

AL-Raida

m a g a z i n e

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Women in
the Arab Family

ABOUT IWSAW

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 development 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 below.

ABOUT AL-RAIDA

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.

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S U B S C R I P T I O N

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	<i>Editorial</i>		
3	<i>Research</i>		
5	<i>Quote/Unquote</i>		
6	<i>NewsBriefs</i>		
7	<i>IWSAW News</i>		
	<i>File</i>		
8	Introduction to the File		
9	Women and the Family in Lebanon: Figures and Facts		
11	Family in Lebanon		
14	Abstracts on Family Issues in the Arab World		
16	Changing Marriage Patterns in Lebanon		
18	Temporary Marriage		
21	Women-Headed Households in Lebanon		
26	A Program that Made a Difference		
28	The Disabled in the Family		
31	Opinions and Practices of University		
			Students Surveyed
		32	How Young People Relate to their Parents
		34	The Girl in the Lebanese Family
		36	Short Story: How We Were
		38	Poetry
			<i>Special Features</i>
		39	Assia Djébar: An Algerian Woman's Voice of Maturity and Vision
		44	Alicia Ghiragossian: The Trilingual Poet
			<i>Book reviews</i>
		46	<i>Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt,</i> by Margot Badran
		48	<i>Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of A'ishah Bint Abi Baker,</i> by D.A. Spellberg

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Al-Raida

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ARAB WOMEN

From Misconceptions to Reality

Hassan Hammoud, Associate Professor of Social Work, L.A.U

For over forty years, most Western and traditional Arab writers dealing with Arab women's concerns, issues, and problems, adopted a Western discourse that remains for the most part unchallenged. Only recently have two prominent Arab women successfully attempted to dismantle this discourse by deconstructing its basic premises and criticizing its concepts and theories. For example, Leila Ahmed's unveiling of the function of the Western discourse is instructive:

"... a distinction has to be made between, on the one hand, the consequences for women following from the opening of Muslim societies to the West and the social change and the expansion of intellectual horizons that occurred as a result of the interest within Arab societies in emulating Western technological and political accomplishments and, on the other hand, the quite different and apparently essentially negative consequences following from the construction and dissemination of a Western patriarchal discourse targeting the issue of women and coopting the language of feminism in the service of its strategies of domination." (1992, p. 168).

And more recently, Suha Sabbagh has shown the ethnocentric character of most Western writing on Arab women by pointing out the rarely considered idea

"that women in different cultures might have a somewhat different agenda or methods of achieving their objectives... The titles of articles that purport to analyze the oppression of women under Islam stress sensationalism and show that, when it comes to writing about Arab women, stereotypical, distorted imaging has continued unabated since the early days of orientalist writings" (1996, xiii).

The Western discourse vehemently criticized by Ahmed and Sabbagh has to a great extent contributed to the diffusion of a system of knowledge, *i.e.*, language and ideas, among Arab women that was originally produced by another culture. What is wrong with this discursive approach is that it sets for itself the task of identifying and describing certain aspects of Arab women's lives, defines them as "hot spots", and proceeds to exaggerate their importance. Thus, Arab women were described as "male dominated, speechless, veiled, secluded, subdued, and unidentifiable beings" (Sabbagh, xi), and therefore reduced to passive creatures living on the margins of society. Such a stereotypical image presents the roles of women in negative terms and obscures their participation as active members in society. Moreover, in claiming to assist Arab women in emancipating themselves from the oppressive and dominating patriarchal system, Western writers call on Arab women to "abandon native ways and adopt those of the West."

The Western position with regard to understanding the images and roles of Arab women is flawed in several respects. First, in producing knowledge about Arab women and repre-

senting it in simple and absolute terms, this discourse implicitly assumes Western standards as the benchmark against which to measure the situation of women in the Arab world. The result is a system of representations that reflects a paternalistic attitude on the part of Western writers toward women in other parts of the world, and, more generally, the perpetuation of oppressive views that "only serve to establish the positional superiority of Western women" (Sabbagh, xx). Second, this Western-constructed system of mere representations emphasizes only the negative aspects and experiences of Arab women, and, in choosing to single out some issues that it considers important in its own eyes, tends to overshadow the more essential aspects of women's struggle and their successful pursuits and achievements. The downplay of the real issues and strengths of Arab women provides a distorted and myopic view of reality and "risks of becoming an oppressive rather than a liberating tool" (Sabbagh, xviii). Third, in championing the cause of Arab women by calling on them to adopt Western ways to improve their status, Western writers prove once more to be culturally insensitive. For to substitute one culture for another could jeopardize people's own identity and could constitute a risk of complete alienation from their own society.

More importantly, Ahmed and Sabbagh not only denounced the imposition of Western discourse but have also urged to deconstruct it by exposing its arbitrary character and the cultural and historical specificity of its concepts, and the danger that their use represents in the context of Arab society. To this end, they call on Arab women to liberate themselves from such misconceptions about or negative representations of their roles and status. In addition, they encourage the production of local knowledge related to the real struggle of Arab women in various fields by exposing the true nature of the obstacles they are facing. Producing subjective accounts by Arab women based on their own experiences is the sole guarantee for advancing alternative culturally sound possibilities that can at the same time accommodate personal problems as well as public issues in the context of the local culture.

In the hope of contributing to the production of an Arab discourse on women, we present this issue of *Al-Raida*. It contains a number of articles on the Arab family aimed at exposing as much as possible the reality of women's struggle within its confines.

References

- Ahmed, Leila. *Women & Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.
Sabbagh, Suha. *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*. New York: Olive Branch P, 1996.

Research Abstracts

Al Zouheiry, Mawiya Fareed. "Mixed Marriage in Lebanon: The Effect it Has on the Psycho-Social Reality." *Lebanese University, M.A Thesis, Department of Social Sciences 1995-1996.*

Al Zouheiry tackles the topic of mixed marriages in Lebanon. She analyzes the overall effect of Lebanese society, which is a confessional one, on the psycho-social state of a woman married to a man from another sect. She portrays the problematic nature of such mixed marriages, in which women, in most cases, are expected to renounce their names, sects, customs and traditions, and to adopt those of their husbands. Al Zouheiry aims at finding out the validity of the assumption that a certain harmony and understanding can be established between two people from different backgrounds and who have enjoyed different customs and traditions.

Twenty five women from the same sect were involved in this study. Al Zouheiry chose a single sect because she was unable to study all the different religious sects present in Lebanon. The sample was collected from five governmental departments. Al Zouheiry used interviews as well as a questionnaire. Her initial sample comprised 29 women; however, four of them refused to participate.

Al Zouheiry found that success in marriage is established when couples demonstrate similar social, economic, professional and psychological characteristics. She also detected the importance of economic independence in producing a successful marriage; it is essential for women to work and be financially self-sufficient. Moreover, she discovered that success in marriage is most likely when couples are not religious (i.e., when the wife is not forced by her husband to contract a religious marriage.), the partners share the same educational background, and do not live next to their parents.

Al Zouheiry argues that Lebanese society fails to accept those mixed marriages in which personal status codes act as impediments hindering their success. The absence of civil codes only highlights the importance of advocating civil marriage. Moreover, the author maintains that harmony and understanding between couples can be established when both partners share a similar socio-economic and educational background and the same tastes and expectations in life. She concludes that a mixed marriage depends for its success on understanding and adaptation between the couples. If these are established, then stability and continuity can take place regardless of external societal and parental pressure.

Mourtada, Asma. "Societal Development and the Marriage Crisis." *Lebanese University, M.A Thesis, Department of Social Sciences 1993-1994.*

Asma Mourtada aims to portray the feelings of unmar-

ried men and women, their opinion concerning their situation, and their parents' standpoint. She attempts to shed some light on the reasons behind this phenomenon, its results, and the determining factors that highlight such a problem. Her sample comprises 50 individuals of both sexes equally divided. The men involved were in their 30s and the women were on the average about 27 years of age.

Mourtada used a questionnaire in which the participants were asked to cite several reasons why they thought marriage was important. The reasons varied, as the participants maintained that people get married in order to establish a family or lead a stable life. Moreover, some regarded marriage to be a requirement in life whereas others believed it to be a religious duty. Both the participants and their parents agreed that the best age for marriage is between 15 and 20 for females and between 21 and 30 for males. The participants had no objection to getting married to someone from a different area or region; however, most of them rejected marriage to someone from a different religion, sect, or nationality. Among the criteria cited for choosing a partner were love and education, social status, economic status, beauty, politeness and religiosity. 76% of the participants regarded themselves too old for marriage. Moreover, they explained that parents tended to interfere less in their decisions and choices as they grew older.

Asma Mourtada concludes that late-age marriage is affected by educational and socio-economic status. She finds that 86% of parents encourage their children to work, for they are anxious about their children being economically dependent on them throughout their lives. They are also saddened by the prospect that they might never experience having grandchildren. Moreover, Mourtada detects a decline in the importance of religion and religious teachings urging one to get married among groups belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds.

El-Tablouny, Juhaina Ismail. "Choosing a Partner." *Lebanese University, M.A Thesis, Department of Social Sciences 1994-1995.*

El-Tablouny attempts to highlight the variables - other than love and emotion- that affect one's decision in choosing a partner, such as educational background, age, profession, and cultural and societal reasons. Twenty married couples served as her sample; they were selected from a village in the mountains called Bekaata. She made use of interviews as well as written material in English and Arabic.

El-Tablouny's research confirms the saying that "birds of a feather flock together" for she discovered that one tends to choose a partner close to him/herself in age, religion, educational background, geographical location, and values. She also found that parents influence their children's decisions in choosing a partner. Moreover, she detected that rural men still suffer from deeply ingrained habits of mind. Hence, although some changes in men's mentalities have occurred, religion and virginity are still heeded when it comes to choosing a partner. She

also noticed that most rural men whose wives are more educated than they are themselves either suffer from weak personalities or tend to utilize their material power to dominate their wives. El-Tablouny's findings reveal that women in rural areas - where they earn less and enjoy less political participation - are discriminated against. Although the interviewees preferred to marry within their confession, intermarriages did take place in Bekaata.

El-Tablouny concludes that marriage is a social process and that individuals tend to choose partners whose religion and nationality are similar to theirs. She holds that educational and economic variables are essential and influential factors affecting a marriage's success. She maintains that people are becoming more liberal and educated since both men and women no longer marry at an early age. Moreover, society these days tolerates relationships between men and women who choose each other for personal reasons such as love and romance. However, parents still influence their children's decisions in choosing a partner. She calls for more studies to examine the variables that affect one's reasons for choosing a partner and she highlights the need to explore the effect that these variables may have on the failure or success of a marriage.

Schaefer Davis, Susan, and Douglas Davis.

"Love Changes All? Changing Images of Gender and Relationships in Morocco." *Children in the Muslim Middle East*. Ed. E.W. Fernea. Austin: U of Texas P, 1995.

This article describes how gender roles in today's Morocco are changing substantially and rapidly - at least at first glance. On closer examination, one sees that the changes are uneven and occur at different rates for different groups. Some women, and fewer men, favor more changes, more equal roles throughout their marriages and also in raising children. Those who support the status quo are mainly men for whom change would decrease privileges. Those who favor change are mainly educated women who work outside the home. Still, other women appear to accept, if not support or put beyond question, traditional gender roles; mainly semirural women in Zawiya with little or no education fit into this group. Yet, at nearly all levels, women want a more affective relationship with their husbands.

What causes these changes? Education and the media are both important influences on gender roles. First, education places youth in closer contact with peers and decreases time spent in multigenerational kin groups. While elders are still respected, they play a less central role in socializing the young. Education has given younger women new goals, increased mobility, and sometimes new jobs. Modern media - especially television films - from both the Middle East and the West, make viewers in all parts of the country aware of new forms of relationships and affect the aspirations of many, especially for marriage based on a love match rather than the traditional one arranged by parents. Yet such love matches, and the resulting "companionate marriages," contain many flaws and strains. A recent American study of reasons given for divorce notes that problems include an expectation of intimacy, one which is based

on an equality for which the sexes are not socialized, and similar problems are likely to occur in Morocco. Thus whether these new aspirations will be met, or whether these young Moroccans are buying a fantasy that is unrealistic and that many of their European and American counterparts have found reason to question, remains to be seen.

Conferences

"International Conference on Gender and Development in Asia" is the title of a conference to be held at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, November 27-29, 1997. The conference is organized jointly by Gender Research Programme, Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies and the Departments of Sociology and Government and Public Administration at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. It aims at bringing together international scholars working on gender and Asian development. The discussion will revolve around three main topics: Gender and Political Development, Gender and Social Change, and Gender, Sex and Violence. For further information and inquiries, contact Organizing Committee (Attn: Ms Serena Chu), International Conference on Gender and Development in Asia, Gender Research Programme, The Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong, Fax: (852) 2609 5215, e-mail: gendev@cuhk.edu.hk.)

The Second International Conference on **"Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: Health and Human Rights"** will be held in Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A. (November 6-11, 1997). The well-attended first Women in Africa and the African Diaspora (WAAD) conference that was held in Nigeria in 1992 attracted participants from all continents. The second conference has generated enthusiastic response worldwide and promises to be an important global event. For more information contact Professor Obioma Nnaemeka, Convener, Second WAAD Conference, French and Women's Studies, Indiana University, 425 University Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46202 U.S.A.

Recent Publications

- * *Feminism and Islam*, by Mai Yamani.
U of London, 1996.
- * *A Woman's Reality*, by Segolene Royal.
Paris: Stook House, 1996.
- * *Pillars of Salt*, by Fadia Fakir.
London: Quartet House, 1996.
- * *Another Voice from Algeria*, by Louisa Hanoun.
Paris: La Découverte, 1996.

Quote, Unquote

"... families are undergoing constant change, due to numerous factors, including the quest for equality between men and women and widening opportunities for women as well as shifts in values, particularly those supporting individualism... Social roles are being redefined and we have been witnessing the reorganization of family forms. All these changes in social life and in the roles ascribed to men and women have brought with them fundamental transformation of lifestyles and personal aspirations... Social policy should seek to educate and inform family behaviour to eliminate anti-social or detrimental practices. It should foster equality between women and men, including equality in their roles as spouses and parents; it should encourage a more equitable distribution of family resources and a more flexible sharing of household and parental responsibilities in order to create greater opportunities for women within and outside the family."

(Women and the Family, London, Zed Books 1994 preface vii)

"Although the internationally recommended minimum age for work is 15 years... and the number of child workers under the age of ten is far from negligible, almost all the data available on child labour concerns the 10-to-14 age group... more than 73 million children in that age group alone were economically active in 1995, representing 13.2 per cent of all 10-to 14 year olds around the world... No reliable figures on workers under 10 are available though their numbers, we know, are significant. The same is true of children between 14 and 15 on whom few reports exist. If all of these could be counted and if proper account were taken of the domestic work performed full-time by girls, the total number of child workers around the world today might well be in the hundreds of millions."

(World of Work #16 June/July 1996 p.12)

"... political rape and honor rape are inextricably linked. In this context, honor, izzat, is intimately tied in with the sense of a male 'natural' right to possess and control womenfolk... Women cannot possess honor in the same way as men. They represent honor; they symbolize honor; they are honor. Objectified into manipulable possessions, symbolic or otherwise, women lose a sense of individuality in the eyes of the community. Raping a woman robs a man of his most prized possession, his honor, but it obliterates a woman's whole being. Once a man's honor is violated, all he can do, all he is expected to do, all he should do is to seek revenge. As for the raped woman, no one

cares or dares to care, she doesn't exist as an individual."

(Faith and Freedom, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1995 p.169)

"Feminists are not against women having children. But motherhood should not be considered to be every woman's destiny nor should womanhood be equated with motherhood. Feminists believe that every woman should have the choice of whether or not to have children... Although only woman can bear a child, anyone can bring it up or mother it. Motherhood means looking after, nurturing and caring for another human being. It means helping another person develop physically, emotionally and mentally. Such mothering can be done by anyone, even by a man. The ability and capacity to mother is not biologically determined. Besides, if the world really considered motherhood to be the most noble of activities - if that is what you get Nobel prizes for - men would not have allowed women to monopolize it. For all their praise of such an activity, men are averse to practicing it themselves. Feminists believe that children would grow up better if they get the best from both their parents. Mothering would then - and only then - become truly creative, joyous and fun for everyone concerned."

(Women in Action, 3/95 pp. 44-45)

Women have real reasons to fear feminism, and we do young women no service if we suggest to them that feminism itself is safe. It is not. To stand opposed to your culture, to be critical of institutions, behaviors, discourses - when it is so clearly not in your immediate interest to do so - asks a lot of a young person, of any person. At its best, the feminist challenging of individualism, of narrow notions of freedom, is transformative, exhilarating, empowering. When we do our best work in selling feminism to the unconverted, we make clear not only its necessity, but also its pleasures: the joys of intellectual and political work, the moral power of living in consequences, the surprises of coalition, the rewards of doing what is difficult. Feminism offers an arena for selfhood beyond personal relationships but not disconnected from them. It offers - and requires - courage, intelligence, boldness, sensitivity, relationality, complexity, a sense of purpose, and, lest we forget, a sense of humor as well. Of course young women are afraid of feminism - shouldn't they be?

(Ms. Magazine vol. V, #3 November/December 1994 p. 21)

FROM PALESTINE

NEW WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM AT BIR ZEIT UNIVERSITY

A Women's Studies Program was established at Bir Zeit University in 1994. The program's goal is to create a deeper vision of social, political, and cultural issues from a women's perspective; it aims to influence the society's and official governing bodies' opinions concerning women's rights and issues. The program itself consists of three facets: teaching, research, and community outreach.

Teaching: Teaching began in the 1994-1995 academic year, and the program currently offers a minor in Women's Studies. The program has developed an interdisciplinary core curriculum of eleven courses.

Research: The Women's Studies Program aims to facilitate research on Palestinian women, both through instituting its own research projects and through collecting archival material and offering services to other researchers.

Community Outreach: The Women's Studies Program aims to develop avenues to empower Palestinian women through a community outreach program in conjunction with the expanding network of Palestinian women's institutions, as well as to contribute to gender-informed public and institutional policies that recognize and secure the economic, social, and political rights of all citizens.

FROM LEBANON

THE OPINION AND PRACTICES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SURVEYED

Upon the request of An-Nahar newspaper, "The International Co. for Information"- which specializes in public opinion polls-conducted a study about students in the five major Lebanese universities: the American University of Beirut (AUB), the Lebanese American University (LAU), Saint Joseph University, the Lebanese University, and the Beirut Arab University. The aims of this study were to survey the idea of civil society among university students and to test their vulnerability to Western ideas in contrast to their Oriental identity. The study was divided into four parts, each of which focused on a particular theme.

(For more information, see p. 31)

FROM THE U.S.A.

THE FIRST ARABIC-SPEAKING AND CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE AGENCY IN NEW YORK

The Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC) was established in June 1994 to address the social service needs of the Arab-American community in New York City. Its Board of Directors is made up of Arab-American professionals and leaders in the community. It was incorporated as a non-profit social service agency in the

State of New York. AAFSC is the first Arabic-speaking and culturally-sensitive agency of its kind in the New York City metropolitan region. Its activities are directed towards newly arrived Arab immigrants, and its main purpose is to strengthen families and to help them adapt to life in the United States. It seeks to prevent the marginalization of families by addressing the destabilizing effects of immigration and by guiding Arabic-speaking newcomers through American laws and cultural norms in order to gain their full rights as Americans.

FROM EGYPT

AL-MUFTI'S DECLARATION PROVOKED EGYPTIAN INTELLECTUALS

On Tues. January 27, 1996 the Mufti of Egypt, El-Sheikh Nasr Fareed Wasel, declared in a general assembly that woman's command of high positions is contradictory to her nature, because such demanding jobs require firmness, whereas the woman is known to be soft. This declaration angered a number of Egyptian intellectuals, men and women alike, who saw in it a flagrant neglect of women's great achievements over the past years and a cover for the inferior way she is being looked upon.

Reference: An-Nahar; Saturday, February 1st, 1996, P.24

FROM SAUDI ARABIA

AL-MISYAR MARRIAGE PROVOKED CONTRADICTION REACTIONS

Fahed Suleiman is playing the role of a go-between in the so-called "Al-Misyar marriage". By fax, Suleiman invites those who are miserable in their marital lives and are interested in an "Al-Misyar marriage" to call him. Those who respond to this invitation and make the call, hear a soft female voice asking them to call a coded number for further information. The "mediator" is paid, according to the faxed message, five thousand riyals (*i.e.* \$1500) for a virgin and three thousand riyals (*i.e.*, \$1000) for a non-virgin.

An *Al-Misyar* marriage imposes fewer financial responsibilities on the man and does not require him to live with his "wife". Moreover, it gives him the right to set the conditions of marriage. El-Sheikh Moh'd Mo'bi, a religious leader, states that in such a marriage the man can visit his "wife" whenever he wishes: "in the morning, afternoon, or in the evening; he is not obliged to live with her."

