. She thought that this was the generation of the present and thought her parents were backwards. These girls lost a lot. They lived a life of no character. They didn't care about themselves. Even if they feared something, they gave it no importance. They wanted a sexual life more than a social life based on good principles of being ladies in society.

SJ: What impact do you think the war has had on women between 25 and 50 years of age?

F: I can't give you much information about them. After the war, they began feeling that, because they were so constrained during the war, many no longer cared about their children. They ruined their houses. Other women took their children in under them. So, we have two kinds of mothers: the mother who gathered her children under her wing and took care of them. These mothers who did their obligations towards their children grow in the eyes of their children. The other mothers got lost, they got even more lost after the end of the war, and now they regret that they left their traditions.

SJ: What impact do you think that the war has had on women who are now over 50 years of age?

F: Instead of having her house full, this woman started getting involved in politics like men. She feels that society belongs to her and that she is able to participate. Some women, though, collapsed and could not be ladies of society.

SJ: What impact do you think the war had on men

younger than 25 years of age now?

F: Big disorder! (*fowda*). Those who were supposed to have an education to enlighten them about good things started to be negative (*salabiyyeen*). In his emergence, the youth was given bad things. The war stopped these youth. If you spoke to a young man in a reasonable way, he would not be convinced, would not listen. These young men lost their education. The one whose parents paid and sweated over him got more lost than the street boy (*ibn ash-shaari*). They blamed the war for everything they did that went wrong. They smoked, did drugs, stole. The good men were pulled in by the bad men.

SJ: What impact do you think the war had on men who are now between the ages of 25 and 50?

F: This is the big impact of the war. This man could not guarantee his future. His education stopped, his work stopped; he was frozen. His ambition was destroyed. They could not buy land, or build, or furnish a house. They could not make plans. They could not establish a family. This man started feeling he couldn't do anything. Even where there are jobs, he says "there is no job." If he wanted a family life, if he wanted to ask for a girl's hand, he started to be afraid of the good girls because he had seen so much. We are Eastern people. If a girl is raised in a good character, the good character was lost in the midst of the bad character. So, if a man tries for something once, twice, three times, he gives up. He no longer believes. He only wants to be free in himself. So the family broke down and family members separated.

SJ: What impact do you think that the war had on men over 50 years of age?

F: Most of these men who were affected were those who had a family. Especially the poor man — this man feared losing his family more than the man with money. This man came to have psychological problems. He is lost; he stays out of things even if they affect his own house.

SJ: Are women able to do things now that they did not do before the war?

F: Yes. There is a big difference in education and work.

Before there was little chance to work. Now, there is a lot of demand on our lives, and the woman is important. She works like any man. She is educated more than before. There is more awareness, more development, more participation of women. Women have done well; the woman is now at the level of the man.

SJ: How are women's relationships different with their husbands now as a result of the war?

F: Those who used to be calm and good, now if a little thing happens, it will create problems. They become angry quickly, become sexually distant, have no patience for each other. They "role-play" from the outside, but on the inside, they are distant. There is *nufur* (alienation, aversion). Men ran away from their homes; if a man has problems at home, he runs away from them. If a woman wants something, this easily creates a problem.

SJ: How are women's relationships with their children different as a result of the war?

F: There are two kinds of faces: The one fears for her children and protects her children to preserve the Lebanese family. She will sacrifice anything. The other women live only for themselves. They don't care if their son is on drugs or in a political party. This woman thinks only of herself, her desires, her life, even at the expense of others. She wants her life only.

SJ: How are women's relationships with their fathers different as a result of the war?

F: In Lebanon, the girl does not relate with her father; she does not express things to her father. Her freedom of expression is with her mother. Even if a daughter is speaking truth to her father, most fathers want their word to be enacted, even if it is at the expense of the daughter. The daughter has less value than the son. Even if the son is wrong and the daughter is right, they will believe that the son is right. For this reason, many daughters don't have much of a relationship with their fathers. The war increased this. The problem goes back to the character of the fathers. Some fathers treat children equally. Some fathers favor their daughters because daughters need more affection than boys. They need protection. The

father does this so as not to lose his daughter because a lot of things pull the daughter away from the father in Lebanon. So, some fathers take their daughters to be their friends so as not to lose them.

SJ: How are women's relationships with their mothers different as a result of the war?

F: The daughter wants to assert her character over her mother. She feels she understands more than the mother, especially if the mother is much older than her and if the period she lived in is very different than the daughter's period of time. If the daughter is educated, she won't accept her mother's word. If the mother tries to explain to the daughter something for her own good, the daughter won't accept unless she experiences it herself. If a mother wants to help her daughter to live in society, she will tire herself a lot. The war created a distance between daughters and mothers. There is no understanding between mothers and daughters now. The mother has experience in life, but she is rejected by her daughter.

SJ: How are women's relationships with their brothers different as a result of the war?

F: The brother is now more focused on himself than on his sister. It varies between those with lots of freedom and those without. Before the war, the brother had a lot of responsibility for his sister, now he thinks his sister is just like any other girl. He no longer feels for her. He is not responsible for her. If the brother gets married now, he has more concern for his wife than for his sister. He no longer has respect for his sister's word. He silences her. He gives no value to her presence, her education, or her culture. If the family used to feel for each other, love each other, a brother would not eat before feeding his sister. Now the brother says the piece of bread is not to be divided between him and his sister, but to be eaten by him alone — all of it. He is greedy. Some have respect for their sisters. There is equality between them, love, and they protect each other.

SJ: How are women's relationships with their sisters different as a result of the war?

F: It depends on the specific personalities. We are still in

the same situation of love, confidence, and caring in our family. I don't know about others. In our family, if a sister wants to do something, she won't do anything unless she asks her sister. We eat together, see each other. If we don't see each other every day, it is as if we have seen no one.

SJ: How are a girl's experiences in school different as a result of the war?

F: The disorder (*fowda*) affected the whole family and society, even in school. The child answers back to the teacher now. There is no character, even in relation to their obligations. There is no respect between students. Boys and girls would rather talk socially than study. They don't take studying seriously, so they fail even more.

SJ: Is the Lebanese Government acting differently towards women as a result of the war?

F: The disorder happened because the state broke. The state is focusing on things that are not important. The state now has nothing to offer the woman or child. The state isn't giving the woman her rights. The state is everything; if it doesn't offer education for a woman, there is a problem. Without the support of the state, the woman cannot do anything.

SJ: Do women have more freedoms now, after the war?

F: The woman has big freedoms now — freedom of opinion, freedom of expression; freedom to do whatever she likes, in her work, in her home. The biggest freedom is in her home. The woman takes life just like that, '*al-ghafli* (haphazardly), as if a person comes to this life only to please herself and leave. The woman now forgets her responsibilities, even if they are more important than her personal things. She puts them to one side so that she can live happily. This freedom made more problems for women. The social freedom is different from work freedom. The social freedom is that the woman takes her boyfriend, and even gets pregnant while single and then marries. She takes life as natural. Some think that this is an advance. They forget their character and even forget themselves.

SJ: Do women work at different jobs since the war?

F: Yes, of course. We are in a period of education and culture. A woman is more educated now, she carries more responsibilities at work, and at a higher level. There is more opening for work for women now.

SJ: Should there be more women in government?

F: I see that the woman is successful in lots of things. So, a woman can join the government. A woman is learning like a man, she holds responsibilities like a man. So why should she not be head of state or a member of parliament? But here in Lebanon, they say a woman cannot exert her presence like a man in politics. They say that politics is only for men. I think that a woman can be head of the state.

