

AL-Raida

Lebanese American University

Volume XV, No. 79, Fall, 1997

The Pioneer

الرائدة

Women in Agriculture

Women's
Labor and
Tobacco
Production
in Lebanon

Women in
Agricultural
Development

Meeting the
Chief of the
WAD Unit
at ESCWA



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). 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 academic research on women, local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures, 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 monographs on the status, development and conditions of Arab women, in addition to *Al-Raida*. Twelve 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 illiterate and 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) 791-645. 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. e-mail: iwsaw@flame.beirut.lau.edu.lb

PURPOSE AND CONTENT: *Al-Raida's* mission is to enhance networking between Arab women and women all over the world; to promote objective research on 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.

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

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Al-Raida

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JULINDA ABU NASR: TO STRIVE, TO SEEK, TO FIND, AND NOT TO YIELD

When asked by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World to write a tribute to Julinda Abu Nasr on the occasion of her retirement in October, 1997, my mind went back to the short period of time I worked with her as editor of the *Al-Raida* issue on **Women and Literature**. In that short span, Julinda stood out as a devoted and inspiring leader of a diverse group of hard working dedicated women. Her style of leadership was a new and inexhaustible source of knowledge for me of how to motivate the people working under you, stimulate creativity, promote a spirit of exploration and get incredible output from them. This realization and the uneasy feeling I felt about simplifying a person in a few hackneyed phrases incited me to talk to people who worked with her to find out at close hand what they thought of her. There was no hesitation on the part of those I got in touch with. They were enthusiastic and had a genuine desire to talk about a woman they had sincere admiration for.

Dr. Riyad Nassar, President of the Lebanese American University, described her as "highly committed, serious and professional." In the last twenty five years, Julinda "has succeeded in moving the Women's Institute from an embryonic stage to a very well-established and highly reputed organization" and has given a "great name for the preschool education." Those who worked closely with her agreed that she does not compromise when it comes to principles. She is a "perfectionist" though in this imperfect world of ours, this quality can be a liability. She is so demanding, Mrs. Nazha Sadek told me, that she expects people to possess the same kind of commitment she has for the Institute and the University. Her insatiable sense of perseverance and work ethics coupled with passionate love for what she was doing caused her to work furiously at all hours of the day and night. There was a great deal to accomplish and, in that sense, time, for Julinda, was very precious. Her diverse interests that ranged from academic research, to social work aimed at women and children including the teaching of literature, drama and music made her acutely conscious of the urgency

of the matter. How could she not "overload the hours" when, at certain stages, she was engaged in 15-16 projects at the same time. For her, work is a creed and a declaration of faith. No wonder the range and extent of her accomplishments.

A Professor of Child Psychology at the Lebanese American University since 1960, Julinda established the Women's Institute in October 1973 and remained Director of the Institute and the University's Laboratory for Preschool Education until her retirement at the end of the academic year 1996-1997. In Julinda's view, it was her Protestant upbringing that molded her personality and made her the "caring" person she is. The missionaries in the Sidon Evangelical School where she studied, as well as her mother who was a graduate of the same school, had a strong impact on her. They taught her that one should not live in an oasis, but reach out for the community and offer help. The motto of the Sidon American School remains with her: "Better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

In 1975, at the start of the civil war in Lebanon, Julinda went to Egypt and instead of spending three days there as was initially scheduled, she remained in Egypt because there was no safe way to return home. Instead of sitting around and despairing over the situation, she decided to do some constructive work. That's when she discovered at close hand the state of oppression and misery Arab women and children are subjected to and began to see another role to the university than the purely academic one. She realized that the university has another equally important mission and that is to bridge the gap between the various sectors of society, rich and poor. This feeling gave her a strong sense of responsibility for the underprivileged, those who are less fortunate. She was convinced that to build a country one has to address the needs of people who are deprived

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and marginalized. Having no one to support them or to alleviate their sorrows, Julinda decided to be their “champion.” At this point, she began to envisage a different role for the Institute. Initially intended as an academic unit to enhance research by faculty members on women’s issues and design curricula on women’s studies and child development, Julinda felt the need to respond to new challenges generated by the war that broke out in 1975. She needed only to look around her to see women and children displaced from their homes and suffering the effects of a brutal civil war and in desperate need of help. That’s where the idea of Basic Living Skills and numerous other projects came from.

Such work would not have been accomplished without the strong sense of solidarity that prevailed in the Institute. Julinda understood the importance of delegating power and insisted on promoting group work. When working on Rural Development and the creation of modal villages in Akkar, Mrs. Sadek told me, the group on the site wanted to consult with her on some tricky issue. Her reaction was: “You are there. Use your own judgment and act accordingly.” Julinda has a “knack for bringing out the best in people” as Mrs. Lydia Daher told me. Those who work with her have no choice but to excel and show their true mettle. The Akkar program is one among a number of rural development programs that the Institute was actively engaged in that include workshops to develop social and political awareness, income generating activities and social and legal literacy activities. Julinda was also engaged in a Basic Living Skills Program designated to generate social awareness among women, teach illiterate and semi-literate women, train displaced and rural women in marketable skills to enable them to earn an income, and develop positive self concepts in women.

As far as Julinda is concerned, academic work is important particularly when it predetermines practical work done in the community. Julinda was one of the first to apply an integrated approach to development. In her view, such an approach, which she adopted as early as the 1970’s, is practical, feasible and functional. Possessing a uniquely “creative style,” as Miss Hoda Butros refers to it, enabled her to look at an objective without being overwhelmed by apparent difficulties and to find

the ways and means to achieve it. This “can do” attitude fostered a feeling that obstacles can always be surmounted. “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” has remained Julinda’s motto throughout. Julinda has no fear of failure: “I have a strong belief that if you really want something, you will get it.” Even when her knowledge of a particular issue or subject is deficient, she makes a point of pursuing the subject and learning about it.

Julinda has gone out of her way to assist children who need help and has managed to recruit a Canadian team to come annually to Lebanon and train social workers in dealing with traumatized children. As Director of the Women’s Institute, she organized various workshops to train preschool and elementary school teachers in innovative teaching techniques, social workers, community development workers in dealing with traumatized children and school librarians in modern techniques of setting up children’s libraries. She has served as consultant on early childhood programs for UN agencies, the Kuwait Society for the Advancement of Arab Children, Save the Children Fund, Middle East Council of Churches training program, and many others. She has organized and conducted training sessions for preschool teachers in Lebanon, Bahrain, and Kuwait, and has organized various workshops in collaboration with the Goethe Institute on Children’s Literature, Children’s Libraries, Music as an Educational Tool, and Children of War. With over twenty publications to her credit, Julinda is a member of several organizations such as the YWCA, World Organization for Early Childhood Education, the Asian Women’s Institute, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. She is founder and president of the Lebanese Board on Books for Young People which is affiliated to the International Board on Books for Young People.

Acutely conscious of the dangerous influence of war on children, Julinda decided to offset the atmosphere of violence and aggression by providing models with acceptable moral and social values. This was done by setting up projects such as sponsoring children’s plays as well as puppet shows. A puppet theater group (organized and trained by the

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Institute) has performed in over 150 schools to 30,000 children who watch the show yearly and receive a free book. The Institute has also been engaged in organizing selected Book Exhibits, training writers and illustrators of Children's Books and organizing the Portable Library. Having been the first to introduce the idea of the portable library in Lebanon in response to basic

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needs to counterbalance the war atmosphere, now, in times of peace, the Institute provides portable libraries to social centers, orphanages, hospitals, schools, and remote rural areas to motivate children to read and discover the joy of reading. At the same time it serves as a therapeutic medium for children with emotional, social and physical problems. With such aims in mind, the Institute has managed to distribute over 250 libraries in different

parts of Lebanon. Miss Butros told me that her "remote village in North Lebanon as well as the village of Jebrayel received a portable library from the Institute."

Her deep insight and "acute intelligence" makes her "a shrewd judge of people," as Rose Ghurayyib described it. When she discovers hidden talent, she goes out of her way to promote it. Julinda has a "young spirit," says Miriam Sfeir, and is always ready to promote and encourage young people who are still pure and uncorrupted by the system. If she cannot tolerate mediocrity and laziness, she has a lot of patience with young people and is ready to give them assistance and help at all levels. As Ghina Ismail put it "Julinda is sensitive, loving, warm and understanding when it comes to the young." This interest in young people prompted her, when she was first appointed by the University to run the Institute, to insist on teaching at least one course to remain in contact with young people. Despite the remarkable work she has done, Julinda insists that she is, first and foremost, a teacher and educator.

Julinda's eternal commitment to all issues related to women can be seen in the vast and incredible amount of work she has done to promote the cause of women in Lebanon and the Arab world. At the strictly academic level, she has engendered courses in women's studies that are presently offered through various Divisions at the Lebanese American University. In order to enhance the academic role it has continued to

play, the Institute has acquired a vast number of books and periodicals (over 500 books and 200 periodicals) on national and international issues related to women. Another publication *Al-Raida*, a quarterly journal, was established in 1976 to increase knowledge on social, economic and legal conditions in the Arab World, enhance networking among women around the world and promote communication among individuals, groups, and institutions concerned with Arab women. In addition, a number of books in English as well as Arabic on issues related to women and children have been published by the Institute.

Because the bulk of her work was accomplished in the erratic years of the war, planning took place at the level of two to three alternatives. If it was not possible to hold a conference in Lebanon, Julinda was ready to go to Cyprus, or Jordan, or the United States for that matter. Julinda has organized a number of conferences on issues related to women such as one on Lebanese Women and the Environment, Arab Women and the Environment and others. She has also served as consultant on Economic Contributions of Arab Women and Continuing Education for Arab Women with the governments of Jordan, Saudia Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia and Morocco as well as with agencies including the UNICEF, UNESCO, AGFUND, UCWA, Ford Foundation, FAO and ILO.

Despite the incredible academic and practical contributions she has made in areas related to women and children, self-promotion has always been contrary to her principles and her nature. The lure of publicity has never succeeded in distracting Julinda from her mission. Julinda has always preferred to work and remain behind the scenes. When it comes to the media, or any form of publicity or self-promotion, she has always kept a low profile: "What really matters is for the Institute and the University to be represented." Julinda has built a legacy and has done it with integrity and an amazing sense of duty and dedication. We will always remember this woman of vision with gratitude and admiration, but we will not despair for we know that the new Director of the Woman's Institute, Mrs. Mona Khalaf, has all the qualities that will enable her to carry on where Julinda has left and continue to strive for exciting goals and new horizons.

*Samira Aghacy
Professor of English
Lebanese American University*

“I AM AT HOME EVERYWHERE AND NOWHERE. I AM NEVER A STRANGER, YET I NEVER QUITE BELONG”

By Lina Alameddine

When asked where I am from, I tend to hesitate in responding. I do not know where I am from nor do I think I am alone in this situation. I was born in Lebanon, grew up in Switzerland, and pursued my college education in the United States. Although I lived abroad, I was lucky in that I still had the opportunity to return to Lebanon regularly for holidays. This is the first time since I was seven, that I have spent more than four weeks in my ‘home’ country.

However, Lebanon has played an intrinsic role in forming my feminist perspective within the macrocosmic picture of my upbringing.

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Despite the number of holidays I have spent in Lebanon, I lack a pristine Lebanese identity. I speak Arabic, but I am still a stranger. The mistake I made was being born the year the civil war broke out. However, I am determined not to allow myself to shy away from an identity that is mine. However, the quest to unite my distinct worlds is not over. I am coming to terms with the idea that I live between distinct worlds, both of which form an essential part of who I am, and especially who I am as a woman!

My first experience regarding the inadequacy attributed to women occurred at an early stage in my life. It was to happen when I joined a few boys in a friendly game of soccer during one of my first visits to Lebanon. At first they laughed and allowed me to play with them; however, when they noticed that I was serious and wanted to keep playing they immediately stopped. They told me it was ‘haram’ for a girl to play with

boys. They were only ten years old. It was at that age that I

was made aware that I was a girl, and not a boy, and that there existed no obvious reconciliation between the two genders. I was mad, and no one could appease my anger, not my mom, nor my dad. The confusion I felt at that moment for ‘only being a girl’ became the basis for my perpetual curiosity in regards to my identity as a woman within an undeniably misogynist society.

Prior to moving to the United States for college, my existence floated between two distinct worlds: a westernized Switzerland and a traditional Lebanon. There could have been nothing more different between my lifestyle in Switzerland and the holidays I spent on the farm in South Lebanon. In Lebanon, I relished in the challenge of trying to understand this essentially inward lifestyle imposed on women. The women I encountered were supposed to be married by the age of twenty two, and from then on, were expected to get involved in the ritualized process of domesticity: the frequent child-bearing, the cooking and cleaning and the premise that a woman will never be equal to a man. In Switzerland, I had not been exposed to these rigid and arcane expectations of women. In school, they were not apparent, nor were they present within my own home life. Expression of individuality was encouraged in all spheres of my life, but it was in Lebanon that I sensed opposition.

During many of the holidays spent in Lebanon, I was young and ready to provoke. The country presented itself to me as an opportunity to question and challenge other women’s lack of awareness and decision making in their own lives. Although my curiosity was innocent, it stemmed mostly from a rebellious attitude of knowing that I was different. I relished in the freedom of choice and expression that I thought I had. I enjoyed being the only girl who felt no shame in running around with the boys, singing as loudly as they did, and even participating in some of their more ‘manly’ conversations. Because I was an outsider, my difference justified these customarily unacceptable actions. At the same time, I used my difference to soothe and justify my

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feeling of alienation from a culture that wanted me to stand on the peripheries.

Unfortunately, the intrigue I felt towards the people of the farm became a burden that I am still reckoning with. As I grew older, I began to resent the stifling and constraining conditions that these women were entrapped in. There was a veil of permanent silence placed upon them that I wanted to evade and help destroy. However, my innocence to the situation blinded me from realizing that my 'feminist' cry was dim in this patriarchal society which was adamantly resistant to change. Over the years, my frustration regarding the narrow-mindedness of both men and women grew into an inbred repugnance of the place that was supposedly my home country. I remember writing in my journal when I was seventeen years old: "I don't belong there, nor do I ever want to belong". My disattachment from Lebanon not only saddened my family, but also led to an implicit resentment on their part. I found myself caught between two worlds, both of which I appraise as my own, but do not completely belong to. In Lebanon, I found that my more liberal educational up-bringing clashed with certain values I felt were archaic. Now, I am seeking to reconcile the disparity of what I was born into and what I have grown up to believe. My western and more liberal education has created two 'worlds' that I appraise as my own, but don't completely belong to either.

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■

Everyday, I am faced with a familiar uncertainty that plagues my decision making concerning future goals and dreams. I attribute this uncertainty to my culture that has no name. I am finding it difficult to reconcile the significance of Lebanon in my life with that of my education and experiences obtained in Switzerland and in the United States. I acknowledge the influence Lebanon has held on the formation of my identity. Now, I feel that without Lebanon, I would not be the same person. Although in Lebanon I am an outsider looking in, I have acquired an appreciation of certain facets that this world has to offer. Indeed, I am still searching for the bridge that will unite my bi-polar worlds for me.

Like many of you, each day I find myself enticed by a mosaic of opinions, cultures, religions and people. I am at home everywhere and nowhere. I am never a stranger, yet I never quite belong. Today, I am still rummaging for answers on how to create a stronger base for my precarious situation perched in between two radically different cultures. I belong to a culture that has no name. I do not belong in Lebanon, nor do I belong in the United States, and the need to belong is of no urgent importance for me. However, what is important is the knowledge that I will not be ostracized in Lebanon for the person I have come to be: an individual, a feminist, someone with an opinion other than what I am supposed to be thinking and believing.

Announcement

AL-RAIDA WELCOMES CONTRIBUTIONS OF CONCERN TO WOMEN THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD. IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL OR FREELANCE JOURNALIST OR RESEARCHER, PLEASE CONSIDER SUBMITTING ARTICLES AND REPORTS ON EVENTS, CONFERENCES, AND DEBATES RELATED TO WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ISSUES. IF YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS ACCEPTED FOR PUBLICATION, YOU WILL RECEIVE A PAYMENT OF US \$100.

Recent Publications

- Ghossoub, May. *Leaving Beirut: Women and Wars Within*. London: Al-Saqi, 1997.
- Minkler, Meredith and Carroll L. Estes (Eds.) *Critical Gerontology: Perspectives from Political and Moral Economy*. New York: Baywood Publishing Company, 1997.
- Stein, Jane. *Empowerment and Women's Health: Theory, Methods, and Practice*. London: Zed Books, 1997.
- Date-Bah, Eugenia (Ed.). *Promoting Gender Equality at Work*. London: Zed Books, 1997.
- Goodwin, Godfrey. *The Private World of Ottoman Women*. London: Al-Saqi, 1997.
- Jaber, Toufic. *Al-Qita' al-Zira'i fi Lubnan: Tahlil wa Afaq*. Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Lubnani lil Dirasat, 1997.
- Habib, Nasira. *Invisible Farmers: A Study on the Role of Women in Agriculture and the Impact of Pesticides on Them*. Malaysia: Khoj-Research and Publication Center, 1996.
- Baydun, Azzah. *Sihhat al-Nisa' al-Nafsiyyah Bayna Ahl al-'ilm wa Ahl al-Din*. Beirut: Dar al-Jadid, 1997.
- Michael, Gorkin and Rafiq Othman. *Three Mothers, Three Daughters: Palestinian Women's Stories*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Kapchan, Deborah. *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.
- Tierney-Tells, Mary Beth. *Allegories of Transgression and Transformation: Experimental Fiction by Women Writing Under Dictatorship*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996.