These conditions infuriated many Saudi women who saw in them an insult to the principle of marriage. The journalist Intisar El-Ujeil said that the *Al-Misyar* marriage is merely a way to legalize having a mistress. She further commented that women are being deceived in this marriage "as if men are buying cows, lambs or water-melon." It is worth noting that whilst this kind of marriage is condemned by some people such as Intisar El-Ujeil, others approve of it, especially divorcees, widows, and those who are beyond the traditional age of marriage.

Reference: An-Nahar; Monday, March 3rd, 1997, P. 24

IWSAW CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WITH PALESTINIAN AUTHOR SAHAR KHALIFEH

In celebration of International Women's Day (March 8), the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), in co-operation with *Dar Al-Adab* (a publishing company) organized on March 7, 1997 an encounter with the Palestinian author Sahar Khalifeh, who was eloquently introduced by Afeefi Arsanios (UNDP - United Nations Development Program). Sahar Khalifeh gave a powerful speech entitled, "Woman and Writing or Feminist Writing", which was followed by a lively discussion. Excerpts from her speech follow.

"Very often we have been asked the following question: Is there feminist writing or is good writing universal and thus surpasses race, color, class and all cultural and geographical boundaries? Very often we have been asked this question, and very often our answers were evasive, apologetic, twisted, hidden, ambiguous, and dishonest ... The feminist issue is a serious matter ... It is our being females that has determined our position in the world from the date of birth until death, and even after death (i.e., when the inheritance is distributed.) ... If feminism was not a serious matter, then why have male writers written about it throughout the years? Why have they boldly described the situation of women as disgraceful, unfair and enslaving?... What did Aristophanes say in his masterpiece *Lysistrata*? What did Ibsen say in *A Doll's House*? What did Bernard Shaw say in his play *Major Barbara*? What did Najib Mahfouz say in *A Beginning and Ending, Between the Two Palaces and Mira Mar*? Were these great thinkers or weren't they? Were they successful? Were they creative?... Didn't they move the world? No-one described them as naive, shortsighted, or limited!"

"These men wrote about us, because we have a cause, because we are the basis, we are the mothers, we are the nation, and can a nation survive without a basis, without an environment? We are the environment ..."

"The poet said:

'The mother is a school, if you prepare her well, you prepare a nation of noble descents.' And we said 'Amen!' And we clapped. However, the reality is that ... we are restrained by three fronts, each of which is enough to overthrow the strongest systems and nations. Poverty, ignorance, archaic superstitions, and tribal myths ... It was in the name of religion they spoke, and in the name of religion crowds of women followed them. However, we and people like us, spoke differently. We said that faith is the road to light ... And we started to seek change ... We started searching in the political parties and organizations ... However, the women there proved to be far away from equality and fairness ... We looked into the feminist movement, but the feminist movement in Palestine, as in all the Arab countries, is still incapable of reaching the masses of women because of the competition, rivalry, and the division of leadership ..."

"What then? What do we have? How do we incur change?... The pen is the only tool ... Let us remember who paved the way for the French revolution. Let us remember Tolstoy's influence on socialism. Let us remember Simone de Beauvoir and what she has implanted in everyone of us across distance, time, authority, and religion ... I remember that feminist writing had existed for centuries, that it was not written by women only, and that it does not suffer from shortsightedness. Feminist writing does not imply egocentrism. Was Ibsen egocentric? Was Bernard Shaw egocentric? Did Simone de Beauvoir have a cause? Was it one without dimensions? ... Feminism means fairness, a revolution over old practices. It means a bridge that connects gaps, mends them, explains them, and rebuilds their joints step by step. Thus, does feminist writing exist? Yes, of course, it exists to those who are sensitive to women's sufferings, to those who are not afraid, to those who do not hesitate to hold the candle in the street, in darkness, and in the pathways of the cave people."

RURAL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT - AKKAR

Within the program of rural development funded by the American Agency for International Development, Mercy Corps - MCI, in cooperation with the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University, organizes a series of activities that aim at establishing model villages in Akkar, North of Lebanon.

For example, twenty-two trainees from several villages learn carpet weaving at the Saint Francis Center for Nuns in Munjiz, a village in Akkar. The second project promotes environmental safety by replacing old water pipes. The

third is a series of agricultural projects that include chicken breeding and the reconstruction of farm roads and watering canals.

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World is also supervising a project for fighting social illiteracy among women through a basic living skills program (BLSP) and a series of informative stories for semi-literate women. While the BLSP focuses on such topics as family planning, health-care, child-care, home management, civic education, nutrition, environmental awareness, and legal rights, the stories aim at bridging the gap between rural and urban women.

Introduction

THE ARAB FAMILY IN TRANSITION

Hassan Hammoud

Learning about Arab culture is a dual process of unlearning the static, oversimplified views that have guided Western thought, then relearning by following a dynamic, analytical approach to a highly complex and contradictory reality ... Unlike mainstream Western scholarship, Arab critical approaches are deeply embedded in a sense of Arab belonging and a commitment to the transcendence of the prevailing order (Barakat p.181).

The intensely transitional nature of contemporary Arab society makes generalization difficult. Arab society today is neither traditional nor modern, old or new, capitalist or socialist or feudal, Eastern or Western, religious or secular, particularistic or universalistic in its cultural orientations (Barakat, p.22).

Halim Barakat's words echo the concerns and interests of a new group of intellectuals who have studied the structure and dynamics of Arab society during the last decade. The importance of this new strand of thought stems from the continuous search for an authentic, more realistic, and dynamic approach that could be useful in the analysis of Arab society. The most salient features of this approach include the following:

- it is multidimensional, that is, it takes into consideration complex and diverse socio-economic conditions, of which the conflicting and contradictory relations have been neglected for too long;
- it provides a critical discourse based on the scientific scrutiny of the present conditions that is needed to change the prevailing order;
- it places Arab society in today's highly transitional context of external and internal contradictions and challenges.
- it is dynamic, since it views society as being in a state of constant change.

This approach has emerged in contrast to the prevalent orientalist attempt to study Arab society, which uses a static, deterministic, ahistorical, and uni-dimensional framework. This framework is problematic because it results in "oversimplified generalizations," ethnocentric value judgements, and a sweeping distortion of reality. This view emphasizes similarities of characteristics among Arab countries despite the wide diversity in social and historical conditions and thus ignores the importance of difference. While it is true that Arabs share some basic common characteristics, wide variations do exist between countries, regions, social classes, religious sects, and other social configurations. Society throughout the Arab world is characterized, indeed, by the contrasting images that peoples hold of their present and future, and these images are greatly influenced by conflicting polarities. The contrasts between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, the religious and the secular, the conservative and the liberal seem to pull the Arabs in opposing directions as their true modes of behavior and thinking vary on a continuum between two poles. Moreover, while existing social institutions tend to reproduce themselves over time, they are nevertheless subject to incessant transformations both in their structures and functions. Not only does this situation show the ubiqui-

tous nature of social change, it also serves as evidence that social institutions in the Arab world are going through a transitional period, which makes it impossible to reach final conclusions concerning their characteristics. Those who have attempted such conclusions have generally overlooked their complex and constantly changing nature in the present era and have delivered clichéd depictions that do not reflect the present conditions of Arab society.

This new approach should furnish the broad guidelines for any attempt at understanding, for example, the Arab family. During the last half century, Arab society has undergone drastic changes that have left their impact on all major social institutions including the family. The Arab family faced the challenge of maintaining its basic structural characteristics while it was also struggling to accommodate itself within the formidable evolutionary process in society. As a result, traditional relationships, roles, and values have been undermined to some extent. For example, the role of the father as the sole authority figure to whom all others are subordinated is being challenged. With the advent of a new socio-economic reality, women and children are assuming greater roles within the family. More women in Arab society are seeking employment outside the home. Children are pursuing their education, and more women are participating in the vital decisions concerning their lives. Throughout the Arab world, the trend is now toward a form of nuclear family and toward greater independence from the hegemony of extended ties. Yet, despite all these changes, solidarity among members of a family and their commitment to its over-all well-being as a unit still prevail. Of course, great variations and disparities do exist among social classes, countries, and regions concerning the issue of traditional versus modern-family relations. Moreover, such matters as the status of women, marriage, divorce, work, children socialization, sibling relations, and husband-wife relations, are all handled differently according to specific societal contexts.

We do not wish to oversimplify the reality about "the" Arab family by offering sweeping generalizations, nor to present a distorted image about its basic structures and functions. But we present the following file in the hope that its contents will shed some light on various aspects of family life in contemporary Arab society without aiming at a comprehensive overview of the Arab family. Thus, we will discuss selected topics, ranging from very traditional practices, such as temporary marriage, to the recent emergence of women heads of households. We hope that these papers, along with many others, will provide our readers with information, will trigger reflection on particular aspects of Arab family dynamics, and will offer realistic answers to some questions that researchers, academics, and the general public have been concerned with for some time.

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WOMEN AND THE FAMILY IN LEBANON

FIGURES AND FACTS

Hassan Hammoud

In collaboration with the United Nations Development Program, the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs has completed a survey¹ that provides for the first time in 65 years a comprehensive profile of the population in post-war Lebanon. One of its several objectives was to identify the demographic, educational, social, and occupational characteristics of Lebanese society. If properly considered, such information could play a major role in the decision-making process over several public policies in the country. The data of the survey are presented in 187 statistical tables. I will analyze selected tables related to the status and characteristics of women and the family.

Population Characteristics

According to the census data, Lebanon has 2,993,302 inhabitants who live in 641,998 households. These households are distributed among three family types in the following order: 78% are nuclear families, almost four percent are nuclear families with relatives, and 9.4% are extended families. This transformation from the extended to the nuclear family-type seems due in part to the migration from rural to urban areas, employment patterns, and the willingness of children to live away from their parents. It is worth noting that of the nuclear families 20.3% consists of 5 persons, 20.8% of 4, and 15.5% of only 3 (Table 2-03).

One of the most surprising facts revealed by the survey is the number of households headed by women. Contrary to the traditional expectation that only men are capable of heading families, 14% of all households in Lebanon is at present headed by women (Table 2-04). Almost 40% of such households includes 3 to 5 persons. Among the many reasons that could account for this are separation, widowhood, divorce, and migration. Lebanese women are proving once more that they are not only capable of working inside and outside the house, but also of handling all family responsibilities and decisions. Despite her early socialization in a male-dominated society that does not provide her with the same entitlements and privileges as those available to men, the Lebanese woman is challenging all traditions and norms, and she is assuming greater responsibilities, for which she was ill-prepared. Her success or failure in her new roles could very well depend not only on her personal characteristics but also on the specific legislations that affect her status in society.

The distribution of the population according to gender reveals that unlike the limited 1970 survey, which showed that males outnumbered females (52% to 48% respectively)², a reverse trend to the advantage of the female population has occurred (51.6% females to 49.4% males. Table 2.06). A partial interpretation of this change might include consideration of the loss of thousands of young men during the 16 years of war and of the continuing exodus of even more young men in search for job opportunities in the neighboring Arab countries.

Women and Marriage.

Age at marriage is usually correlated with education, that is, the higher the level of education, the longer marriage is delayed. The situation among the young Lebanese is much more complicated, since other factors seem to contribute to such a decision, namely the financial status of young men who are practically incapable of securing the basic necessities for marriage, such as decent housing and a profitable job.

This situation leads to a low rate of marriage in the Lebanese population. The national survey reveals that 48.7% of young Lebanese who are of marriageable age - 14 years and above - is still single, while 45% is married. Among the married population between the ages of 15-19, the majority are females (96.4%), while they constitute 84% and 67% for the age categories 20-24 and 25-29 respectively. As for those married between the age of 35-39, the rate is almost equal for men and women.

Unlike women who are getting married at a young age, men tend to delay their decision to take this step. This is due in part to their financial status, which is too low to shoulder marriage responsibilities early in their lives, and to the severe economic crisis of the country. The data reveal that among those who have taken the legal steps to get married in the age category 30-34, males form the majority (84.5%) and females the minority (15.5%). The rate among young men between 25-29 is 70% (Table 2-10). This trend is corroborated by another set of data that show that among all those who got married in the age bracket 15-19, females are the majority (85.4%) while only a minority of males got married at this age (14.6%). However, in the age range of 30-34 the situation is reversed: men made up 81% of all those who got married (Table 2-11). Such evidence raises important questions about future trends in the Lebanese population concerning the size of the family, fertility rates, and even the population pyramid.

Female School Drop-Outs

The data reveal that school drop-outs for both males and females are more prevalent among the primary levels. It then increases for males age 15 at the intermediate level, whereas the rates for female enrollment for all age categories at all levels up to university exceeds that of males. Of all college graduates in the age category 20-24, females constitute 63.4%. This fact, however, should not overshadow the reality that, although the overall illiteracy rate in Lebanon is 13%, the female rate is 17% (Table 3-04). While it is true that more women are getting married at a younger age than men, it could be safely stated that among those who stay single, more women are capable of making it through college than men.

Women and College Education

The Lebanese woman has proven herself capable of competing with men in most scientific fields. She has achieved equal enrollment in the sciences, superior enrollment in the medical and allied health services, and an absolute majority in the areas of Arts and Humanities (19,410 women versus 8,899 men). She is also pursuing technical and engineering studies, at a rate of 1 woman to 5 men. Her participation in the teaching profession stands at 76% (Table 3-08). Such data reveal that the Lebanese woman has shown great interest in the specializations that were once considered turf reserved for men and that she is making great progress despite the many obstacles she faces.

Women's Education and Age at Marriage

There seems to be a positive relationship between the marital status of women and their level of education. Young single women tend to pursue a college education, which normally ends by the age of 22-24. Thus, female college graduates tend to have more freedom in choosing their partners. The survey data reveal that the percentage of women married at a younger age and who did not attend the university is far greater than that of men. Also, the rate of marriage among female college students is far lower. By contrast, the marriage percentage of illiterate women exceeds 64%. Also, multiple marriages are more common among illiterate women than among women with a college education (Table 2-13).

Women's Education and Fertility rate

The education a woman has received plays an impor-

tant role when it comes to deciding on the size of her family. Women with a higher education tend to have fewer children. The survey data reveal that 86% of illiterate women has more than three children while only 33% of college graduates has that many (Table 4-10).

Working Women and Fertility

Although many Lebanese women have a high level of education, and therefore greater access to work opportunities, the majority seems to choose the role of housewives. The data reveal that 87% of married women does not work whereas only 9% is actively involved in the labor force. Fifty percent of married women has 2 to 4 children; however, 74% of working women has 3 children or fewer (Table 4-16). According to the survey working women belong to the age bracket 25-49; the majority hold middle and lower ranking jobs. Only a small number (2.7%) occupy high ranking positions (Table 4-52). It appears that although Lebanese women have attained higher levels of education than men, they are still restricted to traditional roles and have to surpass great hurdles when trying to do better in the labor force.

Conclusion

Although the economic, political, and social institutions of Lebanese society are undergoing rapid transformations, the resulting challenges are not so threatening as to endanger the existence of the family. The recent data showed above indicate that the extended family is being transformed into a nuclear one but the family as such, nonetheless, holds on to its traditional relationships, roles, and responsibilities. Parent-children relationships in Lebanon are still very strong - not only because of the patriarchal characteristics of the family, but also because women in general are playing meaningful and important roles in maintaining the structure of their families. Their educational and occupational pursuits are constantly adjusted to fit their responsibilities within the home. Women's own interests lie in those social relations that provide them with warmth and a sense of security. While it is true that women in the Arab world have a long way to go in their struggle to gain their rights, they do not necessarily consider themselves so unfortunate as they are often depicted. Like women everywhere, Lebanese women lead fruitful lives that oscillate between moments of happiness and moments of struggle.

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FAMILY IN LEBANON

Abdo Kaii, editor

Professor of Sociology at St. Joseph University

Summarized and translated by Ghena Ismail, IWSAW Staff

Discussions about the Lebanese or Arab family have largely revolved around the subject of the family's external duties towards society and public life. Issues related to the internal life, *i.e.*, one's attitude towards major concerns, one's needs and aspirations as well as one's emotional, intellectual, and humanitarian relationships have frequently been ignored. (1)

To examine the Lebanese family from the latter perspective, three field surveys were conducted (from January 13 to August 10, 1995) within the framework of Notre Dame de Loueizeh's social science program for 1995-1996: "Public Concern in People's Issues: Needs and Research, Planning and Supervision". Abdo Kaii supervised the study which covered a random sample of 400 individuals distributed throughout Beirut and its suburbs, Tripoli (North Lebanon), Saida (South Lebanon), and Zahleh (Bekaa). The sample comprised members of different age groups and socio-economic classes with whom personal interviews were conducted. An average of 13-14 questionnaires was distributed per day. (2)

The questions address four issues: the attitude of the Lebanese towards major beliefs and practices; the factors that influence marriage and the choice of spouse; the nature of the family, its main problems, and the strategies suggested by the Lebanese for overcoming these problems; and finally, the values that the Lebanese would like to transmit to their children.

The first part of the study reveals that more than one third of those surveyed think that the essence of all monotheistic religions is the same. However, more than fifty percent believe that their religion represents the absolute truth. Consequently, it is not surprising to learn that most respondents prefer a religious marriage to a civil one. They still adhere to a conservative and rigid value system, and their attitude towards socially unacceptable patterns of behavior is not flexible. Except for self-defense killing, such unacceptable practices are not tolerated, even though the interviewees are fully aware of their prevalence. It is worth noting, however, that divorce is becoming more acceptable than it used to be.

Since marriage remains the recognized custom for the

formation of the family in Lebanon and in all the Arab countries, one cannot examine the concept of family without discussing marriage. Concerning the choice of spouse, most of the Lebanese interviewed emphasize morality, personality factors, level of education, and social background. Family status, the spouse's profession, and financial matters seem to be secondary considerations. The main reason for the increase of the average marriage age is not the individual's need for a wider space or greater sexual freedom, unlike in other countries, but rather the difficult economic situation. In Lebanon, a decent residence is very expensive, given that the monthly minimum wage is 300 000 L.L. (*i.e.*, less than 200\$). It is worth noting that relatively few among today's young Lebanese solve their housing problem by living with their parents. As the concept of privacy is gaining more importance in the Lebanese society, the extended family-pattern is disintegrating.

Not only young couples who want to get married suffer from the difficult economic situation; in fact, the economy seems to be the basic problem from which the Lebanese family suffers in our time. Consequently, when asked to identify the family issues that need improvement, the vast majority of interviewees pointed to the economic conditions. They hardly mentioned the need to improve the internal life of the family, which does not mean that the internal state is in good shape but that the economic situation is tough. Their assessment of the relationships within the family was below the researcher's expectations of 7-8/9 while the actual ratio was 6-7/9. Relationships within the family appear to be neither bad nor excellent. As for the distribution of roles within the family, there is a clear trend towards equality. Duties such as raising the children, decision-making, and securing an atmosphere of love and compassion are no longer classified as either "purely female" or "purely male". This new phenomenon is worthy of attention and encouragement.

Finally, a majority of participants (46%) thinks that the human goal to be most emphasized by family and school education is the acceptance of the other (*i.e.*, someone from a different sect or political affiliation). The moral values and characteristics that the interviewees hope to transmit to their children are the sense of responsibility, faith in one's religion, chastity, forgiveness, and respect for the other; but values that enhance social development, such as hard work, independence, self-control, creative thinking, and leadership skills receive scant attention.

Table 1 - Attitude towards Religion

1. No religion holds the absolute truth; all religions share the same basic meanings	38.3%
2. The absolute truth is present in only one religion	56.8%
3. None of the religions include any truth	1.3%
4. No answer	3.6%

Table 2 - Attitude towards Civil Marriage

1. Preference of religious marriage	82.2%
2. Preference of civil marriage	15.8%
3. No answer	1.4%

Table 3 - Attitude towards Unacceptable Patterns of Social Behavior

	Grade out 9
1. Self-defense killing	6.0
2. Divorce	4.1
3. Keeping money found by coincidence	4.0
4. Lying to protect personal interests	3.1
5. Tax evasion	2.9
6. Abortion	2.9
7. Fighting/Clashing with the police	2.7
8. Political assassination	2.6
9. Buying a stolen commodity	2.5
10. Not admitting responsibility for damage caused to another person's car.	2.5
11. Claiming unlawful rights	2.5
12. Suicide	2.0
13. Marital Infidelity	1.9

14. Bribery	1.9
15. Stealing a car and driving it for the sake of fun	1.7
16. Having a sexual relationship below the age of eighteen.	1.6
17. Drug addiction	1.5
18. Adultery	1.4
19. Homosexuality	1.3
General Average	2.6

Table 4 - Prevalent Family Problems. (Mention three at the most).