SJ: Should women serve in the military?

F: Women in the military is a good idea. This would create a national feeling among women. It would get the woman prepared for her responsibility towards her country. The woman has less courage for battle, though. Some women did do battle in the war, but only a small percent. I accept for a woman to fight in a war, but I have not found them to be as courageous as men in fighting. It is good for a woman to fear for her country like she fears for her children. Her country is her right. It belongs to her like it belongs to the man — Lebanon, the nation, the family.

SJ: Should women serve as police?

F: I don't like it for myself. I don't know much about it. It is still in the beginning; this is the first year we see women as police. We don't have much of an idea about it yet. This is a service to the country, it is playing a role for the system, for the country. It is good that a woman does this, but I don't like it for myself. But I do like military service, like [the position of] inspector. It is the public aspect of the traffic police that I don't like, working in the streets.

SJ: How have women's responsibilities changed since the war?

F: A woman has no feelings for responsibility. She is dis-

tant from the family. She is more focused on herself than on her family and husband. This creates problems and divorces. There are divisions in society; there is a lack of responsibility on women's part.

Interpretation and Commentary

Francine expressed views that were frequently reiterated by other women and men I interviewed as part of this research project. While there were a diversity of views expressed by respondents to each question, Francine's opinions were commonly held, particularly among the women I interviewed in this village. A striking paradox emerges from Francine's responses. On the one hand, she experiences greater freedom for women, greater opportunities at home, at work, and in society. She supports women's greater economic and political participation, even to the extent of women's active participation in the military. She sees that many women are succeeding in all arenas of life. Yet, she feels that women, in general, have not lived up to the responsibilities entailed by these new freedoms. Women, in her view, are now more concerned with themselves and the satisfaction of their own personal pleasures. As a result, families in general, and children in particular, have suffered. Francine does not have much kinder words for men. Men have failed their families, their wives, their sisters, their daughters. Much of these failures she attributes to the after-effects of the war. Yet, in her own world, Francine feels safe, still woven into the fabric of her caring family.

These paradoxes were repeatedly voiced in the interviews I carried out in 1994 and 1995. Most women felt themselves cared for in their own, immediate families, and felt that their own families had remained intact. Yet they felt that family life in general had deteriorated in Lebanon and that men and women were failing to fulfill their familial and social responsibilities. Despite this, many saw the aftermath of the war as a time of great opportunities and yearned for a political leadership to support the basic values of Lebanese family and social life while continuing to offer new opportunities and rights for women.

Excerpts from the Poetry and Prose of Lebanese Women

Selected, translated and introduced by
Dr. Mona Takieddine Amyuni,
Associate Professor of Humanities
American University of Beirut

Andree Chedid has been widely recognized as one of the best francophone writers of Lebanese origin in the world. In addition to writing several collections of poetry, Chedid is also the author of two novels set in war-torn Lebanon. The poems translated below illustrate both compassion and a consummate art achieved through a great economy of means, an arresting imagery and powerful contrasts. Chedid's poetry presents compelling images of the war's impact on Beirut and its citizens.

Black Winds

In prolific language
men lay waste the land

Tear it up with gunfire.
crash it with terror
bury it under the dead

In the spiral of ages
in the black winds of hatred
love is too light.

Ceremonial of Violence (1976),
A collection of poems in French

Of the Same Bed

He shot down the child

Nobody held back his arm
Nobody checked his gun
No arm held tight his waist
No signal checked him

He shot down the child

In spite of eyes white with terror
In spite of a mouth tattered by fear

Ceremonial of Violence

Born in 1935 in the mountainous Shouf district of Lebanon, **Nadia Tueni** died prematurely in 1983, leaving behind her several important collections of poetry in French. She is currently read in several universities throughout the world, particularly in francophone countries. Highly stylized and dramatic, her poems have often been adapted for the stage.

Women of My Country

Women of my Country
The same light hardens your bodies,
The same shade softens them,
Gently elegiac your lips and
A goldsmith has chiseled your eyes.

You,
Who pacify the mountain,

Who make man believe in his virility,
And the ashes in their fertility,
The landscape in its permanence.
Women of my Country
You retrieve the eternal
Out of sheer chaos.

Lebanon: Twenty Poems for One Love (1979)
A collection of poems in French

The next poem speaks of Tueni's deep love for her homeland, indeed, of her total identification with it. Here, we find an ironic revelation: Lebanon's cultural differences are its richness, but also its curse. Only great poetry can render this tragic irony with such simplicity.

I soften my voice and listen
to the roars of my country,
to speak of the pain
for having planted neither love nor hatred,
for having mixed up roots
and confused mountain with sea.
I soften my voice to sharpen
the thunder's blades,
to draw strength from the tribe
and sleep between the rock's shoulders.
I inhabit the silence
to listen to my people's pulse,
and say,
"If one should die, it would be for one drop of
blood,
single and
different."

Sentimental Archives of a War in Lebanon (1982)
A collection of poems in French

In this last selection from Tueni's poetry, we find an echo of Christ's washing of his disciples' feet, a gesture of tenderness, generosity and humility which acquires a weary ironic tone in the context of war-time Lebanon:

Land of too many people,
Land of nobody,
I offer you the dead cities of your thoughts,
The tattered dusks of unknown metals
And I
Shall sponge off
Time's own sweat.

Sentimental Archives of a War in Lebanon (1982)



The following excerpt by Renee Hayek illustrates today's *avant-garde* writing in Lebanon. An increasing number of women are writing in the post-war period, in a variety of genres, such as autobiography, the short story, novels, and poetry. Renee Hayek received First Prize for short fiction at the Annual Exhibition of the Arabic Book in Beirut in 1994. Her short stories convey a typical urban sensibility imbued with boredom, loneliness and a mechanical way of life .

What will she do but wake up, as she does every morning? She dresses up. She goes to work, where she does not drink coffee with her colleagues. She does not like the bitter taste of coffee. She does not smoke. She works all day, then goes back home. She eats, changes her clothes and watches TV. Later, she goes to sleep and dreams of him, laughing and joking. He suddenly invaded her life, her world. He came in and made her happy by not asking for her permission. He goes far away, then comes back every day and asks her whether he bores her. He makes her laugh so much that her tears run down her face. She tells him: "You're mad!"

from *Portraits for Forgetfulness*, 1994

Special Report by Maha Ayyoub Independent Researcher

In 1994, a round-table discussion was held with leading Palestinian women activists in Lebanon to discuss current pressing development issues confronting the Palestinians in Lebanon, particularly women. Since the beginning of this century, political issues have been at the center of Palestinian communal life. This is especially true now, as the neglect of social, educational, medical and economic services for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon approaches a crisis point. For Palestinian women, this struggle has become increasingly frustrating and exhausting. In order to understand what these women have to cope with, one needs to briefly review the history of their situation.

Before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the existence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was a source of economic sustenance and a socio-political reference point for the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon. Though strangers in a strange land, the Palestinians did not live in a state of constant anxiety and uncertainty, as they do today. After the PLO infrastructure in Lebanon was dismantled in 1982, many Palestinians sank into poverty and despair, a bleak situation which was only exacerbated by the Camp Wars of the mid-1980s. During this dark period, the contributions of Palestinian women to their society became even more important and crucial (1).