New Releases from "Women Make Movies"

Permissible Dreams traces the life of an illiterate rural Egyptian woman, married at 15 with eight children to care for. Although she does not read or write, the woman in question is her family's economist, doctor, and the planner of its future. The documentary is directed by Ateyyat El-Abnoudy.

A State of Danger is directed by Haim Bresheeth and Jenny Morgan. This documentary, shot in Israel and the Occupied Territories, offers a unique and vital perspective on the Intifada (uprising). It enables women peace activists, on both fronts, to speak out and make their muted voices heard where they discuss grassroots support, human rights issues and the role of Arab and Jewish women in bringing peace to the region.

Hidden Faces is directed by Claire Hunt and Kim Longinotto. The documentary pictures the lives of Egyptian women in both

rural and urban areas. The directors make use of interviews to disclose Egyptian women's profound attachment to traditions while highlighting the contradictions of feminism in a Muslim world.

Women in Niger scrutinizes the life of women in Niger, a traditional Islamic country. It portrays the massive impact of fundamentalism on women. The videotape in question should be viewed by all those interested in Human rights issues. The documentary is directed by Anne Laure Folly.

Send all orders to:
Women Make Movies
462 Broadway, Suite 500 - L, New York, NY 10013
Telephone: (212) 925-0606
Fax: (212) 925-2052
E-Mail: cinema@wmm.com

Conferences

The All China Women's Federation (ACWF) will be hosting a seminar from 18-22 June, 1998 in Beijing, China. The goal of the seminar is to "facilitate exchange of information and experiences on the follow-up actions by governments and NGOs to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action." For more information contact: ACWF, 15 Jian Guo Men Street, Beijing 100730, China. Fax: (86-10) 6513-6044. E-mail: acwf@public3.bta.net.cn

The year 1998 marks the 50th anniversary of the adoption, by the UN, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). On this occasion a conference exploring the concepts, strategies, and practices by which the understanding of human rights has been expanded to incorporate women's lives and gender differences will be held from 14-27 June, 1998. It will bring together activists, from all around the world, who have been working on issues of women's human rights. For further information, contact Institute Coordinator, Center for Women's Global Leadership, Douglass College, Rutgers University, 27 Clifton Avenue, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, USA, Fax: (1-732) 932 - 1180. E-mail (subject: WGLI 98): cwgl@igc.apc.org

A workshop "Improving Women's Health Utilizing Persons with Midwifery Skills" is the theme of a workshop to be held soon. Participants will explore ways to implement a woman's right to reproductive health within her community and identify the educational support needed locally and nationally to provide basic midwifery skills. Details: International Confederation of midwives, 10 Barley Mow Passage, Chiswick, London W4 4PH, United Kingdom. Tel: 44 081 994 6477 Fax: 44 081 995 1332

Quote, Unquote

As a Third World woman, it is disturbing to know that most women do not have ready access to this information - to breast cancer alternative therapies and environmental information. It's frightening to know that our countries are being inundated with harmful products in the name of corporate profits. We need to close our borders to cancer-causing agents. It is involuntary genocide. If breast cancer has become a metaphor for malignant development, then let's not let it metastasize in our countries.

(Dr. Iris Zavala Martinez, *WEDO News and Views*, September 1997, p. 10)

"... Western feminists have revolutionized academia by introducing the discipline of women's / feminist studies, Muslim feminists have a similar, yet more complicated task and responsibility ahead of them. Namely, ... to introduce the field of Muslim women's studies to both Western and non-Western institutions. ... Muslim feminists have to avoid the pitfalls of imitating androcentric patterns as mimicked by certain Western feminists."

(*People's Rights Women's Rights*, issue#4, March, 1997, p. 19)

"Recognition of the vital role of women in socio-economic life in both agriculture and non-agriculture activities, in accordance with the goals of the United Nations Decade for Women, is a prerequisite for successful rural development planning and programme implementation. Rural development based on growth with equity will require full integration of women, including equitable access to land, water, other natural resources, inputs and services and equal opportunity to develop and employ their skills. There is also an urgent need to expand knowledge and statistical data on all aspects of women's roles in rural activities and to disseminate this information in order to promote greater awareness of women's role in society"

(*Kathleen Cloud, International Journal of Rural Development*, vol.1 No. 1, Fall 1981)

"I am cooking now and I don't know when next I'll cook a proper meal and when I'll be able to live in a proper place; that is poverty, I am squatting because landlords would not accept me with eight children. It is depressing and frustrating."

(*Choices: The Human Development Magazine*, UNDP, Vol. 5 No. 2, October 1996, p. 7)

"smoking kills more women than alcohol, illicit drugs, car accidents, suicide, and homicide - combined. It's by far the number one cause of premature death in women, causing approximately 20 percent of all deaths, killing roughly one in seven - or 141,832 - women annually. Lung cancer, which has increased over 400 percent in women in the past 30 years, is now the biggest cancer killer of women - bigger even than breast cancer. ... women are uniquely vulnerable to certain smoking - related health problems. Women smokers are more susceptible to reproductive tract infections and cervical cancer, and those who use oral contraceptives have an especially high risk of stroke and heart disease. Smoking also wreaks havoc on women's hormonal systems - decreasing fertility, increasing the chances of premature

menopause and osteoporosis, and disturbing pregnancy."

(*Sharon Lerner, Ms. Magazine*, May/June 1995, p. 22)

"In developing countries women grow up to 80 percent of all food produced, but rarely hold the title to the land they cultivate. Worldwide they constitute one third of the wage-labour force. Much of their work, however, is unpaid. If global calculations of gross domestic product included household work, they would increase by 25 per cent."

(*The State of World Population, United Nations Population Fund*, 1995, p. 27)

"how do we make every woman know her rights and how do we make this process more simple? Further, after knowing their rights, how can women exercise them. Here, I am talking about specific, measurable and achievable actions that even poor community members can take. We all know that when our rights are abused, we can hire a lawyer and take the offending party to court, but who can afford legal costs these days? If I can't afford to hire a lawyer, then village women won't even contemplate hiring one. What I am saying is that there is a lot of legal rights education going on, but the recipients of knowledge continue to get frustrated because they cannot afford legal costs"

(*Rose Muragiri-Mwololo, AWID News*, Vol. 10 No. 1, March 1996, p. 4)

"Alone with her seven children, Houria could take it no longer. Everyone was fleeing the municipality; not a soul remained in the villages. The army watched the exodus of a whole people without budging. With a knot in her stomach, Houria donned her scarf and left for Algiers with nothing but a bag stuffed with second-hand clothes and a transistor radio sent by her brother in Paris. This time she left the gas cooker, the fridge, the black and white TV - along with a cow, its calf and a splendid vegetable garden - behind. ... Perched on the roof of a truck bound for Algiers, surrounded by her brood of kids, Houria weeps. From her lofty perch, she watches an endless stream of folk fleeing their land. Here a mattress strapped to a back; there a carpet rolled under an arm. ... Mutual hatred drives the war and annihilates all hope of an end. Houria no longer recognises the city, by day an overcrowded labyrinth of streets and alleys, by night deserted. Where black money and corruption flows as freely as blood. Mercedes and hearses, deposit boxes in the banks and coffins in the streets. ... Houria no longer has faith in anything."

(*Selim Zaoui, Index on Censorship*, issue# 3, 1997, pp. 49-50)

"Though women are forbidden to meet their male counterparts, own an office or personally meet men in the course of business, ingenuity takes care of most problems. They 'take tea' with other women and operate their business networks thus. By hiding behind the corporate veil, women have been able to wield real economic power domestically and internationally as independent agents. As Saudi enters the next century, and the wealth of these women grows, it will be interesting to observe how long they will be content to wield their economic power from behind their veils."

(*Mai Yamani, Index on Censorship*, issue# 4, 1996, p. 83)

NewsBriefs

FROM LEBANON

Antonia Caccia in Beirut

Renowned Emmy award-winning British film maker Antonia Caccia visited Beirut where she screened her documentary film **Stories of Honour and Shame** at the American University of Beirut. The documentary which is based entirely on first-hand accounts tackles the experiences of Palestinian women in the Gaza strip. **Stories of Honour and Shame** is Caccia's third documentary tackling the Palestinian cause. The two previous films are **On Our Land** and **Voices from Gaza**. The film is based entirely on first-hand accounts on how many of these women have no say in how they live; however, they show remarkable courage and frankness because, despite the many obstacles, they manage to endure."

(The Daily Star, November 13, 1997)

FROM ALGERIA

Sakharov Prize for Human Rights goes to Algerian Rights Activist

The European Parliament presented the Sakharov Prize for Human Rights to Salima Ghezali, Algerian human rights activist, director of the Algerian weekly newspaper **La Nation** and co-founder of Algeria's Women's Rights Movement. The award was granted to her in appreciation of her courageous journalistic investigations regarding the violence in Algeria. After receiving the award which amounted to \$ 16,500 Ghezali called for international intervention and investigation into the mysteries surrounding the massacres in Algeria. According to her, "There is terror practiced by criminals, and there is a terror sustained by the government in defense of its power. We should try to identify the source of the violence, and see who profits from it." She also maintained that nowadays "courage and freedom of thought consist first and foremost in daring to demand an international commission of inquiry into the massacres."

(The Daily Star, December 18, 1997)

FROM IRAN

A Female Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Women's Affairs

Iranian Minister of Interior, Abdallah Nuri, appointed Zahra Shujaey to the position of Mudir 'aam (general Manager, the equivalent of a permanent secretary) to the Ministry of Women's Affairs. This is the first time a woman occupies such a rank since the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Shujaey, a human rights activist, is former consultant to the minister in question. She served as his adviser on women's issues for 4 years from 1989-1993. She taught Political Science at the University of Tehran and is a member of the Women's Educational and Social Council which is part of the Higher Council for the Cultural Revolution. Shujaey is expected to

tackle issues regarding social laws and legislation pertaining to women as well as violence against women. Shujaey is the third woman to be appointed to a key position in president Mohammed Khatimy's Government.

(Al-Nahar, September 3, 1997)

Iranian Women and Karate

During the years that followed the Islamic Revolution in Iran sports for women, especially martial arts, were ignored because such recreational activities did not fit the traditional role of Muslim women. This year and for the first time since the eruption of the Islamic Revolution Iranian women will be allowed to compete in Karate.

(Al-Nahar, September 3, 1997)

FROM EGYPT

Female Circumcision

Egyptian human rights activists and women organizations cheered the government's decision to enforce the decree banning female circumcision, while fundamentalists and tribe members considered the court's ruling as absurd. Even though female circumcision is now punishable by law in Egypt and courts ruled that "it's illegal for anyone to carry out circumcision operations, even if the girl or her parents agree to it," many families, especially in Southern Egypt, publicly refused to abide by such a law irrespective of the consequences. Given that circumcision is a deeply entrenched traditional practice, local women's organizations maintained that "Before trying to enforce the Law, it will be necessary to sensitize the population to the reasons for the ban."

(The Daily Star, January 10, 1998)

FROM TURKEY

Turkish Minister Supports Virginity Tests

In an interview with a local newspaper, the Minister for Women's Affairs, Isilay Saygin, supported the traditional practice of subjecting women to virginity tests: "It does not bother me. I do whatever Turkish tradition and customs require of the family. Educating children is the duty of the father and mother. The state is the father." Since her appointment, Saygin has succeeded in provoking feminist by publicizing her anti feminist stance. For instance, she believes that "three women do not equal one man" and claims that "women don't want to take part in politics." Her announcements outraged feminists who protested against violations of individual rights and demanded her resignation. Sahika Yuksel, a doctor from Istanbul, maintains "No one should have an interest in whether an adult woman is a virgin or not ... Unfortunately, in certain countries including Turkey, virginity is considered an important sign of honor."

(The Daily Star, January 9, 1998)

FEMALE LABOR FORCE IN LEBANON

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) has completed a study entitled **Female Labor Force in Lebanon**. The study was funded by the Agency for International Development (AID) and was executed by a working team brought together through the assistance of the Consultation and Research Institute, a Lebanese consulting and research firm. The study provides the necessary database for formulating effective policies, plans for action, and specific projects targeted towards improving the status of working women in Lebanon. It also offers information on the attributes of working women (education, skills, training, experience, social status, etc.), the size of the Lebanese female labor force, the conditions of working women, the problems they face as well as the job market demand for female labor. The study has been translated into Arabic.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LEBANESE WOMEN WRITERS AND POETS IN LEBANON

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) has concluded its long awaited bibliography of Lebanese women writers and poets. The study consists of entries for more than one hundred and ten women. The entry for each author provides a profile of the author's life, education, work, activities, and a bibliographic list of her works. The monograph also contains three studies on women's literature in Lebanon: Samira Aghacy on the short story, Sabah Zwein on poetry and Rachid al-Daif on the novel.

WOMEN - MEDIA AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) has completed a study on Lebanese women and the media conducted by Ms. Irene Lorring. The research project assesses the role of the Lebanese media in sustainable development, the factors that affect decision-making processes within the Lebanese media institutions, the role and status of female media professionals, and the quality of education university students are getting in preparation for this task.

SALWA NASSAR KAMA 'ARAFTHUA

A biography of Salwa Nassar, the first Lebanese woman physicist, has just been published. The book

is written by her colleague and friend Najla Akrawi who traces the different stages in Nassar's life: her student years at the Junior College later known as Beirut College for Women (BCW), her experience in the United States of America where she worked with prominent physicists, her appointment as president of BCW, as well as her illness and death.

THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE WORKS OF AL-TAYIB SALEH

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World has published a monograph on women in the literature of Tayib Saleh. The author, Saleh Ibrahim, traces the presentation of women in the novels and short stories of Tayib Saleh. Women, in Saleh's work, are perceived as sexual objects dominated and abused by men. Women are also seen as victims of traditions and the male's own interpretation of tradition and the religious text. According to Ibrahim women in the works of Tayib Saleh, are either traditional, fluctuating between customs, traditions and a desire for freedom, or "new women" who have managed to reject and react against the limitations and the marginal position assigned to them.

SEX AND MARRIAGE IN THE NOVELS OF HANAN AL-SHAYKH

A monograph, by Saleh Ibrahim, on the works of the Lebanese writer and novelist Hanan al-Shaykh has just been published by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World. Ibrahim asserts that in the works of Hanan al-Shaykh sex is not solely restricted to mechanical contact, but takes on a wider dimension to incorporate issues related to belongingness, internal psychological tensions and other problems that ensue from sexual repressions and frustrations.

NEW APPOINTMENT

A new director, Mrs Mona Khalaf, has been appointed to the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW). Mrs Khalaf is an Assistant Professor of Economics at LAU's Business School. She is a member of the Lebanese National Commission for Women and of the Board of Trustees of the United Nations Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). She also served as a research associate at IWSAW between 1993 and 1995.

Introduction

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Women have proven that they are persons in their own right, who always have, and always will, make up a major contribution to the development of the world despite the lack of recognition and acknowledgment of this contribution to the gross national products (GNP) of their countries.

Gertrude Mongella¹

Women's involvement in the agricultural sector is a well recognized fact, particularly in developing countries where they are the most important food producers and where they assist their husbands in most of the farming tasks. Yet, they are still perceived basically as "housewives" and their involvement in agricultural activities is considered as a natural extension of their homemakers' role. As a result of this misconception, programs for economic development in rural areas are almost always designed by men "with the needs of men in mind."²

Although official statistics indicate that women constitute more than half of the agricultural labor force in the developing world, yet the bulk of women's contribution is unremunerated and is not considered as "work" neither by national accounts experts, nor by women themselves who often respond when asked whether they work or not, that they do not have the time to do so. This failure to value women's work reduces them to "virtual non-entities in most economic transactions - such as property ownership, or offering collateral for bank loans"³ - and limits, as a result, their potential to become economically productive. In fact, rural women do not have equal access to resources be it land, credit or technology.

Gender asymmetry as far as access to land is concerned, remains one of the major obstacles that rural women face. Traditionally land passes from father to son, while women are relegated to farming small or remote plots of fragmented land. These difficulties are even more accentuated in the case of women heading households. A review of land reform programs in various countries indicates that "female heads of households seldom have access to land even when their productive activities call for it."⁴

This inaccessibility to land deprives rural women from the collateral needed to get credit support. In addition to this constraint, access to credit is jeopardized by the following assumptions:

- Rural women are primarily involved in subsistence production rather than market - oriented activities and have no say in cropping and input decisions; consequently, their credit needs are often underestimated by financial institutions. In 1990, only 5% of the \$5.8 billion multilateral bank loans for

agricultural and rural development reached rural women. In African countries, where women account for more than 60% of the agricultural work force, their share in total credit allocations to the agricultural sectors is less than 1%.

- Rural women represent a high credit risk. They are unable to manage credit, except when it is a small loan. Such loans carry, however, high administrative costs for financial institutions which, as a result, are reluctant to extend them.⁵ This assumption is not, however, supported by empirical evidence which indicates that very often rural women use credit more effectively and more responsibly than men.

Access to technology is also another issue that needs to be tackled when talking about rural women. This technology when available is not always "appropriate" nor "affordable". It should be "appropriate" in the sense that it would maximize efficiency without threatening jobs, harming the environment or being too sophisticated; "affordable" in the sense that it would not be too expensive to be bought by rural women who are often very poor.