1. General financial difficulties	57.2%
2. Covering health expenses	29.5%
3. Securing a decent residence	28.2%
4. Covering education expenses	27.0%
5. Unemployment or inability to find a good job	19.8%
6. Not concerned	15.5%
7. Finding a school and a university for the children	12.2%

Table 5 - Family Issues That Need Improvement

1. Facilitating the acquisition of a residence	71.8%
2. Provision of free education	71.8%
3. Provision of free health care for mother and child	68.2%
4. Provision of psychological and social services for the treatment of deviance in the family	68.5%
5. Provision of guidance for the strengthening of family relationships, especially between the spouses	17.8%

6. Provision of guidance for the management of family resources	15.5%
7. Provision of guidance and mediation for the treatment of severe differences within the family	15.2%

Table 6 - The Role of Father and Mother Respectively

Basic Functions	Father Mainly	Father Alone	Mother Alone	Mother Mainly	Both Parents
1. Provision of basic necessities of life	31.2%	39.5%	1.2%	5.5%	22.0%
2. Management of family matters	4.2%	20.8%	24.8%	30.5%	29.2%
3. Taking care of the children	0.5%	2.8%	42.2%	38.0%	15.8%
4. Raising the children	1.05%	1.5%	13.0%	27.2%	56.0%
5. Making important decisions in general (school, residence)	12.8%	3.14%	2.8%	5.0%	64.8%
6. Protecting the family	25.5%	0.3%	1.5%	3.5%	38.8%
7. Providing an atmosphere of love and compassion	0.8%	1.8%	8.8%	26.5%	61.8%

Table 7 - Human Goals That Should Be Most Emphasized By School And Family Education

1. Acceptance of the other regardless of religious, political, and social background.	46%
2. Improvement and Development	26.3%
3. Respecting customs and traditions	14.0%

4. Individual freedom	12.0%
5. No answer	1.7%

Table 8 - Moral Values And Characteristics That The Lebanese Hope To Transmit To Their Children.

1. Sense of responsibility	44%
2. Faith in one's religion	43.5%
3. Chastity	42.3%
4. Forgiveness and respect for the other	40.5%
5. Good conduct	37.8%
6. Hard work	36%
7. Politeness	33.5%
8. Independence	28.5%
9. Sincerity	26%
10. Self-control	24.8%
11. Caring about others	23.8%
12. Patience	21%
13. Perseverance	20%
14. Creative thinking	13.8%
15. Obedience	13.5%
16. Generosity	13.3%
17. Leadership skills	10.3%

Endnotes

(1)Kaii, Abdo. "Introduction: The Family In Confrontation with the Current Humanitarian and Socio-Economic Challenges." *Family in Lebanon*. Proceedings of the Seventh Conference. Lebanon: Notre Dame de Loueizeh. February 1, 1997.

(2) Abdo Kaii (preparation and implementation), Milhim Shawool (writing the report), Antoine Msarra (an analytical summary), *A Survey of Public Opinion about the Family*. Ritch-Mass Foundation for the Benefit of Notre Dame University. January, 1996. pp 30.

ABSTRACTS ON FAMILY ISSUES IN THE ARAB WORLD

SOCIAL AND FAMILIAL FACTORS LEADING TO LATE-AGE MARRIAGE AMONG SAUDI WOMEN

Summarized by Adnan Hammoud, Director of Arab Cultural Center, Beirut, and translated by Myriam A. Sfeir, IWSAW Staff

The researchers scrutinize the familial and social factors that lead Saudi women to marry late. Their field of study is restricted to the family, which acts as an analytical unit, because they believe that late-age marriage of women is very much related to the social conditions of the family.

The working sample was chosen from a survey conducted in 1985-1986 by the Research Center for Crime Prevention, which is associated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The initial sample comprised 1% of the families living in the city of Riyadh, *i.e.*, 2,000 families. However, the researchers used two criteria to reduce those 2,000 families to 599: families had to have Saudi origin, and the father's age had to be 49 or above. Of these 599, 88 families experienced late-age marriages among their women.

Several familial characteristics leading to such

late-age marriage were identified. Among the most important is the increase in literacy rate among women aged 18 years and above; the increase in women's quest for higher education corresponds to an increase in late-age marriage. The participation of women in the labor force is another factor: families whose women work outside the home witness an increase in the late-age marriage phenomenon. Socio-economic status is also important: in 1% of the families concerned, women hold administrative or technical jobs, earn high monthly incomes, and live in wealthy neighborhoods. The researchers conclude that the phenomenon of late-age marriage of women varies according to the socio-economic characteristics of their families.

* Originally published by Ibrahim El Abeedy and Abdallah El Khalifeh in *Majalat Al Ouloum Al Ijtimaiyat* issue # 20 Spring/Summer 1992.

DIVORCE IN KUWAITI SOCIETY ITS REASONS

Fahed Thakeb El Thakeb has taken as his object of study divorce in Kuwaiti society. He holds that Kuwait has over the years witnessed numerous educational, cultural, and social changes, which culminated in an increase in the literacy rate among women. This increase in women's education positively affected their participation in the country's labor force. Consequently, the age of marriage was postponed due to the impact of Western ideology on the educated woman, because this ideology changed her outlooks and allowed her to evaluate life from a different perspective. The educated woman became critical of the institution of marriage and of the socially prescribed gender roles.

This study aims at highlighting the determining factors that lead to divorce in Kuwaiti society. It espe-

cially attempts to analyze the divorcee's opinion towards these factors and to relate them to the social and cultural background of the women concerned. El Thakeb made use of a sample that comprised 258 divorce cases, which were selected from a total of 1,072 such cases during the years 1990-1992. He questioned only the female partners in the divorce.

His sample selected women divorcees according to age group, geographical area, and occupation or profession, and he put 245 questions to them. One of these was open-ended and concerned the reason for divorce. The latter (answered by 145 divorcees) were grouped into eight categories. Twenty-three percent stated mistreatment by and corruption of the spouse. Ten percent involved the unavailability of an independent home.

Eleven percent of divorcees blamed polygamy and nine percent sexual problems. Interactive problems in the couple accounted for another nine percent. Economic problems, on the one hand, and repulsiveness and lack of conviction, on the other, each also accounted for nine percent of divorces. Finally, psychological problems due to doubt and jealousy as well as physical problems again amounted to nine percent.

These varied problems must be analyzed in relation to factors in the background of the women questioned such as: the duration of the marriage, the educational level of the women, the monthly income of the couple before their divorce, the age upon divorce, the time period spent with the husband, and the duration of residency with him.

El Thakeb concludes that these problems were most often due to changes in the Kuwaiti educational and social sectors. Moreover, he holds that the most important reasons leading to divorce, especially for young female university graduates, are lack of independent housing, lack of interaction between the couples, and dissatisfaction with the marriage. He attributes this finding to the changes that occurred in women's outlooks concerning marriage and family as a result of Western influence.

*** Originally published by Fahed Thakeb El Thakeb in *Majalat Al Ouloum Al Ijtimaiyat*, issue # 24 Fall 1996.**

THE EFFECT OF WAR ON LEBANESE WOMEN'S FERTILITY RATE

Dr. Muhammad Faour examines the effect of war on the fertility of Lebanese women on the basis of statistical data collected from four surveys between the years 1970 and 1985. The first was conducted by the Ministry of Planning in 1970. It included all the Lebanese provinces. The second was undertaken by the Family Planning Association in 1971 and the third was conducted by the American University of Beirut in 1983. The last study, by the Hariri foundation in 1985, included the provinces of Beirut, the southern suburb of Beirut, the Bekaa, and the North.

Dr. Faour begins by comparing all these data because Beirut and its southern suburb - unlike the North and the Bekaa, where only intermittent skirmishes took place - witnessed continuous battles over a period of seventeen years. He maintains that the fertility rate of inhabitants living in those Lebanese areas that served as battle fields and suffered the ill effects of war the most decreased, regardless of socio-economic strata, more than did the rates in safer areas. Faour cites several factors that serve as indicators of a woman's fertility rate, namely educational level, economic growth, the intensity of war and its violence, the use of contraceptives, ... He concludes that the war's impact as a determining factor in decreasing fertility is important but relevant only in certain cases. In areas which served as battle fields and where continuous violence, destruction, and brutali-

ty prevailed, a decrease in fertility rate did occur. However, in areas where recurrent battles causing minor destruction took place, the link between peace and fertility proved insignificant, for these areas witnessed long intervals of peace regardless of the instability in national security. Yet, the effect of the Lebanese war on the economic, social, and psychological conditions indirectly influenced the rate.

Finally, Faour attempts to associate the decrease in female fertility with behavioral changes. He concludes that due to the prevailing socio-economic conditions the advantages for a small family exceeded those for a large one. Moreover, the increased access to higher education improved women's status in society for it empowered them by rendering them more conscious of their situation. With consciousness came maturity and an eagerness for further education, as well as an insistence on sharing responsibility in basic family decisions with the male partner. In addition, daily interaction with the international mass media that advocate late-age marriages and a low fertility rate has helped to bring about current behavioral changes.

*** Originally published by Mouhamad Faour in *Majalat Al Ouloum Al Ijtimaiyat*, issue # 18 spring 1996.**

CHANGING MARRIAGE PATTERNS IN LEBANON

Adele Khudr, Project-Officer, Basic Social Services, UNICEF.

Marriage is probably the oldest social institution in human history. It constitutes an important step in starting a family to which both men and women have to be initiated. The age of women at marriage is an important determinant of the type of society, indicating its status as "traditional" or "modern". Age at marriage is related to a number of phenomena including the level of education, the participation of women in the labor force, the economic situation prevailing in a society, and the social perception of marriage.

This article sheds light on the changes that have taken place in the last 25 years concerning the age of women who marry in Lebanon. The pattern depicted represents an increasing proportion of single women in Lebanese society, which is coupled with marriage at a more advanced age. The reasons for this pattern are linked to phenomena affecting both men and women.

Evolution of the marital status of women

An analysis of the percentage of single women in Lebanon over the past 25 years, *i.e.*, between 1970 and 1995, reveals an increasing proportion of single women among all age groups.

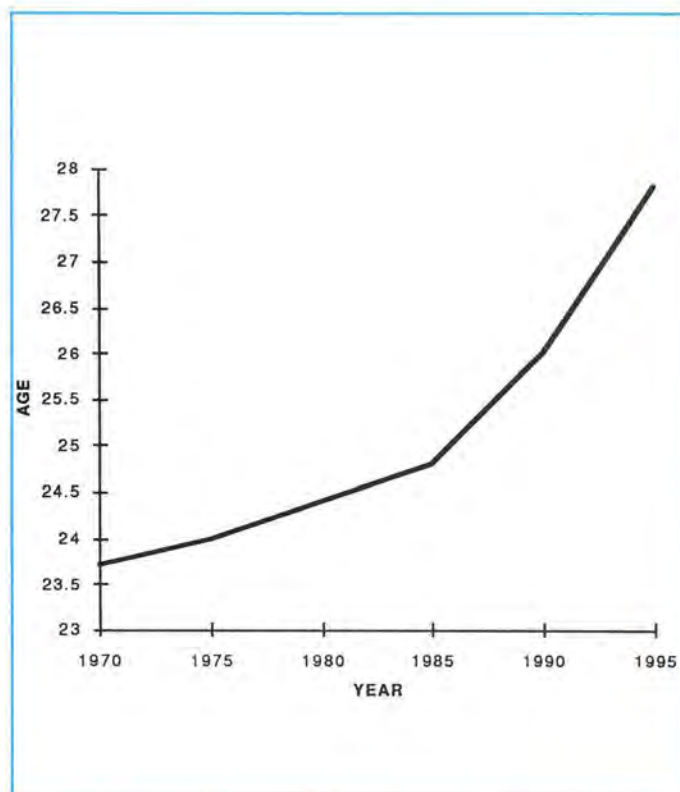
Percentage of unmarried women

Age Group	1970	1986	1993	1995	
15 - 19	86.9	86.2	94.5	95.0	
20 - 24	51.3	58.3	74.4	72.0	
25 - 29	25.4	35.5	47.5	46.6	
30 - 34	14.1	19.5	28.6	30.4	
35 - 39	9.7		12.3	18.2	20.9
40 - 44	7.5	7.2	11.6	15.2	
45 - 49	6.8	6.7	8.4	11.5	
50 and above	5.9	6.0	5.7	7.3	
Average 15 and above	29.3	35.1	38.9	37.5	

The most striking finding in this table is the increase in the proportion of unmarried women in the age groups (20 - 24) (25 - 29) (30 - 34) (35 - 39). These are the age groups in which most of the women get married and that were mostly affected by the war, *i.e.*, those whose youth coincided with the war years.

Evolution of the average age of women at marriage

The increase in the population of unmarried women in the various age groups has been coupled with a delay in the age of women at marriage, as revealed in the following figure:



Source: The Lebanese Woman 1970 - 1995: Numbers and meanings, National Commission for Women and La Source, 1997.

Discussion

Lebanese society has undergone major changes in the last 25 years due to the effect of the war that lasted about 17 years. Large population movements, displacement, threats to physical survival, deteriorating economic conditions, as well as changes in the patterns and levels of education among both men and women, have deeply affected Lebanese society.

The changes represented by the increasing proportion of unmarried women, especially in the young age groups, and the delay of marriage to a more advanced age, can be explained by the following:

1. An increase in the level of education among women. The illiteracy rate among Lebanese women dropped from 20.1% in 1970 to 3.6% in 1995 for the age group 15-19, from 28.5% to 4.8% for the age group 20 - 24, and from 59.4% to 25.6% for women aged 25 and above. This is coupled with an increase in the number of women who pursue a university education.

The percentage of women enrolled in universities increased from 47.1% in 1982 to 50.1% in 1992 and to 52% in 1994. The single most important determinant in the age of marriage is education. The positive relationship between education and age at marriage is a common pattern found in rapidly developing societies. Access to education seems to have a tremendous impact on women's perception of themselves, on their reproductive and sex roles, and on their expectations of social mobility. There is a prevailing idea that marriage will hamper the woman's ability to pursue her education, and hence marriage is delayed until a later age.

2. The participation of women in the labor force. Lebanese society has witnessed an increase in the proportion of working women from 14.3% in 1970 to 18.5% in 1995 for all women aged 15 and above. In particular, it has gone up from 20.3% to 31.1% for women aged 25 - 29, from 16.1% to 26.7% for those aged 30 - 34 and from 13.6% to 25.4% for those aged 35 - 39. The increased participation of women in the labor force means that they have started to earn an income that allows them to be independent to a certain extent rather than depend on potential husbands for their livelihood. This is linked also to the feeling of social and intellectual independence, and to the higher self-esteem and change of self - image associated with participation in the labor force.

3. The over-all deterioration of the economic situation in Lebanon, which presents a serious challenge for young men of marriageable age. Young men who are faced with

job insecurity and high cost of living - particularly housing costs - postpone marriage. Indeed, although no statistical figures are available to document the age at marriage of men, it is possible to observe that most of the marriages of men at early age occur either among very wealthy families able to support their sons or among migrant men. The pressures that are put on men for paying the dowry and various other marriage - related expenses are also worth noting.

4. Migration, population movement, and urbanization. The years of war have resulted in several phases of massive displacement of the population both within and outside the country. Lebanon is also one of the highly urbanized countries in the Arab World; 86% of its population is urban.

The movement of families from rural to urban areas results in the weakening of family ties and in severing the relationship between the migrating family-members and those who stayed behind in rural areas. In a country like Lebanon, which is known to have a high proportion of consanguineous marriages, this is bound to have an impact. On the other hand, the patterns of nuptiality are definitely influenced by urbanization: the more urbanized young people are, the later they marry.

Conclusion

The patterns of marriage in Lebanon are definitely changing in the direction typical of a rapidly modernizing society, which is characterized by a higher proportion of unmarried women in all age groups coupled with an advanced age at marriage. Although I have identified some reasons for this phenomenon, a qualitative study among women of different age groups and various socio-economic backgrounds remains essential to shed more light on this interesting pattern of development. Another aspect to be investigated is the impact of this change on lifestyles, patterns of child-rearing and child-rearing, as well as maternal and child health resulting from delayed marriages.

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TEMPORARY MARRIAGE

Myriam A. Sfeir

Temporary or *Mut'a* marriage is one of the most fiercely contested moral issues in Islam. When taking on the subject of *Mut'a* marriage, Muslims enter a battle in which lines are drawn between the "Shiite" and the "Sunni". The debate between these two fronts is endless, *i.e.*, the *Shiite* consider this marriage to be legitimate, whereas according to the *Sunni* it is forbidden.

Both parties agree that *Mut'a* existed during the days of the Prophet and that he encouraged his followers and soldiers to practice it. "*Mut'a* was permitted to prevent chaos and social disorder by soothing individual discomfort" (Haeri 1989, pp.49-51). The *Sunnis* attribute its permissibility at one point in history to unusual circumstances, namely when long separations in times of war negatively affected individuals and society. The *Shiites*, however, hold that, although the Prophet recommended it to his soldiers, *Mut'a* should not be interpreted as being restricted to specific historical circumstances. The *Sunnis* affirm that only one reference, and that a rather controversial one, to *Mut'a* exists, namely, in the *sura* of women, verse 24: "Beyond all that, is that you seek, using your wealth in wedlock and not in license. Such wives as you enjoy thereby, given their wages apportionate. God is All-knowing, All-wise" (*Quran* 4:24). They go on to claim that nothing is mentioned in the *Quran* relating to its form, its procedure, the reciprocal rights of the temporary wife, *etc.* (Haeri 1989, p.61). The *Shiite Ulama* disagree and maintain that *Umar Bin El Khattab* equated *mut'a* marriage with fornication and called for its abolition. But to them his prohibition of this form of marriage is invalid because "that which has been made lawful, '*halal*', by Muhammad is '*halal*' till the Day of Resurrection and that which has been forbidden, '*haram*', is '*haram*' till the Day of Resurrection" (Haeri 1989, p.63).

Islam and Christianity look at the function of instincts from different angles. While the Christians consider the individual to be torn between instinct and reason, *i.e.*, between bad and good, Islam views the raw instincts as energy which is pure and which lacks any implications of bad or good. The connotations of good and bad arise, however, when the social destiny of men is taken into account:

The individual cannot survive except within a social order. Any social order has a set of laws. The set of laws decides which uses of the instincts are good or

bad. It is the use made of the instincts, not the instincts themselves, that is beneficial or harmful to the social order. Therefore, in the Muslim order it is not necessary for the individual to eradicate his instincts or to control them for the sake of control itself, but he must use them according to the demands of religious law (Mernissi 1985, p. 27).

According to Islam, sexual desire should not be suppressed, because a sexually frustrated member of the community is considered dangerous, defective and inferior. It should be used to serve the purpose of the Muslim order which is the perpetuity of the human race: "used according to God's will, the desire of the flesh serves God and the individual's interests in both worlds, enhances life on earth and in heaven" (Mernissi 1985, pp. 58-60). Sexual desires should be harnessed and channeled in the right direction, namely marriage. The prophet Muhammad is said to have stated that "marriage is my tradition ... He who rejects my tradition is not my follower" (Mernissi 1985, pp. 58-60). It is a protective device against *zina* whereby one's sexual desires are satisfied. *Zina* may be defined as "any sexual intercourse between two people who are not in a state of legal matrimony or concubinage." Both adultery, which involves at least one married person, and fornication, which involves unmarried individuals, are considered acts of *zina*. Therefore, in order to prevent individuals from committing *zina*, sexual desires should be gratified through marriage, for only within the married couples is sexual intercourse legitimate.

The *Shiite* claim that, throughout the ages, marriage has always been accompanied with adulterous relationships. Moreover, permanent marriage failed to solve the problems of sexual gratification due to many obstacles that impede its realization, such as financial problems or the need to further one's education. Because permanent marriage may be out of the question under certain circumstances and because it is important to fight moral corruption and decadence, temporary marriage is seen as a solution for regulating sexual relationships within the confines of religious law. "*Mut'a* is for the people who can't marry permanently and who are in need, or are afraid that if they do not do it they will commit a sinful act ..." (Haeri 1989, pp.49-51).

Mut'a is an Arabic word that can be translated as "enjoyment" or "pleasure". *Mut'a* marriage or temporary marriage is a contract in which a man and an unmarried woman (virgin, widow, divorcee) decide upon the

length of the marriage and the amount of money to be paid beforehand. This contract takes place between the two parties involved, does not require the presence of a religious figure or of witnesses, and does not need to be registered. The term may be as long as ninety nine years or as short as one hour, depending on the couple's desire. No divorce is required as the marriage is terminated upon the expiry of the contract. After that, a woman is expected to serve her *iddah* or waiting period, which is defined as the length of time by the completion of which a new marriage, if contracted, would be lawful. The children born as a result of *mut'a* marriage are legitimate and enjoy the same rights as their siblings born from a permanent marriage. A *Shiite* man is allowed four wives in permanent marriage: "Marry of the women who seem good to you two, three, or four, and if ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only)" but he can contract as many temporary marriages as he desires (Mernissi 1985, p.46).

The objectives of the two types of marriage differ. *Mut'a* marriage which is considered a form of marriage with a built-in time limit is contracted for sexual enjoyment whereas a permanent marriage is contracted for procreation. The structural elements of *mut'a* marriage are very similar to that of a permanent one. It requires a legal form of contract (*sigheh*) where the woman says "I, (name), marry (or *mut'a*) thee, for the amount of (money) and for such and such a period" and the man says, "I accept". In a permanent contract, the duration and payment are not specified, and the ceremony is usually not a private affair. In both marriage types, the limitations of interfaith marriage (*mahal*) must be observed. A Muslim woman cannot marry anyone but a Muslim, and a Muslim man can choose from among the chaste Muslim women, Christians, Jews, and sometimes Zoroastrians (Haeri 1989, pp. 50-51).