The conditions that Palestinian women have faced through all the invasions, deaths, deportations and imprisonments have distinguished her as the main provider of her family. She is not only the refugee, but also the mother, the wife, the daughter, the sister, the bread-winner, the teacher and the fighter. She proved her awareness, ability and willingness to overcome and persevere through grave difficulties. She confidently entered the work-place, shouldering all the burdens facing her and her people in the Lebanese society. When the Palestinian Women's League (PWL) was founded, the Palestinian woman's chief concern was not simply equality with men, but rather, the right to work, to be educated, to be provided with the basic necessities of life — clean water, adequate shelter, food and medical services — for all Palestinian refugees. Palestinian women have fought for their human and national rights first and foremost, and for their rights as women only secondarily. They have expressed their deep concern for their society by initiating educational and vocational training programs, income-generating projects, child-care services, and providing economic and emotional support to widows and orphans of men killed in combat.

The dire problems facing Palestinian women in Lebanon today cannot be considered as separate from the problems facing the Palestinian people as a whole. Also, many of the difficulties

currently confronting Lebanese women are affecting Palestinian women as well. Women of both national groups are deprived of civil and personal rights, because both are subject to the same personal status codes, whether Muslim or Christian.

We must acknowledge that social, economic and political conditions in the post-war period in Lebanon are more complicated and difficult than they were before the war. All social movements, not only the women's movement, are confronting difficulties. The key reason for this is the dire economic situation in present-day Lebanon. Today, Palestinians in Lebanon, women as well as men, are primarily concerned with finding food, shelter, health care and education. Their main worry is the issue of their residency in a country that can barely provide for the basic needs of its own people, let alone a large refugee population.

Among Palestinian women, a group experiencing especially difficult hardships at present is the war widows. A recent study of Palestinian war widows in the Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut sheds light on a much larger picture. Widows in general, and young widows in particular, suffered considerably during the war. They exhibited more severe anxiety symptoms than others, felt sick, tired, and had sleeping problems. The only thing they could do to keep their minds off of their troubles was to work, but work is increasingly difficult to find for any Palestinian in Lebanon, male or female.

Out of 247 widows in Bourj al-Barajneh, 80 percent have had no schooling at all, 9 percent have been to school for up to six years, 9 percent have had more than six years of schooling, and only 2 percent have had more than 10 years of schooling. In other words, 89 percent of the widows surveyed in this one refugee camp are functionally illiterate.

In relation to social problems, a significant number of these widows related that they had difficulties in disciplining young male members of their families. The incidence of psychological problems among young males, primarily resulting from the war as well as a lack of training and opportunities, and a concomitant lack of self-esteem, can complicate and worsen already difficult family relations, thus adding even more stress to the lives of widows who are serving as their communities' primary sources of support, guidance and education. The problems confronting the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon are indeed immense and grave, and it is the Palestinian woman who is bearing the brunt of these problems. Given the discouraging and uncertain political status of the Palestinian refugee community in Lebanon, women's burdens are likely to increase, rather than decrease, in the coming years.

(1) Rosemary Sayigh (1994). *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon*. London: Zed Books.

Young Women in Post-War Lebanon

Interviews conducted by Ghena Ismail

Since the end of the Lebanese war in 1990, many books and articles have been published by scholars and journalists explaining the roots and repercussions of the war. The causes of war are still not clear to most people, not even the most sophisticated and well-educated. Obviously, they cannot be any clearer to individuals whose births coincided with the beginning of the war. Young women born during the period 1974-1976, who first opened their eyes to see their country in ruins, could not comprehend what the real cause of the war was; they did not have any active role in it. Their only role was that of recipients of the negative consequences of the war. In order to understand how war influenced these young women's views, attitudes, and behaviors, I carried out interviews with ten female university graduates and students in various branches of the following universities: Lebanese American University, American University of Beirut, Lebanese University, and Beirut Arab University.

Reema, born in 1974, is a Sunni Muslim Palestinian girl who has just finished a B.A. in Political Science at A.U.B. For the last two years of her education, Reema has received financial aid from the university. Reema's family consists of four children, two girls and two boys, of whom she is the eldest. Concerning war's influence on her views of national and confessional identity, Reema says that her national identity is a problem with or without a war. However, the situation was, of course, worse during the war. As a group, Palestinians were persecuted, and hence had to hide their national identity. Regarding her perception of Lebanon's role in the region and in the world, she carelessly shrugs her shoulders and says, "they say it's going to replace Hong Kong as the center of trade, but I don't care."

With respect to women's reactions to war, Reema believes that women's responses to the crisis took place mainly in their homes. Men, on the other hand, either participated in the war or were busy finding the economic means to enable their families to survive. As for sustaining Lebanese society, Reema thinks that neither men nor women played a significant role. "Each was more concerned about the members of his or her own family." Reema estimates that many women must have abandoned their jobs during the war because they were primarily concerned with protecting their families. "Now that the war is over and there is more safety, women are able to put their children in day-care centers, and hence, are going back to work."

If Reema could sit with young girls from Somalia, Chechenia or the former Yugoslavia, she would advise them to be trained in self-defense because women, according to Reema, are pri-

mary victims of violence. She would also encourage women to participate in decision-making and in the rehabilitation of their nations after war. "Women's participation can be very beneficial, since I view women as less obsessed with power than men. Moreover, being more sensitive to their family's needs, they can consider the nation's needs better than a man."

As for the obstacles Reema faces as a woman, she says that she has a double problem since she is a Palestinian woman. Reema's greatest satisfaction in her field would be to feel that she is performing well and that she is not marginal. "Accomplishing things for women would definitely satisfy me a lot." Her hope for Lebanese society focuses on awareness campaigns concerning various issues, and the best she can hope for the Lebanese women is that they start viewing themselves, and being viewed by others, as human beings. Finally, Reema does not foresee that the situation in Lebanon will be much better in ten years.

Yasmine, born in 1976, is a Sunni Muslim Lebanese girl who has just finished her first year of business at Beirut Arab University. Her family consists of six children, of whom she is the fifth. During the war, her father worked in Kuwait in order to support their family.

Yasmine asserts that war had a great influence on her. "First of all, during the war I lost my house, as did many people. Second, my sister was born retarded due to the shock my mother received when the house was bombarded during her pregnancy. Third, our financial status deteriorated. Fourth, people in the West no longer respect me and they view me as a "terrorist". Due to all of this, I no longer feel secure and I feel rather disappointed since I had to give up many dreams because of our financial difficulties." Yasmine doesn't deny that during the war she sympathized most with the Lebanese belonging to her sect. However, she asserts that she views herself mainly as a Lebanese. Concerning the war's influence on her views of Lebanon's regional and international role, Yasmine felt that Lebanon was weak and didn't know how to defend itself. "What we as Lebanese did to ourselves and to our country was very backward and shocking!"

Yasmine does not think that women's reactions or roles during the war were necessarily different from those of men. "Many women entered political parties and tried to defend their communities. In fact, women and men played an equally significant role during the war." As for the war's overall influence on women, Yasmine believes it was positive as it encouraged women to become stronger and more enlightened about their capacities and their rights.

If Yasmine were to give advice to young girls from Somalia, the former Yugoslavia or Chechenia, she would advise them to be strong and not to be shaken by war, for war is only a temporary state. The biggest challenge Yasmine faces as a girl are the traditions of her society, which try to control her whenever she wants to do anything. However, she asserts that this doesn't weaken her. "I can and should always defy the unfair rules." Yasmine says that the way she sees herself in ten years depends on her country. If it improves, she would see herself in a very good position in her field of work. As for the future of Lebanese society, she hopes that discrimination based on gender will be completely eliminated. However, Yasmine doesn't expect her hopes to be realized since she doesn't trust the intentions of the people in power.