Gender asymmetries regarding access to resources have obviously a negative impact on rural women's productivity, on their decision-making power both within the household and in the formulation of development strategies as well as on their self-image. There is, therefore, an urgency in addressing these issues by those involved in rural development, be they government agencies or private and civil organizations. The file in this issue of *Al-Raida* will be examining the situation of rural women in Lebanon. More specifically, it will essentially analyze women's participation in the tobacco industry, everyday problems they face and their contribution to economic development.

Mona Khalaf
Director, IWSAW

ENDNOTES

1 Mongella, Gertrude, *Report on the 1994 Meeting of the International Steering Committee on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women*, Rome: Quintly S.p.A., 1994, p.111

2 Fawzi al-Sultan, in *ibid.*, p.65

3 UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1995, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.97.

4 United Nations, *Development for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. Women in a Changing Global Economy*. New York: United Nations, 1995, pp. 37-38.

5 Fawzi al-Sultan *op.cit.*, p.65.

6 United Nations, *op.cit.*, p.38.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

FACTORIES WITHOUT WALLS: WOMEN'S LABOR AND TOBACCO PRODUCTION IN LEBANON

By *Samira A. Atallah,*
Boston University

INTRODUCTION:

Since 1970, the United Nations International Year for Women, there has been a growing sense of the value of women's work both in the formal and informal sectors, and its significance to the international market and the larger economic system. Concurrently, there has been unprecedented interest in the role of religion, namely Islam, in the development of Middle Eastern women warranted by the rise of religious fundamentalist movements in the region. Despite the vast literature on these topics, there has been a marked absence of empirical studies with historical and comprehensive orientations. In the case of Lebanon, standard literature on its political and economic experience, has always overlooked women and gender. Neither do regional women's studies in general explore the lives of Middle Eastern and Lebanese women in the comprehensive context of their countries' evolution. They tend to rely on interpretations of religion and patriarchy as the main determinants of women's conditions. The study of rural women in the region especially, has been marked by outright negligence.² Akram Khater argues that, "buried under the label of family, peasant women [in Lebanon] appear as simply a part of the family, a sub-unit of the clan structure. Viewed mostly as happy matrons, no exploration is ever offered of peasant women as individuals."³ This study attempts to address these deficiencies. It aims to induce a recognition of the significance of women's role and gender relations in rural development, through a case study of the tobacco cultivation system in Lebanon.⁴ It provides quantitative and qualitative analyses of various aspect of non-wage agricultural domestic labour, the basic socio-political forces that create and perpetuate such a mode of production, and women's perception of their own role within this structure.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the dependency of an important Lebanese industry on the contribution of rural women. This contribution is treated in conjunction with the historical development of South Lebanon - the largest tobacco area in the country - under the rule of both the Ottomans and the French colonizers, as well within the context of post-colonial public policies. In the process, the

INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE WORLD LEADS TO THE SINGLE CROP, AND THE SINGLE CROP TO THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE FARM. BUILD A FACTORY COMMUNITY, AND IT WILL GRADUALLY MAKE A FACTORY OF THE FARM AS WELL - A FACTORY WITHOUT WALLS, BUT SUFFERING MANY OF THE EVILS OF FACTORY LIFE.

Frank Tannenbaum (1924).¹

study examines the effect of religious and cultural practices on the lives of rural women. It also highlights the role of various civil institutions, including the tobacco syndicate in enforcing differences between women tobacco laborers of different Lebanese confessions and regions. The analysis emphasizes the interrelatedness of these

various variables in determining overall regional development as well as gender relations and the status of women.

The principle hypothesis of the study is that rural women are an essential yet exploited component of the agrarian project in Lebanon. I argue that this exploitation of women is a function of an official economic project which benefits from the predominant patriarchal and religious order, while accommodating the interests of a local elite and those of an international market. Furthermore, this case study challenges both a culturalist approach which identifies Islam and Arab culture as the main determinants of the status of Arab women, and mainstream modernization theories which stress the principle role of capitalist development in women's empowerment. It argues that Lebanese women's lives are shaped not simply by religion and culture, but especially by the dynamics of national economic development, class position, international relations, and public policy.

The analysis in this study builds on the foundation of the dependency and world-system approaches which consider capitalism as a system of production that incorporates the seeds of women's exploitation and underdevelopment in its very structure and historical process. It departs from both approaches, however, by recognizing some role for patriarchy and religion in the perpetuation of women's underdevelopment - a role equally unexplored in both approaches. Moreover, this position treats women as an integrated and active variable in the overall equation of capitalist development, whereas the top-down dependency approach considers them a passive non-integrated element available to join capitalist production as a reserve labor force only when needed and, then, to be withdrawn from the market when necessary. The examination of the dynamics of tobacco production in Lebanon and the analysis of the data collected to this end reveal that women are

in fact a central and constant element in the capitalist development process. Furthermore, it reveals that, despite the fact that their conditions are marked by a high level of exploitation, rural women reflect neither passivity nor irrationality of choices.

Finally, it is important to note that this paper does not claim an exhaustive exploration of the whole tobacco production system in Lebanon. Nor does it provide a detailed analysis of the political and economic structure of South Lebanon and the relations between its tobacco growers and the government. The analysis only focuses on one aspect of this industry which involves the labor activities of women (especially unpaid) in the context of rural family relations, and the role of these activities in agrarian capitalist production. Clearly, the other pertinent issues will not be ignored though only a brief overview of each of them will be provided in support of the main subject of inquiry.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION:

The methodological foundation of this study is based on a synthesis of theory building and empirical data collection and analysis. The theoretical framework is grounded in current paradigms of development and state-society relations, feminist theories of international relations, and recent interest in Islam and Middle Eastern societies. Considering the scarcity of literature on the tobacco industry and the deficiency of gender sensitive data in Lebanon, the empirical foundation draws on extensive field research⁵ I conducted in Lebanon in the summers of 1994 and 1995. During those periods, I conducted interviews with government officials from various ministries, including the Head of Foreign Relations of the Ministry of Agriculture⁶ and the General Director of the Ministry of Social Affairs; representatives of the tobacco company (La Régie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs, commonly referred to as the Régie); representatives of non-profit organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental agencies; tobacco plantation owners; and female agricultural workers and, whenever possible, their husbands. The objectives of the field research were:

- 1) to document the relative size of the female agricultural labor force engaged in this sector, its daily production activities, and the conditions under which it operates;
- 2) to identify women's perception of their work and its value;
- 3) to investigate the general perception of women's paid and unpaid work; 4) to analyze the effects of women's economic participation on their status and development within and without the family, and how this contribution interacts with other socio-religious and political variables specific to rural Lebanese society.

The initial stage of my fieldwork was at the Régie, a highly bureaucratic establishment. Since my contact person at the Régie was one of the top five directors, access to the company's archives and classified documents was relatively facilitated. At the Régie's Registry I had access to records of some details related to the country's tobacco plantations⁷ for the

pre-1975 period and more recent years. Even though figures on the size of cultivated lands and licenses were outdated and often inconsistent, they provided an overall background of the magnitude and potentials of the industry. I visited also two of the Régie's regional offices (Tyre and al-Batroun) where I obtained records of their respective towns; I also interviewed their local staff.

The highlight of field research and its main component were open-ended interviews carried out in 4 villages with female tobacco laborers. The villages were chosen along religious and regional lines: 2 Shi'a villages from the South, a historically deprived area under continuous Israeli aggression, with the largest concentration of tobacco crops in the country; and 2 (one Christian and one Shi'a) villages from al-Batroun - north of Beirut - a relatively privileged area with a large concentration of Christian Maronites - a minority whose elite until recently had the upper hand in the country's economical and political affairs. The rationale behind this selection was to consider the effects of regional and religious differences along with their political and economic implications on the status and development of Lebanese women.⁸

Formal interviews were conducted using a questionnaire which covered a wide range of topics ranging from family relations and background, personal activities and interests, to production activities. The main focus of the questionnaire was the division of labor within the household and in agricultural production. The questionnaire also included a section on decision making processes which relate to agricultural production and sales, children's schooling and socializing behavior, family health, and domestic outlays.

Most interviews lasted about 45 minutes, and more than often questions not on the questionnaire were posed when deemed necessary. My findings are based on a total of 82 formal interviews with 62 women and 20 men from all 4 villages (see Table 1). However, the concluding analysis is also based on many informal group discussions and informal interviews held without the formality of a questionnaire during visits to about 200 households.⁹

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF FORMAL INTERVIEWS BY REGION AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

	Male	Female
Shi'a from South Lebanon	10	40
Shi'a from Mount Lebanon	4	10
Maronite from Mt. Lebanon	6	12
Total	20	62

Field Research Data, collected by the writer, Lebanon 1994 - 1995

In terms of the definition and role of female labor in its various forms, tobacco farming typically involves the following categories of women laborers:

- 1- Women who are independently employed as seasonal full-time or part-time wage laborers on tobacco farms (category 1 or C1).
- 2- Female dependents of full-time male wage laborers on tobacco farms (category 2 or C2).
- 3- Women in tobacco-producing households whose husbands or fathers are engaged in outside paid employment activities (category 3 or C3).
- 4- Women in households completely dependent on earnings from tobacco production with no other sources of income (category 4 or C4).

This study treats women of these categories as a homogeneous group insofar as they suffer disadvantages because of their class and regional affiliation, their gender, and the sexual division of labor. However, the analysis will demonstrate that their individual status, value of labor, and relationship to the market differ to a great degree according to their immediate household context, marital status, and overall social situation of their families. The analysis in this study draws only on interviews with women from the third and fourth categories. During the war, the tenant system of production witnessed a great decline and only household production persisted. Therefore, the number of women from the first and second categories (at least in the selected villages) is not significant and does not provide enough data for an adequate analysis of their rate and modes of participation. Table 2 indicates the family status, household category, and employment status of female interviewees from the second and third categories.

TABLE 2: FAMILY STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF FEMALE LABORERS

	Married	Single*	Widow	C3	C4
Shi'a/South	36	2	2	7	33
Shi'a/Mt. Leb.	10	0	0	6**	4
Maronite/Mt. Leb.	11	0	1	9+	3

Field Research Data, collected by the writer, Lebanon 1994 - 1995.

*These single women are included in C4 and are treated as married women as they live with their families although they rent their own licenses.

**Including one who works part-time as an elementary school teacher.

+ Including 3 women who also hold outside jobs: 2 work as nurses and one as a school teacher.

Finally, it is important to note that I rarely had the chance to interview women alone. Family members, passers-by, and occasionally, husbands were present, and may have affected their responses. More often than not, I had to politely

interrupt the husband or a (male) neighbor as they tried to answer on behalf of the woman. But in all cases people were cooperative and willing to share their time. Some women were especially eager to express their views and frustrations with their life conditions. A few went as far as complaining openly (yet with a hint of a joke) about their husbands who, in their words, "spend their days socializing over coffee while we women do the dirty job." On many occasions, I also had the chance to 'silently' observe women at work. Typically, a group of women (commonly extended family members) of various ages sit in a circle around piles of tobacco leaves and spend

long hours stringing them. Those moments of silent observation brought me closer to the world of tobacco women - a world of undervalued efforts and



exploited labor - an assembly line of hard working hands stringing tobacco leaves with a bit of hope and a lot of anger, muted anger.

WOMEN IN LEBANON: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

A world-system approach situates national economies within "an international capitalist system with a division of labor corresponding to its constituent parts - core, periphery, and semi-periphery".¹⁰ Increasing globalization has extended the boundaries of this system and linked small units in the periphery, such as the household, typically regarded as outside capitalist production, to the interests and fluctuation of the

market in the core.¹¹ These units provide international capital and market with opportunities for profit maximization by performing undocumented labor at a very low cost. Both the state (another unit in the world capitalist system) and women (from within the household unit) are fundamental to the maintenance of this exploitative exchange process (Moghadam, 1993).¹² The state accommodates this process 1) through policies (or lack of policy) which permit the incorporation of household labor (women) into low-wage sectors and/or non-wage activities; and 2) by fostering ideological and patriarchal structures which undermine women's position and work and exclude them from the power structure. As a result, while typically situated outside the formal market, women form a substantial yet unacknowledged supply of the world's labor force.

Lebanon and its economic functions in the international division of labor fit well within the world-system perspective. Both as producer of raw materials and service center for international capital, it has always been dependent on women's work in its various forms. Nevertheless, official employment and educational policies have left women in a

constant state of marginalization and exploitation. At the same time, the political structure thrives on a system of primordial and sectarian groupings. This system is rooted in colonial policies and post-independence governmental strategies which have fostered ideological and patriarchal structures detrimental to the development and empowerment of women.¹³ They have also reproduced dependency, inequality, and uneven regional development.

The tobacco industry in Lebanon is a perfect example of an arena which illustrates the complex economic and political dynamics of the Lebanese system. This industry is a state monopoly which operates through a restrictive licensing system. As such, it is a national economic enterprise of a rather unique status, especially, considering the typically hands-off governmental policy and the laissez-faire structure of the Lebanese economy. In addition, its production constitutes about 10% of the total national agricultural GDP which in turn is 7.2% to 10% of the total national GDP.¹⁴ It has been a vital element in the Lebanese economy, primarily as a source of hard currency generated by the export of unprocessed tobacco products. It also constitutes the livelihood of a large segment of the rural population especially in, but not restricted to, the South, one of Lebanon's less developed areas. For all practical and obvious reasons, the tobacco industry in Lebanon represents one of the most

intense and complex forms of



Picture Credit: Samira Atallah

relations between the state and the peasantry - a relation that has been historically marked by recurring social and political unrest.



dynamics of great social, political, and economic relevance.

The tobacco industry brings together in a hierarchical order four divergent groups of different capacities and interests. The international cigarette industry and its market hold the strongest position in this order. The Lebanese official establishment through the Régie - the state-owned tobacco company which monopolizes tobacco sale and production - occupies a variety of positions. It is the middleman extracting raw materials (tobacco leaves) from the peasants and then exchanging part of them on the international market for hard currency. It is also the industrialist engaged in the production and sale (locally

and internationally) of national brands of cigarettes. Finally, it is the administrator organizing all the tobacco related affairs (including planting, pricing, manufacturing, etc.) through a restrictive licensing system. In the latter capacity, the Régie also regulates imports of foreign brands of cigarettes (including purchasing, marketing, and taxing). Obviously, this multiplicity of roles corresponds to a multiplicity of conflicting interests, which often come at the expense of the interests of the tobacco growers and local production. The third group in this hierarchical order is the tobacco growers (including landless as well as landholders owning various sizes of lands) who are mostly concentrated in South Lebanon. The religious and regional identity of this group as well as their own internal hierarchical relations bring another problematic dynamic to the whole industry. Finally, women as paid and unpaid laborers constitute a sub-category situated within the latter group (more details on this category will follow).

That women are the majority of the labor force engaged in the agricultural production of tobacco in Lebanon is an understatement. With the possible exception of land clearance, they participate actively in all phases of tobacco farming. Simultaneously, they are also responsible for all ongoing domestic and family tasks, including in some cases food harvesting and processing, and care for livestock. Despite this, rural women's contribution suffer from negligence and under-evaluation. According to the National Report on Women in Agriculture in preparation to the Beijing Conference (1995), rural women as agricultural workers, enjoy no legal protection of their rights or working conditions. Official statistics and reports on the percentage and activities of women in the agricultural labor force suffer from inconsistency, lack of conceptual planning and analysis, and deficiencies in data collection and illustration. Due to this lack of official recognition and inadequate documentation, the work conditions and needs of rural women in Lebanon have rarely been identified or addressed. This neglect has consequently furthered their invisibility in national development policies, including those carried by international development agencies.

THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DYNAMICS

Tobacco production in Lebanon involves a number of significant issues pertinent to the discourse both on national and women's development. Those issues include 1) the character of agrarian capitalist production, 2) the definition of unpaid female labor in its various forms, 3) the interaction between official public policy and gender relations, and 4) the relations between paid and unpaid work, on the one hand, and local and international markets, on the other. As such, the dynamics of this state-owned industry represents an arena of complex

At different stages of production, relations between those various groups have revolved around four sets of socioeconomic transactions: commodity market transactions (market / Régie), unequal surplus transfer and exchange (Régie / landlord), feudalistic appropriation (landlord / laborers), and traditional gender and hierarchical relations (male / female family members) supported by social beliefs and practices rooted in an Islamic/patriarchal cultural foundation. Those transactions operate in an exploitative system whose dynamics are reproduced at different levels of social interaction and between the various actors involved. Within that system, household relations develop in a manner which enforces gender inequality and women's underdevelopment.

Structural relations between the Régie and tobacco growers (landless or land holders) as well as within the

household between male and female members seem to fall outside the capitalist mode of production as they do not always involve exploitation of wage labor, rent, and profit maximization. Additionally, the landlords' appropriation of peasants' labor evolves in seemingly "feudalistic" manners which involve neither a simple commodity exchange cycle nor a surplus product, at least not in the traditional sense.¹⁵ The existence of these apparently feudal and non-capitalist relations does not necessarily signify that the tobacco industry (and consequently agrarian relations in South Lebanon) operates in a dual-economy structure. The economic agrarian reality in Lebanon as manifested in the tobacco plantation system reveals a complex capitalist structure in which wage labor is only one important component. It reflects other relations of production which technically fall outside direct market exchange systems, both at the macro level (between peasants and landlords) and the micro level (within the household). Although of feudal and non-capitalist character, those relations constitute an important component in the maintenance and survival of the capitalist system. The integration, reproduction, and development of those relations are conditioned and limited by both their own internal dynamics as well as by the manipulative requirements of the capitalist rationality of the dominant mode of production.