A consideration of payment (*ajr*) should be specified upon contracting a marriage or else it is considered void. In this aspect permanent and temporary marriage differ, for in the latter the *mahr* can be left unstated whereas the validity of the former requires specifying the sum. A further difference concerns the payment of consideration: a permanently married wife receives her payment if intercourse takes place, whereas in the temporary marriage upon the end of the contract the husband is obliged to give his wife half the amount specified if intercourse did not take place. If the marriage is consummated and the husband decides to dismiss his wife before the term is up, she gets the full amount. Besides, a husband is required to pay his wife the full sum if he chooses not to have intercourse with her yet does not release her from her obligations. The duration of temporary marriage (*ajal*) ought to be made "quantifiably clear" in a *mut'a* contract where the two parties specify a time limit, unlike a in permanent marriage where the

duration is one's lifetime (Haeri 1989, pp. 52-53).

For women, *mut'a* marriage entails no privileges or rights; her condition is worse than that of a permanent wife. In return for her sexual favors she receives her consideration (*ajr*) but her husband is not required to pay for her upkeep (*nafaka*) - not even when she is carrying his child (unless that had been agreed upon in the *mut'a* contract). Moreover, a *mut'a* wife is not entitled to inherit from her husband. A permanent wife has the right to inherit from her husband, and the husband is required to pay for his wife's upkeep (*nafaka*) provided that she "submits to his every desire and is at his disposition for the satisfaction of every one of his wishes ... she is not allowed to refuse his advances except on grounds of religious impediments"(Haeri 1989, pp. 65-69).

The degree of obedience being limited in a *mut'a* marriage, a temporary wife enjoys greater freedom and autonomy and her activities do not fall completely under her husband's control. However, if her leaving the house interferes with her husband's right to sexual intercourse her activities are forbidden. There are legal devices that ensure a permanent wife's right to intercourse and sexual satisfaction by her husband, but these do not apply to a *mut'a* marriage. In a permanent marriage "it is just for the husband to have sexual intercourse with his wife every four nights if he has four wives." However, if he has one wife he can spend as many nights with her as he pleases. Moreover, a husband is obliged to sexually satisfy his wife not less than once every fourth month. Some *Ulama* hold that "this command is not limited to permanent marriage" (Haeri, 1989, pp. 70-72).

In an interview, Ayatollah Al-Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah explained that the issues related to *mut'a* marriage should be dealt with in-depth in order to fully grasp the significance of such a marriage. He holds that temporary marriage used to be considered similar to the quick marriages in emergency situations. He disagrees with some *Ulama* who assert that men are entitled to marry up to four temporary wives as they are in permanent marriage, and he maintains that there is actually no limit to the number of temporary wives as long as one keeps in mind that this marriage should take place in emergency situations and special cases.

Al-Sayeed Fadlallah affirms that the difference between *zina* and permanent marriage, on the personal level, lies in the latter being a contractual obligation where the partners agree upon the rights and obligations required of each of them. He defines *zina* as an illegitimate relationship without contractual links and restrictions other than one's personal moods and desires. According to him *zina* takes place when people live together in concubinage or have intercourse without any

of the restrictions that give one partner rights and obligations over the other. From the legal and religious point of view, the law protects permanent marriage and states its legitimacy whereas *zina* is punished by the law and religion.

Al-Sayyed Fadlallah holds that men need to satisfy their instinctive and natural sexual urges and desires. He explains that permanent marriage is not always the solution to the sexual problem for it is usually accompanied with *zina*. Given that the sexual relationship stems from a human need, Al-Sayyed Fadlallah maintains that we should find a solution for this sexual problem within the confines of religion alongside the need to marry permanently and that this solution is *mut'a* marriage. He explains that men and women differ in their sex drives. The former require copulation with more than one partner to relieve their body from sexual tension whereas women are by nature used to abstinence. Instead of committing *zina*, a man who is unable to afford marrying permanently, can enter into a legitimate contract whereby he is able to satisfy his desires in a lawful and religiously acceptable manner.

According to Al-Sayyed Fadlallah, a husband's sexual rights over his wife do not differ whether he is married to her permanently or temporarily. Islam made women and men free; what binds them together are the vows they take towards each other. He holds that a woman who agrees to marry, either permanently or temporarily, is willingly giving up her freedom. He offers an analogy between marriage and employment to explain his point: "a female employee has to succumb to the orders of her boss and in this case we cannot say that we are oppressing her or robbing her of her freedom for she is the one who willingly chose to place her freedom in the hands of someone else by subjecting it to the will of someone else in the workplace. The same applies to marriage, marriage is not based purely on sex, yet sex or sexual activity is an important factor for married couples. So when a woman agrees to get married she knows exactly what is expected of her, namely obeying her husband's wishes and desires. The element of choice is present and she was the one who chose to link her life to the wishes of someone else. So she is in no way exploited, for she willingly entered into the contract."

Al-Sayyed Fadlallah says that, normally, society and the *Shiite* community itself look down upon *mut'a* marriage as shameful and condemn it, for this form of marriage opposes traditions and customary practices; society fails to tolerate the temporary marriage of a widow, a divorced woman, and, especially, a virgin. Moreover, he adds that it is considered socially unacceptable for a man to propose temporarily to a woman or to her parents. Al-Sayyed Fadlallah explains that some *Ulama* believe that virgin women should not be allowed to contract this type of marriage for it brings upon them social shame even though

it is religiously legitimate and acceptable; these *Ulama* maintain that a virgin should obtain the approval of her father or paternal grandfather before getting married. However, Al-Sayyed disagrees with this position, arguing that, if a virgin is an adult and capable of managing her own money, she need not have the permission of her father.

When asked how he would react if his own daughter were to contract a temporary marriage, he answered, "I would not like to see my daughter married temporarily due to the instability of *mut'a* marriage. I want for my daughter a stable life and *mut'a* marriage, though legitimate, is not a permanent marriage. Yet, if this is to ever occur I would not treat her as a delinquent or as an adulteress or even take a negative standpoint." Al-Sayyed Fadlallah contends that the negative aspects of a *mut'a* marriage fall mostly on the woman's head, because society is patriarchal. Temporary marriage stigmatizes the woman and causes her to be looked down upon by society - especially if that society is primitive. For example, he believes that in tribal communities such a marriage might endanger her life and render it unstable. He holds that a woman's need for emotional stability in life is innate and more prominent than that of a man; hence, a woman who gets addicted to *mut'a* marriage will lose all sense of stability, with all the social and psychological consequences. Besides, she might run the risk of remaining alone always, for men will refuse to marry her permanently.

Al-Sayyed Fadlallah says that the Eastern way of thinking and the high price and value attached to virginity may render *mut'a* marriage a problem that affects the woman's life negatively. However, he maintains that in a liberal society where relationships between men and women are permissible and which acknowledges a woman's need for sexual pleasure, *mut'a* marriage should not be problematic for a woman. Still, a woman is required in such a liberal society to preserve and protect herself by abstaining from committing *zina*, delinquency, and immorality. Given that our society is still very conservative, Al-Sayyed affirms that Eastern women should protect themselves from its wrath. They should not be contented with what religion proclaims as legitimate or illegitimate, for many things acceptable to religious law are unacceptable to society. "A woman should protect herself from the injustices of society."

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WOMEN-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS IN LEBANON

Ghena Ismail

One cannot tackle the issue of the family in Lebanon without referring to the women-headed households. According to the statistical survey of the population and residence, conducted by the Ministry of Social Affairs and issued on October 14, 1996, 14.2% of families in Lebanon are headed by women (*i.e.*, 91,131 families). These women may be widows, divorcees, abandoned, or married to men who were kidnaped, worked abroad, or are sick and incapable of working. One common factor among these women, whatever the socio-economic background, is that they are in charge of their families by force of the situation.

To get to know more about these women, their perceptions, feelings, hopes, and expectations, IWSAW carried out the following interviews with seven women from different socio-economic levels who have become heads of households for various reasons. They were asked the same set of questions which aimed at investigating their feelings about their situation, the decision-making process in their families, their residential and health circumstances, and the basic problems they face.

Interviews

Lara is a 39-year old Lebanese Maronite who was married to a Palestinian Muslim man for only three years. After the divorce, three years ago, Lara became the head of a household consisting of herself and her two children. Financial difficulties constitute Lara's main problem; she nowadays works as a secretary. Her ex-husband does not contribute to the children's expenses, since he is "brainless", as Lara describes him. "Even during marriage, I was the main financial supporter, but whatever small contribution he made then was helpful." Currently, Lara lives with her brother and mother in a two-bedroom apartment where she and her children have their own bedroom. This situation has positive as well as negative effects. On the one hand, she need not worry about finding a place to live or about childcare during her absence. On the other, her mother and brother constantly interfere in the up-bringing of the children, so that there is no single obvious authority figure. Most often, Lara's mother and brother will side with the kids even if they do something that she does not approve of. However, this interference is limited to such matters as eating too many sweets or staying up late to watch a movie; when it comes to more important matters, such as the choice of school, it is always Lara who decides. The children's relationship with their grandmother and uncle is excellent, and although Lara's brother does not assume any financial

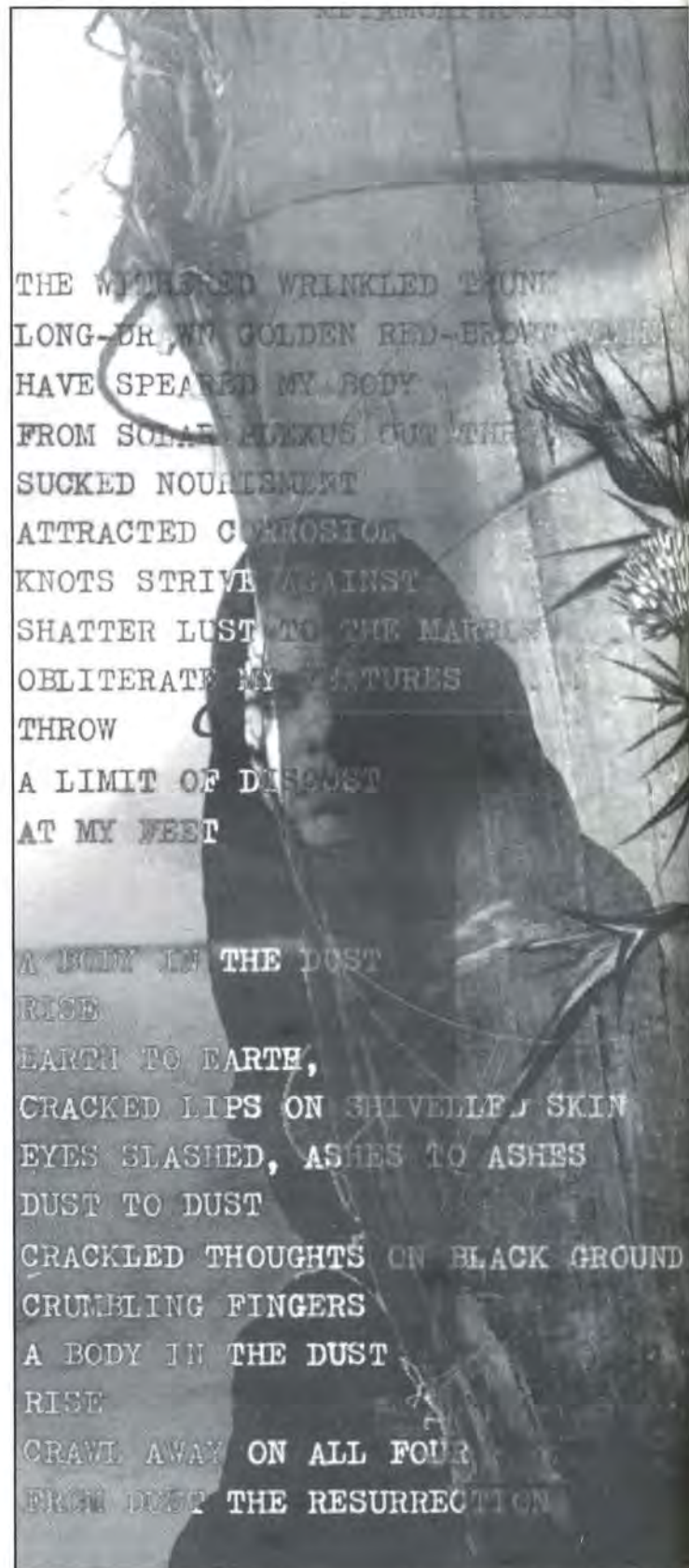
responsibility towards her and her children, he helps them indirectly. Lara does not foresee any improvement in her status: "On the contrary, the older my children, the bigger their needs will be; at the same time, my income is not likely to increase." Yet, since there is nothing she can do, she does not bother herself with unnecessary worries.

Faizeh is 49 years old; she is a Lebanese Muslim (of Syrian origin) whose smiling face radiates happiness and content. After the third child was born, and as her husband's health deteriorated, Faizeh started working as a maid. Faizeh's husband did not approve of the idea; however, since they were in desperate need of money to cover his medication expenses, Faizeh worked during his absence. Faizeh has a blind sister who has been living with them since she was married and who took care of the kids during her absence. "My husband of course knew that I went to work, but he turned a blind eye." Thus, being independent was not a new experience to Faizeh after her husband's death. Even before his decease, Faizeh was the primary provider and this never bothered her, for she believes that a good and clever woman should not be dependent on anyone - not even her husband. Moreover, Faizeh enjoys working and cannot see herself as a housewife at all. What started bothering her after her husband's death, was mainly people's attitude - especially when she went to Syria. People gossiped about the fact that she was living alone, and they inquired about every man who visited her - even if this man was one of her brothers. Her brothers wanted her to live with them, and they strongly suggested that she leave her children to their father's family, but this was totally unacceptable to her. Faizeh did not depend on any external help; she did not expect to be helped in the first place. Her brother-in-law tried to help her financially; however, he was often stopped by his mother who never extended a helping hand to Faizeh's family, not even during her son's stay at the hospital. "She has always been very stingy." One and a half years after her husband's death, Faizeh married her brother-in-law. This helped to put an end to people's gossip. Moreover, Faizeh's remarrying was very beneficial to the children, since their uncle loved them a lot; however, he failed to be strict with them, and thus she has always been the source of authority at home. Faizeh feels pride in telling us that her three oldest sons now own a bakery, are happily married, and live in two homes that she bought. Her sons want her to stop working, since they feel that she needs to rest, but she refuses. She loves her work too much to be able to quit.

Rana is a 48-year old Lebanese Orthodox Christian of Palestinian origin and has been a widow for nineteen years. Rana holds a B.A. in History but works in a

bank to support her two children and her father-in-law. Rana's pattern of life changed radically after her husband's death. "When my husband was alive, I needed not worry about anything. He worked in the Institute for Palestinian Studies," wrote for *An-Nahar* newspaper, and taught on a part-time basis at A.U.B. He loved me a lot and did his best to secure for us the best kind of life." His death did not break Rana, as she knew that she had to be strong enough to face the new challenges of life. For the first seven years, Rana did not work; her sister-in-law supported the family financially, while she stayed home to take care of the children. Rana's father-in-law and sister-in-law live close to her. However, her husband's family does not interfere in the decision-making process. "Right from the beginning, I made it clear that the children should be brought up by one person only." Rana explains that her husband's family is her true family. None of her own sisters or brothers (who are very well off) ever extended a helping hand to her. Rana's bitterness towards her family is obvious: "I hold much grudge against all of my family, and I meet my sisters only on special occasions." She feels proud of having been able to let her daughters achieve what they have achieved today. The eldest daughter studies at the Lebanese American University (LAU) and the younger one is at the International College school (I.C.). Rana has always insisted on matriculating her daughters in the best schools and colleges, and she was often blamed for that. To her, a good school does not only ensure a good education but also a good social environment. Giving her daughters the opportunity to interact with people from a high social class might help them in the future. "I know I am paying the cost of these words, but, honestly, I cannot imagine my daughters studying in schools of a lower rank. I have nothing to leave to my daughters but a degree from a respectable university." However, how is Rana able to manage with her modest salary from the bank? "I am falling under the weight of heavy loans and debts. Yet, the good performance of my daughters in their studies offers me the best consolation." When asked how she would be able to pay back her loans, Rana replied that her daughters should take care of that when they start working.

Dima is a 38-year old widow and one of the very few women engaged in the industry of wood trade in the Middle East. Dima received a B.A. degree in Economics from A.U.B, and was very eager to work and practice what she had learned. "I always had a curiosity to know what happened beyond the counter in the bank. My work in the bank provided me with an excellent experience from which I benefited a lot later in my life." At the age of 29, Dima got married and moved with her husband to Saudi Arabia. Up until then, Dima's life was characterized by one simple word: "happiness". Her childhood had been a very happy one, and her marriage was equally happy as she was deeply in love with her husband. One year later, her life took a different turn. Her mother died, and less than two years later, before Dima had absorbed the shock, her hus-





"Metamorphosis", 1996, Computer Art. Lina Ghaibeh

band became so seriously sick that his death was inevitable. Despite the emotional turmoil she found herself in, Dima decided that she should prepare herself to take her husband's place in work after his death. So, she went to the company and took care of the business. "It was then that I realized the importance of the banking background I had." Dima's work was not socially accepted. She was the only woman working in the wood-industry field in Saudi Arabia, and one of the very few women in this field in the Middle East. However, people around her sympathized with her as they understood that she was not working to defy any rules or traditions but to protect her husband's work. When Dima's husband died, her father was very much concerned about her. He wanted to give her a fixed income and provide her with whatever she needed. However, Dima thought that she was mature and old enough to take care of herself and her son. She accepted to transfer the business to Lebanon upon her father's request. Dima's father, with whom she enjoys a special relationship, encouraged her to live with her son in their own apartment to which purpose he supported her financially. I could see the tears in Dima's eyes when she talked about her husband's death; however, I could sense as well her willful and defiant attitude. "Life is a challenge," Dima asserted more than once. Dima refuses to view her situation as pitiful or burdensome in any way. On the contrary, she believes that she was lucky to have lived thirty years of absolute happiness. To Dima, life is a big challenge and one has to come out on top. "Of course, I would have been happier if I had my husband next to me, but there is nothing I can do, and life has to go on. Moreover, I have my son, who is the most beautiful gift life has offered me."

Sanaa is a Christian Lebanese who has been married for eleven years. She is only thirty-six, but she definitely looks much older. Four years ago, Sanaa's husband developed severe heart problems and could not go to work anymore. Thus, Sanaa found herself responsible for a family consisting of herself, her husband, and three children. Sanaa holds a baccalaureate degree and used to work in a pharmacy when she was single; however, she did not consider working in a pharmacy again after her husband's illness declared itself, because it was very important to her to be back home before the children would return from school. In the beginning, Sanaa worked in a sewing factory close to home; however, two months later the factory closed and the family lived in extreme poverty. In the winter, she started to look for another job. Eventually, she sold household objects and cosmetics to friends and neighbors. The most important challenge Sanaa faced was that of paying the tuition fees: the children attend a semi-private school, which charges 500,000 L.L. (*i.e.*, about \$325) per child. The school may be a bit more expensive than other schools but it has the advantage of being close which spares Sanaa having to worry about transportation expenses. Two years ago, Sanaa suffered from a severe hemorrhage, caused by a stomach ulcer. She had to stop working and could not pay

the tuition fees on time. Fortunately, Sanaa knew about the S.O.S. from one of her friends, and she filled out an application form. She did not expect that her application would be accepted that easily. The social worker explained that Sanaa's application was accepted because her husband was not capable of working and she had under-age children. In the beginning, the S.O.S. covered the schooling of Sanaa's children and allocated a monthly allowance to the family. Then they helped Sanaa enroll in a hairdressing and make-up training program. Sanaa's health improved much, and eventually she opened a hairdressing salon at home. Then, the S.O.S. stopped giving aid, and Sanaa's husband started to look for work. "Had we continued helping Sanaa financially, her husband would have never considered working. He had gotten used to being dependent on Sanaa," a social worker at the S.O.S. stated. Although Sanaa's work gave her a bigger role in the decision-making processes at home, she does her best not to let her husband feel useless. When asked about his role towards the family and the children, Sanaa laughed not knowing what to say: "The children love him a lot."