Mona, born in 1976, is Greek Orthodox Lebanese girl whose family consists of one boy and two girls, of whom she is the youngest. She is studying education at L.A.U. with the help of financial aid. Mona believes that war certainly influenced her parents' behavior towards her. "They were very protective; they didn't want us to go out and preferred that our friends visited us in our homes." Mona denies that the war had any significant influence on her national and confessional identity. However, she says that when she went to East Beirut, her friends were very surprised that she was able to live in West Beirut among the Muslims. As for Lebanon's regional role, Mona believes that it has almost no role. "The great powers have been able to abuse Lebanon through creating rifts between people and encouraging sectarianism."

Mona thinks that women's reactions to war were different from those of men. "My mother, unlike my father, used to get so afraid, that after the war she had depression three times." In regard to women's roles, Mona says that their roles during war were confined mainly to their homes. "It is men who played the leading role during the war, for it is they who resisted, fought and worked for the country." The words of advice Mona would give to young girls from Somalia, Chechenia, or the former Yugoslavia are that they should be strong and not let the war affect their education. "Even if they can't go to school, teachers should still gather the students anywhere and teach them." The biggest challenge Mona faces as a girl is overcoming the way society views her, especially when she loves. Her hope for the Lebanese society is that people become more loving towards one another and to get rid of their sectarian mentality.

Lina, born in 1973, is a Greek Orthodox Lebanese girl. She earned a B.A. in Business Administration from A.U.B. last year. Since then, she worked in a company which she recently left. Her family consists of three children, two boys and one girl; she is the middle child. As for the war's influence on her life, Lina

says that her parents were certainly over-protective. She went nowhere except to school, and up until today, she hasn't seen any part of Lebanon except Beirut. Regarding her national identity, it wasn't the least bit affected by war. She has always been very patriotic. Being a Christian living in West Beirut was not a problem for Lina. "I never felt afraid. As a family, we interacted with people from different sects and I never felt that we were threatened." Concerning the war's influence on Lebanon's regional and international role, Lina says, "I always felt that Lebanon had no real role. For every decision it makes, it has to take permission from 'outside', not only from one country, but from many countries."

Lina believes that women and men played an equally important role in sustaining Lebanese society during the war years. "As for me, both of my parents worked at A.U.B. to improve our living conditions and ensure our education in the best university in Lebanon." As for the war's influence on women's role, Lina says "Women have definitely learned to depend on themselves more due to the loss of their husbands or due to the great inflation in prices which has made men incapable of supporting his family alone. However, at work, men still take the more important positions and are paid more than women for the same job. In the government, we're still not seeing many women."

If Lina could sit with young girls from Somalia, Chechenia, or the former Yugoslavia, she would advise them to fight for what they want and inform the world about their problems so that they can receive some sort of help.

The biggest challenges Lina faces as a girl is to be able to behave the way she likes regardless of what society might think of her. "I want to be able to decide what's convenient for myself." When I asked Lina where she sees herself in ten years, she laughed, saying, "I can't even say where I will be tomorrow. In general, I imagine that I will still be in Lebanon, for I don't like to leave Lebanon. I hope to be in an important position, having a nice family with at least three children." Lina's hope for the future of Lebanese society is that everything improves, people learn to care more for one another, and that they develop a stronger sense of belonging to their country instead of having everyone care only about his/her family or sect. Also, Lina hopes that women continue their struggle towards liberation. Finally, Lina affirms that "in year 2005 women will certainly have a greater influence."

Wafaa, born in 1974, is a Sunni Muslim Jordanian girl. She is repeating the first year of law at Beirut Arab University. Her family consists of four female children, of whom she is the eldest. Wafaa left Lebanon with her family for Oman in 1979. They came back three years ago. Although Wafaa didn't live the war, she believes that women's behavior during the war was

more responsible than that of men, and that women played a more important role in sustaining Lebanese society. Regarding the war's influence on women's role, Wafaa thinks that it was positive. "In addition to the fact that the number of working women increased during the war due to dire financial need, the Lebanese woman in general became more mature than other women. This is because she had to deal with difficult circumstances which hardened her, unlike women who live abroad. We lived a luxurious life in which we didn't have to think or worry about anything. However, these changes didn't affect the power structure of the Lebanese society. In the family, it is still the man who makes the final decision. In work and in the government, the man is still more influential."

The biggest challenge Wafaa faces as a woman is to prove that women can be better than men and make their own decisions. After ten years, Wafaa sees herself being responsible for a family, having two children and still fighting to reach her goals. She adds, though, that if she found that her family needed her, she might quit her work. As for her hopes for Lebanese society, she says, "I hope that classes and class struggle are abolished, along with sectarianism. As for women, I hope that we'll have more female parliamentarians and that women in turn will have a greater influence." In ten years, she believes that the situation will definitely be better for the Lebanese women because more and more women are getting educated.

Minerva, born in 1975, is a Shi'ite Muslim Lebanese girl. She has finished the first year of interior design at the Lebanese University. Her family consists of six children, three boys and three girls, of whom she is the third. As for the war's influence on her views of Lebanon's role, Minerva feels that Lebanon was one of the weakest countries; however, this doesn't affect the way she views herself as a Lebanese.

Minerva believes that men definitely faced more difficulties during the war, since they were more concerned about defending their country. As regards the war's influence on women's role, Minerva thinks it was positive. "The man learned to depend more on his wife, as he needed her help. Suddenly, women became entrusted with more tasks within their families and had to make more decisions on their own." However, Minerva doesn't think that this has brought about a significant change in the power structure of the Lebanese society. "Man is still the decisive power in the family. In work and in government as well, he is certainly more dominant."

If Minerva had the chance to sit with young women from Somalia, Chechenia or the former Yugoslavia, she would advise them to hold on to their countries and never think of leaving them, no matter what happens. Minerva's biggest challenge is to reach an important position in the field of interior design. In ten years, Minerva sees herself continuing her education,

working and happily married but without children "I don't want to have children before I assert myself in society. By the time I'm ready, I will not have more than two children." Regarding her hopes for Lebanese society she says, "I hope that sectarian discrimination shall be eliminated so that we'll have a more united country." As for the Lebanese women, Minerva hopes that they continue their struggle to assert themselves in society and reach the most important positions. In the year 2005, Minerva believes that the situation might be better, but she doesn't think that by then women will have accomplished all that they look forward to. "There will certainly be more women in the government, but the number of women will still not be equal to that of men."

Hala is a Sunni Muslim Palestinian girl. Her family consists of five children, three girls and two boys, of whom she is the second. Hala has finished the first year of Business in L.A.U. She was born in Abu-Dhabi, and has been living in Lebanon for only four years.

In Abu-Dhabi, Hala never cared about people's sects. "I'm a Sunni; however, I never was aware of the differences between Sunni and Shi'a before I came to Lebanon." As for the war's influence on Lebanon's role, Hala feels that Lebanon was a toy in the hands of foreign countries, and that war has caused a decrease in Lebanon's tourist activity. Hala believes that women's role, although limited within their families, was more important in sustaining the Lebanese society. "Although men fought during the war, they were not fighting as Lebanese. Most of them were fighting as members of a certain political party or religious group." As for the war's influence on women's role, Hala views it as positive. "During the war, many women had to work due to either the loss of their husbands or the pressing financial need." Concerning the power structure of the Lebanese society, Hala doesn't think it has changed. "From the families I know, the woman is still man's follower. She is expected to know how to please her husband in order to avoid problems."