TOBACCO IN LEBANON: AN INTRODUCTION

The history of tobacco in Lebanon is one of precarious fortunes and constant struggle. It involves many complex dynamics of significant impact on the directions of the labor movement, gender relations, and regional and capitalist development in rural Lebanon. Its initial evolution was closely tied to foreign (namely French) interests, while its growth has always been completely subjugated to the interests of the private sector, the cigarette cartel, and the feudal elite. Both the industrial and agricultural sectors of tobacco production suffer from mismanagement, exploitation, and corruption. And nowhere is the impact of these problems felt more than in the Shi'a region of South Lebanon which comprises the largest concentration of tobacco growers and farms. Hasan Sharif argues that "tobacco cultivation is the source of much of the South's misery" (H. Sharif, 1978, 11). Over the years, *al-tabagh* (tobacco) has become a political 'issue' largely associated with the Southerners' struggle against internal and external forces, including the Israeli occupiers. This issue has acquired emotional overtones of patriotism which go beyond economic as well as political considerations. For a Shi'a from South Lebanon, the term *al-tabagh* evokes both survival and defeat. Majed Halawi (1992) argues that politicians from all ideological spectrums have capitalized on the tobacco issue in a manner which has not always benefited tobacco workers. The feudal elite of South Lebanon often played the tobacco card to pressure the government into policies that suited their own interests. While groups of opposition, especially from the leftist camp, always adopted the tobacco issue as part of their strategies to confront the establishment and criticize its policies towards the workers and the South.

Despite its economic, social, and political significance, the tobacco issue in Lebanon has rarely received much academic attention. Except for a few limited unpublished graduate theses (Hasib Faquih, 1993; Nahla Faquih, 1981; Georges Yacoub, 1972)¹⁶ and one monograph published under the auspices of the Institut des Sciences Sociales at the Lebanese University (Michel Morcos, 1974), no recent studies have attempted to conduct a comprehensive inquiry on the important social, political, and economic aspects of this industry. Those few studies are marked by one of two patterns: either a focus on the managerial and productive structures of the Régie, or on the suffering of the "Shi'a" tobacco growers (with emphasis on the Shi'a element). In both cases, they base their findings on insufficient data which reproduce the same gender bias of most Lebanese statistical studies, and/or fail to advance their analysis in the historical context of Lebanon's development and labor relations. Many argue that this deficiency is due to the secretive and bureaucratic nature of the Régie which does not allow much room for statistically sound analysis¹⁷ (N. Faqih, 1981; H. Faqih, 1993). On the other hand, studies of the political history of the Shi'a community in Lebanon (see Majed Halawi, 1992) rarely devote more than a few pages to the tobacco issue; in many cases, most discussions of the topic lack historical and/or national relevance.¹⁸ As for women's role, most studies mention their heavy concentration in the labor force of tobacco farming, but only in passing and without any significant analysis of the value of this involvement and its relevance to the overall economy of modern Lebanon. It is hoped that this study will trigger further research interest and contribute, however modestly, to a better understanding of rural women's conditions and their chances for empowerment.

THE TOBACCO AREA: AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH LEBANON

As advanced above, tobacco farming has been largely concentrated in South Lebanon. Initial French interests focused tobacco cultivation in this region largely because of its convenient agrarian land tenure and the availability of female cheap labor through domestic production. In the post-independence period, Lebanon's official development policy promoted the advancement of the service, trade, and banking sectors in Beirut and its immediate surroundings to the disadvantage of other regions as well as sectors, especially agriculture. The Shi'a Southerners, lacking educational and employment opportunities and, therefore, skills, found in agriculture their only chance for survival. The subjugation of agricultural policies to private interests, the monopolization of fertilizers, the neglect of productive irrigation plans, and the domination of agricultural credit by moneylenders and wealthy landowners, pushed the inhabitants of the South into dry-farming and cash crops, such as tobacco. Although the Régie's policies were exploitative, tobacco farming still seemed attractive to the Southerners considering that the licensing system adopted since the 1930's guaranteed the sale of their entire crops. Successive governments encouraged Shi'a involvement in tobacco farming with the objective of keeping

them on their land and limiting internal migration.

By the mid 1970's, 72% of the population of South Lebanon was dependent on tobacco farming, while the region accounted for a similar proportion of the total area under tobacco cultivation in Lebanon (Halawi, 1992, 59). It is almost impossible however to identify the number of laborers who actually work in tobacco farming. The official statistics of the Régie indicate that 35000 licenses (out of a total of 41126 for the country) were granted to the Southern region in 1974. This number however does not correspond to the number of tobacco laborers, because 1) owners of licenses are not necessarily the ones who work in tobacco. According to A. Baalbaki, the maximum number of license holders who actually engage in tobacco production does not exceed 20,000,¹⁹ and the rest are either sharecroppers, or absentee landlords who lease their licenses to one or more persons. 2) Tobacco farming is labor-intensive and involves both seasonal labor and all-year activities; therefore, the number of required laborers that varies throughout the year depends on the size of the licensed crop. 3) Tobacco farming is family based and all family members are involved in its various phases which makes it even harder to calculate the number of laborers. By all accounts however, at least 150 thousand laborers (full time and part time) are needed to cultivate all licenced lands.

In 1971, tobacco production contributed 10% of the country's net national income, amounting to LL. 41208304, with the South providing 76% of this total (see Table 4). Figures of the Régie's profits in recent years are unavailable. H. Sharif, however, argues that in 1961, the Régie's profit was LL. 62,314,000 or about \$US20 million (Sharif, 1978, 11). On the other hand, the yearly income of a family of tobacco growers in the South averaged LL. 1,208.14,²⁰ or LL. 8.14 more than the LL. 1,200 that the Institut de Recherches et de Formation en vue du Développement Harmonisé (IRFED) in 1960-1961 identified as destitute (Halawi, 1992, 58).²¹

TABLE 3 - TOBACCO PRODUCTION IN LL. BY REGION (1971)

Region	Amount (LL.)	%
South Lebanon	31,399,201	76.20
Other Regions	9,809,103	23.80
Total	41,208,304	100

Source: Morcos (174, 109).

Throughout the civil war, tobacco production in South Lebanon witnessed a significant decrease. Continuous Israeli aggressions in the region and overall economic depression led to a significant increase in internal and external migration.²² Moreover, the arrival of UN security forces into the region and along with them a strong purchasing power (in US dollars) triggered the emergence of new types of commercial activities

especially in petty trade and small appliance shops catering to the needs of the foreign inhabitants. At the same time, immigrants' remittances brought to the Southern economy a flow of cash allowing a further increase in these new business ventures (Baalbaki, 1994; Halawi, 1992). With the instability of the tobacco situation, especially that the Régie suspended production and purchasing for a number of years, many families abandoned tobacco farming.

Since the advent of peace and the restoration of the Régie, tobacco farming has been on the increase again. According to informal figures of the Régie, 30% of the total number of farmers who hold auctioned licenses have not begun cultivation yet. At the same time, the Régie has increased the number of licensed lands in the South by 18% indicating a renewed interest in tobacco farming. The same reasons which initially prompted Southerners to undertake tobacco farming continue to exist. Official negligence of the South (despite the many promises declared by the new emerging Shi'a leadership) continues. Regional developments in the aftermath of the Gulf War cost many immigrant workers from the South their jobs and source of income. Political instability in West Africa - historically an attractive destination for Shi'a immigrants - also resulted in the return of many immigrants to their lands. Furthermore, a Régie representative suggested in an interview that the government is determined to limit the outflow of Southerners into Beirut and, therefore, is officially requesting the Régie administration to offer the growers more incentives. An official promise to extend social security and employment benefits to tobacco growers and laborers is contributing to an even further increase in production. While this promise might turn out to be just another empty one, Southerners are indeed choosing anew the "sour choice" (a term commonly associated with tobacco farming) with the hope that their "source of misery" (to use Sharif's term) might actually become their source of relief.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RÉGIE'S PUBLIC POLICIES AND STATE-PEASANT RELATIONS:

Tobacco cultivation in Lebanon is governed by a licensing system which gives the Régie absolute power over all phases of production: from auctioning the licenses, to fixing all the details involved in the production process (including the size of crops, processing, seedling) and marketing of the final product. The Régie's power is sanctioned by the Ministry of Finance Decree No. 10957 of 1968. This decree "stipulates that the Régie present[s] its yearly recommendations to the Minister of Finance supported by detailed studies and statistics, determining the areas needed to be licensed for tobacco cultivation in order to meet requirements for local consumption and export" (Yacoub, 1972, 5). Once approved, individual licenses are issued by a ministerial Arrêté, and as long as the growers continue to meet the requirements (including continuing yearly cultivation), their licenses are renewed every year.²³ Although the Minister is the one who ultimately decides on the final regulation of areas and licenses, the Régie as the

middleman between the Minister and the peasants plays an important and decisive role, especially throughout the recommendation process.

The main requirements of the licenses are: 1) submission of sufficient proof of ownership of cultivated lands; and 2) a proof verifying the status of the licensee as head of a household.²⁴ The minimum size of a licensed area is one dounum (equivalent to 1000 square meters or 0.05 hectare), while the maximum size is 50 dounums (2.5 hectares).²⁵ The Agricultural and Technical Departments of the Régie continuously supervise all licensed areas and provide technical advice to guarantee the quality of production and make sure the farmers are fulfilling the terms of their licenses. The Régie's representatives also estimate the output (size and quality) of each land and decide accordingly (and in advance) the price for yielded tobacco leaves. Packages of tobacco are delivered to the Régie's regional warehouses where the company's officials weigh them and pay farmers according to the previously prescribed prices. According to Yacoub, "farmers are supposed to hand over to the Régie all their production of tobacco leaf. Amounts in excess are destroyed without compensation to the farmer. Shortages, however, subject the farmer to penalties" (1972, 6).

Over the years, the licensing system has been shaped by many forces amongst which economic logic played a very small part, if any at all (Yacoub, 1972, ii). By all accounts, the relationship between the Régie and the peasants has always been one of exploitation and struggle (Morcos, 1974; Sharif, 1978; Halawi, 1992; H. Faqih, 1993). Halawi sums up the effects of the Régie's policies on the Southern tobacco growers:

The Régie has always wielded immense power and influence over the peasants. In more than one way, the company perpetuated the classic forms of political patronage in the South by promoting the dependency of the peasants on their zu'ama, traditionally also their landowners, for both granting licenses and pricing the crop. It would suffice to look at the list of the names of the major "growers", i.e., those who are allowed by the Régie to plant more than 2.5 hectares, to appreciate the extent to which patronage played a pivotal role in the granting of licensing (Halawi, 1992, 58).

And among those "major growers" are politicians who have probably never been to the South or worked in tobacco, as well as high ranking employees in the Régie itself who list their licenses under their wives' names to avoid getting into trouble with the law that does not allow employees to engage in tobacco production, fearing conflict of interest (Morcos, 1974, 61). The auctioning of licenses is only the first in a long list of exploitative dynamics. Both Halawi and Morcos argue that well-connected landowners and zu'ama always received the

bulk of the licenses and then, in turn, sold them to their supporters at substantial profit. This profit was sustained by the pricing policy of the Régie. Preferential treatment was given to those leaders and feudal families, at times offering them 3 to 4 times the price given to small peasants. Those buyers would then purchase the latter's crop at a slightly higher price and then sell them in turn to the Régie at the already prescribed higher price (Morcos, 1974; Halawi, 1992). The Ministry of Finance, the official body responsible for the Régie, overlooked these practices since they involved political figures from the highest echelons.

The Régie also holds a monopoly over the purchasing, sale, and marketing of foreign tobacco. According to Sharif (1978, 11) driven by preference for short-term profits, the company always managed to bypass the law which stipulates that foreign imports should not exceed 5% of native cigarette selling in the country. In 1972 alone, the Régie increased imports of foreign cigarettes by 50%. This led to higher profits, which were accentuated by an increase in local sales' taxes on cigarettes. Lebanese cigarettes could not compete with imported ones even if the latter were more expensive, given the poor industrial foundation of the Régie and the policy of reserving the best quality leaves for export. Hence, it is not surprising that Lebanese cigarettes are of inferior quality and, therefore, subject to low demand.

The manufacturing of local cigarettes has never been a top priority for the Régie. The Company's General Technical Secretary advanced in an interview that about 90% of the unprocessed tobacco leaves are exported to the US, Canada, and Brazil, and the rest (typically of the worst quality) are reserved for local production. The Régie benefits from exportation as it involves lower costs and therefore greater profit (the Régie's cost of tobacco planting is only for the price of leaves. At the same time, the Régie's preference for exportation is also due to the fact that the government grants the company about 6% commission²⁶ for all international transactions related to the sale of tobacco leaves (in addition to a 4% commission for the total amount purchased from the growers).²⁷ Furthermore, according to Yacoub, "in the profit sharing formula the Régie get an additional 4% of the adjusted profit which excludes LL.20 per Kilogram of foreign tobacco sold on the Lebanese market" (Yacoub, 1972, vii). As such, profits of the Régie rise at the expense of both the peasants and the national treasury, especially that much of the profit remains undeclared and gets channeled as high salaries and "extra" expense accounts for the high ranking officials involved in the business.

The exploitative approach of the public policy governing tobacco production is most apparent in the government's exclusion of tobacco growers from all employment benefits. Only laborers who work in large agriculture producing companies qualify for benefits. Family members employed in their family-owned agricultural companies (regardless of the size of production or number of

employees) do not qualify. Women, forming the majority of tobacco laborers, are by definition excluded.

LABOR OPERATIONS IN TOBACCO PRODUCTION:²⁸ FOCUSSING ON THE FEMALE

The licensing system of tobacco production establishes a formal relation between the peasants and the official establishment. While this relationship places the peasants within the control of the state, it does not, however, bring state benefits into the immediate lives of the peasants. Women, as the remainder of this paper attempts to demonstrate, are an indispensable element in tobacco production. That they are the majority of the labor force of tobacco farming is an understatement. They participate in all phases of production, except those involving land plowing. Women however, rarely have any direct interaction with the Régie even in cases where their husbands or fathers are not involved in the production process. During the evaluation period, Régie representatives deal directly with the male members of the household, partly for social reasons which restrict female interaction with male strangers and partly for the fact that lands (and therefore licenses) are mostly in the name of men. In the case where women are the holders of land and licenses, Régie representatives would still extend their technical advice to the male members of the family assuming that those are the supervisors of production. At the same time, however, rigid traditional attitudes become flexible if a woman is the sole owner of the license (in the case of widows). The same dynamics are also apparent during the delivery process as women rarely get involved in transporting tobacco packages. But between the initial stage which involves license auctioning and product and price estimation, and the final stage of transporting tobacco and collecting proceeds, most of the operations are in the 'hands' of women. And those hands are what keep the assembly line of tobacco production rolling - a production which transforms women's world into factories without walls.

Tobacco cultivation depends on two factors: land and

labor, with the latter being the most productive factor. The nature of tobacco farming does not allow mechanization and, therefore, depends predominantly on a large labor force (hands). At some point in the production process, a multiplicity of 'hands' is decisive, especially during the cropping and stringing period when leaves are at risk of dryness and damage. In these cases, both timing and time are equally important. The number of laborers as well as the period of operations depend on the size of land and output, but the schedule extends all year long (see Table 4).

In general, the cultivation of one dounum may require 100 to 150 days of work and about 8 part-time and full-time laborers (excluding a tractor-operator). What follows is a description of labor operations involved in tobacco production in order to give a clear idea of the division of labor and women's activities.

The first phase of tobacco cultivation begins towards the end of January or early February, when frosting is no longer a risk, and continues until the end of May. The period involves preparation of both seed beds and licensed fields. Seed beds are preferably located near the house and close to a water source. The preparation of the chosen area (rectangular beds) is a complex and detailed process which involves thorough plowing (manual) and then smoothing of the soil. Throughout this process chemical insecticides and weed killers²⁹ are used. After sowing the seeds, the beds are covered with a thin layer of soil mixed with fertilizers, and then watered thoroughly. Meanwhile, the fields are prepared simultaneously by tilling the soil (at least four times) with a tractor.

Most of the people interviewed for this study stated that they hire an outsider with a tractor to till the land (only one family had a son who owns a tractor). Preparation of beds and seed-bedding, however, is largely carried out by family members. Occasionally, only families which belong to category 3 (see above) hire part-time laborers, as husbands (and male children) with outside jobs (regardless of their work hours and responsibilities)³⁰ are less cooperative. In such cases, female hired-help³¹ is paid half the hourly rate of male labour. No satisfactory explanation was given for such discrepancy in wages. But in all cases, female family members are heavily involved (see Table 5). Those who do not participate in this phase are largely women whose husbands do not have outside jobs (see category 4). In this case the division of labor is clear: the husband and older children (male or female) are responsible for operations in the field; and the wife and younger children (mostly female) are responsible, besides their domestic duties, for operations within the household (especially at later phases). This division of labor is based on decisions taken in an atmosphere of cooperation and 'partnership'.

The second phase involves transplanting

TABLE 4: SCHEDULE AND DISTRIBUTION
OF TOBACCO LABOR OPERATIONS:

January until May	Preparation of land and seed-bedding (plowing, disinfecting, sowing, watering, fertilizing, etc.)
May and June	Transplanting, planting, irrigating, and weeding.
June until October	Harvesting (leaf cropping and weeding), pest-control, and leaf-stringing.
October until December	Leaf-drying and leaf-pressing.
December and January	Leaf-packaging and transportation of bales.