Lina is a 38-year old Christian Lebanese who has been married for twelve years. Lina's husband had been suffering of a serious psychological illness which prevented him from working. Only when Lina got married did she understand how seriously ill her husband was, and thus she knew that she had to be responsible for earning the family's keep. She started by doing housecleaning for other people. I could easily feel how uncomfortable Lina felt about the situation. "I only worked in two houses ... I did not do this kind of work for a long time ... It is not ayb (i.e., improper) to work," she kept emphasizing. Lina stopped working in other people's houses three years ago, after she found out about the S.O.S. At the S.O.S. she learnt sewing. Lina now does the sewing at the S.O.S. and receives a monthly salary. She does not have to worry about paying rent since the house is her husband's. Tuition fees are only 275 thousand L.L. (i.e. around \$180), which is not a problem. The big problem Lina faces every month is covering the daily living expenses and her husband's medicines. The situation bothers Lina a lot, especially because she knows that her husband does not put in the necessary effort to work. "It is true that he is psychologically ill, but he does not have the will to fight his illness and to find work. He has learnt to be dependent on me." Although Lina's husband does not assume any kind of responsibility in the family, she does not like to make him feel useless. "I make sure to consult with him on every single matter. If I think differently from him, I do not break his word, but it is apparent I try to persuade him." The children love their father, but they trust and love their mother more.

Suha, a forty-year old Muslim, lived with her family in Saudi Arabia for fifteen years. Six years ago, Suha and her husband decided that she would go to Beirut with her children while he would stay on in Saudi Arabia for

another couple of years. She did not find the task of being head of the family burdensome. "My life had to become more organized, since there was no one to help me. I got thinner and people thought that my health was affected by the big responsibility I was shouldering. However, my health was not affected. I only got thinner because I became more active. I refused to bring a maid in the beginning, because I thought that since I was not working I should be able to manage. In fact I managed well, but it wasn't easy, especially because my ten-year old son was weak at school and I had to teach him daily for no fewer than six hours. The second year I brought a maid." However, Suha says that even when her husband came, things did not change. The major challenge Suha was facing was helping her son to succeed in school. Although her husband was a teacher, he lacked the patience to teach their child. It was due to the fact that Suha's parents were living in Beirut that her husband had agreed to her living with her children in Beirut without him. Suha, however, did not depend on her parents at all. Their presence was emotionally comforting, since she knew that if something bad occurred they would be close to her. Suha made all the decisions concerning her family. When a big decision had to be taken, she told her husband about it. "I did not tell my husband because I did not trust my ability to make a right decision on my own, but to prevent him from blaming me if things went wrong." Suha did not face any difficulty in dealing with her children during her husband's absence. She does not think that a man is automatically more capable of controlling children's behavior. The person most affected by the absence of Suha's husband was her youngest son, who was only two when they left Saudi Arabia. "My youngest son missed his father a lot, and he started calling his grandfather "papa" as a means for compensating himself." Suha's husband came back three years ago, because he could not stand being away from his family any longer.

Discussion

None of the women I interviewed developed health or psychological problems except Sanaa who had a stomach ulcer. None of them lamented her role as the head of a household. Besides, they were all confident about their ability to make decisions in their families and to control their children's behavior. The basic problem facing all these women, except Dima and Suha, appeared to be financial.

If this is the case, can we say that the situation of these women is not unique? In other words, can we assume that the problems they are facing are merely economic and similar to those that any poor ordinary household faces?

Both Dr. Nabih Eid, a family doctor and an Associate Professor of Psychology at the Lebanese American University (LAU) and Dr. Touma Khouri, also an Associate Professor of Psychology at LAU, reject this assumption. Dr. Eid quotes studies that have shown that female-headed

households suffer from anxiety, which he attributes to poor parenting, since the mother becomes both the target and instigator with respect to her children. Children in the first year after separation become more defiant, negative, aggressive, and angry. If they are of school age, their school performance typically drops at least for a while (Frostenberg & Cherlin 1991, Hethengton & Clingmpal 1992). These effects are more easily visible in boys than in girls since boys lack the role-model with whom they would tend to identify themselves. As for the mother, she is likely to show wide mind swings, to experience problems at work, and to suffer from poor health. Parenting style changes as it becomes less authoritative and almost neglectful (Hethengton 1989). Women, in particular, do much less well in monitoring their children's behavior and setting clear rules or limits. "As time passes, accommodation takes place and the problem becomes less intense." Dr. Eid asserts that the feeling of anxiety is not experienced only by widows or divorcees, but also by women whose husbands are psychologically or physically ill. A woman's physical and sexual needs ought to be satisfied. Otherwise, she will experience frustration and anxiety which may lead her into depression. In our society where sex is a taboo, the woman very often sublimates her sexual needs into other activities.

Dr. Touma Khouri thinks that in the absence of the father the woman will feel more bossy and her children will start viewing her as the source of authority. If the children are young, they are more likely to accept their mother's new role. However, if they are teenagers, and especially if they are boys, a clash might take place. "In our male dominant society, the son might try to take the role of his father and thus share the authority with his mother. This will have psychological effects on the mother, especially if she is not capable of securing the livelihood of the family." However, Dr. Khouri draws attention to the fact that every case is unique: "The kinds of problems facing a woman who is the head of a household vary according to her age, the age and sex of her children, and the social norms to which she is subject."

Ms. May Majdalani, a clinical psychologist, also accepts that a woman might face some difficulties if she has boys, since boys need to identify with a male role-model. However, she does not think that this necessarily causes psychological problems for the woman. On the contrary, Ms. Majdalani believes that a woman who becomes widowed or divorced might find within herself the strength to cope with the responsibility, and thus may in many cases blossom a few years after the separation. Ms. Majdalani adds that the state of a woman after being widowed or divorced depends upon the previous family pattern and couple relation which might be a negative one. "Once a woman is in charge of the family, no one will belittle her, and if she is strong enough, she will benefit from the situation."

Ms. Mona Sharabati, a clinical psychologist, also asserts

that to say that any woman who is widowed or divorced is going to have problems is an incorrect generalization, and she does not think that it is more difficult for the woman to manage if the children are boys. "The boy can find the male figure with whom he needs to identify in his uncle." She adds that it is much easier for the woman than it is for the man to be in charge of the family: "The quantity of woman's presence is more important, and thus it is easier to bring a substitute for the man."

It is interesting to note that while both male psychologists I interviewed agreed that the female head of a household is likely to suffer from psychological problems - mainly resulting from the new double role she has to adopt as the mother and the father at the same time, the women psychologists pointed out the possibility of the woman "blossoming" after the separation; their rationale was that the previous family pattern was not necessarily positive. In fact, this applies well to the women I interviewed. If you take Lara as an example, you will notice that she was not much affected by the divorce, since she had been the main source of earnings even during her marriage. As for Faizeh, being independent was not new to her after her husband's death, since she had always been the primary provider. When Sanaa was asked about her husband's role towards the family, she laughed, not knowing what to say, and then she replied, "the children love him a lot." Suha did not face any difficulty in dealing with her children during her husband's absence; the one who was most affected by the absence of Suha's husband was her two-year old son, and the reason why Suha's husband came back after three years was his need for being with the family and not the other way around!

In conclusion, the status of the woman-head of household depends on many factors: financial status, social attitude, age, number and sex of the children, the previous family pattern and of course, two more factors that were stressed by all psychologists: the woman's personality and her perception of her own situation. "This makes the difference," one of them asserted. Apparently, it does. Otherwise, how could one explain Faizeh's high spirit, smiling face and forgiving attitude in spite of all the difficulties she encountered! Thus, no simple generalization can be made regarding the status of a woman who becomes the head of her household. The assumption that such women are likely to suffer from psychological problems is not to be totally disregarded, but it should certainly be restricted to a limited category of women, *i.e.*, those women who have enjoyed healthy relationships with their spouse. Thus, if we really want to know more about the status of a woman who becomes head of a household, we should first know more about the status of married women in our society.

(N.B. The names used in this article are not the real names of the women interviewed.)

A PROGRAM THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

Anita Farah Nassar
Program Officer (IWSAW)

‘When tough times prevail, outstanding tenacity arises’. This ancient Arabic proverb highlights the attitude of many Lebanese who suffered the miseries of war, poverty, and displacement. I am referring to a majority of Lebanese women who were deprived, displaced, widowed, divorced, or who lost one or more of their family members during the war. Yet, these women displayed outstanding courage, determination, and resourcefulness, and they came through at the end and managed to extract their families from impoverished and devastated circumstances.

Nevertheless, one hand cannot clap alone, and a helping hand in tough times is vital. In 1985, the Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) reached out a hand to these women by means of an Income Generating Program*. The program was basically intended for those who were willing to invest the time, effort, and devotion needed to overcome self-defeating attitudes and to become entrepreneurs and supporters of their families. This program was complemented by the Basic Living Skills Program (BLSP), which teaches the basic skills needed to sustain and handle the demands of a healthy family in all its practical and theoretical aspects, such as family planning, health-care, child-care, home management, civic education, nutrition, environmental awareness, and legal rights.

After years of determination and hard work, the Income Generating Program can now be assessed as a program that made a difference through some success stories. Nine hundred and sixteen women participated and seven of them gladly opened their hearts and talked about how this program changed their lives.

M.J. is 22. She is a single and displaced woman, the eldest in a family of ten. They were all living in a single room in one of the semi-demolished hotels of downtown Beirut. Because her father was handicapped and her mother was illiterate, M.J. found herself as the sole supporter of the entire family. When she joined the Program we were astounded by her determination and energy to absorb the available information, although we kept in mind that she knew that the chances of her running a business from her domicile were very slim. Nevertheless, M.J. continued in the professional sewing program and earned her certificate. After graduation, she set up her business at home, performing minor sewing tasks in a corner in the single room she and her family lived in. As time passed, her clientele grew, and she adjusted her working conditions to suit her growing needs. She bought a sewing machine, which she paid for as her income accu-

mulated. Soon, she was able to afford to move her entire family into better accommodations and place all her younger sisters and brothers in school.

M.D., a mother of six, joined the professional sewing training - program to help out her husband who was then an unemployed construction worker. Although M.D. was illiterate, she developed her own system to take measurements and work accordingly. In a short time she grasped the numerical sequence and became proficient in taking proper measurements. Her labor rather than her husband's day-by-day work soon became the sustenance of her family and she became the sole financial pillar of her family.

B.S. was one of the few candidates who, in addition to her family problems, was suffering from emotional and depressive disorders. At the age of 21, B.S. was a single woman taking care of her physically handicapped father and her terminally ill mother with no source of income whatsoever. She joined the “industrial sewing” training program in the hope of a better chance to support them. And that is exactly what B.S. achieved. She currently works as an assistant to an established fashion designer and earns a relatively good salary sufficient to support her mother's treatment and to meet all her father's needs.

Z.S. is 17 and suffers from Thalassemia; she is the eldest of six children. Not only was Z.S. facing a devastating economical and social crisis, she also was suffering from her mother's crushing attitude towards her fatal disease. Instead of psychologically helping her, Z.'s mother set out to deliberately destroy her daughter's self-confidence by overemphasizing her health conditions and calling her useless. However, when Z.S. joined the sequin-embroidery training program, she discovered through the health-awareness section of the BLSP that her disease is treatable through lifetime medication. As a result, she regained self-confidence and determination, which allowed her to establish her own business at home using the skills she learned. Moreover, she started earning enough money to cover her medical treatment.

J.H., a 22 year-old displaced woman, excelled in the professional sewing training-program. Upon her graduation, she immediately found a job and was employed in a factory. Throughout her training period, J.H. acquainted herself with her legal rights. She was able to acquire the social security benefits of which most of her co-workers

were unaware. During her basic training, she implemented the awareness and prevention measures that she had been taught. Consequently, she was able to diagnose early breast cancer and, with the help of the social security services, she received treatment and recovered fully. Here we have a perfect example of a person who in fact shifted her life's track from that of a dead-end to one of hope.

C.F. is 45 and suffered from one of life's disasters: she lost one of her six children during the war. In addition, the Lebanese war deprived her husband of his job as a skilled laborer and also dislocated the whole family. Upon her initial introduction to the sequin-embroidery program, C.F. was diagnosed as suffering from severe psychological disorders. It was up to the trainers to help her overcome her trauma by integrating her into a group suffering similar problems. She then realized that her miseries were comparable to those of others trying to cope with life's demands. Consequently, she picked up her strength and finally made her way through. She now works at a factory and earns a decent income that provides for her family.

A.D., a 34 year-old married woman with three children, has been displaced no less than three times. Her husband is unemployed but is fully responsible for his brother who is suffering from cancer. Faced with these conditions, A.D. joined the upholstery-sewing training program. A.D. showed great potential, which led to her employment as an assistant to her trainer who owns an upholstery-sewing factory. A.D. is now the sole financial supporter of her family.

Considering the achievements of these women, it is essential to reveal the results of two different surveys conducted by the IWSAW to assess the impact of the Income Generating Program.

In 1993, IWSAW conducted a survey on a sample of 154 women who had been trained in different skills. The purpose was to discover the number of women who are earning a decent income as a result of their training. Table 1 shows that 99 candidates were employed and 45 were self-employed (working from within their own homes or having established their own business). Thus, a 93.5% employment rate had been achieved.

A second survey (table 2), was conducted in 1995 on 137 women to reveal the efficacy of the program as a whole. The first segment aimed at finding out whether the duration of their training had been sufficient for acquiring their chosen skill and their employment eligibility. The second part sought to reveal the employment percentage among the candidates. The purpose of the third part was to find out whether a productive working woman had also become an active decision-maker. And the fourth part deals with the effect of the BLSP on their development as individuals.



Jacqueline Maalouf: A trainee is now a trainer

Table 1

Kind of skills	No. of Candidates interviewed	No. of Candidates employed	Self-employed	Percentage employed
Hair Dresser Technician	11	6	5	100%
Knitting	16	11	2	81.25%
Sewing-Factory	55	35	15	90.9%
Sequin Embroidery	72	47	23	97.22%
Total	154	99	45	93.5%

average age: 22.5

common condition: they are all displaced;

average # of children/family: 7

Table 2

Participant's answers	No. of participants	Percentage
Training Duration Sufficient	116	84.67%
Training Duration not Sufficient	21	15.33%
Employed by others	67	48.9%
Unemployed	9	6.57%
Self-employed	58	42.33%
Decision-maker	69	50.36%
Not a decision-maker	17	12.41%
No answer	51	37.23%
Change in daily habits	135	98.54%
No change in daily habits	2	1.46%

total number of interviewees: 137

In conclusion, we can say that this program went far beyond its original aim of providing skills to its shattered, displaced candidates; in fact, it fully reconstructed their lives and turned them into self-sufficient family-leaders and responsible citizens. Thus, this program has positively contributed to the development of the Lebanese family.

*** Al-Raida Volume VIII Nb. 72, 1996 for full details of the project**

THE DISABLED IN THE FAMILY

*Rita Mufarrij Merhej,
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In an Expert Group Meeting on "Social Barriers to the Integration of Disabled Persons into Community Life" (convened by the United Nations Department of Economical and Social Affairs at Geneva in July 1976), the participants exchanged views on a wide range of problems and obstacles known to impede the integration process.

In some traditional African societies for example, disability was viewed as a disgrace to the whole family, and as a result, handicapped members of the family might be hidden from outsiders; it was also often considered undesirable for disabled persons to have marital and sexual relationships.

In many Asian countries, the attitude of the community towards disability was fatalistic, with established discriminatory rules and injunctions against handicapped people. In Latin American countries, some schools still rejected disabled children and the majority of affected persons in rural areas could not benefit from the rehabilitation services available in urban areas; the most important social barriers to integration were the lack of community education, the rejection or the overprotection by the family and the marked dependence of disabled persons on others. In Third World communities, prevalent conditions of illiteracy and superstition affect disabled persons by making them feel inferior and, in some cases, even unwilling to be integrated into the community.

In general, able-bodied persons harbor prejudice against the handicapped because they believe that the disabled fundamentally differ from them due to a biological inferiority, which they presume to overshadow all potential abilities and skills. Because of this presumed infirmity, a wide range of occupations and social options are denied to the handicapped, who are often also considered to be less intelligent, less logical, and less able to make the "right" decisions when it comes to determining their own lives.

And where do we, in the Arab World, stand with respect to the integration of the disabled in community life? In this article I will focus on the disabled child, its psycho-social position within its family, the attitudes that surround it, the available educational opportunities, and the child's future

prospects as a grown-up member of society.

Unfortunately, most of what we saw described in 1976 still applies in 1997. Let us not, however, start off with a negative view and let us pinpoint instead the many positive achievements that have been implemented in the Arab World up to date. In general, over the past decade, governmental agencies and the private sector in several regions of the Arab world have given much attention to the problems of disability. With respect to mental disability, for example, great efforts have been made in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Algeria, Mauritania, Lebanon, Egypt, and Morocco to establish the bases for the vocational training of the mentally disabled, to ensure their employment in the private sector, and to provide high-caliber training in the fields of rehabilitation and special education.

In Egypt, blind children are given the opportunity of scolarization at the pre-school level; special educational institutions exist to handle visually-impaired children from a very early age. Moreover, universities in Egypt are equipped with Braille-systems and auditory libraries to facilitate the integration of blind students in university life.

In Kuwait, the private sector has been very efficiently active in serving people with disabilities. The quality of care given to multi-handicapped children and youth is quite impressive and much money is invested in the professional training of the staff. Physically disabled children as well as adults receive comprehensive services in an ultra-modern and highly-equipped center founded by the Kuwaiti Government in the early nineties. Kuwait is also considered a pioneer in the Arab world for having created a special resource center exclusively for children with learning disabilities.

In Lebanon, after years of bloodshed and destruction, the Government created in 1992 a Ministry to handle all issues related to disability, which gave thousands of people cause to hope for a brighter educational and vocational future and for ultimate integration in the community.

Yet, in spite of these very important achievements and the significant development in the quantity and quality of care services that disabled people can receive, a major problem without apparent solution remains: the community - at - large still lacks

awareness with respect to issues of disability, which entails faulty interpretations of and misconceptions about the status and the needs of the disabled person. This is mostly due to the fact that developing countries have limited economic and socio-cultural means and must attend to a short-list of priorities, namely poverty, ignorance, and physical health. These are, by themselves, cultural disabilities that do require radical emergency treatment. However, what societies fail to understand is that disability is not simply a marginal issue to be treated after and separately from the supposedly more urgent problems cited. The disability issue is indeed at the very core of these problems, for poverty (leading to undernourishment during pregnancy and in the first years of life, absence of educational opportunities to the child, *etc.*) as well as ignorance (consumption of the wrong medication during pregnancy, neglect of certain accidents and traumas during pregnancy, deliveries performed in most unsuitable conditions, *etc.*) and disease lead to a high occurrence of disability in any given society.

In the last decade, and especially so in Lebanon, outstanding efforts have attempted to promote social understanding and acceptance of disability via the media (television and radio, as well as congresses and seminars in almost all Lebanese regions). These efforts culminated in the famous Peace March from South to North Lebanon in October 1991, in which thousands of disabled people, their families, and friends participated.

And yet we see that, in spite of all these efforts, society continues to stigmatize the disabled person. Let us start from the very beginning. A disabled child is born into a family. First he/she is going to be confronted with parental feelings of guilt and fear. This initial confrontation is of crucial importance because it could lead to a very deep wound in the relationship of the child with its environment. The guilt feeling is very often found in parents who ponder the role of heredity, for, as we know, heredity plays an important role in the formation of the fetus. However, parents ought to remember that, although fetal formation may be hereditary, the child's development is not, and that their job is to try and give a value to their child, far removed from what he/she inherited biologically. Parents should be able to look at their disabled child as a source of power, regardless of his/her physical appearance, and they should realize the importance of his/her belonging to the family.

However, this is not what happens in reality. In most cases, the almost universal expectation of a "normal" child leads parents to reject the disabled child. This rejection will impede his/her social and psychological development, and hence the process of integra-

FORTHCOMING
IN AL-RAIDA

ARAB WOMEN
AND POVERTY

ARAB WOMEN
AND LITERATURE

tion. In our societies, which still are characterized by the extended family-type, the child is going to face a wide range of attitudes coming from a wide range of people (including family members whose interference is inevitable), and which represent a mixture of ignorance, fear, overconcern, support, overprotection, or else neglect, mistreatment, and even abuse.

The social stigmatization of disability in general, and the spread of this stigma to close relatives (blood relatives and spouses) in particular, constitutes a significant barrier to the familial integration of its disabled member. In some families, close relatives may even want to dissociate themselves from the stigmatized person and therefore reject him/her altogether. Moreover, some direct institutional discriminatory practices adversely affect the integration of disabled persons into the family, such as legislation that prohibits them from marrying and bearing children or that accepts some disabilities (mental illness in particular) as grounds for divorce.

The next problem that parents of disabled children have to face is the education (or "cure") of their child. What to do? Where to go? Whom to refer to? Only a minority of parents (usually the well-educated, well-informed, well-connected, and financially stable) decide to take initiative, knock on doors, and ask, sometimes aggressively, for what is a basic right for their child: a proper education. And it is thanks to those "aggressive parents" that, since the mid-fifties, most of the educational facilities and special-care institutions for disabled children were created.