The biggest challenge Hala faces in her life right now is to be able to enjoy her youth in spite of her father's restrictions. "I want to live my youth according to my own principles. I don't want to act like an old person from now until I'm old. In the future, when I love someone I want to be able to go out with him without feeling afraid."

In ten years, Hala hopes that she'll succeed in co-ordinating between her work and her family, be married to a man she loves, have children and be living a luxurious life in a civilized society. "These are my hopes, but I don't like to be very optimistic about them so as not to be disappointed later." Regarding her future hopes for Lebanese society, Hala wants Lebanon to become more advanced and to overcome many of

the misconceptions it has, especially those related to women and sectarianism. Also, she wants women to have more rights, and thus, a greater role. "In the year 2005, I definitely see the woman playing a more important role than she does now. After all, no society can progress with half of its members paralyzed. Moreover, the coming generation is certainly more educated and enlightened."

Najwa, born in 1974, is a Druze Lebanese. Her family consists of three girls, of whom she is the second. She has just finished her second year of Business at L.A.U. and she works at the college in order to have financial aid. Najwa left Lebanon with her family when Israel invaded in 1982. They stayed in Nigeria until 1987; hence, they lived the war in 1989, during the "war

"Now, the girl gives priority to educating herself."

of liberation" led by General Aoun.

Najwa asserts that, during that war, the sect meant nothing to her. "I cared the most for the people who were suffering most, regardless of their sect. During the war of liberation, my heart was with the people of Beirut." As for women's reaction during the war, Najwa explains, "from what I saw, the man was stronger. While the women were screaming, the men went out to see what was going on." She laughs and adds, "But I liked to go out." In respect to women's role, Najwa says, "I wasn't here for most of the war period, but I don't feel that women did anything." As for the war's influence on women's role, Najwa thinks it was positive. "More women started to work, especially those whose husbands had died. Also, you no longer feel that girls are as eager to get married as they were in the past. Now, the girl gives priority to educating herself." Najwa doesn't know whether the power structure within the family has been altered as a result of war; however, she asserts that, "I don't think that the issue is an issue of power. In my family, for example, although the final decision is my father's, my mother always gives her opinion. However, she refrains from allowing us to do anything if my father doesn't approve of it. She prefers that he bears the responsibility. Yet, in other families I know, the mother doesn't even give her opinion. The decision is entirely the father's. I imagine that this was the state before and after war."

Najwa's biggest challenge as a girl is to be able to prove her-

self through her career. "Here, I get really annoyed by the inferior way the girl is looked upon, and hence I have made up my mind to go for a Master's degree." Najwa's greatest satisfaction in the future will be her feeling of success in her work and the fact she is helping her husband.

Najwa sees herself in ten years as having an important position in the field of her specialty, happily married and a mother of four children. As for her hopes for the Lebanese society and the Lebanese women, Najwa hopes that women will have a more effective role instead of only talking and chanting slogans. However, I don't like to see the woman neglecting her family, for the family is very important. As for Najwa's expectations for women's situation in the year 2005, she says, "definitely, women will have progressed. First of all, we have become more open-minded. Second, the new generation is not blindly obeying their parents; it is rather obvious that the parent's authority has diminished. The new generation should grab this opportunity to correct some of the misconceptions of their elders. However, the youths shouldn't forget about morality. Many of them are doing so, and this is something that has to be dealt with."

Sana, born in 1975, is a displaced Shi'ite Muslim Lebanese who has finished her second year of Communication Arts at L.A.U. and works in the college to receive financial aid. Her family consists of seven children, four elder girls and three younger boys.

Sana's family has been displaced for nineteen years. Before the war, they used to live on Arax St. in East Beirut; then they came and took over an empty house in El-Sanayea. "After the war was over, five years ago, the land lord made us move from the 1st floor to the 2nd floor. Nevertheless, we're not going to move out. How can we leave when our house on Arax St. is still taken over by a different family?!" Sana doesn't feel that the experience of displacement has affected her or made her feel afraid or insecure. "We're not the only people who were living in other people's houses during the war. Many other people did the same thing. This was very normal during the war." As for the war's influence on Sana, it was great. "I feel afraid of staying at home alone. I even feel afraid to stay at work alone. All the time, I feel that something terrible might happen. My parents try to help me to stop being afraid, but fear has become part of my nature." As for the war's influence on Sana's identity she says, "I grew to hate any person who is biased in favor of his/her own sect." Concerning Lebanon's role, Sana feels it became weak, and that it now has no important role. "When a Lebanese travels abroad, people don't look at him highly. They see him as coming from a country of constant wars and problems"

As for women's reaction to war, it certainly was different from

that of men, according to Sana. "When we used to escape bombardments and stayed in the shelter, my mother didn't dare to leave the shelter at all, but my father went out. Also, my mother, sisters and I broke down more often than my father did. My father tried to calm us down. This was the case in most of the families I knew." In respect to women's role during the war, Sana says that it was mainly that of keeping their families together. Hence, fewer women went to work during the war."

If Sana were to sit with young girls from Somalia, Chechenia, or the former Yugoslavia, she would advise them not to give up or neglect their future. "Women have to continue their education and work and learn to depend more upon themselves." Sana never felt that being a girl was an obstacle in her way, "I act the way I like and I don't care about society. My parents

"Women became stronger and more mature"

always trusted me and gave me total freedom."

In ten years, Sana sees herself in an important position, married and the mother of four children. What she hopes for Lebanese society is to live in peace, never to have wars again, and that the Lebanese women progress in their movement and become more capable of making their own decisions. In the year 2005, Sana expects things to be better because right now she can see that there is "a trend toward improvement."

Rabab, born in 1974, is a Greek Orthodox Lebanese girl who has just received a B.A. in Communication Arts-Journalism from L.A.U. Rabab's family consists of five children, four girls and one boy, of whom she is the eldest.

Despite the war, Rabab always felt proud to be a Lebanese. "I never felt ashamed of my identity, maybe because I lived abroad and wasn't really aware of what was going on in Lebanon. I hadn't the least idea about the Lebanese people's sickening behavior. When I came back, I was shocked to find that most of the Lebanese workers steal and most of the community is accustomed to lying. Nevertheless, I don't blame the Lebanese entirely. After all, they have been through such an ordeal." Rabab affirms that the war has strengthened her patriotism. "I didn't become sectarian, perhaps because I didn't live here during the war. Yet, I can understand why the Lebanese people are sectarian."

As for women's role in sustaining the Lebanese society, Rabab thinks it was more important than that of men. "Men fought, but unfortunately they accomplished nothing. In contrast, women

did a great job by being responsible for bringing up the new generation." Concerning the war's influence on women's role, Rabab thinks it was positive. "Women became stronger and more mature. Being subject to the hardships of war, women were forced to consider matters which they hadn't considered before. Today, after the war is over, we find many women calling for their rights." Rabab does not think, however, that this change in women's role has led to an alteration in the social or political power structure. "We still have a very long way to go before we can have a non-patriarchal society."

Among the biggest obstacles Rabab faces as a woman is the viability of being financially independent. "Since I'm not allowed by my parents to travel abroad to work, I can't see how it would be possible for me to make money in this country." Another obstacle Rabab faces as a woman is the viability of living alone. She asserts, however, that "one day I'm going to live alone regardless of what my parents or society would think." In order for the Lebanese society to improve, Rabab hopes that all the laws concerning women will be changed and that civil laws will be improved and established to protect women's rights. "Civil laws are the only solution for the injustice done to women. Also, I hope that our society overcomes many of the misconceptions it has. We, as Lebanese, appear to be very civilized. Yet, I believe that we're still very backward in our thinking." In year 2005, Rabab expects an improvement on the legal level since she knows of many people who are working hard to improve women's status through legislation. However, she doesn't expect much on the social level. "Up until today, there are many women who are not even aware of their poor situation!"