Source: Data collected by the author, 1994 and 1995.

TABLE 5 - TASKS BY WOMEN IN TOBACCO FARMING
IN LEBANON

Tasks	No. Of Women (Sample Size 62)	Percentage
Land Clearing (seed-beds)	42	67.74
Seed-bedding	48	77.41
Planting	53	85.48
Fertilizing	31	50
Irrigating	48	77.41
Weeding	53	85.48
Pest Control	40	64.51
Leaf-Cropping	61	98.38
Leaf-Stringing	62	100
Packaging	61	98.38
Transporting and Marketing	5	8.9

Source: Data collected by the author, 1995.

tobacco leaves from the seed-beds to the field. This process is very tedious and time consuming and requires a large number of hands working in teams. First, plants are carefully pulled out and handed over to another person who transports them to the fields. A laborer receives the plants in mud and plants them in holes dug at a distance of 40 to 60 cm in parallel lines and then shoves the earth with his/her foot. Throughout this phase, the whole family is mobilized. Out of the 62 women interviewed, 53 participated in this process. Of the rest, 2 women (from Mount Lebanon) had outside jobs, 2 stated medical reasons, one was 63 years old and could not sustain the hardship of the process, and 4 stayed home to take care of younger children and household chores. But the same women asserted that this lack of participation is not necessarily permanent as it may vary from one year to the other depending on their health and/or work circumstances. In addition, similar to the first phase, men who hold outside jobs are not heavily involved in the transplantation process and thus, outside help is sought.

Harvesting and leaf-stringing begin in June (although some transplanting may continue) and last until October (though it may end earlier depending on the size of the crop). Women and children are at this point the main element in the production process. As table 6 indicates, all but one (because of old age) of the 62 women interviewed engaged in leaf-cropping and all 62 of them in leaf-stringing. Husbands and male adult children of women in category 4 participate in harvesting, but

rarely if ever in leaf-stringing (only in one household an old grandfather was helping). Outside paid-help is never sought for these activities: all men interviewed said "this would be a waste of money; women can 'easily' do it while taking care of cooking and cleaning and even socializing."³² And, indeed, women do (it is questionable how easily though). Their days revolve around tobacco stringing which could begin as early as 6 a.m. and end as late as 9 p.m.

Women (mothers, daughters of all ages, daughters-in-law, younger boys, sisters) gather in circles (either on the house terrace or inside the house in a large room) around piles of tobacco leaves and string them into chains. They exchange stories, sing, or even watch television if available. Female visitors would occasionally join in the activities, either out of politeness or habit (as they are often tobacco growers themselves on a break from work).³³ Men, on the other hand, would go out to socialize with their male friends either in a local coffeehouse or in the village square. Even if they remain at home, they rarely participate; they simply sit with the women and watch them working. When I questioned them about the reason, men who have outside jobs claimed that they had already done their daily share of work in the office, and those who do not said that they needed some time to relax and socialize with their friends and, "after all, women (not men) can socialize together while stringing tobacco." They all supported this claim arguing that women do not spend time outdoors anyway (they have no place to go, but to other households) and in all cases they have more patience for monotonous activities. Women, on the other hand, either joked bitterly and sarcastically about men's resistance to this activity or even complained openly, yet rarely in the presence of men.³⁴

Throughout the day, chains of stringed tobacco are hung indoors until they turn yellow before they are brought out in the sun and hung between two parallel poles. In case of rain or high humidity (both cause leaf-fermentation) chains of tobacco must be entered into a storeroom or, into small houses, bedrooms and living rooms. No studies have been conducted to date about the health hazards involved in these cases, but all peasants who slept in rooms full of tobacco leaves complained of insomnia and headache symptoms. Additionally all women interviewed complained about skin problems. Once dry and crisp, tobacco leaves are packaged and clothed in bales. The Régie used to provide the peasants with special bags as part of the prescribed subsidy; however, since the beginning of the civil war in 1975 peasants have been purchasing those bags at their own expense. Packages of dry tobacco are ready for transportation to the Régie's warehouses by early January, and, at this point, women's involvement comes to a halt. Only 5 out of the 62 women interviewed participated in the delivery process: 2 were widows and therefore the heads of their households, and 3 were the owners of the cultivated lands and licenses and accompanied their husbands to Régie locations. The latter group told me that at points when they couldn't make it for one reason or the other, the Régie's officials overlooked their absence and easily dealt with the husbands instead.

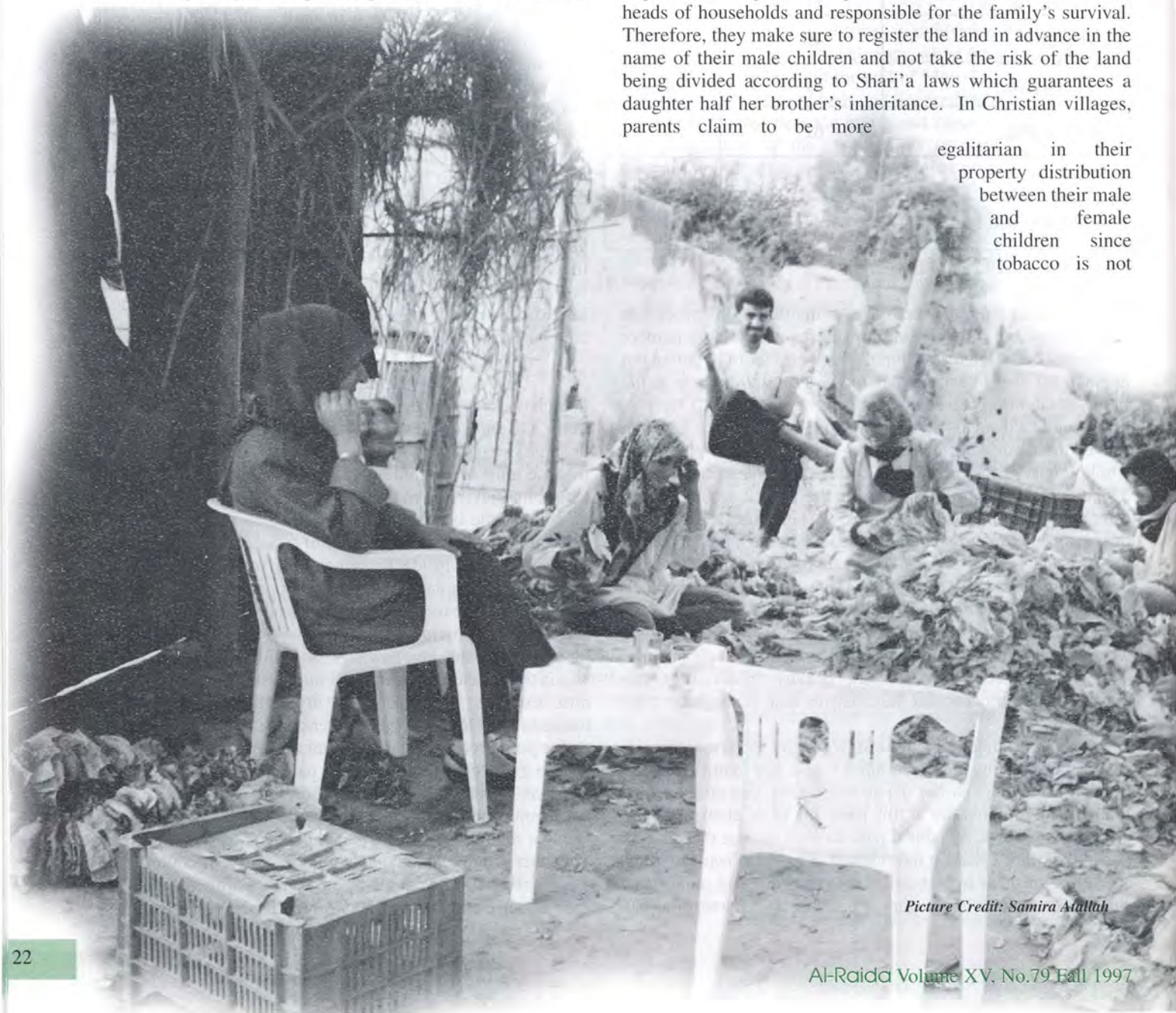
THE HOUSEHOLD AS A PRODUCTION UNIT:

The research findings show that rural women are not only involved in the tobacco sector as social reproducers of labor, but are participating directly as paid and especially unpaid laborers. Men's labor in this sector is secondary in number and value to that of women. This is apparent, despite the fact that available statistics on Lebanon's agricultural development as well as records of the Régie ignore women's involvement. In fact, the significance of women's and children's contribution to tobacco production is strikingly apparent in the Régie's regulation which restricts the granting of tobacco licenses to landowners who are married and heads of family. These two requirements (marriage and landownership) are extremely important in the development of both gender relations and landowner/peasant relations. They establish a state of complex, yet unequal, dependence between all the

groups involved. When questioned about the rationale behind this requirement (family status), all Régie representatives categorically affirmed that without family support, tobacco agricultural production is virtually unfeasible. When pressed for further explanation, they admitted that a family base (especially a large family) keeps the cost of labor very low and therefore the margin of profit very high, for the Régie and, arguably, for the family.

Land and family structures in South Lebanon are especially favorable for this strategy, considering the unavailability of other gainful employment opportunities in the region and the dependence of a large number of families on agriculture, (an immediate outcome of the economic development strategy of the government). Inheritance decisions are directly affected by the Régie's land ownership requirements as parents keep in mind that, after all, men are the heads of households and responsible for the family's survival. Therefore, they make sure to register the land in advance in the name of their male children and not take the risk of the land being divided according to Shari'a laws which guarantees a daughter half her brother's inheritance. In Christian villages, parents claim to be more

egalitarian in their property distribution between their male and female children since tobacco is not



Picture Credit: Samira Atallah

TABLE 6: EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF FEMALE LABORERS - SAMPLE SIZE 62 (1995)

Educational Level	Shi'a from S. Lebanon	Shi'a from Mt. Lebanon	Maronite from Mt. Lebanon
never attended school	25 (62,5%)	2 (20%)	1 (8,33%)
up to 3 years/school	11	2	0
Elementary Certificate	3	1	1
Mid-School Certificate	1	4	4
High School Degree	0	1	4
College studies	0	0	2
Total	40	10	12

Source: Constructed by the author based on data collected in 1995, Lebanon.

really the primary source of income in the region (at least not for Christian families).

On the other hand, the patriarchal structure (enforced by a traditional religious attitude) in the South which confines women to the private sphere of the family makes the region even more advantageous to the mode of production associated with tobacco cultivation. Tobacco is a labor-intensive crop (see Table 4 for a list of activities involved). As Vaughan and Chipande³⁵ argue, "because of the large number of discrete operations which need to be performed (some at short notice) on it, tobacco production is difficult to mechanize."³⁶ A large part of the activities, especially in the post-harvesting period (such as stringing leaves), is performed at home. At this point, the production benefits from the patriarchal family and draws heavily on the labor of a large pool of women and children (Shi'a families in South Lebanon are marked by a high level of birthrate).

The data on Southern women laborers' educational level indicates a very low level of schooling, especially in comparison with both Christian and Shi'a laborers in Mount Lebanon (see table 6).

The deficiency in the educational levels of Southern women limits their employment opportunities and direct participation in the formal sector, and consequently confines them to the home and to tobacco

activities. Those activities are largely seen as not requiring any "real" skills. They are of a repetitive nature and require patience and time. For instance, both men and women in Mount Lebanon stressed the fact (often proudly) that, if she chooses or the situation requires, the wife or the daughter may be able to have access to gainful (waged) employment in the formal or informal sector. They attributed this freedom to the woman's educational level. Furthermore, regional development in Mount Lebanon as favored by the establishment allows the availability of such employment opportunities outside the tobacco industry (for both men and women). In the case of Southern women, on the other hand, both men and women stressed that tobacco is their only possible arena. In the case when the male head of the household did not have access to wage activities outside the agricultural sector, a sense of equality was apparent in his attitude (if anything, he would stress his physical advantage, being stronger and more capable of enduring physical work). Almost all husbands of women from the third category, who are employed in governmental posts (Water company, Régie regional office, Electricity company), pointed to the fact that their wives could not have access to the same job due to their lack of "skills."

The detailed findings also show, that despite being subject to many common constraints, there are important variations in the situation of women in the tobacco setting, and in the general perception of the value of their labor activities. These variations are directly linked to household structures and, in the case of married women, to their husbands' economic activities. The labor of women whose husbands are engaged in waged labor is assigned less value (by both men and women) than that of women whose husbands are engaged full time in tobacco production. Even within the first case, there are further variations among women if the husbands' waged employment is outside or within the agricultural sector,

within or without the formal sector. As noted earlier, men with paid employment outside the agricultural sector do not participate much in the operations of production, and women seem to accept this lack of involvement: "after all he goes out to work," they told me. However, they seem to be even more sympathetic to their husbands' withdrawal from the operations if the latter worked within the agricultural field (but outside tobacco); women in these cases stressed that their husbands are indeed really working very hard. In this latter case, men themselves exhibited a stronger sense of understanding of the hardships associated with their wives' work in tobacco production. Furthermore, the positions and power of women are also determined by their access to economic resources outside the tobacco sector, as well as by their ownership of land (suitable for cultivation of any products). All of the few women who owned the cultivated lands (and therefore the licenses) claimed to have more say in the decision process related to tobacco operations (such as hiring outside help) and to have more control over the proceeds than those who did not own the land.

During the interviews, both husbands and wives treated women's labor with less significance in the case of the husbands who have gainful employment outside home-based tobacco production. In this case, women's labor stands in a contradictory relationship to waged labor, and it, therefore, takes its meaning and value from this relationship. The outside income of the husband (real, stable, and measurable) gives him more importance in terms of the maintenance and survival of the family, and therefore more power. And again in such cases, these men insisted (rather arrogantly) that the family's well-being depends primarily on their salaries and that tobacco proceeds are "extra money," and the operations gave women something to do during the day. In these cases, men acted as the 'overseers' of production and dominated most decisions; they considered their wives and daughters to be "helping" with the family's income but not really "working" - considering that outside help is usually sought to make up for the husbands' absence. Women's activities at this point stood in comparison with the work of paid laborers whose role is considered more important than the work done by unpaid women. As for women's perception of their own activities in such cases (category 3), they all realize their vital role in the maintenance of production but only as an extension of their gender-defined duties. All women in this category answered the question "Do you work?" by saying rather timidly, something of this sort: "not really, I just 'help' and anyway, *bitsalla* (I kill time) with tobacco."

On the other hand, when both men and women work their own land and/or rent a tobacco license and land for family production and have no outside wages, the value of their respective labor is relatively equal. In this case a woman's labor and time are considered equally vital to the production process as her husband's. When asked if their wives and daughters "work," virtually all men in this

category answered positively. Furthermore, women in this case are more integrated in the decision - making process in terms of all phases and details of production. Most men said that they consulted with their wives about hired help (whenever needed), schedule of operations, and spending of proceeds. Women however, have no role during the phases which involve activities of direct contact with the public sphere (namely the Régie) - such as the sale and delivery of products. During those phases, the sexual division of labor is very rigid. But interestingly enough, this division, as in the case of widows, is maintained less by patriarchal structures than by the Régie's regulations related to land-ownership and licensing. Finally, all men regardless of their employment activities stated categorically that if the wife and the daughter do not agree to 'help' or 'work' in tobacco production they would definitely refrain from tobacco cultivation and would seek other possibilities. Furthermore, all families engaged in tobacco production (especially those completely dependent on this production for survival) expressed preference for daughters as opposed to sons - a preference which contradicts with the common perception that the Arabs typically prefer boys to girls.

CONCLUSION: GENDER RELATIONS OR CAPITALIST RELATIONS?

It is evident that women play an essential role in the tobacco production system. Their position within this system, however, is governed both by the dynamics of capitalist relations and those of gender relations. At the same time, the system of production itself depends in its development on two main factors: 1) the existence of certain patriarchal and gender relations and principles which define women's duties and restrict them to the confines of the household; and 2) the official development strategy in Lebanon which, in general, provided women with less educational and employment opportunities (with regional variations) and, therefore, made them available for unpaid household production.

As for women's perception of their role in this system, it is often determined by their immediate household and family context, as well as their educational and social attributes which determine their access to outside income possibilities. But regardless of these conditions, women often viewed their activities (whether working or helping) as part of an overall family strategy. Even when they complained about their husbands' lack of support and their work conditions, they viewed their ultimate "oppressor" to be the circumstances which have led them (and their families) into such situations in the first place. Those circumstances were, in their view, the result of the government's regional policies as well as the Régie's exploitative measures. Women in Mount Lebanon, however, carried less anger and a milder attitude towards both the government and the Régie since they lacked the sense of desperation apparent in the disposition of Southern women. The involvement of many households in Mount Lebanon in tobacco production is the result of a rational choice based on economic

calculation rather than limited income earning opportunities. Many women in these households insisted that they chose tobacco production out of convenience and appreciation of the freedom of movement it entails. This choice factor is also apparent in the case of a number of other women in South Lebanon who are resorting to tobacco farming as a strategy for survival and independence. From within the boundaries of their patriarchal households and social limitations, these women are challenging and attempting to change and/or benefit from the established social and economic order imposed by the dynamics of tobacco production. This paper will conclude with a presentation of the experiences of three such women.