The majority of parents remains passive, or rather utterly helpless. Not knowing where to go, not even aware of the availability of educational facilities, they keep the child at home, protect and pamper him/her, against a background colored with a fatalistic resignation to their tragic destiny; but by doing so, they are preventing the child from acquiring the skills he/she will need for proper rehabilitation and social integration. They are keeping the child forever under their control - in some cases, at their mercy - depriving him/her of the most basic right of a human being: the right of freedom. Of course, the above description fits the situation in rural areas better than in urban ones. In almost all Arab countries, most of the specialized schools that offer services for the disabled are clustered in the cities, often mainly in the capital, whereas the remote regions and villages remain deprived of such services.

Even in the cities, very few efforts at integration take place. Disabled children are still segregated in schools and training institutions, which prevents them from mixing with other children. Till today, our

schools are not equipped with the appliances and technical means needed to help disabled children and youth take part in the educational process; buildings are inaccessible and prevent them from using ordinary school facilities. Moreover, financial resources to fund certain educational programs (for example, special remedial classes within the ordinary school) are inadequate, as are the required manpower and the special equipment for the implementation of such programs.

Going back to the initial point of our discussion, namely the disabled child in his/her family, can we end on a positive note after this more or less bitter panoramic presentation of facts? What has been achieved in the Arab world as far as disability is concerned is very impressive, considering the many obstacles. We believe, however, that the major task facing us in this part of the world is to fight public ignorance and the many misconceptions it entails. No, a disabled person is not to be pitied. No, a disabled person is not contagious. No, a disabled person is not inferior to us. No, institutions for the disabled are not charity and welfare organizations. And this complex task starts at home, because there lies the essence of the problem: the parents of the disabled child should be able to gradually overcome their feelings of guilt and fear; to do so, they should realize that their child is a worthy member of the family just as his/her siblings. Such an attitude would positively affect not only the disabled child throughout his/her development but also the other members of the family. Moreover, parents should realize that they must involve the siblings in this integration process and rely on their cooperation in his/her education. The role of the mother is of crucial importance, because she more than anyone else in the family, is going to head this long battle against social inertia, indifference, depreciation, and rejection. Upon this battle depends the future of her child; the mother is the one who will wear an iron façade in the midst of hostility and discouragement, and who must communicate to the other members of her family her tenacity, her intransigence, her dynamism to continue the battle.

Through this familial network of joint efforts, the siblings will get to accept their disabled brother or sister, understand his/her condition, and respect his/her needs. Only then will the disabled person be adequately and strongly equipped to face the world outside the boundaries of the family and to fight the obstacles that he/she will surely encounter.

We are very much convinced that if the integration of the disabled child does not start at home on solid grounds, it will never reach the schools, the community, and society in general.

OPINIONS AND PRACTICES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SURVEYED

Ghena Ismail

Here follow the results from the survey mentioned in the News Briefs section (p.6).

1) The first part highlighted certain social phenomena among students, such as smoking, drinking, drug consumption, and sex. Percentages and numbers in this study revealed cultural stereotypes.

- In Lebanon, unlike in the industrialized world, the rich students are the ones who smoke.

- The difference in religious sect does not reflect a difference in the habits of smoking, drinking, drug taking, or even sex before marriage. The main behavioral difference appears to be prayer: *i.e.*, students who pray versus those who do not.

- Students in universities of a Western orientation/profile come out on top in all aspects of the study (smoking, drinking, drug taking, and sex before marriage). This result might be explained by cultural and economic factors. The influence of Western society is felt less in the Lebanese or Beirut Arab Universities. Moreover, students in the latter universities are not financially capable of behaving like students in the other universities.

- Peer pressure is an obvious factor regarding such habits as smoking and drinking, in particular.

- Sex definitely requires more socio-physiological studies, because students' replies seemed sometimes "liberated", at other times "extreme" and contradictory to their announced beliefs.

2) The second part of the study focused on civil rights such as civil marriage, the deletion of the religious sect from the identity card, capital sentence, and crimes of honor.

- The Christian students in the Lebanese American University (LAU) and the American University of Beirut (AUB) supported civil marriage the most (*i.e.*, those Christians who are in colleges of a mixed orientation/profile). The basic criterion for accepting or rejecting civil marriage is praying. Students who do not pray are more likely to support the concept of civil marriage. The percentage of their acceptance is 60.5% as compared to 25.5% among students who pray.

- As for the issue of deleting the indication of sect from the identity card, it turned out that the poorer students supported the idea more. Sixty-six percent of them were for the idea.

- Half of the students interviewed at AUB and LAU accepted homosexuality, as compared to more than one third of the students at Saint Joseph. The lowest rate of acceptance was in Beirut Arab University.

3) The third part dealt with students' civic education and their commitment to the building of a civil society. Obviously, the role of students in the building of a civil society will not be

essential. Results of the survey emphasized the concept of cultural reproduction.

- The student's family monthly income reflects the economic reality represented in the universities included in the survey. The fact that most students at the Lebanese University and the Beirut Arab University come from limited-income families explains their attendance at these two universities.

- The great percentage of students from middle-class families and who are pursuing higher education reflects their desire of improving their socio-economic status. The satisfaction of students from upper-class families with the B.A./B.S. degree indicates their content with their social status, whereas the difficult economic conditions of poorer students prevent them from pursuing their higher education due to their need to work.

- The pattern of spending among university students was directly related to the family's monthly income. Most of the students at LAU and AUB are looser with money, whereas students in the Lebanese University and the Beirut Arab University follow a more careful/tight spending pattern.

- The main source of students' education is the media (radio and T.V.), much more so than reading. The students' favorite authors are mostly script-writers. It is worth noting that one third of interviewees could not recall the name of the last book they had read.

- One third of the students do not read newspapers.

- Students at Saint Joseph University watch the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) most frequently, whereas Beirut Arab University students tend to watch Future TV more often.

4) The fourth part, which examined the students' religious behavior and their political and national affiliations, confirmed the idea that students of the 1990s are essentially different from those of the sixties and seventies - and this not only in Lebanon but all over the world.

- Most students are believers, and the percentage of religious indifference which was widespread among students in the 60s and 70s has considerably decreased. The percentage of students who pray is 67, and the most popular international person is Pope John Paul II.

- The percentage of students who are affiliated with a specific political party has considerably decreased.

- Seventy-five percent of the students considers that the peace with Israel is already determined and is not a Lebanese or regional decision. Moreover, three-quarters of Saint Joseph University students would support a student exchange-program with Israel.

- The vision of students of Saint Joseph University towards what they consider the cause of the Arab problem reflects a kind of racism and indifference.

Translated and summarized from An-Nahar newspaper (January 14, January 24, February 4, February 19 - 1997)

TAHTAL MIJHAR

HOW YOUNG PEOPLE RELATE TO THEIR PARENTS

Ghena Ismail

Sociologists and psychologists agree that our society is in a transitory stage. Some people resist the idea of adapting to new ideas, out of fear that such ideas may threaten our customs and traditions. This transitory state inevitably affects family relationships. It is worth noting, however, that social change is not a peculiar experience, but rather, an ordinary everyday affair. But since the family is a sacred social institution, especially in our Arab societies, any change is usually subject to considerable resistance and questioning. This response definitely affects the relationship between young people and their parents. In an attempt to set a defined framework for this relationship, an age of consent (21) was established in the West. The issue is not as clear cut in our society, however.

Independence, trust, communication, and conflict were major themes discussed in the second symposium of IWSAW's talk-in program, Tahtal Mijhar ("Under the Microscope") which was held on December 17, 1996. The discussion was moderated by Ghena Ismail, IWSAW staffer, and was attended by the Friends of IWSAW, who helped prepare this program, and students from various Lebanese universities. The guest speakers at the symposium were Dr. Nabih Eid, a family doctor and a Psychology professor at the Lebanese American University (LAU), and Dr. Hassan Hammoud, a Professor of Sociology and Social work at the same university.

At the beginning of the session, a video report prepared by the Friends of IWSAW, which featured young people from LAU, the American University of Beirut (AUB), and the Beirut Arab University revealed that many young people, men and women alike, felt that they reached the age of consent in the eyes of their parents only when they got married. Other respondents said that they never reached the age of consent in the eyes of their parents. Only one respondent said that the age of consent depended on the young person's character.

Since most of us live with our parents until marriage, do we have the right to ask for independence? Is independence needed for the well-being of the individual, or is it a concept imported from the West? Can independence be achieved in our collectivist society? What are the conditions of this independence and what is the

thin line dividing independence from individualism?

There was clearly a consensus among participants that we have the right to ask for independence and that independence is essential for the development of a mature personality. However, the debate revolved around the definition of this independence and the ideal method of achieving it.

Dr. Eid stressed that independence is necessary for character development, and that it is something that parents should work on developing right from the birth of their children. "One should learn to dichotomize oneself from one's parents." Dr. Hammoud, however, preferred to see independence as a process of "extension" rather than "dichotomy". "Young people are the outcome of a certain history and a group of experiences. They cannot and should not be viewed as independent of their past. Communication and understanding should be the method for resolving any conflict between young people and their parents."

To what extent do parents frequently understand their children's problems and concerns? How frequently do young people confide in their parents and resort to them in times of crisis? The video report prepared by the Friends revealed that many young people preferred to confide in their friends when they were facing a problem, especially if it was personal. Does this reflect a lack of confidence in parents' abilities to help their children, or is it just a way to maintain a certain level of privacy? What if parents were not as understanding as they should be? What if they were never



Ghena Ismail: Moderator of the talk-in



Audience members at the talk-in

ready to acknowledge their children's rights to independence? Even then, young people should not assume negative attitudes, Dr. Hammoud asserted. "Forging a fruitful dialogue and an atmosphere of trust is the method that young people should use to persuade their parents of their decisions."

However, it seemed from the video reports prepared by the Friends that not all young people approve of or believe in the realism of this solution. A twenty-two year old woman who works at a local radio station had to go to Qana in April to cover the massacre. Knowing that there was no way to persuade her parents of the



Nabih Eid and Hassan Hammoud: The guest speakers

necessity of her going to Qana, she lied to them and told them that she was at the radio station. While some participants thought that her behavior was irresponsible, others believed that she was simply performing her duty and thus was not to be blamed for lying to her parents. "Had she told them, she would have subjected them to an unnecessary state of worry," one of the participants argued. Dr. Eid and Dr. Hammoud, however, strongly disagreed. Dr.

Hammoud said that someone had to

know where she had gone. "If she had died, someone would have had to go and pick her up!"

However, while lying was not justified as a means for avoiding conflict, it was stated by both Dr. Eid and Dr. Hammoud as well as by some of the participants that it was not necessary to confide to parents every single detail. A certain degree of privacy can and, perhaps, should be maintained. It was made clear that maintaining privacy does not contradict with being honest with parents. "Having privacy is different from lying," one of the participants asserted.

In conclusion, the importance of independence for the development of healthy and mature characters was emphasized by both Dr. Eid and Dr. Hammoud. Ideally speaking, parents should have worked on building independence in their children from early childhood. However, even if parents did not do so, young people need to know that the best method to achieve independence is building trust through effective dialogue. This may be difficult; young people should not give up, they should keep trying, because the easy or quick solution adopted by many of them, namely lying, is not safe and is not good in the long run. Once a lie is uncovered, young people will lose their parents' trust, which they utterly need. Young people have to orient their maturity and growing knowledge towards building an honest and healthy relationship, rather than towards rebelling and taking negative stands.

THE GIRL IN THE LEBANESE FAMILY

ONE STEP AHEAD

Saleh Ibrahim, writer

Translated by Myriam Sfeir

It should be evident to those interested in women's issues that the prevailing standards associated with Lebanese women are evidently changing. Given that we are passing through a stage where chaos and contradictions prevail, it is very difficult to obtain precise facts. However, we can shed some light on various aspects related to women's issues in general. One of the prominent features that characterize the transitional period through which we are passing is the sharp split in outlook and convictions pertinent to women. In this article I will analyze the girl's status in the Lebanese family and emphasize that she has progressed and that her conditions have improved. I will base my analysis on a brief survey and on published research written on this subject.

I would like to point to the obvious differences, caused by variance in time and methodology, between the reality of women in our society today and the claim made by earlier writers on the subject. In an article on the girl in the traditional family, Rose Ghurayyib stated that

we find an apparent decline in the status accorded to women for it relegates to men privileges where women are assigned the tasks refused by men. Equality with men concerning inheritance rights is disregarded and very often women are deprived of their inheritance rights. Moreover, although women's work inside the house and in the fields is essential and important, family members tend to diminish its importance and restrict the rewards accorded to them to food and clothes. Women's subordinate role in the family forces them to accept the double standards associated with the sexes where a differentiation in treatment occurs. Moreover, women are urged to accept male's domination and to practice traditional female traits such as self sacrifice, modesty...

This passage was published 17 years ago. Although traditional families still oppress women and deny them many rights we cannot generalize and state that the practices it describes are common in all families today. For example, there are many parents these days who protect their daughter's right to inherit. They appreciate

her work outside the home, and what she earns she keeps. I believe that more Lebanese women are aware of their rights as partners in the family and as citizens capable of embracing leading roles. Another generalization appears in Hijazi's book "*Al Takhalouf Al Ijtimaey*" when he claims that poor lower-working class women are exploited. They are obedient and submissive, and their will and desires are restrained. They are used as tools for production and reproduction. In middle-class families, some women are still prepared to play subservient and oppressed roles and they are used as tools. However, this pattern no longer appeals to the majority of women who find themselves in a conflict between their traditional role and their newly acquired maturity, intellect, integrity, and rights. As for the privileged upper-class women, Hijazi feels that, although they are well-off financially and enjoy all the material privileges available, their fate is no different, for they are discriminated against and are also used as tools to a certain extent.

One should keep in mind that Hijazi wrote his book about 18 years ago, which enables us to re-echo what has been said about Ghurayyib's article. Recent work reveals that Hijazi's findings may now be challenged. Modern Arab women from various socio-economic classes are aware of their needs and they partake in decision-making, production, work, and family management. This is not to say that women have reached the desired goals of liberation; however, they have taken big strides. More women are enrolling in educational institutions and are engaging in public life. Female participation in the labor force is noticeable and so is their political involvement. Women nowadays are aware of the necessity of taking charge of their lives. They constantly question their lot and refuse to be relegated to the private domain. However, one cannot deny the fact that the newly acquired values are still relatively weak in comparison to the traditional ones which control a woman and diminish her societal roles. Male domination is one of the reasons hindering women from working.

A study conducted in 1985 by the Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) revealed that, although the most important factor urging women to work was economic necessity, yet, 87% of the single women whose ages ranged between 20 and 30 years worked in order to interact with the public world outside the family. Moreover, 94% of the single women, 80% of the married ones, and all teen-agers who

worked, did so in order to gain experience in life.

I have also conducted a survey on a sample of 50 single working women in Nabatieh, a town in Southern Lebanon. Eight percent of the women interviewed came from the town itself whereas all the others came from nearby villages. I aimed at investigating male opinion concerning the female participation in the labor force.

The results showed that 60% of the fathers of these women did not object to the idea of their daughters working. However, 44% of these fathers had initially refused the idea but had agreed to it when pressured and convinced by other family members. It is important to note that the basic reason for a father's approval is economic necessity. Brothers also had had a say in the matter; 33% of them had refused to allow their sisters to work, while 77% of the brothers confirmed a change in mentality by allowing them to be employed. The survey reveals increased tolerance and willingness on the part of the brothers to accept new ideas. It also highlights the fact that rural women, most of them poor, are heading towards economic, social, and self-development.

The survey affirms that a woman's consciousness of her legislative rights is below average and practically nonexistent. Ninety-six percent of the women who participated answered that they work more than eight hours a day without requesting extra pay for overtime work. Moreover, 90% of these women earns less than the minimum wage set by the government, and 98% is not covered by social security. Only 4% of these women has applied for their salaries to be adjusted and to be registered for social security benefits.

The results that I have obtained indicate that, although the Lebanese woman views her future in a different light, she is still hampered by various obstacles, namely traditions, values, and norms. Although Lebanese women's conditions have improved, they are still not equal to those of men. Society is oppressive and tends to elevate the value of certain habits and traditions that inhibit women from progressing.



"The paper", 1994, Mixed media Rim Al Joundi

SHORT STORY

How we were



Emily Nasrallah, Lebanese Novelist

I held onto your hand and your soft, delicate fingers intertwined with my big, coarse ones that were offspring of the oak and the sumac trees. And through the pores invisible sap communicated to your warmth. Happiness blossomed in your innocent eyes as you skipped along the sidewalk near the blue sea. Your free hand gestured toward the horizon and your stammering lips said, "Sea gull ..."

As though the gull heard the echo of your words and thought them a summons, it approached the shore where we stood. Your eyes were fixed upon the path it traced in the sky. When it was only meters from us, it dove into the water and retrieved a small fish. Dumb and cocky, the fish had been attracted to the surface of the water by the dancing lights. After regaining its balance, the gull flapped its wings and flew away. We continued on our way, on our slow, peaceful walk.

On one tranquil morning we saw a number of other people ambling along, too. Young and old, mothers and children. They were strolling down the sidewalk which opened like a lover's arms, welcoming their happy faces, carrying them atop its solid, cobbled surface, that they might enjoy the mixed blueness of the sea and sky.

On those mornings, and on morning following them, and the ones after those, we went out to walk by the sea, and were met by faces that grew familiar. We exchanged greetings without words. We shared the silent

understanding of our common goal.

You began to grow. Your soft, delicate fingers separated from my big, coarse ones. I stood aside and observed you as you skipped sometimes like a bird, or hopped like a rabbit in the stillness of the wild. The threads of time stretched out, carrying with them the multicolored bubbles of our happy times together.

Sometimes, when you met children of your own age, you slowed down. You watched them, smiled at them and spoke to them. And soon enough it happened - you entered their world and forgot me, some distance behind you, just a person who watched out for you. And when you remembered me again and came back, you found my arms trembling with yearning to hold you.

Sometimes we were content to sit on one of the stone benches; your legs swinging in a failed attempt to reach the ground.

We passed the time tattling - questions from you and answers from me. At times we reversed roles: I asked and you answered. Your words transported me into the wondrous, marvel-filled world where children reside on crystal islands populated with vast forests of imagination.

Many a time I attempted to penetrate that world but was unable to even cross the threshold, let alone enter it. Adults were barred from the magical world that opened only to the flutter of young wings.

I remember during one of our talks asking you, "If I became a child again, would you allow me into your world?"

You looked up at me, your eyes filled with wonder and confusion and a great deal of misgiving. "If ..." you said. Then, as though saving yourself from falling into error, continued, "But grown ups cannot become children."

"If children can grow into adults, why can't adults return to their original state ... they used to be children before?"

Without missing a beat, you answered, "Because they are out of the game."

At times the sun deserted the beach, leaving a gray cloud cover that stretched out of the blueness of the sea and upwards as fast as the eye can see. We walked through the fog and eaves dropped on the waves as they whispered to those who caressed their cheeks and kissed their mouths in play. And when the whispers turned to howls and roars we ran and hid behind the glass windows and watched how the threats and warnings were to be executed.

In that long time, you were my little girl, and I was your mother. Then your little footsteps bolted away from the runway within my heart, and you soared.

I had no idea that between the flutter of an eyelid

and the ticking of seconds you were learning how the seagulls soar. I did not know that you were filching the secret of mastery over me, while I watched your shadow jumping, from between my eyelids, surrendering stupidly to my ecstasy.

And during one of those moments of surrender and deceptive peacefulness, you withdrew, your little foot-falls becoming giant footsteps.

The little fingers, that had received the sap of my love and the warmth of my being, expanded ... Expanded and extricated themselves from mine. They were transformed into the strong wings of a seagull, and you soared into space ... into the limitless universe.

I returned from my wearisome voyage to rest on the old stone bench, on the sidewalk by the sea, after exhaustion of attempting to catch up with you. I looked for the seagulls in vain, I searched for the light in vain.

Gray clouds enveloped the buildings and descended to wrap the blueness of the sea, and silence the chuckle of waves.

I said to myself, "It is autumn. Why am I trying to penetrate this clear, calm surface? This natural autumn scene? It is an autumn cloud caressing the surface of the water, and it will soon clear. And the water will be blue and clear, and will tremble with the stroking of the breeze."

And I said, "This is but a temporary state and it will soon dissipate and happiness will once more return to dance within my heart and my eyes, as I watch over you running and skipping ... as I run after you with all the strength and energy I can muster, my voice reaching you ahead of me, to support you should you fall."

I told my soul, comforting it, lifting it out of its wearying anxiety, "We will be back. We will return to how we were in the past. And you will be my little one again. Your velvety fingers will hold on to my thick rural ones. We will run together by the sea, facing the mountain, over the cobbled sidewalk."

But the doubts that rise from that truth are like a dagger in my throat. Soon they become a scream that demolishes the dream and shakes the foundations of illusion.

I see you suddenly as you truly are. A young woman, pure as the light of day. you are not a seagull, you are no longer a child who skips along as I chase after her.

Our childhood talks hung still on the invisible threads of time. I saw them sometimes moving, shivering like the autumn leaves.

I tried to grasp at some of them with my hands, those childhood conversations, to put them in an envelop and send them to you.