As we all know, Lebanese women, except in a few cases, did not engage in actual combat during the war. The majority, though, believed that women's role was equally important to that of men if not more important. Some of the girls questioned the value of fighting and had to wonder if it did the country any good. As for war's influence on women's role, most of the young women believed that war has set a new course for women. They held more responsibilities, both inside and outside the home. It is in the hands of us young women to carry this progress a step further, to improve the status of women on the political, economical and social levels. This is yet to be seen.



A Statistical Profile

Reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive statistical data on any facet of post-war Lebanese society are very difficult to find. For many Lebanese, a statistical survey is not simply a fast and efficient way of obtaining objective data, it is also a highly charged political issue touching upon the very roots of the Lebanese civil war, most notably the questions of confessional power-sharing and Lebanon's cultural identity. The last nation-wide survey administered in Lebanon was conducted in the 1930s. The 1932 census data revealed that Christian sects constituted a narrow majority of the nascent Lebanese population. More than sixty years later, it is doubtful that these census findings still possess any validity. Although there are not yet any precise and official data to prove so, most demographic specialists assume that Christians are a minority of the current Lebanese population and that Muslims now constitute the majority. The Ta'if Accord, the agreement that helped bring about the cessation of armed conflict in Lebanon, implicitly recognized this demographic change by stipulating that Christians can no longer hold more parliamentary seats than Muslims (the previous ratio was 6:5 in favor of Lebanon's Christian sects; now the ratio is 1:1), and by its reapportioning of decision-making powers in the executive branch of the Lebanese Government.

Another reason for the lack of adequate, nation-wide statistical data in Lebanon is the fact that no institution, whether private or governmental, was able to conduct a nation-wide survey during the 16 years of war. The country simply lacked any centralized, legitimate form of authority capable of coordinating such a large and complex project. As the Lebanese Government begins the challenging process of rebuilding the nation, statistical data will be increasingly crucial for the formulation of policies and implementation of strategies to solve the interrelated economic, social, environmental and infrastructural problems that developed during the war. The administration of a new national survey should be one of the top priorities of the Second Lebanese Republic.

Two recent statistical surveys of the conditions confronting women in post-war Lebanon provide a partial, yet intriguing, view of contemporary Lebanese society. Both surveys were published in 1995 in preparation for the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing. The first, *at-taqreer al-watani ila al-mutamer al-'alami ar-raabi' lilmar'a* (The National Report to the Fourth International Conference on Women) was prepared by the Lebanese National Committee for Beijing under the able leadership of First Lady Mona al-Hrawi, while the second study, *al-mar'a al-lubnaanīyya fi muwajahat al-harb wal-'unf (1975-1990) wa at-tahaddiyat al-ijtima'īyya wal-iqtisadiyya* (The Lebanese Woman in the face of war and violence [1975-1990] and social and economic challenges), was prepared by Dr. Ali Faour of the Lebanese University for the Lebanese Family Planning Association.

As is to be expected in any society which has recently experienced war, women outnumber men in the Lebanese population. This is due not only to the deaths of many male combatants during the fighting, but also reflects the massive immigration which has emptied Lebanon of so many of its citizens, primarily men. Since the war began in 1975, approximately one million Lebanese have immigrated, a large number of them permanently. This imbalance in Lebanon's male-female ratio may lead to psychological and social problems for the many Lebanese women who will not find husbands in the future. In a society in which an adult woman's status is still determined first and foremost by whether she is married and has children, thousands of women without prospects for marriage will find themselves unable to fulfill traditional social role expectations. It remains to be seen whether they will actively attempt to change social expectations and redefine their own roles outside the contexts of marriage and motherhood.

With fathers deceased or working abroad, brothers and husbands either disabled or killed in the course of fighting, and sons too young to shoulder economic burdens, many Lebanese women found themselves entirely responsible for ensuring their families' continued subsistence.

Women's participation in the Lebanese work force clearly increased as a result of the war. With fathers deceased or working abroad, brothers and husbands either disabled or killed in the course of fighting, and sons too young to shoulder economic burdens, many Lebanese women found themselves entirely responsible for ensuring their families' continued subsistence. In 1970, women comprised only 19 percent of the Lebanese workforce; in 1995, 28 percent, *i.e.*, more than a quarter, of Lebanese workers are women. Whereas a large percentage of women workers before the war were involved in the agricultural sector, fully one-third of women workers in post-war Lebanon are involved in administrative work. In other words, more women workers are participating in economic sectors

more women workers are participating in economic sectors which offer opportunities for professional advancement and social and economic mobility, thus improving the chances that some of these women may reach decision-making ranks. The increasing social mobility of women is evident in statistics comparing women's representation in the liberal professions in 1980 and 1994. In 1980, only 5.8 percent of all lawyers in Lebanon were women. Fourteen years later, one-fourth of all Lebanese lawyers are women. In spite of obvious gains, however, the *Report* of the National Committee notes that women are virtually absent from crucial political and economic decision-making processes. Furthermore, women do not scale the administrative ladder as quickly as do their male counterparts. Changes in legislation and public education campaigns about women's worth and abilities may begin to rectify women's absence from centers of power.

Living in crowded, substandard, unhygienic housing conditions, and demoralized by their considerable social and economic losses, displaced persons experience more health problems than those who never lost their homes.

Despite the intensity and duration of the Lebanese conflict and its undeniably disruptive impact on most Lebanese families, female enrollment rates in primary and secondary education, as well as female literacy rates, actually increased during and after the war. Similarly, in spite of the degradation of sanitary conditions during the war years, and despite the constant dangers of death and injury from snipers, car bombs and shelling, the statistical data reveals that women's health conditions actually improved somewhat during the war. Limited data suggest that Lebanon's health and demographic indicators are comparable to middle income countries (1). For example, life expectancy at birth in Lebanon is 68 years, whereas in Syria life expectancy is 65 and in Egypt only 59. Lebanon's crude death rate in 1990 was 7.8, as compared to 10.8 for Egypt (2). Even during the violent war years, Lebanon's infant mortality rate was considerably lower than most other Arab countries. In 1992, Lebanon's infant mortality rate was 40 per thousand. In all other Arab countries except Kuwait, infant mortality rates for the same year exceeded 100 per thousand. Lebanon's most recent health statistics do not indicate disparities according to

recent health statistics do not indicate disparities according to gender; in most comparable developing countries, female mortality rates among infants and children under five are higher than the male mortality rate for the same age group. In Lebanon, however, according to a forth-coming UNICEF study (3), male mortality among infants and children exceeds that of female mortality, indicating a pattern similar to developed countries.

Some of the most detrimental health effects of the war can be found among the hundreds and thousands of Lebanese citizens displaced from their homes and villages of origin by the war. Living in crowded, substandard, unhygienic housing conditions, and demoralized by their considerable social and economic losses, displaced persons experience more health problems than those who never lost their homes. Considering that nearly one-fifth of the citizens of Lebanon were displaced in the course of the hostilities, this adds up to a large number of long-term health problems — both physical and emotional. Five years after the end of the war, only about one-fourth of all displaced people have been returned to their communities of origin.