Tahira (her real name) is 35 years old. Her family has been producing tobacco as the sole source of income for as long as she could remember. Since she was a child, she has assisted in all phases of production. Tahira is illiterate as her parents could not afford sending her to a school outside the village (none existed in hers) and also because her help was needed at home. As a teenager, she learned how to sew and, for over 15 years, spent her free time outside tobacco operations making clothes. A few years ago, Tahira decided to use her savings from her allowance and clothes-making to rent a land and a tobacco license. She told me that since she was helping her family in tobacco production, why not do it for her own benefit. When her parents objected she insisted claiming that she had probably missed her chance for marriage and she needed to secure her future and not remain dependent on her brothers. She also appeased them by explaining that they would not lose her help (as she would take care of her crop and theirs simultaneously), and after all, as she informed me, "they did not provide her with skills that would allow her to seek employment elsewhere".

Tahira explained her preference for tobacco over clothes-making on the grounds that tobacco sale is guaranteed by the license conditions, and this way she didn't have "to rely on the insecurity of making clothes to women who could not afford many dresses a year to begin with." When I went back to the village to conduct research on a different project at the end of the summer in 1995, I met Tahira in the female literacy program. She happily informed me that she was no longer illiterate. She also told me that, although she has enough money to buy her own land and license, she does not qualify for the license as she is not considered by the Régie as head of a household. However, she timidly hinted to the fact that this situation may change as at least one single man has expressed interest in marrying her.

Layla and Zaynab are best friends and both are in their mid 30's. The first is a widow (her husband died of a heart attack a few years ago) with three small children, while the second jokes that she "has missed the marriage train." Zaynab has been helping her parents with tobacco, as she claims, "since I was a toddler!" She always wanted to have her own source of income as her father is not very generous with her and has always been very strict. But considering her lack of skills and

education, she has had no other options but to concede to reality. Layla, on the other hand, has no experience in tobacco since neither her family nor her late husband was a laborer or grower. When her husband died, she and her children inherited a large piece of land and some money; however, she ended up under the domination and at the mercy of her family in law, especially since she had no skills to seek outside employment.

One day, Zaynab suggested to Layla to join efforts and get their own tobacco production going. And that's exactly what they did, at the outrage of both Layla's family in law and Zaynab's parents. Layla provided the land and got the license (being a widow she is considered a head of a household). Zaynab sold her jewelry and added the money and her modest savings to Layla's money. But most important, she provided her knowledge and skills in tobacco farming. Zaynab defied her parents' will and did what she wanted, but she was able to do so only because she used her own savings and also because, after all, she as well as Layla "did not break any social rule." They remained within the confines of tradition and religion. And the same applies to Layla vis a vis her family in law. Zaynab and Layla divide the responsibilities equally and in such a way that they do not overwork themselves. They hire laborers only if they have to and in such cases, they told me, they make sure to pay a female laborer a bit more than her male counterpart!

Zaynab and Layla both claim that they have the best reputation in the village and are pressured to watch their actions and not risk losing it. Zaynab has practically moved in with Layla and visits her parents infrequently but runs into them a lot (they live at a short distance). When I went to interview the parents, the father spoke angrily about his "selfish" daughter, while the mother managed to whisper to me proudly that her daughter is very smart and capable. Finally, Layla is tutoring Zaynab in reading and writing. They both told me jokingly that they are 'roommates' (they used the English word) just like women bi-Amerca (in America).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Quoted in D. Janiewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender, and Class in New South Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), p. 8.
- 2 A recent exception is "Al-mar'ah wa houdoud al fiqr fi al-ariaf al-loubnaniyah", in Arabic, by Ahmad Baalbaki, paper submitted to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Conference on the Role of Women in the Agricultural Sector and Rural Development, Beirut, Lebanon, 1994. This brief, yet comprehensive, study provides a detailed overview of the role of rural women in the informal sector and the effects of recent economic and agrarian transformation on their role and status.
- 3 Akram Khater, "She Married Silk: A Rewriting of Peasant History in 19th Century Mount Lebnaon," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1993, p. 8.
- 4 I am grateful for the valuable advise and meticulous comments of Dr. Irène Gendzier, Dr. Herbert Mason, Dr. Charles Lindholm, Dr. Shahla Haeri, and Dr. Cornelia Al-Khaled who read this paper as a case study of my doctoral dissertation entitled *The Politics of Inequality: Reconceptualizing Gender, Labor, and National Development in Lebanon*, Department of Political Science, Boston University, 1997.
- 5 My field research was greatly facilitated by the help and resourcefulness of Ms. Randa el-Husseini (UNIFEM), Ms Afifeh Arsanious (UNDP's

Registry), Ms. Randa Aboul el-Hosn (UNDP), Ms. Wafa Dikah-Hamzeh (Ministry of Agriculture), Mr. Mouhannad el-Asa'ad (Save the Children), Dr. Wadi' Jureidini (AUB), Ms. Naja Kassab, and the staff of the Régie in Beirut, al Batroun, and Tyre branches. I am especially indebted to the many women in the tobacco 'areas' who opened their homes and their lives to me with much generosity and gracefulness. A special note of respect and appreciation to the memory of Mr. K. Hijazi who passed away in February 1996.

6 When I first met Ms. Dikah-Hamzeh in the summer of 1994, she informed me of the recent creation in the ministry of a "Woman in Agriculture Division." She explained how the Minister was very interested in women's role in the Agriculture sector and committed to their development. Upon my return to Lebanon in the summer of 1995, Ms. Dikah-Hamzeh informed me (regretfully) that with the appointment of a new Minister "the new division was put indefinitely on the 'shelf'."

7 Agricultural production is divided into five geographical districts, which are in turn subdivided along their villages' lines.

8 My original intentions were to focus my field research on Shi'a Southern villages; however, considering the general interest in religion and its role in the lives of Lebanese women, I decided to include a Christian village in order to provide a comparative analysis of the status of Muslim female laborers and their non-Muslim counterparts.

9 Some of the most illuminating information came during a chat over tea or coffee. People seemed more careful and somehow "calculating" about their answers during formal interviews. In many cases, once the interview was over, the person would jokingly say to me "now we can talk"! Such instances confirmed my original conviction that the questionnaire is only helpful as a guideline and as a tool to gather statistics.

10 Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p.3.

11 J. Smith and I. Wallerstein et al., *Households and the World Economy* (Beverly Hill: Sage Press, 1984), p. 8.

12 For more on this argument see also Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989; and Jane Collins and Martha Gimenez, Editors, *Work Without Wages*, SUNNY Press, New York, 1990.

13 For an informative study of the role of state building and structure in the lives of Lebanese women and family, see Suad Joseph in Deniz Kandiyoti, Editor, *Women, Islam, and the State*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1991.

14 Figures on tobacco production are based on the Régie's archives and on Michel Morcos, *La Culture du Tabac au Liban* (Beirut: Lebanese University, Institut des Sciences Sociales, 1974); Georges Yacoub, "The Régie de Tabacs et Tombacs: An Economic and Organizational Appraisal", in Arabic, unpublished thesis, American University of Beirut, Lebanon, 1972; and Nahla Fiqh, "Zira'at al-tabagh: al-rokhas, tatawor geoghrafiyatoha, tarikhotha", in Arabic, unpublished thesis, Institute of Social Sciences, Lebanese University, 1980-81.

15 For more details on relations between landlords and peasants in the South as well as on landownership and feudalism in the region (including the way it differs from European feudalism), see Majed Halawi, *Lebanon Defied, Musa al-Sader and Shi'a Community*, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco and by Elaine Hagopian and Samih Farsoun, AAUG, Michigan, 1978.

16 During my research in the archives of the Lebanese University, I came across references to few other dissertations on tobacco, including a Masters' thesis which discusses the role of women in tobacco cultivation (by Ilham Rashid, 1974). Despite great effort, I never managed to have access to the thesis or to the writer.

17 While this may be one valid justification, I would argue that this deficiency is directly connected to a larger problem related to Lebanon's historiography as well as the study of labor relations in Lebanon.

18 For this genre, see Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a of Lebanon*, Cornell University Press, 1986.

19 Ahmad Baalbaki, *Mouhawalat fi dirasat al-tanmiyah al-rifiyyah fi lubnan, in Arabic* (Beirut: Al-Farabi, 1994), p. 45.

20 In 1971, \$ 1 averaged LL. 3.00

21 A study in 1980 by Joseph Chamie indicates that the Shi'a were the

poorest single confessional unit in the country. The average annual income for a Shi'a family was LL. 4,532 compared to LL. 7,173 for a Catholic family (the richest unit), as quoted in Halawi, 1992.

22 For a comprehensive study of the effects of Israeli aggression on the economy of South Lebanon including tobacco production, see Kamal Hamdan, "Tafkik al-bunya al-iqtisadiya al-ijtima'iyah" in "Nataej al-idwan al-israeli ala lubnan," pp. 75 - 91, in "Fi nataej al-'oudwan al-israeli 'ala jounoub lubnan", in Arabic, a publication of Cultural Council of South Lebanon, Beirut, 1979.

23 The Régie has, however, overlooked this requirement and automatically renewed licenses of 'important' landlords who suspended cultivation.

24 Although this requirement is not clearly stipulated in the Régie's official documents, it was clearly stated by all the company's representatives interviewed for this study.

25 Exceptions were always granted to landlords with 'strong' connections allowing them to go beyond the maximum dounums allotted to them.

26 While Mr. Hijazi, the Régie's General Technical Secretary, specified the commission to be 6% of the export value of all leaves sold abroad (interview in 1994), Georges Yacoub estimated a 3% commission (1972, vii). It is unclear if this inconsistency between the figures reflects changes over the years or inaccuracy.

27 Again, there is a discrepancy between this figure (based on the interview with Mr. Hijazi) and Yacoub's claim that the Régie is entitled to 4 piastres per kilogram of all tobacco sales made in the Lebanese market (1972, vii).

28 Details about labor operations are based on the author's field research in 1994 and 1995, and the Régie's literature. This section also benefited from the discussion in Marit Melhuus, *Peasants, Surpluses and Appropriation: A Case Study of Tobacco Growers from Corrientes, Argentina*, University of Oslo, 1987, 100-107.

29 The Régie is in principle supposed to provide farmers with these chemicals. Since the 1970's, however, the company has not met this condition. Peasants are at the mercy of merchants and their outrageous prices. Furthermore, women who are involved in seed-bedding are never informed properly of the health hazards associated with insecticides. Many of the women interviewed explained that they simply wash their hands after this process and then begin cooking or baking.

30 Many of these men are employed in the governmental sector in the nearest city (Tyre) and enjoy a very flexible schedule and light workload.

31 I carried my interviews in the summer when this phase of production was over and, therefore, I could not locate any seasonal wage laborers to interview. I was informed that those women are usually outsiders from nearby villages or from Palestinian camps.

32 Cropping takes place between 3 a.m. and 7 a.m. the latest, while stringing could continue well into the night.

33 I often found myself reaching for one of the "extra" needles in order to start stringing. They would then joke with me saying "you see, tobacco is not only addictive but it is also contagious!"

34 One woman began to rebuke her husband when he, during the interview, appeared neatly dressed on his way out. She openly complained about her fate and that of her 'female' children stuck with the dirty job, while the men of the house are socializing and roaming around the village. When I asked another woman if her husband helped with leaf-stringing she laughed sarcastically and said "oh ya right, he is a 'khawajah' (a pampered gentleman) who strings his 'masbaha' (worry-beads) all day."

35 Megan Vaughan and Graham Chipande, *Women in the Estate Sector of Malawi: The Tea and Tobacco Industries*, International Labor Organization, 1986, p. 24.

36 This is one of the main differences sericulture (the culture of raising silkworms) and tobacco farming. Although both involve tedious and detailed activities, the former may be mechanized or semi-mechanized and performed outside the home while in the latter case the processing of raw tobacco may only be manual and more convenient to be performed at home. This difference explains the variation in the development of sericulture in Mount Lebanon under French influence which turned Mount Lebanese peasants into cheap factory laborers and that of tobacco which kept peasants until today outside the conventional factory life. For a comprehensive study of sericulture in Mount Lebanon, including all its operational procedures, see A. Khater, 1993.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: A FORCE FOR CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, there has been an increasing tendency to examine the role of women in rural development, to understand their particular contribution, and to implement programs and projects to improve the quality of their lives.

Studies confirm that women produce between 60 to 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production, yet their key role as food producers and providers and their critical contribution to household food security is only recently being recognized.¹

Until the last 20 years, rural women have been neglected both in terms of understanding their exact position as a human resource in rural areas, and identifying the particular constraints they face.

WOMEN ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE IN AGRICULTURE

In Lebanon, as in most developing countries, the major constraint to the effective recognition of women's actual roles and responsibilities in agriculture is the scarcity of gender desegregated data available to technicians, planners, and policy makers. The role of women in agriculture has been undervalued in most official data. Due to inconsistencies in reporting, poor methods of data collection and the use of narrow definitions of work and employment in national statistics, data often fail to capture the real contributions of women in agriculture. As a result there has been a widespread erroneous notion that women have a marginal role in agriculture. However, more recent efforts to include desegregated data by gender at the national level, as well as information gathered in micro studies and special surveys, have shown that women's contribution to agricultural labor has been severely underestimated, and that in fact, women's participation rates are quite significant, especially when unpaid labor is taken into account. Official statistics reported a decline in the percentage of women participants in agricultural professions from 26% in 1970 to 7.6% and 11.4% (when considering female unpaid labor) in 1995.² On the other hand, field studies and PRA surveys conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, in addition to other estimates and projections revealed that women, as paid and unpaid laborers, represent up to 40.7% of the total paid and unpaid agricultural workers.³

The variations in data dictate the necessity for more detailed studies and the importance of caution in interpreting data on rural female employment and underemployment basically because several variables should be examined such as migration, lower wages for women, climatic and agronomic factors, seasonality in the demand for labor in agriculture etc. In addition, differences in the definitions of "employment," "underemployment," and "unemployment" must be clearly understood in cross-national studies.

RURAL WOMEN - AN ENORMOUS HUMAN RESOURCE... WHAT CONSTRAINTS DO THEY SUFFER FROM?

Rural women are a crucial resource, vital to agricultural development, food security, and sustainable socio-economic growth; however, these women remain restricted within the marginal role allotted to them:

1. While women are the main stay of small scale agriculture, farm labor force, and day-to-day family subsistence, they shoulder at least one third of the agricultural work and have more difficulty than men gaining access to resources such as land, credit, productivity enhancing inputs and other agricultural services. Special credit facilities for women are limited and only a small number of women farmers apply for loans. The agricultural sector is a risky field, and the lack of experience, information, and illiteracy prevailing among women, act as obstacles interalia to them receiving agricultural loans from banks. Analysis of the data available from PRA surveys indicate that women give up their inherited land to their brothers or fathers, who, in turn, offer them protection from their husbands and husbands' families in times of conflict, as well as support in times of need.⁴
2. In the past, research and extension systems largely ignored the need and priorities of women farmers, and only recently have they shown any concern for women's increasing responsibilities in agriculture. Women have no access to improved agricultural technology which has been widely recognized as a prime force of increased agricultural productivity, as well as an engine for accelerating rural economic growth. This is primarily due to the absence of gender based extension systems within the government's specialized departments. Until 1975 public extension services in agriculture were mainly provided by 48 male extensionists. Women extensionists were totally absent, thus depriving women farmers from the extension services and, consequently, from the acquisition of any skills.
3. As paid or unpaid labors, women may spend up to 14-19 hrs/day in crop and livestock production, in addition to domestic work such as cleaning, cooking, baking, child rearing, and collecting water and fuel for household use.

Table 1: Average Number of Hours Spent per Day on Agricultural and Domestic Activities in non-irrigated Areas by Task, Gender, (1993)

Task	Male	Female
Collecting wood or shrubs for fuel	1.0	1.0
Carrying Water	1.0	2.0
Preparing food	-	1.0
Cleaning house	-	2.0
Caring for children	-	3.0
Planting	3.0	-
Weeding	-	2.0
Irrigation	-	-
Milking	-	1.0
Milk processing	-	2.0
Caring for livestock	-	1.0
Marketing animal products	-	0.5
Processing crops*	3.0	3.0
Marketing crops	6.0	-
Total	14.0	18.0

Source: Lebanon.Ministry of Agriculture, PRA Surveys, 1995.

* Includes harvesting and other Agricultural Practices.

4. A gender division of labor is observed in the Lebanese farming system based on the nature of the agricultural enterprise itself and the operations used in the production process. Men are involved in capital-intensive mechanized crops and operations such as mechanical land preparations, irrigation, spraying and tractor driving, while women are responsible for the labor - intensive work that requires painstaking physical effort and perseverance such as weeding, hand sowing, spraying fertilizers, vegetable pinching, etc.

5. Women's role in livestock is even greater, as they are responsible for all aspects of animal husbandry, and to a lesser degree for marketing and herding. They feed and gather fodder, care for small ruminants, rabbits and poultry, clean stables, milk animals, make butter, cheese, yogurt, and other milk by-products.

6. As it has been observed women are less likely to be involved in more mechanized and capital - intensive farms geared to market - oriented production; also, women from landless families and/or small land holdings perform tasks and work for

longer hours than those from large land holding and rich rural households. Poor women are more likely to seek temporary employment or permanent labor on other farms. Owing to social restrictions, they are also more liable to work in agriculture outside their own villages.