I told myself, "Tread softly on the sidewalk by the sea and listen carefully, for the waves may have retained some of what has slipped through the cracks of memory. You may find a picture stolen by the seagulls and hidden in their secret caves among the rocks." I said all that to myself to silence the anxiety storming through me, quak-

ing within me, and to fill the bottomless void inside me.

My grown little one, you continued your journey, you have not stopped. You skipped over the sidewalk by the sea, and rode on the wing of a seagull (or and airplane, to me they are no different ... they have taken you away from me, snatched you away when your down was not yet sturdy enough).

You did not choose your distance, nor did I. It was imposed upon us by another, stronger will.

And when I saw you ambling among the fields of that faraway continent, replacing the sidewalk by our warm sea with that distant shore so close to the North pole, I wept.

I have wept a great deal since we were separated. Not for myself ... but because the separation was the one event that I had not been expecting, that I had not prepared for ... and because the mother bird does not push its chicks off the bough, out of the nest's warmth, to learn how to fly, until she is certain that their down is complete and their wings fully mature, able to carry them away safely to their destinies.

That was not what happened with us. That is why I came back, to walk over the sidewalk of our past, thinking have you again some day. "When the simmering fates let up, and volcanoes calm down. I will get you back again with blooming flowers and baskets-full of the fruit you picked along your journey into different worlds that have opened up to you, welcomed you, invited you within to explore their essence and their meaning. But what I do not know is how you will return.

When ... ? When will it come about?

As I await the answer, my little one who has so suddenly grown, I continue to walk along the sidewalk by the sea during the light of day and the dark of night. I am here on the sidewalk you have known, now that night's mysterious armies have landed. The amblers have deserted their shore, the sun forsaken the horizon, and with it the bevy of gulls. Nothing moves save the slight trembling of the tree tops, and the soft twitching of the water, like the sound of one who is enjoying the rehashing of memories.

As I make ready to leave with those who are leaving, I see you coming towards me. Suddenly you are here, the way you were with me during our past walks. I stretch my arm out to hold your hand and your soft fingers intertwine with the coarseness of mine. You spring along with happy steps, chasing a bird that tries to rejoin the flock, After being caught unawares by the night.

We discover together that the night will not hinder its attempt to join its friends. And with the sound of its flapping wings, I hear the echo of a phrase that has become my mantra, the prayer I offer to the world: How we were in the past ... when you were my little girl.

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Poetry

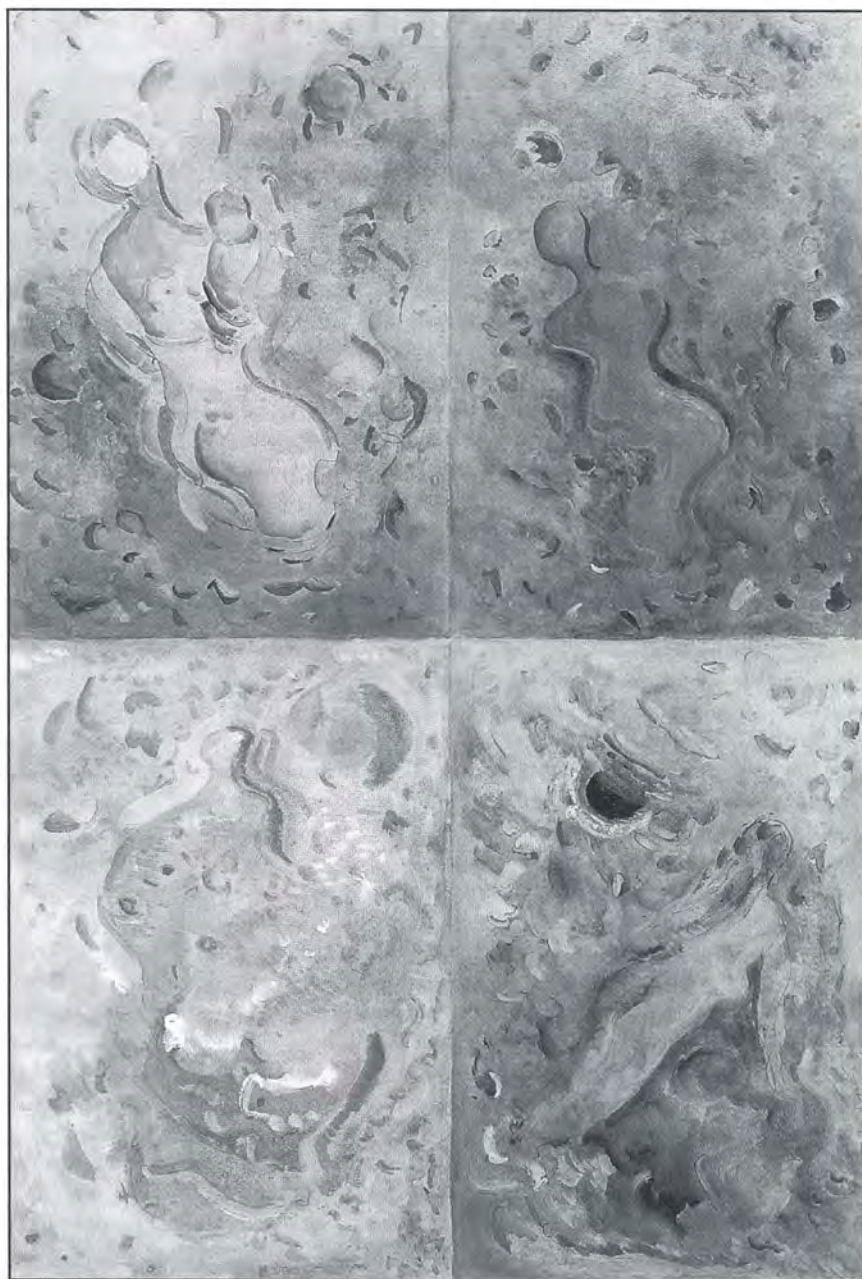
To Mother on Mother's Day

Abdel Kareem Adeeb, Ph.D., P.E.

Director of Engineering

Advanced Engineering Technologies, Inc.

Your heartbeat I could hear
 'Cause my world was so near
 Truly I could not breathe
 But my life was at ease
 In such a wonderful world!
 Yes I felt like a bird
 Afraid to leave its nest
 I was living my best
 Nine months through motherhood!
 Mind you I had no toy
 To play with and enjoy
 It felt so great so good
 To live inside of you
 And feel your love so true!
 My life was like a dream
 Yet everything did seem
 Amazingly so real
 I never ate one meal
 Though I was able to grow
 From my head to my toe,
 For God, blessed his name
 Created us the same
 That we blossom and bloom
 Inside our mother's womb
 The most perfect Abode
 Never too hot nor cold
 So sheltered from the start
 Nearby our mother's heart!
 Will you join me and say
 To mother on her day
 Thank you mother so much
 For, whatever you touch
 Does overflow with love
 From almighty above



"Mother in Four Parts", 1975. Samia Osseiran Junblat

Special Features

ASSIA DJEBAR

An Algerian Woman's Voice of Maturity and Vision

*Evelyne Accad,
Professor of Francophone Literature
University of Illinois
at Champagne-Urbana*

I see for Arab women only one way to unleash everything: to speak out, to speak out unceasingly of yesterday and of today, to speak out among ourselves [...] and to look outside, to look beyond the walls and the prisons.

Assia Djebbar, Femmes d'Alger

Assia Djebbar, a writer of middle-class Muslim and Algerian origin, was able to synthesize her traditional Islamic background and her European education. By the age of twenty-six she had published three novels (*La soif, Les impatients, Les enfants du nouveau monde*) and had obtained a B.A. in History from the Sorbonne. During the revolution she taught in Tunis and Rabat where she completed a fourth novel (*Les alouettes naïves*). She returned to Algeria after its independence in 1962, and taught at the University of Algiers. In 1969, she co-produced a play, *Rouge l'aube*, for the Third Panafrican Cultural Festival in Algiers, and her *Poèmes pour l'Algérie heureuse* was published by la SNED (the National Algerian Publishing House), all of which signaled that she had been accepted and was willing to make peace with the authorities of her country.

In 1969 she suddenly stopped publishing and producing, and remained silent for about ten years, leading many critics to speculate about the causes of her silence. Clarisse Zimra probably gives the best analysis of this silence, which she regards as "a cycle that opens on an enlarged version of the female self. The resulting figure is one of disclosure rather than closure."¹

It was with a film (*La nouba des femmes du Mont Chénoua*) that Djebbar finally broke her silence. The film received the first prize at the Venice film festival in 1979. It was followed by a collection of short stories (*Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, 1980), named after the 1832 Delacroix painting. She has since published three volumes of a quartet (*L'Amour, la Fantasia*, 1985; *Ombre sultane*, 1987, and *Vaste est la prison*, 1995) in an increasingly refined style which blends historical events and autobiographical elements in a complex weave of time and space. *Loin de Médina*, which appeared in 1991, marked an interruption of her quartet with its reflection on the life of the Prophet Muhammad, which we will analyze later. Another

interruption, stirred by Djebbar's desperate concern for the events in her country, saw one more publication in 1995: *Le blanc de l'Algérie*, which she wrote after being shaken by the violent death of a loved one:

"The worst moment for me...was in March of last year (1994), when a friend and relative, Abdel Kader Alloula, died. He was an extraordinary man...the only one in my opinion who, for the last thirty years, had forged an Arabic language between the popular language of the street and the literary one... He died at the age of 53. He was forging this language for us. It was a song at the cross-roads between several traditions. The fact that this man was killed was for me—how shall I say—as if danger was being installed...in the heart of Algerian culture. My reaction was to close myself into my apartment for three months and to do my own amnesia, going back into my mother's, my grandmother's, memories, and into my own, of thirty years in which I lived pushed back and forth between Europe and Algeria." (*Langue et Littérature en Suisse Romande*, pp. 73-74.)

Le blanc de l'Algérie is an amazingly courageous and honest narrative which raises vital questions about Algeria's current, past and future political and cultural situation. In it, Djebbar expresses a strong vision beginning with the personal and the national and concluding with the political and the universal. It is because of this progression that I suggest that her fiction has achieved a true maturity, a realization that the self and its freedom cannot be separated from the entire social context. Obviously, this evolving vision has important political implications.

Djebbar now spends most of her time in France as a writer, film producer, and literary critic. This year she received the International Neustad Literary Award given by the journal, *World Literature Today* a very prestigious Prize which, in the last twenty years, has seen eighteen of its laureates subsequently receive the Nobel Prize. Djebbar's first novels reflect an evolution of her ideas from an insistence upon the necessity of self-preoccupation in a world hostile to women, to a recognition of the importance of awareness of others, to the resolution of personal problems through immersion in a national cause. Her first novel reveals a selfishly unhappy woman preoccupied with herself; her second shows a woman more aware of society but still bored and selfish; and finally, her third novel depicts women who lose themselves to gain their country's independence. This reflects the approximate path of women's liberation in Algeria, a movement which lost nearly all its impetus after



"Women of Algiers", 1834, Oil on canvas. Eugène Delacroix

national independence was gained. According to Fadéla M'Rabet, women were simply used during the revolution, only to be pushed down to a lower level after independence.²

Reflecting occurrences in Algeria, Assia Djebar's first novels indicate a simultaneous—and perhaps related—progression in the cause of nationalism and regression in the cause of women's rights. The nationalism which was so necessary for the revolutionaries to oust the French colonialists became counter-revolutionary after the oppressor was evicted. As part of this counter-revolution, traditional laws were reinstated which deprived women of the rights they had enjoyed under colonial rule. Although Djebar's first novels give us the impression that she is revolutionary in her ideas of women's role and their liberation, her theoretical ideas presented at that time in an introduction to a book of photographs called *Femmes d'Islam* showed her to be a moderate.³

Djebar believed then that it was dangerous to speak of the Muslim woman because she could be seen in such varied contexts throughout the Islamic world. Even within the

confines of Algeria, attitudes toward the liberation of Algerian women varied widely, often reflecting what the individual stood to gain or lose by such liberation. For example, there was the French-educated Muslim man who deplored the seclusion of women, but married a European, or the Muslim father who was in favor of having his daughter receive a bicultural education, but then became alarmed when his daughter gained a wide knowledge of the world and began to behave like a European. Finally, there was the feminist who decided that the dominating male, to whom she happened to be married, really possessed only illusory power! Nor did Djebar find true liberation to be an unmixed blessing. She observed, for instance, that the Eastern mindset tended to emphasize and value private rather than public life, in distinction to the Western approach, which tended to value the public display and outward control of others. Essentially, this was the difference between being and doing. Thus, liberating a woman in an Eastern cultural context often entailed thrusting her into a cruel and competitive public world for which she was unprepared and in which she

might have no wish to participate.

Djebar denied that women were inferior to men in Islamic thinking. Instead, she insisted that the genders were complementary. Furthermore, she emphasized that women were in fact becoming emancipated as the traditional extended family structure disintegrated, as more and more women were holding jobs outside the home. Djebar also noted, however, that this emancipation as a result of the disintegration of the family structure was creating problems, rather than solving them.

In his study, *Women of Algeria*, Gordon saw a similarity between Debèche's and Djebar's directions: if women were to be emancipated, it had to be accompanied by harmony with society as a whole, for the liberation of women demands the liberation of men as well from the framework of traditional Muslim thought.⁴ In short, while Djebar was acutely aware of—and poignantly depicted—the plight of the Algerian woman, she was far from convinced that the total liberation of women by legislative fiat would be a wise course of action for her country. Indeed, since she saw liberation primarily as a process of individual adjustment of mindset, she would probably have viewed “legal” liberation as irrelevant.

In contrast to a few novels written by women in the Mashreq and the Maghreb which lashed out against brutalizing social conditions, the majority presented, in the first decades of women's literary production, a more moderated view. Often pampered and bored, the women writers of North Africa and the Middle East frequently began their careers by imitating the West. Djebar and Ba'albaki, for example, imitated Françoise Sagan in drawing melancholic characters and plots filled with sudden violence and frequent violations of normal fictional causality. Later they tried to grasp more of themselves through increased sensitivity to their Eastern heritage, producing self-searching, introspective literature which revealed the inward turn of their rebellion. The critic Abdelkabar Khatibi tried to explain the reasons for this inwardness which characterized so many of the women writers of that period:

“Considered, and perceiving herself, as an object, the woman is more sensitive, more centered on her own psychological problems. Bullied, obliged to be always on the defensive, she interiorizes her complexes and neuroses. This is why one finds in feminine literature this constant taste for introspection, this obstinate search for the other, this feverish Puritanism.”⁵

This preoccupation with the self may account for the writers' inability to engage themselves in political and social problems outside their own immediate environment. Thus it was that the writers of that period, while dwelling on their own oppression in some detail, generally lacked sympathy for and awareness of the sufferings of women from the lower strata of their own societies. A number of cultural problems which directly affected women found no expression in the fiction of women writers of that period. Little attention was paid to crimes of honor, for example. Djebar mentioned

them in *Les Enfants du nouveau monde*, but passed no judgment on the act itself. It was merely mentioned in passing as evidence of traditional thinking among political revolutionaries.

The inability to express women's problems and to be heard by the public she wanted to reach, combined with personal problems and the dilemma over which language to use, rendered more acute through a search for cultural and national identity, can probably account for the cessation of Assia Djebar's writing for a long time after that novel. In a recent interview with Lise Gauvin, she tells us:

“It seemed to me I could have been a poet in the Arabic language. *Vaste est la prison* starts with an introduction called “the silence of writing”. I talk about why I remained almost ten years without publishing. I show what I had not yet perceived in *L'Amour, la fantasia*. In that book, I was in a relationship between French and Arabic. French had given me liberation of my body at the age of eleven. But it was also a Nessus tunic, meaning that I had been able to escape from the veil thanks to the French language, thanks to the father in the French language. It was evident that at the age of sixteen or seventeen I conceived of myself as much as a boy as of a girl.”⁶

Language is a dilemma Djebar reflects upon in many instances. Like many North African novelists who have been outspoken on the topic,⁷ Djebar also experiences bilingualism as a problem which “enriches only the one who truly possesses two cultures. And this is rarely the case in Algeria.”⁸ But unlike many of her male counterparts who express this dilemma in violent terms, Djebar has a more tender relationship with language:

“I started by writing one day, on the first page of a notebook, a rule of behavior to myself: ‘To recover the Arab tradition of love in the language of Giraudoux.’ ...Each time, I find different justifications, the least of evils being to recreate in French a life lived or felt in Arabic. This movement from one language to the next has probably helped North African writers of French expression with lyricism for some, with a tone of aggressivity or on the contrary one of nostalgic poetry for others. As for me, my desire is to find, in spite of this movement, a profound fluidity and intimacy—which seems difficult.”⁹

Ten years of silence were broken with a film, *La nouba des femmes du Mont Chénoua*, 1979. Like the Senegalese Sembene Ousmane, Assia Djebar felt she could reach her people at last, and especially the women, in a language understandable through spoken Arabic and through sounds and images. It is a very beautiful film which reflects on memory and portraying the gaze. A young woman plunges into her past and allows women to speak out, giving them a voice and telling their stories mixed with the stories of their ancestors and flashes on war. In it, one already finds many elements of her future novels.

With her short stories, *Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement*, a take-off from her film made into narratives, women's voices come out even more strongly. It is as if millennial oppression was finally unleashed, veils dropped, bodies restored to their beauty and full integrity:

"New Algerian women, for the last few years circulating, crossing the threshold blinding themselves with the sun for a second. Are they liberating—are we liberating ourselves—completely from the relationship with the shadow entertained for centuries with their own bodies?" (167-193).¹⁰

L'Amour, la fantasia, is a carefully worked-out narrative that functions on two levels, reflecting two journeys: one into her inner-self, partly autobiographical, the other historical, tracing the Algeria's history from the conquest of 1830 to its liberation in 1962. It is also a reflection on language. These two themes, the autobiographical elements mixed with history and the reflection on language, are crafted beautifully within the narratives. They can be found again in the other two volumes of her quartet. In addition to these two levels, Djébar gives us interwoven narratives through various voices set into different time frameworks. For example, her reflections on language is one voice, lyrical passages in praise of Algerian women are another. She successfully constructs a polyphonic narrative resembling a symphony, thus the allusion to Beethoven's *Fantasia* and her division of the novel into five parts, like a symphony. The condition of women is also very present and continues in the line of her preceding works with more strength and determination to give them more voice and visibility. Djébar studied the archives and looked for women's achievements and participation in political and historical events. She demonstrates that women were active participants in the resistance against the French. As Mortimer well analyzed:

"By alternating historical accounts of the French conquest, oral history of the Algerian revolution, and autobiographical fragments, Djébar sets her individual journey against two distinct and yet complementary backdrops: the conquest of 1830 and the Algerian Revolution of 1954. The former introduced the colonial era; the latter brought it to a close. In this way, the narrator establishes links with Algeria's past, more specifically with women of the past whose heroism has been forgotten. Giving written form to Algerian women's heroic deeds, Djébar as translator and scribe succeeds in forging new links with traditional women of the world she left behind."¹¹

In *Ombre Sultane*, Djébar continues on the musical theme she started with *L'Amour, la fantasia*, alternating the voices of two women, one traditional, the other liberated, married to the same man. The inner and outer journeys are still present but are reflected by the two women. Hajila, the traditional woman, decides to leave the confinement of her home and explore the city while Isma, the emancipated one, embarks on a reflection of her past, her childhood as well as her married life. She resembles the heroines of Djébar's ear-

lier works. It is almost as if *La soif* was being repeated in this novel with Isma, like Nadia, choosing Hajila who is submissive, as a second wife to her husband and then pushing her into a revolt bound to end in tragedy. But in this novel, the complexity of the narrative gives way to various interpretations, one of which being that Hajila could be the double of Isma, or her subconscious. The intermingling of Schéhérazade's story adds to this complexity and gives yet another understanding of the story. It recalls the tales of the *Arabian Nights* in which Schéhérazade, a princess, tries to escape the fate a cruel Sultan inflicts on all the virgins of the town: He has sex with them and at the end of the night he kills them. Schéhérazade succeeds in saving her life by inventing tales that never end, thereby keeping the Sultan interested in hearing the next one every night. In order to do so Schéhérazade calls upon her sister, Dinarzade, for help. Dinarzade sleeps under the nuptial bed and helps her sister remember stories: "To throw light on the role of Dinarzade, as the night progresses! Her voice under the bed coaxes the story-teller above, to find unfailing inspiration for her tales, and to keep at bay the nightmares that daybreak would bring."¹²

In an anticipation to her narrative *Loin de Médina* (Far from Madina, 1991), Djébar tells us why she terms "novel" this collection of tales, narratives, visions, scenes, and recollections inspired by her readings of some of the Muslim historians who lived during the first centuries of Islam. Fiction allows freedom in re-establishing and unveiling a hidden space. Through it, Djébar gives a voice and a presence to the many women forgotten by the recorders and transmitters of Islamic tradition.