Although additional in-depth quantitative and qualitative research is required, it appears that women fared much better than might have been expected during the war years. What might account for the surprising increases in female school enrollment and literacy, as well as the apparent slight improvement in women's overall health conditions? One hypothesis which immediately comes to mind is that the various local-level non-governmental organizations which assumed the tasks of health care delivery, social service provision, and educational programs in the absence of the central government were more responsive to the needs of women than the Lebanese Government had been. The fact that women played such prominent roles in Lebanese NGOs' social service planning and delivery during the war supports this hypothesis, but only comprehensive and objective research project can prove or disprove it.



Footnotes

- (1) *World Bank Staff Appraisal Report, 1994.*
 - (2) *Ibid.*
 - (3) *UNICEF Situation Analysis of Women and Children in Lebanon, (forthcoming).*
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Rise the Euphrates

By Carol Edgarian

New York: Random House, 1994

**Reviewed by Azadouhi Simonian Kalaidjian,
Department of English
Lebanese American University**

Rise the Euphrates is Carol Edgarian's first novel. It has been widely acclaimed and recognized in literary circles in the United States, thus establishing the author as a rising American writer. The novel tells the story of a nine-year-old Armenian girl, Garod, a survivor of the Armenian genocide during the First World War. Garod witnessed her mother throwing herself into the Euphrates river, swollen with corpses, rather than be raped and slaughtered by oncoming Turkish soldiers. The mother, Seta, wanted the daughter to throw herself into the river, too, but she lacked the courage to take her own young life. The instinct for survival keeps her alive and on the road, while her mother sinks to the bottom of the river, only her kerchief floating on the water a sign of her life and death.

For the young girl, Garod, this is such a traumatic, mind-numbing experience that she temporarily forgets her own name. She loses her identity, and is renamed "Casard" by the Customs Officer at Ellis Island in New York City, where she meets and later marries an Armenian refugee, settling into the immigrant community of Memorial, Connecticut. There, the young immigrant couple established themselves and had two daughters, one of whom they named Araxi, after the famous river Arax in Armenia.

Throughout her active years as a pillar of the local Armenian community, Casard refuses to talk about the genocide of her people, calling those events "indignities." Even at a Remembrance Day gathering many years later, she keeps her silence and tries to prevent her grandchildren from participating in the memorial activities. Casard carries within her a heavy burden of unexamined traumatic experiences, some of which she witnessed even before seeing her mother drown herself in the Euphrates. She had watched as her hometown, Harput, was devastated by Turkish soldiers, who had first sent all of the village's men on a voyage of no return. Among these men was Casard's brilliant father, a physician whom she had loved dearly. She had also seen the beautiful adolescent girls of her town, their heads removed from their bodies,

hung like lanterns from the municipal council building. Later, on the road to exile, she had watched helplessly as her baby brother died.

Rise the Euphrates is the story of four generations of women uprooted from their homeland. The narrator, 33-year-old Seta Loon, is a third-generation Armenian-American, whose father is an outsider to the Armenian Community in Connecticut. Caught between the generations, caught between her Armenian and American cultural heritages, Seta confronts an even fiercer division: the one within herself. Haunted by survivor's guilt, silence, and isolation, Seta longs to love, to speak, and to be free. "I saw myself as two halves: half Seta, half Loon. I saw my family as shivering fragments and my grandmother falling like a wingless bird" (page 7).

Seta Loon's life is dominated by the stories and memories of Casard, her embittered grandmother. At her baptism, Casard whispers her story and lost name into the infant's ear. "...as I grew, her story would rise from my belly, in my waking hours and in my dreams, and reveal images — a Turkish sword, a muddy river, a child's hand letting go — until at last, I would recover her name....At last I understood that the trouble in my belly was my grandmother calling out to me" (page 84). The memories return, as promised, in a dream: "On this night, the women gave me a new story...not of shame, but a story for the day after the solstice, for the journey back to the light" (page 345).

"The daughter assumes what is unfinished in her mother's life," Seta tells us; "the unanswered questions become her work" (page 347). Seta Loon's quest is clear: she wants to rid herself of the burdensome guilt feelings she inherited from her mother, Araxi, and her grandmother, Casard. Casard's guilt stemmed from her betrayal of her drowning mother when she let go of her mother's hand. She lived and relived this scene during her years in the small Connecticut town. She sometimes questioned whether she would have let go of her father's hand, too, and was happy to realize that no, she wouldn't have betrayed her father. Her emotional bond with him had been far stronger than had been her bond with her mother. Araxi's guilt, on the other hand, was her betrayal of

her mother's dearest wish that she should marry an Armenian. As time went by, and especially after Casard's death, Araxi's sense of betrayal became so overpowering that she had long fits of depression and eventually separated from her American husband. The fourth generation Seta Loon, in her turn, rebelled against her mother's seemingly selfish conduct and sided with her father. Leaving her hometown, she deserted her mother, thus claiming her liberty from her mother's emotional domination, and became pregnant outside of marriage.

From the beginning, Seta Loon was destined to end her family's long trauma. Towards the end of the novel, she is totally liberated from the burden of guilt she had inherited, and comes to terms with her family's gruesome history. She is blessed with the healing of her psychic wounds through self-acceptance and forgiveness. When she accepts her mother and grandmother and forgives them, she can also accept herself. As a result, she is miraculously healed and enabled to move forward into the future, now filled with a strong determination to play an active role in the life of future generations. "Our tales are what bind, they are the spiraling — the vicious, wonderful spiraling — which, if never questioned, lock the generations in a web of infinite expectation, lies, shame and hope....For my unborn child, I am after hope. Hope and the chance for a new story that will put to rest the lies and shame. And so I listen cautiously to Casard, who says: "To make a new life, you must hope for the future, and you must remember what has already been."....Hope grows inside of me, it could pour at any moment from my breasts, gold threads of light, it is that much hope" (page 8).

This novel is based on some factual incidents; the author relates that she has had similar experiences, noting that "in writing about the genocide, I had to live it, and this has been a healing process. That wound which every Armenian feels has healed somewhat for me. I feel like I have come out at the other end [of a long process]". (1) Carol Edgarian had done research as a congressional page (assistant) in Washington, D.C., and spent many weekends looking at the primary documents on the Armenian genocide at the United States National Archives. She had nightmares during this period of her life, because the information she collected was horrifying. Commenting on the experience of Armenians, she says, "that is really the task for all of us: to come to terms with the past and to move forward. That's a frustrating experience for Armenians, because there has never been a public acknowledgment of the past. The book looks at how, pri-

vately, we must each come to terms with it. At the book's end, Seta is really just beginning."

The significance of *Rise the Euphrates* lies in its therapeutic effect on even third generation Armenians in the Diaspora who are still carrying burdens of guilt and shame for the genocide. They can relive the experiences of Seta Loon, and eventually come out of them cleansed and healed. In order to reach other communities and nations suffering from discrimination, mass slaughters, poverty and alienation, Armenians have to first undergo a psychic cleansing and a healing process of self-acceptance and forgiveness. This novel shows one way of embarking on that path.

Footnotes

(1) The author was quoted in an interview by Salpi Ghazarian which appeared in *Aim Magazine* in May, 1994. The magazine is published in Los Angeles, California.



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The Price of Honor: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence in the Islamic World

By Jan Goodwin
Boston: Little Brown, 1994
363 pages

Reviewed by Dr. Sami Baroudi
Social Sciences Division
Lebanese American University

Jan Goodwin's account of the lives of women in the Islamic world is quite illuminating, even captivating. The author spent several years traveling throughout the heartland of the Muslim world, interviewing women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, "...from princesses, to rebels, from professionals to peasants" (page 7), in ten different Muslim countries. The result is a lucidly written book, rich in detail, about the ways in which contemporary Muslim women are daily adapting to changes in their societies, among them, a growing trend towards Islamization.