7. Men appear to have predominant control over decision making, though more in-depth studies are needed to determine the precise roles and powers each gender has in household decision making processes. PRA's and field observations have indicated that almost all decisions pertaining to agricultural production practices are men's business. In-addition, all marketing decisions and the allocation of subsequent generated income are totally male dominated. Even when the husband is away for a short time, decisions wait for his return. However, if his absence is prolonged, the wife could have more authority over the decision - making process, in consultation with other male family members.

Table 2: Women's Decision - Making Authority at the Household Level

(Percentage of Wives who Report that they Usually Decide) 1994.

	Husband present	Husband Away
What to grow	None	None
Use of fertilizer	None	None
Better seeds	None	None
Use of pesticides/herbicides	None	None
Use of veterinary medicine	None	None
How much to sell (crops)	None	None
How much to sell (livestock)	None	None
Seeking loans (crops)	5%	5%
Seeking loans (livestock)	N.A.	N.A.
Buying tools	None	None
Allocating water (crops)	None	75%
Allocating water (livestock)	90%*	90%
Hiring Labor	None	None
Attending extension meetings	75%**	-
Allocating family expenditures	None	None

Source: Lebanon. Ministry of Agriculture, PRA Surveys, 1995.

* A woman dominated activity.

** % of those who reported that they would attend after consultation with their husbands.



Photo: R.M. Habre

8. Women - headed households are poorer than male - headed households especially with the disparities prevailing in agricultural wages. Women are often paid two thirds to one - half of the wages earned by men for the same number of hours. The average daily wage for women ranges between 7000 - 10000 L.L./day depending on the area and the type of work; whereas that of men ranges between 13000 - 17000 LL./day. It ought to be mentioned here that the percentage of women - headed households has been increasing over the past ten years due to extensive male migration to the cities which forces men to abandon their agricultural lands seeking better employment opportunities as well as the increased number of widows in the war period (from 9.2% in 1954 to 20% in 1994).⁵

9. Although existing laws allow women to obtain land, credit, employment, and social insurance, the application and effectiveness of these laws are still governed by a wide range of socio - economic, traditional, and religious factors. At the same time, there is lack in the legal provisions that govern employment in agriculture for both women and men. The Lebanese labor law, passed in 1946, excludes from its provisions those working in agriculture. Accordingly women in this sector are not protected by laws that govern employment organization such as working hours, maternity leaves, health measures, etc. The situation is further aggravated by the National Social Security Fund that excludes temporary labors, daily paid and seasonal labors, categories within which the majority of women working in agriculture fall.⁶

10. The number of women seeking higher education in agriculture is on the rise (47% of BS. graduates and 59% of MS. graduates respectively out of the total number of graduates in Agriculture in 1993). However, female employment rates, in the Agricultural sector, remain considerably lower than male rates for two main reasons:

- Employment opportunities are mainly available in agricultural private firms where females have had lower chances of employment especially in war times when extension services are primarily restricted to private firms that prefer male engineers for field and commercial services;

- No openings for recruitment were available in the public services until the early 1990's.

It should be mentioned here that females have better chances of employment in teaching and research at universities and research institutes.

SOME ACHIEVEMENTS

There has been an increase, from 1990-1997, in the number of governmental, non - governmental, and international programs and projects, as well as initiatives in support of rural women in general. Projects have included providing loans and training, as well as establishing rural women cooperatives. Numerous government, parastatal, academic, charity, and NGO agencies have been operating in niche areas such as women's literacy, women and child health care, sewing, embroidery, and other pre- formed feminine tasks. Focus has been also placed on the provision of training in household small scale agro-industries. Small projects are addressing the direct needs of women farmers as food producers in terms of strengthening their technical know how and providing sustainable resources for agriculture production.

Policy makers at the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) are becoming more conscious of women's contributions in this field owing to the support of the international organizations. Rural Women components within agriculture development projects have triggered the Ministry of Agriculture to press towards the establishment of a specialized gender unit the mandate of which will be to mainstream gender-sensitive considerations into agricultural policies and practices.

A SAMPLE PROJECT AT THE FIELD LEVEL

The Rural Women Development Program (RWDP) at the Ministry of Agriculture (within the irrigation rehabilitation and mechanization project, funded by the Lebanese government, World Bank, and IFAD) is a good example in terms of its direct response to the problems facing women in agriculture, and in establishing the necessary administrative support and organizational structure at the Ministry of Agriculture in order to ensure the sustainability of rural women programs.

To be specific this program entails:

- designing and executing training and income generating activities within an integrated farming approach where agriculture production, livestock production, cropping, and food processing are integrated;
- tailoring extension programs to meet women farmers' needs. The programs include mechanized agriculture, technology transfer, and step-by-step on job description and demonstration of agricultural practices and livestock best production procedures. All activities are executed in collaboration with research centers and the active development programs in the project areas;
- orienting women farmers towards new, highly demanded, easily marketable crops. Those include agriculture production in soilless culture, mushroom production, "endive" production,

drying flowers, etc. New interventions are piloted in one village, and when proved economically feasible are extended to other areas;

d. strengthening the local indigenous groups and women NGOs through contracting active local NGOs for project execution in full collaboration with RWDP;

e. enhancing and supporting the formation of women committees and promoting their involvement in already existing NGOs and village clubs/committees.

Unlike other related development projects, RWDP program is not confined to one administrative area in the country. It is designed to cover around 80 villages distributed in the three districts of Lebanon where agriculture is concentrated: the Beka' valley, the South, and the North.

BENEFITS OF RWDP PROGRAMS

The overall impact of the RWDP activities within the project areas will be significant. Extension and associated activities will enable increasing crop yields and higher household income. Women will benefit from those interventions that are specifically directed at alleviating their priority constraints and meeting their priority needs. The long-term impact of the training program will not only be restricted to the skills learned and the direct generation of income, but also to increased self-confidence and general awareness which will enable women to be more active in the future development of their areas.

This is a 5 year program which started in 1996 and is supposed to end by the year 2000. In the year 2001 what would the situation of women farmers be like? It would be the responsibility of the specialized gender unit which would have been established at the Ministry of Agriculture; otherwise the whole issue of internationally supported development projects will be brought to the table for evaluation. In fact, it is the sustainability of such projects that should be placed as a top priority issue.

REGIONAL COORDINATION AND NETWORKING

It ought to be mentioned at this level that the situation of Lebanese rural women in agriculture is shared to a large extent among many other countries in the Near East region. The Near East office and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (RNEA/FAO) were geared in the last five years towards the development of a Regional Plan of Action for Women in Agriculture in the Near East Regions 1996 - 2000., or RPAWANE 2000, through a participatory people-centered approach. Eighteen Arab and Near Eastern countries including Lebanon are participating in this endeavour. Four strategic areas of concern have been identified by RPAWANE 2000:

1. Collection, analysis, and dissemination of gender disaggregated statistical data;
2. policy advice, institutional support, and capacity building;
3. women in agriculture and sustainable development;
4. networking and people's participation.

Major contributions of RPAWANE 2000 have been

accomplished in the region. A major output is the establishment of a Regional village - anchored network for gender and food security - in a concerted effort among the Near Eastern countries including Lebanon, RNEA/FAO/ and other UN agencies. The importance of networking and people's participation stems from the fact that, unlike top-down prescriptive programs, they are self-regulated, cost-effective, and flexible frameworks that could serve to strengthen institutional collaboration on national, regional, and international levels and create a wider sharing of ideas, experiences, comparative advantages and resources.

Mobilization of resources would be one of the essential three muscular arms that the network would have. The other two include: collection, dissemination, analysis, the use of disaggregated data and statistics and program/project formulation and implementation. The invitation is hereby extended to all national and international agencies, donors communities, NGOs, private sector, academic and research institutes, and all WID and GAD machineries to join in this endeavor.

ENDNOTES:

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- 2 Comité National de la Femme. 1996. *La Femme Libanaise 1970-1995, Chifres et Sens*. Volume 1, 1996.
3. United Nations. *World Demographic Estimates and Projections, 1950-2025*. (New York, United Nations). 1988.
- 4 Ministry of Agriculture. 1995. *Women in Agriculture in Lebanon*. National Report. In Preparations of the "Policy Framework and Regional Program of Action for Women in Agriculture in the Near East (RPAWANE)." Ministry of Agriculture, Lebanon.
- 5 Same source based on Tabbarah and Osseiran. *National Report Presented to the World Population Summit*, 1993.
- 6 Mughazel, L. 1994. "The Legal Status of Women Working in Agriculture." Paper Presented to the National Workshop on Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, Beirut, March 25, 1995 (in Arabic).

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PURSuing DREAMS ...

AN UPSTREAM STRUGGLE

*By Michelle Obeid, Graduate Student,
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A 70 year old woman once told me, "education is a must for women these days if they want to raise a family and help their husbands. Men ... they don't need education. Wherever you throw them, they land on their feet." This statement seems to be the reversal of what that same old woman might have said 30 years ago; however, many people today still believe that education is more important for boys than girls in order to justify the dichotomy of roles ascribed to males and females. While males, "the breadwinners," need education in order to find better jobs, therefore providing for the family, females, "the homemakers," have little need for it since they are more restricted to the private space, the realm of the household.

A shift in boundaries is taking place in one of the very remote villages of the Lebanese Northern Beqaa. The whole village of Irsal is undergoing change on several levels. Over the past 30 years, there has been a major change in the mode of agriculture. A transition has been taking place from a traditional agropastoral system which relied on small scale farming (traditional crops like wheat and barley) and seasonal transhumance to fruit production, mainly cherry and apricot.

Since the new mode of agriculture is less time consuming than the former, villagers started opting for new off-farm income generating activities. A survey carried out in Irsal by the American University of Beirut in 1996 showed that fruit production, is the type of economic activity in the village followed by quarrying and jobs



related to it, military service in the Lebanese army, and finally agropastoral agriculture.¹

As a result, all conventional farm activities (ploughing, chemical spraying and harvesting) which had once consumed all the time of women involved in agriculture require now no more than two to three months per year. Thus, the image of rural women being engaged in on-farm activities all year long is no longer representative.

In response to these transitions, new roles have been assigned to women without, however, relinquishing the traditional ones. Thus, Irsal is a community which has ascribed a new value for education without renouncing the traditional roles expected of women. In this context, it is interesting to explore the self-perception of women with university or college education, who desire ambitiously (perhaps too ambitiously) to break away, yet find themselves entrapped in restrictive norms and traditions dictated by their culture.

There are ten schools in Irsal which are not enough for a population estimated at 32,000. Thus people send their children to schools outside the village. I spent four months in Irsal, in the summer of 1997, doing research. I had the opportunity to discuss the problem of education with both young men and women; however, I will only portray the views

expressed by women who are generally more restricted by cultural values. If they perceive higher education as an extremely essential asset, they encounter several intertwined and endemic problems that thwart many of their plans and aspirations.

The women I have interviewed are all currently registered at the Lebanese University in Zahleh, which is the closest university to Irsal. Clearly, the remoteness of Irsal forbids them from attending university on a regular or daily bases. Transportation costs approximately 200,000 LL. a month. This in itself constrains them in the choice of an academic specialization since they are compelled by virtue of their deficient financial resources to select an academic program that does not require daily attendance. Hence, they are inclined to pursue subject matters that do not really interest them such as Arabic Literature, Philosophy or Geography.

Since they are not bound by daily attendance of classes, Irsali university students are deprived of the privilege of being full and carefree college students. Instead of

being reduced to doing nothing in the idle winter season, many seek jobs. In a focused group discussion which I held with five university women whose ages range between 23 and 27, only one was a full time student. Three were school teachers and one was a secretary in a non governmental organization in the village. The jobs they held made their academic life even more difficult as studying was almost impossible:

I teach all year long. I have 40 students to worry about. For example, I come back home and I stay up all night correcting homeworks. One time I woke up suddenly and asked myself where I was. Then I realized that I had fallen asleep over a student's copybook. This is a burden for me. (Jamila,² 1997).

Jamila is hurt that her father keeps comparing her to her friend Nahla who does not have a job:

If I ever fail a subject, my father jumps to the conclusion that Nahla is more intelligent. He does not see that she has the luxury of reading all winter. She is psychologically relaxed. It does not occur to him that his daughter, for example, is tired and that she goes out to work in order to help him. He blames me (Jamila, 1997).

College students in Irsal are not only denied the expected and normal routine of attendance but also compelled to negotiate and compromise their time to comply with non-academic obligations. Because they are busy during the winter season, they are forced to sit for their exams during the make up sessions, that is in September. Hence, their most intensive study period coincides with the most active season of harvest, preparation of foodstuff for winter and other household chores they are expected to perform.

They all agreed that perhaps the fundamental problem which aggravates all the other difficulties they encounter are the restrictive norms and traditions Irsali women are entrapped in. There is a conflict between their desire for education, and for careers, and the gloomy prospects of marriage and domestic duties. Even if their parents believe in the value of education, the messages they often receive from them underlie other priorities:

Listen, our parents, for a very long time, have had certain traditions and norms which they very much preserve. Parents tell their daughters: You want to go all the way from here to Zahleh to attend a class instead of learning to become a good housewife. No matter how much education you acquire, you will end up at home [a housewife] ... In summer, my studies are always interrupted by my mother, 'Fatima, why are you sitting there doing nothing, come and help in the harvest.' 'Mother I have a degree to worry about.' 'Degree, what good would the degree do

Even though parents appreciate the value of education certain household duties cannot be ignored even if at the expense of a university degree.

you?' (Fatima, 1997).

Even though parents appreciate the value of education, there are certain household duties which cannot be ignored, even if at the expense of a university degree:

I am the only daughter in the house. I am in charge of everything. I did not ask for these responsibilities, they have been imposed on me ... For example, I clean the house before I start reading ... I do everything, sweeping the floor and wiping it, washing the dishes, washing clothes, cooking ... As soon as I finish I am exhausted. By then I don't have the energy to look at the book let alone memorize a word. How do they expect me to pass? (Zahra, 1997).

The women asserted that if only the parents and the community were less rigid, they would be able to accomplish many things. The five of them would have gone to Beirut or maybe Syria in order to pursue their studies:

I have a plan in mind. I have ambitions. But these are suppressed by reality because nothing can be accomplished. For example, I want to do something, I want to be an engineer. There is no engineering school in Zahle. My parents would not allow me to go to Beirut. I am forced in spite of myself to major in Psychology. I hate it. In our society we cannot realize the dreams we desire, for the prevailing restrictions destroy all our aspirations. (Fatima, 1997).

As a result of these conditions, university years drag on and on. Some students have been enrolled for more than three years, but they are still in the first year. This is reinforced by the lack of job opportunities. The village is flooded with school teachers. An educated person has no choice but to teach in one of the schools, even if he/she does not like doing so. Since girls are seldom allowed to take jobs outside the village circle, the alternative would be sitting idle and relying on one's brother or father for pocket money. Jamila, though, insists on earning her own living rather than end up a burden on her brother:

I make 200,000 LL. from private lessons. Why should I ask my brother for money. Even if he cares about me, tomorrow he will get married and nobody will care for anybody. Each person should take care of him/herself.

Aside from the above limitations, girls reach a stage where the community starts pressing them to marry. This is when a great dilemma starts taking place. The girls' self perception is quite positive. They see themselves as educated, motivated people with bright futures ahead; however, "old maids" have no place in their community, and they have to face up to the harsh reality of growing up and having to take steps

they had not necessarily anticipated. Jamila told me once that she would not surrender to the pressures because she was not just any girl. She is educated and wants to be independent. She is a philosophy student and a high school teacher and is quite capable of building her own future. She went as far as rejecting a suitor simply because she was not in love with him. By the end of my stay, I heard that she got engaged to that same person she had rejected. In the group discussion she admitted the following:

Whenever I sit alone and reflect, I ask myself: what have I done? Why did I accept him? By God, by the Prophet, I can't believe I did this to myself. I am trying to convince myself, I am trying. I just want to live a comfortable life ... I am not happy with him. We are incompatible.

College women in Irsal remain victims of norms and socio-cultural expectations. While there is a strong tendency to educate women, education remains a secondary issue when it comes to other priorities. There is also a manifest ambivalence in the intrinsic value of college education when pitted against the prospect of marriage and domesticity. When the women are released from these normative constraints, they all fantasize or at least consider pursuing their education away from home. Some women are strong and are willing to fight. Others, unfortunately, find it difficult to "go against the current" and hence opt for the easy way out and give in to social pressures.

When I asked Jamila why she accepted her incompatible suitor, her reply was:

I am now 23 years old. No one is asking for my hand. They all prefer my younger sisters. Tomorrow my brothers will marry and I will stay at home only to serve their wives. Instead of struggling with my mother and my brother and my father, I'd rather struggle with myself. I will struggle with him [fiancé] and he will struggle with me.

ENDNOTES:

1 Darwish, M.R., Hamadeh, S., Sharara, M. & Baalbaki, A. (1997). "Economic Assessment of Land Use Shifts in Dry Land: The Case Study of Irsal, Lebanon." Unpublished paper, prepared for the DRMP workshop in Cairo, Egypt. Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. American University of Beirut, Lebanon.