This is quite an ambition, and Djébar does it well in her usual careful, sensual, and articulate language. In a beautiful style, she recreates the lives of the women who surrounded the Prophet Muhammed, the influence they had on his thinking and the debates of the times. The unofficial, occulted history of the beginning of Islam becomes very real and tangible through its women, as created by Djébar's powerful pen. There is Aisha, the prophet's favorite wife; Fatima, his proud daughter. They both died soon after him. There is Sadjah the woman prophet; Selma, the healer, and so many others. They all seem to act freely and are not afraid to stand up for what they believe, especially when it pertains to their belief in the Prophet. The Prophet himself is described as someone soft-spoken and very kind to women, whom he treats with respect and care and whose advice he takes seriously.

This is certainly a revolutionary outlook and program for women's role in contemporary Arab society, if only it would take its religious tradition seriously as an example to follow. And I have no doubt Djébar intended it this way. Nonetheless, such a tactic raises many problems, not least to be found in the text itself. The final message is that one ought to leave Madina: "If Aisha, one day, decided to leave Madina? Ah, far away from Madina, to find the wind, the breathtaking, the incorruptible youth of revolt!" (p. 300). But actually, the whole novel is a song to Madina, a

glorification of the Prophet and of the women in his life. This is the most problematic contradiction one finds throughout the book: if, in order to free oneself, one ought to leave tradition and its enslavement, then how can one look upon tradition as a beautiful past filled with noble role models?

Other questions raised by this narrative as it inscribes itself in today's contemporary Arabic and North African literature are: What message can today's writers give? Ought they give one? Is there no middle way between these two ventures: glorification and reinterpretation of tradition?

Djebar must have been aware of, or unconsciously gripped by, all these questions because her latest work *Le blanc de l'Algérie* (1995) inscribes itself into the most daring, courageous, and outspoken reflections of today's world problems and pressing conflicts, most specifically, those daily enacted in the current Algerian civil war. It dares to look at the roots of the conflict and raises vital questions including the works of well-known writers and intellectuals (Fanon, Camus), as well as political leaders.

Djebar associates the destiny of Algiers in 1957 to the present, noticing that violence and carnage are taking the same form: "on both sides, death launchers — one in the name of legality, but with mercenaries; the other in the name of historical justice — or ahistorical, transcendental, therefore illuminated with demons. Between these two sides, ...a field is open where a multitude of innocents are falling, too many humble people and a number of intellectuals" (p. 134). She is not afraid to attack the power in place: "those who continue to officiate in the confusion of the hollow political theater...the well-kept, getting better established year after year; with a belly, self-righteousness, space, bigger bank accounts....This is how the caricature of a past is amplified where indistinctly sublimated heroes and brotherly killings are getting mixed up" (p.150). She wonders who is going to talk about all of this now, and in what language, noticing that the two who could have done so with irony, humor and strength — Kateb Yacine and Abdelkader Alloula — are dead and "we miss them." Indirectly, Djebar is setting herself in their place by giving us this strong, beautiful text.

Le blanc de l'Algérie is also a reflection on death, and on the yearning for, and the contemplation of, the possibility or the probability of her own death. The grief and sadness she feels over the deaths of loved ones and the destruction of her country leads her to express a death wish: "Desire takes hold of me, in the middle of this funeral gallery, to drop my pen or my brush and to join them,...to dip my face in the blood [of the assassinated]..." (p. 162). She barely resists the temptation, finally noticing that the earth calls her, other countries invite her. She will heal, but not forget. I agree with Clarissa Zimra, who notes that:

"The White of Algeria" marks a turning point in Djebar's career, because it is the first time she has come publicly, in voice as well as in print, to an openly political position regarding current events in her country....She indicts the official governmental policy that would render the complex

and multi-layered ethnicity of past and present-day Algeria into a single entity. But she also indicts a whole generation of writers and thinkers, herself among them, who have not spoken soon enough and loudly enough."

The blunter and more open treatment of the oppressive aspects of North African societies that we find in the more recent literary inscriptions by Assia Djebar is not simply a more daring exercise of literary freedom, although we must never lose sight of the courage she has shown. Rather, the increasing clarity and frankness with which the social context is presented suggests that it is no longer merely a backdrop for the action of the story. In these works, North African society itself comes forth as a character in the play, a character complete with principles of choice and action, and with both trivial and tragic flaws.

It is not necessarily the role of fiction to provide blueprints for concrete social action—and much bad fiction had resulted from attempts to do so—but the recent fiction of Assia Djebar, with its greater openness and its integration of individual struggle into the larger social context, may well become a force for positive and creative change in the Arab world and in her native Algeria, which needs so much at this point in history.

Endnotes

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- 2) M'Rabet, Fadéla. *La femme algérienne, suivi de Les Algériennes* (Paris: Maspéro, 1969), pp. 97-142
- 3) Djebar, Assia. *Women of Islam* (Netherlands: Deutsch, 1961) p. 1-25.
- 4) Gordon, David. *North Africa's French Legacy* (Harvard University Press, 1962) p. 49.
- 5) Khatibi, Abdelkadir. *Le roman maghrébin* (Paris: Maspéro, 1968) pp. 61-62.
- 6) Djebar, Assia. "Territoires des langues: entretien," (avec Lise Gauvin) *Littérature*, No. 101, fév. 96, pp. 73-87.
- 7) See my articles on the topic: "Writing to Explore (W)Human Experience," *Research in African Literatures*. (No. 23.1, Spring 1992) pp. 179-185; "L'écriture (comme) éclatement des frontières," *Postcolonial Women's Writing in French, L'Esprit Créateur* (ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi), (Summer 1993. Vol. xxxiii, No. 2) pp. 119-128.
- 8) Interview. *L'Afrique littéraire et artistique*, No. 3, February 1969.
- 9) *Europe*, No. 474, October 1968, pp. 114-120.
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A LICIA GHIRAGOSSIAN

THE TRILINGUAL POET

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Poetry is the expression of our innermost being: dreams, ideals, passions, and emotions. However, it has ebbed through the tide of the modern technological age, which has crushed and distorted the soul of the individual human being. In such an unpoetic cultural environment, the appearance of souls dedicated to poetry is a rare phenomenon and deserves our appreciation and encouragement. Alicia Ghiragossian is one of those rare poets whose voice is singularly resonant and influential and has made an impact on contemporary poetry.

Born in 1936 in Argentina, to Armenian parents, survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide, she grew up in the tradition of Spanish Argentinean poetry. With her first volume of poems, *One Day Five Voices* (1966), she was immediately acclaimed as an original poet and soon after won the "International Prize of Poetry" in Europe in 1967. The same year the Italian translation of her poems was published, "Being and Punctuation", with illustrations by Pablo Picasso. This very great honor to the budding young poet brought her international recognition overnight.

Her unusual talent received due appreciation by her own people when the Armenian government extended an official invitation to Alicia to honor her. Soon, her poems were translated into Armenian by the renowned poet Vahakn Tavtian (*Roots and Essence*, 1967). The publication received unprecedented national acclaim both in Armenia and its Diaspora.

Her poetry brought a new freshness and modernity to Armenian literature and made an impact on its development. Numerous young poets were inspired to follow her path and through Alicia's work there was a remarkable transfusion of new blood into Armenian poetry. Her books have become bestsellers in Armenia since 1967.

While in Buenos Aires, Alicia studied for a law degree and she was a lawyer when she moved to Los Angeles in 1971, where she practiced her profession. Her marriage in 1972 and the birth of her daughter, Lara, in 1973 were great sources of inspiration for her love poems and those dedicated to motherhood. Her poems are characterized by deep thought and clairvoyant perception, with rich metaphors, new analogies and sharp antinomies. She uses language with great economy to express profound emotions. She transcends the realistic world and reaches the metaphysical one, which is rooted in her being. Her poetry expresses the oversensitive pulse of modern times.

Alicia Ghiragossian's poetry has been so unique and original that it has given rise to a new School called "Metadimensional Poetry." This kind of poetry goes

beyond the known dimensions of reality into the metaphysical and eternal. For example, if the theme is motherhood, the concept will be metadimensional, that is, it should not stop at the first or second dimensions, which are ordinary, commonplace, and descriptive, but it should go on to the third, fourth, fifth, sixth or twentieth dimensions. Thus, the reader has a totally surprising, new perspective on the themes; a new world is opened before him/her and thus he/she enters a dimension that transcends known boundaries. In her *Introduction to the Beyond the Word* volumes, Alicia states: "We are interested in traveling very deep into the inner landscape of the soul (either of people or things), where the movement of atoms is registered; we are interested in being projected to the macrocosmos, to reach the cosmic forces and to be able to encounter the mysteries of the universe" (pp. 5-6)

In order to reveal this mysterious world that is intangible and haunting, she constructs an inner rhythm in her poetry that is free from old rules and is hypnotic in its effect; thus she transports the readers into a metaphysical universe full of mysteries. Alicia accumulates these effects through her surprising expression and unmatched analogies.

*Open arms
is the prologue
of a hug.
Open arms
is the sign
of freedom
but it is also the design
of a hurting Christ.*

*Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (p. 70)*

Alicia's subjects are varied: love, motherhood, solitude, peace, prophesy, truth, mysticism, roots, pain, suffering. These themes are balanced with emotion and philosophy, heart and mind, spontaneity and intellect, depth and flight.

In her "motherhood" poems, we share her innermost conversations with her unborn child. She creates an altogether different dimension of motherhood, as the mystical dialogue between the mother-to-be and the child reveals the truth that the child is destined to create the mother-unlike the accepted concept which considers the mother-to-be the creator of the child:

you do not have life yet

and you bring life to me.
 People think
 I give you birth
 but we both know
 we give birth
 to each other.
 I
 the child
 you
 the mother.

Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (pp. 81-82)

Her poems about God cause astonishment and wonder. She demonstrates a strange braveness and a novelty in poetical expression. In the closeness where she reaches the image of God, there is an encounter with the external or transcendental world:

And God
 entered my bedroom
 without slippers
 engraving the message
 with her footprints.
 We became friends
 at a glance.
 She already knew my soul
 and could recognize
 the scars from hurricanes
 on my back
 God was barefoot.
 And I rearranged my bedroom.

Beyond the Word
Meditation (p. 17)

Love in its emotional, passionate, and metaphysical aspects is revealed in her poems. She crosses the delicate veil of life and afterlife to follow the journey of her heart:

Love
 is the genius
 of existence
 The opposite of love
 is not just its absence
 but death itself.
 Lovers
 restore
 eternity.

Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (p. 15)

The great disappointment of love, too, is revealed in a poignant manner:

I do not know
 when and how
 that poison
 became storm
 and destroyed
 the American plastic dream.
 It became a cancer
 and rootlessly pulverized
 promise and hope
 child and future

Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (pp. 71-72)

Alicia's poetry is characterized by profound messages, rebellion against corruption and materialism in society, criticism, and human weaknesses such as envy, self-interest, and egoism. She is a poet who is concerned about purity, warmth, high human essences, and uprightness of the soul:

We must fabricate
 the vision of light
 and navigate through its rays
 to grasp the future
 detach it from time
 and build a new memory (p. 9)
 Where dreams are not
 the reverse of reality
 but life itself (p.10)
 Then we may have breathed
 the mystery
 and embraced
 the pure essence. (p. 10)

Introduction
Beyond the Words

Alicia writes in Spanish, Armenian, and English. This is quite unusual but, being an Armenian born outside her homeland, she was exposed to different languages and cultures, which has in fact enriched her poetry and given deeper dimensions to her creative work. She writes a given poem in the language that comes from her inner world. Each theme, and its treatment, is expressed in the language that is closest to the spirit behind the theme.

Her ethnic Armenian roots gave her poetry a deeper dimension. Her first encounter with her homeland created a revolution in her life. All along she had been in search for her identity; she wanted to know who she was, whom she belonged to, what her roots were, who her ancestors were, what cultural and racial heritage she had. She found the answers to these perennial questions during her first visit to Armenia in 1967. Later she revisited Armenia more frequently, and each time, she accumulated new sensations, which turned into poems written in the Armenian language.

Feminists, Islam and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt

by Margot Badran
Princeton University Press, 1995

Reviewed by Hosn Abboud

Margot Badran presents "Feminists, Islam and Nation" as a historical study of the Egyptian feminist movement from the end of the nineteenth until the middle of the twentieth century. The history of the Egyptian feminist movement according to Badran is part of the modern history of Egypt. The most important points that Badran tackles are the following:

First, a feminist orientation to Egyptian woman's issues became apparent at the end of the nineteenth century within the framework of the family, mainly in the urban areas and prior to Qassem Amin's suggestions. This social awareness was enhanced by women who examined the drawbacks of existing gender patterns that emphasized the role and contributions of men while neglecting those of women, until women began to be perceived as burdensome not only to the man, but also to her society and nation as well. This stage is illustrated effectively in the writings of the poet Aisha El-Teimouriyya, the researcher Zeinab Fawwaz; and the writer Melk Hafni Nassif.

Second, the feminist movement never existed outside the Islamic or the Egyptian national frameworks. The Islamic Reformation movement of Muhammad Abdo the "national emancipation movement" headed by Saad Zaghloul, and the Egyptian Feminist Union headed by Huda Shaarani, were all interdependent.

Third, the Egyptian feminist movement, due to its evolution in an Arab environment and its concern for reinterpreting Islam and liberating Egypt, could not be considered "foreign". Although Egyptian women tried to

learn from European women when meeting with them at the Women's International Conferences, they were not influenced by them, especially because British women never took a stand against the British occupation of Egypt.

The book is divided into three parts: the first includes four chapters in which the author explains the development of the feminist awareness of two pioneers: Huda Shaarawi, the founder of the Egyptian Feminist Union, and Nabawiyya Moussa, the first Egyptian female governor. This historical stage witnessed active social participation, journalistic productions, and the organization of the feminist movement.

The second part comprises the main body of the book and is divided into seven chapters. Here, Badran narrates in detail the history of the Egyptian woman's conflict within the family, especially in connection with personal status laws and women's struggle to achieve their right to secondary education.

The third and last section contains only one chapter in which the author surveys the Arab feminist movement that was founded by the Egyptian Women's Union. The Arab Feminist Union was founded for the sake of national issues after Arab women were isolated from the international feminist movement, which did not support colonized women's calls for independence. Badran writes that "the institutionalization of Arab feminism emerged from a coalescence in solidarity around a nationalist cause, the Palestine cause. Arab feminism was also, in part, born out of the limitations of international feminism" (pp. 223). In the twenties and thirties, Egypt was the only Arab country that had obtained independence. This gave rise to an active feminist movement that became a catalyst for the wider Arab feminist movement. The conference of the Arab Women's Union was held in Egypt in 1936 to discuss the Palestinian problem, and again in 1944 to discuss women's issues and the Arab union. It is worth mentioning that the Constitution of the Arab Feminist Union was written one year before the Constitution of the Arab League and that Egypt still plays a pioneering role locally and regionally. This was illustrated by Egyptian women's contributions to both the Population Conference held in 1994 in Cairo, and the Fourth International Women's Conference held in Beijing in 1996.

This book is required for any Arabic studies library and constitutes a valuable reference for the researcher and specialist interested in the history of modern Egypt, since Badran has interviewed a number of pioneers who

have since passed away. She has also examined diaries, letters, speeches, journalistic articles, poems, novels, and the by-laws and constitutions of feminist organizations. She has conducted a focused study on the Egyptian Women's Union and its periodicals, which were published in French and Arabic, also studied the archives of the European women's movement.

It is apparent that the Egyptian Women's Union constitutes the primary subject of the book. The author does not present the opposing movements' points of view, which considered the politicization of women's issues to be part of an imperialist program. Had she included these opposing views, the book would have been complete. However, this fear of discussing all the implications of women's issues is understandable, since talking about woman's role threatens cultural values and the masculine characteristics in any society. The author did not address any women's movement other than the Egyptian Women's Union, perhaps due to the leading role this movement played in Egypt. However, an examination of the opinions of other Arab women's movements would have better illustrated the scope of the Egyptian Women's Union's popularity and its influence.

This book is of interest to women and men alike because the issues raised are still subjects of daily discussion in the journals, books and literary circles of the contemporary Arab World. Egyptian and Arab women want to redefine their Islamic, national and social identities in accordance with the current historical period. The book includes valuable information; it must have taken the author a very long time to present, in detail, the history of our mothers who proved their potential in various fields. The author's intention was to ensure that no one would forget the invaluable contributions of these women, or would take any of their accomplishments for granted because this might lead us to take lightly some of our society's gravest issues.

It is worth mentioning that the Board of the American University of Cairo presented a version of this book at the last book exhibition in Cairo, and that the author is now working on an Arabic translation so that this important study will be within the reach of more Arab readers.

*Translated from Arabic by
Ghena Ismail*

Al-Raida welcomes reviews of books on any and all topics related to women in the contemporary Arab World. Book reviews should not exceed six double-spaced typed pages. Please submit a hard copy and a diskette.

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Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past The Legacy of A'ishah Bint Abi Baker

D.A. Spellberg
Columbia University Press, 1994

Reviewed by Fatme Charafeddine Kamal,
IWSAW Staff

Do historians preserve the past, or do they reinvent the past to fit it into how they would have wanted it to be? The impact of the historian's biases on his/her writing of history has been investigated by many modern scholars. In her book, Spellberg uses the example of A'ishah Bint Abi Bakr to study the effect of gender and politics on Muslim historiography.

The author's choice of A'ishah is by no means an arbitrary one. In fact, A'ishah, who is one of the most prominent women in Islamic history, perfectly represents the case of a life in which femininity and politics are interwoven.

A'ishah's prominence stems from several important factors:

- Her marriage: She was not only one of the Prophet Muhammad's nine wives but was also believed to be his favorite. After his death, she became a widely acknowledged authority in the evolving science of reporting the Prophet's words (Hadith) and deeds (Sunna or Tradition).

- Her genealogy: A'ishah was the daughter of Abu Bakr who was reported by many early Muslim historians to be the Prophet's closest companion and who was chosen as the first Muslim Caliph after the death of the Prophet. Moreover, Abu Bakr's venerated character and his highly esteemed political career by *Sunni* scholars were the object of rejection and repudiation by *Shii* scholars who supported Ali Bin Abi Taleb's claim to the Caliphate.

- Most importantly, what distinguished A'ishah was her involvement in controversial if not scandalous events. At the age of fourteen she was accused of adultery; shortly thereafter her innocence was declared by a divine revelation received by the Prophet and recorded in the *Quran*. The other problematic involvement of A'ishah was of a political/military nature. After the killing of the third Muslim Caliph Uthman Ibn Affan, A'ishah took part in the conflict over political control over the Muslim community. She led an army and set out to wage war against Ali Bin Abi Taleb. A'ishah was defeated and the conflict escalated into the first civil war in Islamic history.

The meaning and implications of A'ishah's feminine, religious, and political persona which puzzled the early

Muslim scholars, are still forcing debate and disagreement among their modern successors. This controversial aspect of A'ishah's legacy is the focus of Spellberg's work.

Spellberg argues that disagreement between *Sunni* and *Shii* scholars prompted contradictory depictions and interpretations of A'ishah's legacy. Early *Sunni* scholars held A'ishah in high esteem by assuring her preference by the Prophet over his other wives, adopting a compassionate attitude towards her concerning the adultery accusations, and acknowledging her as an authority in the field of collecting the Prophet's Hadith and Tradition.

In contrast, *Shii* scholars undermined the character of A'ishah by refuting her preference by the Prophet, not acknowledging her divine vindication from adultery charges, suspecting her actions in promoting her father as the first Caliph, and by rejecting her authority in transmitting the Prophet's Hadith and Tradition.

Although *Sunni* and *Shii* scholars disagreed vehemently about many aspects of A'ishah's legacy, they concurred at the critical juncture of assessing her involvement in political life. Scholars from both sects used A'ishah's political activity as the perfect example of the capacity of women to destroy political order, which became the strongest argument for the exclusion of women from public life.

Male scholars refined and expanded, invented and denied aspects of A'ishah's historical personality in order to preserve the past so that it would fit their own political and the personal views and aspirations. They agreed and disagreed, but they all made sure that A'ishah, who was the first woman in Islamic history to assume a leading political role, would also be the last one to do so.

Spellberg's work is not the first book to explore the relationship between politics and Muslim historiography; most books on Muslim historiography have dealt with this issue. Nor is it the first to treat the subject of gender and Muslim historiography. Fatima Mernissi initiated this area of study with several valuable studies, such as *The Veil and The Male Elite*, (1975), and *Women and Islam : An Historical and Theological Enquiry*, (1993).

A'ishah's heavily charged life has interested many scholars. Several books about her have been written by Muslim and Arab scholars. Nevertheless, the first and only book on A'ishah prior to Spellberg's by a Western scholar, *i.e.*, *A'ishah the Beloved of Mohammad*, was published in 1942 by Nabia Abbott, the prolific writer on the subject of women and Islamic history. What distinguishes Spellberg's work is that, whereas previous scholars sought to establish A'ishah's biography, she endeavors to question the reliability of the original sources that preserved this biography.

Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past: the Legacy of A'ishah Bint Abi Baker is very well written and documented. I recommend it for the fields of Women's Studies and Muslim Historiography.