The introductory chapter, entitled "Fundamentally Different," gives a broad overview of the political and social environment in the Muslim world, currently characterized by Islamic revival. Goodwin is quick to point out that women's rights are among the first casualties of the drive to Islamize society throughout the Middle East (page 7-9). Virtually all Islamist movements vehemently reject Western notions of women's rights and insist that the Qur'an and *shari'a* (Islamic Law) ought to be the sole source of legislation concerning women. As Goodwin points out, throughout the centuries, Muslim jurists' interpretations of the Qur'an and the *shari'a* have placed far greater restrictions on women than on men. The book's introduction is intended for the general Western reader, who probably has little understanding of Islam. The introduction is especially good at exposing Western stereotypes about Eastern societies; a specialist on Islam or

the Middle East may want to skip the introduction altogether. This introductory chapter suffers from one major setback: it is loaded with questionable information about the activities of supposed "terrorist" radical Islamist groups in America and the West, as well as alleged Saudi manipulations of the U.S. Government, information that has nothing to do with Goodwin's subject matter.

Chapter Two, "Muslims: The First Feminists", is again intended for the general Western reader and has little to offer of an original viewpoint. Most of the material in the chapter seems to be based on a lengthy interview Ms. Goodwin conducted with Professor Leila Ahmed, an academic authority on Islam and women, whom Goodwin extensively quotes. In this chapter, Goodwin simply repeats the argument that the advent of Islam tremendously improved the conditions of women in Arabia. Goodwin stresses the gentle nature of the Prophet Muhammad, his faithfulness towards his first wife, Khadija, his kind and fair treatment of his subsequent wives, as well as his commitment to the eradication of the worst forms of abuses against women, such as female infanticide (pp. 36-38). Goodwin is correct to point out that Islam was the first religion to advance a detailed list of women's rights, from alimony to inheritance, child support, and protection against slander. Goodwin argues that a deterioration in the status of Muslim women occurred shortly after the death of 'Aisha, the wife of the Prophet, whose authority in matters of religion was undisputed by her male contemporaries during her lifetime (pp. 42-43). In the following centuries, all Muslim jurists have been men, and they have interpreted the religion in such a way as to discriminate against

women while favoring men. This is a very interesting hypothesis, but it is impossible to prove or disprove.

The eleven chapters that follow are all based upon extensive field work in ten Islamic countries and represent some of the best scholarship on the subject of women and Islam published in the second half of this century. The chapters recount the author's journeys throughout the Islamic world, a journey Goodwin felt compelled to undertake after an emotional and sad encounter with an eleven-year-old Afghani refugee girl whom she met in Peshawar, Pakistan while working as a reporter among the Afghani *mujahideen* in the late 1980s (pp. 3-6). Goodwin's quest to learn first-hand about the conditions of women in Muslim societies led her to travel to many hot spots, such as Karachi, Kabul, Gaza, *etc.*, as well as to two of the most conservative Islamic countries: Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Goodwin seems to take delight in recounting the many difficulties she had before she was finally granted a visa to travel to Iran (pp. 103-104). Ten of the eleven chapters deal with the lives of Muslim women in particular countries (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank, Iraq and Egypt). One chapter is devoted to American women, formerly Christian, who have converted to Islam, usually as a result of having married Arab Muslim men.

Especially informative is Chapter 11, which focuses on Palestinian women who participated in the *intifada* and who were then jailed and tortured by the Israeli authorities. Goodwin shows great sympathy and affection for the Palestinians, especially Palestinian women who have had to cope with the harsh realities of occupation, serious economic hardships, inadequate housing and social services; frustrated husbands, brothers and fathers who sometimes vent their emotions on women; and the growing power of Islamist movements seeking to confine Palestinian women to their homes (pp. 292-298).

The value of *The Price of Honor* lies in the hundreds

of lengthy interviews that Goodwin reproduces almost in their entirety. The interviews themselves are very loosely structured, and the questions to which the women are supposedly responding are conveniently dropped out of the text. For the most part, Goodwin lets her respondents structure their own stories, they thus speak freely about the defining moments in their lives, their relationships with members of the opposite sex, their careers (many have quite interesting and challenging ones), their fears, anxieties and hopes. The women themselves, not Goodwin, decide what the relevant facts are. What adds to the chapters' beauty is the total absence of any sense of confrontation between Goodwin and the women she interviewed, even when the latter adhere to convictions that are totally opposed to Goodwin's. To her credit, Goodwin never adopts a defensive position when some of the ultra-conservative women she interviewed (mainly the recent converts to Islam) furiously attack, and one may even say, misrepresent, the beliefs and lifestyles of feminists and liberated Western women (see especially pp. 182-183). She clearly sees her mission as one of understanding Muslim women, not of confronting, head on, their beliefs and lifestyles.

Goodwin goes a long way towards shattering Western stereotypes about Muslim women as ignorant, submissive, and superstitious people content to stay at home. Rather, the women who emerge from this book are courageous, religious, caring and fair. In every Islamic country to which Goodwin traveled (including conservative Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states) she discovered strong-willed, educated, intelligent and career-oriented women who, in numerous ways, challenged or circumvented restrictions on women's basic rights to work, get promoted, drive, receive education abroad, and travel alone. A case in point is Huda Awad, an unmarried Saudi businesswoman, who heads her own successful construction company, spends hours at construction sites, interacts regularly with men, and travels abroad unaccompanied by a *mahram* (protector) (p. 224-229). Even those women who appear to blindly obey the men in their lives (whether father, brother, husband or son) seem to do so either because they truly

believe that this is the right thing to do, or (more commonly) out of a sense of expediency, since the consequences of rebellion can be quite disastrous given the combined weight of the male-dominated state and economy, religious interpretations and custom.

In the Epilogue, Goodwin returns to the theme of the rising tide of "fundamentalism," and its implications for women's rights in the Islamic world. Goodwin is correct in identifying radical Islamist groups as the sworn enemies of women's rights, for such groups interpret the Qur'an in such a restrictive way so as to subordinate women entirely to men (p. 352). Unfortunately for advocates of women's rights, the religious establishment in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt has shown no interest in defending women against the onslaughts of the radical Islamist groups. Goodwin fully acknowledges that feminists' ideas and rhetoric cannot be used in the struggle to defend Muslim women's rights, since the vast majority of Muslim men (and even quite a few women) reject out of hand anything having to do with Western feminist ideas. Goodwin, however, is firm in her conviction (shared by most of the educated Muslim women she interviewed) that Muslim women must rise to the challenges posed by growing radicalization and must also question the teachings of establishment figures such as Sheik Bin Baz of Saudi Arabia and Sheikh Gad al-Haq of Al-Azhar in Cairo. In their struggle to protect and promote their basic rights, Muslim women must turn to the Qur'an and the practice and teachings of the Prophet, since they increasingly define the context within which the debate on crucial social issues is carried out in the Muslim world. The virtual monopoly that men have over the interpretation of the Qur'an and the *Shari'a* must be quickly ended if Muslim women are to have a chance to protect and promote their rights within an environment that is becoming increasingly radicalized and polarized.

Despite its weak introduction and epilogue, *The Price of Honor* represents an important contribution to the growing literature on women in Muslim societies.

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