2 The names used are pseudonyms since the information passed on to me was done in strict confidentiality.

*The
prevailing
restrictions
destroy all
our
aspirations*

AN EXPERT'S PERSPECTIVE ON AGRICULTURE IN LEBANON

*By Myriam Sfeir
Assistant Editor*



Dr. Mouin Hamzé currently presides the Board of Directors of the Agricultural Research Institute (ARI) at the Ministry of Agriculture, the only official Agricultural Center in Lebanon. ARI was established in 1956 and embraces seven main stations for research distributed along the entire Lebanese agro-ecological zone.¹ Work in these stations focuses on all agricultural fields namely plant production, plant protection, animal health, food nutrition, food technology, food control, and the environmental aspects involved in the use of agricultural input. Dr. Hamzé also occupies, since May 1996, the position of Director of the Francophone graduate program on sustainable agriculture, the only post-graduate program in Lebanon dealing with this topic. The program, a joint project between the Lebanese University, l'Université Saint Joseph and l'Université du Saint Esprit (USEK), concentrates on water and agricultural input management. It is supported by two French higher education institutes as well as other francophone agencies (AUPELF - UREF). Scholars work with students on how to improve Lebanon's agricultural practices, preserve its natural resources and assure the sustainability of its agriculture. This year the number of students enrolled ranged between 12 and 15. Among the previous positions Hamzé has held is Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Lebanese University. He served the Faculty for four consecutive terms after its establishment in 1985 and until July, 1997.

Myriam Sfeir: In your capacity as previous Dean of the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences at the Lebanese University how would you rate female enrollment and performance in the agricultural field?

Mouin Hamzé: The number of female students enrolled in the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, since its inception in 1985, has always been more than 55% of the student body. Besides, 70% of our supporting staff are female and the ratio of our female educational and research staff has never been below 45-50%.

There is no discrimination in the choice of specialization among the students of the Faculty of Agriculture at the Lebanese University. Our female students are free to enroll in any field² provided that they qualify. Given that female students are more inclined to opt for specialties which are more suitable to women, we at the faculty, were afraid that the high ratio of females enrolled will force us to reorient our options, specialties, and job opportunities, but we were mistaken.

Our female graduates, however, face many obstacles at the professional level. Female engineers are denied the opportunity to prove that they are reliable, capable, and credible. Decision makers in the agricultural field and ninety percent of the private sector have an unfair preference for male engineers. Besides, social constraints in rural areas also prevent female engineers from working and engaging in field work because farmers favor dealing with men. The current situation forces many of our female graduates to work in administrative positions at the Ministry of Agriculture or as research assistants at the Agricultural Research Institute. Yet, in spite of all the disappointment and discrimination more than half of the students enrolled in the Faculty of Agriculture are women.

It is high time we revised our educational system to remedy the prevailing situation. Alternative specialties should be devised where women can prove themselves and be of good use to the producer, consumer, and the marketing system. This alternative once developed will give female engineers more job opportunities.

MS: How long does it take a student to acquire a BA. in Agricultural Sciences?

MH: Acquiring a BA. in Agricultural Sciences, irrespective of specialization, requires five years. The program is designed in such a way that the student spends four years studying general agriculture while the final year is devoted to research work in the student's field of specialization. The four sub disciplines in which students can specialize are plant production, plant protection, animal production, and food technology.

MS: Why this preference for male engineers?

MS: Decision makers in the private sector do not believe that a female engineer is capable of taking on reliable and commercial activities in rural areas. They prefer to appoint men who, they believe, are tough, reliable, and credible. Also, considering the mobile nature of agricultural work, there is a preference for male engineers since they can easily sleep overnight in rural areas. Contrary to their male counterparts, it is more difficult for a female engineer to travel to remote areas

and stay overnight in places lacking suitable accommodation facilities and guest houses. Moreover, it is very tiring to commute to and from rural areas every day. Therefore, if women engineers are not ready to stay overnight, in order to be present early in the morning on the field with the farmers, there is no point in appointing them. In-depth discussions and consciousness raising campaigns, among social workers and decision makers in the private sector, are badly needed to help resolve such unfairness and discrimination.

MS: Which domain of agricultural work is supported mainly or mostly by women?

MH: Although harvesting and weeding are considered women dominated activities, a very high percentage of women farmers as well as female agricultural laborers in the Beka' and Akkar take up numerous and manifold agricultural tasks.

Women farmers direct more than 60% of all agricultural lands and farms in Lebanese rural areas. Owing to a number of factors including widowhood, absence of the husband, and extensive male migration to Beirut and its suburbs, women are forced to engage in agricultural production by attending to their neglected fields. They are suddenly compelled to cope with the various agricultural duties with no previous training. Provision of adequate training needed to improve their skills in specialized agricultural work, would enable them to earn better wages than the ones they currently receive.

Given that agricultural production is a multidisciplinary system covering all activities, small farmers (females) in Lebanon do not engage in one activity. Most of the time women are responsible for the whole agricultural cycle from seedling to marketing. Besides engaging in planting, green house cultivation, fruit and vegetable gardening, weeding, irrigation, milking, milk processing, caring for livestock, processing crops, herding and feeding cows, bee keeping, poultry raising, applying fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, etc., women also care for their children and carry out all domestic activities. Coordinating between house work and the never ending agricultural duties is not an easy endeavor and at the end of the day, women farmers often end up exhausted; however, they have no alternative but to accept the burden of a very high percentage of the agricultural workload because of the escalating living conditions.

Besides, being uneducated, untrained, and uninformed, women farmers are frequently tricked by intermediary agents and cunning salesmen. The former usually demand high percentages of profit to market their goods, and the latter may sell them unsafe pesticides. These pesticides may have dire effects on their health condition and that of their children.

Extensive work should be done in order to improve the status of rural women. To ameliorate the present situation, the Ministry of Agriculture plans to establish 24 extension centers, for farmers, in the 24 different Lebanese districts. Even though both governmental³ and non-governmental organizations have been organizing innovative programs, projects, and initiatives in rural areas to support women in agriculture, our system at this point is still very deficient. Founding a system whereby female engineers interact with women laborers and farmers and

try to explain to them the problems at hand would facilitate the latter's task.

MS: At the Agricultural Research Institute do you take into consideration the ill effects the use of pesticides has on the environment and on a person's health?

MH: Certainly. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is now a part of every research project undertaken by our center. When we attempt to cure a disease we take into consideration the consequences of treatment on the environment and on human beings. We carry out many projects dealing with how to avoid pesticide residue, integrated pest management in food control, food quality, etc. Furthermore, we carry out routine analysis on all our crops to determine the amount of pesticides used by farmers and urge them to limit the use of pesticides especially on strawberry, tomato, cucumber, and other stone fruits.

In spite of our efforts we still have a serious problem. The results in many cases prove that the amount of pesticides used is higher than the authorized level in many European countries. For example, all intensive productions of tomato or cucumber under green houses contain a mixture of pesticide, fungicide, and acaricide 2 to 3 times more than what the culture needs. The excess material used by the producer to prevent any parasitic attack has a serious consequence on the quality of the crops. A very appetizing and juicy apple might contain a lot of pesticide remnants that are very harmful.

We need a law which controls the use of pesticides, specifies the different types needed to cure different diseases, and the brands authorized by the Ministry of Agriculture. Once you authorize a pesticide, the difficult part lies in regulating its use; how can one be sure that farmers will stick to the specified quantity needed to preserve their product?⁴

MS: Is misuse due to ignorance?

MH: Well yes, ignorance coupled with fear. Farmers are scared that if they do not apply pesticides in excess their crop will be infected and they will lose all their assets. This situation highlights the importance of research, education, and training where farmers are taught when to apply pesticides and are provided with some guarantees in order not to lose their investments.

MS: What are the future projects undertaken at the Agricultural Research Institute?

MH: At ARI we are presently focusing on three main projects. The first tackles tissue culture which entails producing virus free plants. These plants being resistant to disease help decrease the amount of pesticides used by the farmers. Armed with advanced bio-technological methods and genetic engineering techniques, scientific and research laboratories and centers nowadays are able to produce plants resistant to disease. Given that our conventional orchards can no longer withstand the various diseases, we aim to replace the present plants with disease resistant ones. This operation is possible, but initially we have to multiply the available mother plants. We have already produced virus free olive plants through tissue culture

in our center in Tyre. Within two years we should be able to distribute virus free plants to the private sector and to farmers through a pilot orchard we established at Tal Amara, two years ago.

The second project undertaken entails developing food control techniques in our center in Fanar. At the center we are engaged in food analysis methods required by the Lebanese government; the samples sent to our laboratories are examined in order to detect the constituents that make up a product, its quality, and the percentage of pesticide residue it contains. The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Economy, and the Customer Services Department at the sea port of Beirut make use of the data we forward to them in order to accept or reject imported products. We also provide farmers with instructions on food control, inform them on the quality of products by teaching them to detect pesticide residue, and train them to observe the required standards in agricultural products by decreasing the use of pesticides.

The third project involves introducing new alternative crops in the marginal non-irrigated agricultural lands in the Beka', Akkar, and the South. We are trying to introduce new crops in the areas which used to be cultivated by prohibited culture namely hashish. Although no culture or crop can beat the high prices farmers exact from selling hashish, we at ARI are currently testing some alternative crops that can replace hashish and have a real economical comparative advantages. Our aim is to prevent the desertification of the area by introducing new crops that are materially rewarding and able to tolerate the drought.

This project will be completed within two to three years given that the agricultural process is a slow one. In agricultural research, results are not attained quickly.⁵ More than one test is needed⁶ before introducing a new line and distributing it to farmers. To ensure the success of such an initiative, a political decision is required along with economic studies, agricultural research, social studies, and financial support. We expect some promising results.

ENDNOTES:

1 The main headquarter is in Tal Amara, Rayak, and the other six locations are in Tyre in the South, Abdeh and Kfarchakhna in the North, Fanar in the northern suburb of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, Terbol and Kfardan in the Beka'.

2 The various specializations are plant production, animal production, plant protection, and food technology

3 Although the training sessions are the responsibility of the training department at the Ministry of Agriculture training programs are also organized at the ARI.

4 For instance, for one season's production of tomato, farmers apply pesticides 12 times instead of 3 to 5.

5 For example, if we want to introduce a new line in wheat the process of testing and selection takes eight years before authorization is granted.

6 To be sure of the characteristics of the line, its potentials, and the possibilities it yields

FEMALE ENROLLMENT IN THE FACULTY OF AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE:

STATISTICAL DATA COLLECTED FROM FOUR UNIVERSITIES IN LEBANON

Bachelor of Science in Agriculture AUB

Year	Males	Females	Total
1966	14	1	15
1967	19	4	23
1968	24	1	25
1969	24	0	24
1970	28	4	32
1971	33	5	38
1972	26	7	33
1973	29	7	36
1974	21	3	24
1975	31	5	36
1976	30	6	36
1977	17	11	28
1978	17	11	28
1979	21	14	35
1980	25	23	48
1981	27	17	44
1982	24	26	50
1983	13	15	28
1984	28	32	60
1985	41	38	79
1986	28	26	54
1987	19	9	28
1988	12	14	26
1989	32	18	50
1990	7	4	11
1991	33	39	72
1992	33	21	54
1993	24	18	42
1994	28	18	46
1995	31	20	51
1996	35	23	58
1997	16	20	36
Total	790	460	1250

USEK Liscence en Agronomie	Year	Males	Females	Total
	1993	35	20	55
	1994	21	12	33
	1995	15	7	22
	1996	5	6	11
	1997	17	15	32
	Total	93	60	153

Masters of Science AUB

Year	Males	Females	Total
1970	25	2	27
1971	51	5	56
1972	42	5	47
1973	46	3	49
1974	52	5	57
1975	61	8	69
1976	49	5	54
1977	24	0	24
1978	35	2	37
1979	38	8	46
1980	36	10	46
1981	41	14	55
1982	48	12	60
1983	30	14	44
1984	27	27	54
1985	23	13	36
1986	24	19	43
1987	20	18	38
1988	13	11	24
1989	10	12	22
1990	4	7	11
1991	12	7	19
1992	7	6	13
1993	14	16	30
1994	8	17	25
1995	13	7	20
1996	21	16	37
1997	8	17	25
Total	782	286	1068

Lebanese University Liscence en Agronomie	Year	Males	Females	Total
	1990	17	13	30
	1991	22	7	29
	1992	19	13	32
	1993	15	13	28
	1994	25	17	42
	1995	18	15	33
	1996	33	12	45
	1997	14	32	46
	Total	163	122	285

Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Dietetics, AUB

Year	Males	Females	Total
1983	6	1	7
1984	2	10	12
1985	3	16	19
1986	1	22	23
1987	2	18	20
1988	3	19	22
1989	3	12	15
1990	3	24	27
1991	3	33	36
1992	7	21	28
1993	5	29	34
1994	7	36	43
1995	2	31	33
1996	3	32	35
1997	7	26	33
Total	57	330	387

USJ Liscence en Agronomie	Year	Males	Females	Total
	1984	8	1	9
	1985	10	0	10
	1986	2	2	4
	1987	5	3	8
	1988	4	0	4
	1989	2	4	6
	1990	9	2	11
	1991	7	2	9
	1992	14	2	16
	1993	6	1	7
	1994	6	0	6
	1995	5	1	6
	1996	6	3	9
	1997	4	3	7
	Total	88	24	112

THE AGRICULTURAL CENTER OF THE NORTH (ACN)

By Myriam Sfeir, Assistant Editor

In 1994 the Rene Moawad Foundation (RMF), a non-governmental and non-profit organization whose objective is improving the level of human and social conditions prevailing in Lebanon through economic and development projects, started building an Agricultural Center in the North, with the financial help of the European Union, the Spanish government, and the Spanish foundation Promocion Social de la Cultura. In September 1996 the center began its operations, but the official opening of ACN took place on October 25, 1997 under the auspices of the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Shawki Fakhoury. Through the Agricultural Center of the North (ACN), RMF plans to lessen the manifold obstacles resulting from the shortcomings of an archaic system lacking in subsidies and state protection, which impede a farmer's task.

ACN is among the first projects to be financed by the European Union, maintains Lina Raphael, the communications manager at RMF. She holds that securing a fund from the European Union and the Spanish government gives one a lot of credibility, yet, it is not an easy endeavor. According to Raphael "once the Union or Spain accepts to finance one of your projects this implies that you have convinced them that there is a real need on the field." Raphael explains that Mrs. Nayla Moawad, president of RMF and a member of the Lebanese Parliament, insisted on the idea of development and opted for agricultural and social development. According to Raphael, Moawad was eager to revive the North, a traditionally agricultural region, and the agricultural sector, threatened to disappear in the aftermath of the war.

The initial goal of the project was to eliminate the obstacles hindering agricultural development in the North, according to Gilbert Aoun, agronomic engineer in charge of the technical division at Tanmiya. He explains that agriculture in Lebanon suffers from very high production costs caused by high storage costs, expensive machines and inputs as well as the absence of sufficient funds to finance the modernization of the sector.

Also, the absence of technical support and information technology where farmers have no access to new agricultural techniques as well as the lack of available information explaining to the farmers the rules of the market succeed in accentuating the problem at hand. Moreover, the difficulty in marketing agricultural goods along with all the problems of product marketing namely the underdevelopment of the food industry; the absence of union structures, global and commercial strategies, as well as

marketing policies, discourage farmers from venturing into such a vocation.

To overcome the previously mentioned impediments, ACN came up with a number of solutions. The first measure taken by the ACN crew was to provide farmers with a refrigerating service. Five large, very modern refrigerating rooms occupying 950 square meters were installed. Aoun holds that "ACN's refrigerators can accommodate approximately 50,000 crates. We offer farmers many services at cost price all year long where no profit is exacted and our prices are 50% cheaper than the market."

The second step was to equip farmers with the necessary machinery. ACN supplies farmers with modern and practical agricultural equipment. Given that most farmers in the North own pieces of land smaller than 5000 square meters and lack the financial means to buy a tractor to plough their land, they resort to renting tractors from private companies where a very high price is exacted. So ACN placed tractors for rent at the disposal of farmers at prices 40 or 50% cheaper than the market.

In order to modernize the archaic and structureless agricultural sector, the agronomic engineers at ACN introduce agriculturalists to different agricultural techniques such as the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and fungicides which are sold to farmers at cost price. In addition, ACN counseling team provides farmers with free of charge instructions and guidance on how and when to use the products. They travel to the areas of production and assist farmers in detecting and solving the numerous agricultural problems.

Apart from the regular seminars, training sessions, and workshops organized for farmers residing in the North, ACN publishes books on agricultural subjects such as forestation, food security, food control, etc. This year ACN held two training sessions on agro-food production for house-wives whose



husbands are farmers. The aim behind both training sessions was to enable women to generate revenues by processing their husband's unsold excess crop into agro-food products. Each training session involved theory courses and practical work, absorbed 20 participants, and lasted two months and a half. The women participants were instructed, by dietitians and agronomic engineers, on how to prepare jam, apple marmalade, stewed fruits, rose water, honey, vinegar, etc. Their products were later sold at the Artisan du Liban in Ain al-Mreissi. Fady Yarak, the manager at Tanmiya, explained the difficulty involved in recruiting women candidates without acquiring the approval of their husbands: "We talked to the farmers and tried to convince them of the importance of women's participation in productive and income generating activities. We explained that teaching their women how to take advantage of their culinary talents would yield more income and a better family life."

Concerning product marketing, ACN's staff came up with a number of solutions to help farmers, namely providing relevant data through market surveys, assisting in exporting their goods, and creating quality labels for these goods "through instituting quality control, using sorting, grading, and canning equipments." The staff at ACN also help farmers market their merchandise by serving as a link between them and the merchants. Aoun explained: "We locate potential buyers and invite them to inspect the products stored in our refrigerators. Being the link, we eliminate the presence of an intermediary who will ask for part of the farmer's profit."

Young farmers, Aoun maintains, are not encouraged to carry on where their parents have left for they are fed up with the frustrations of the agricultural industry. He goes on to say that the local market is flooded with cheap imported

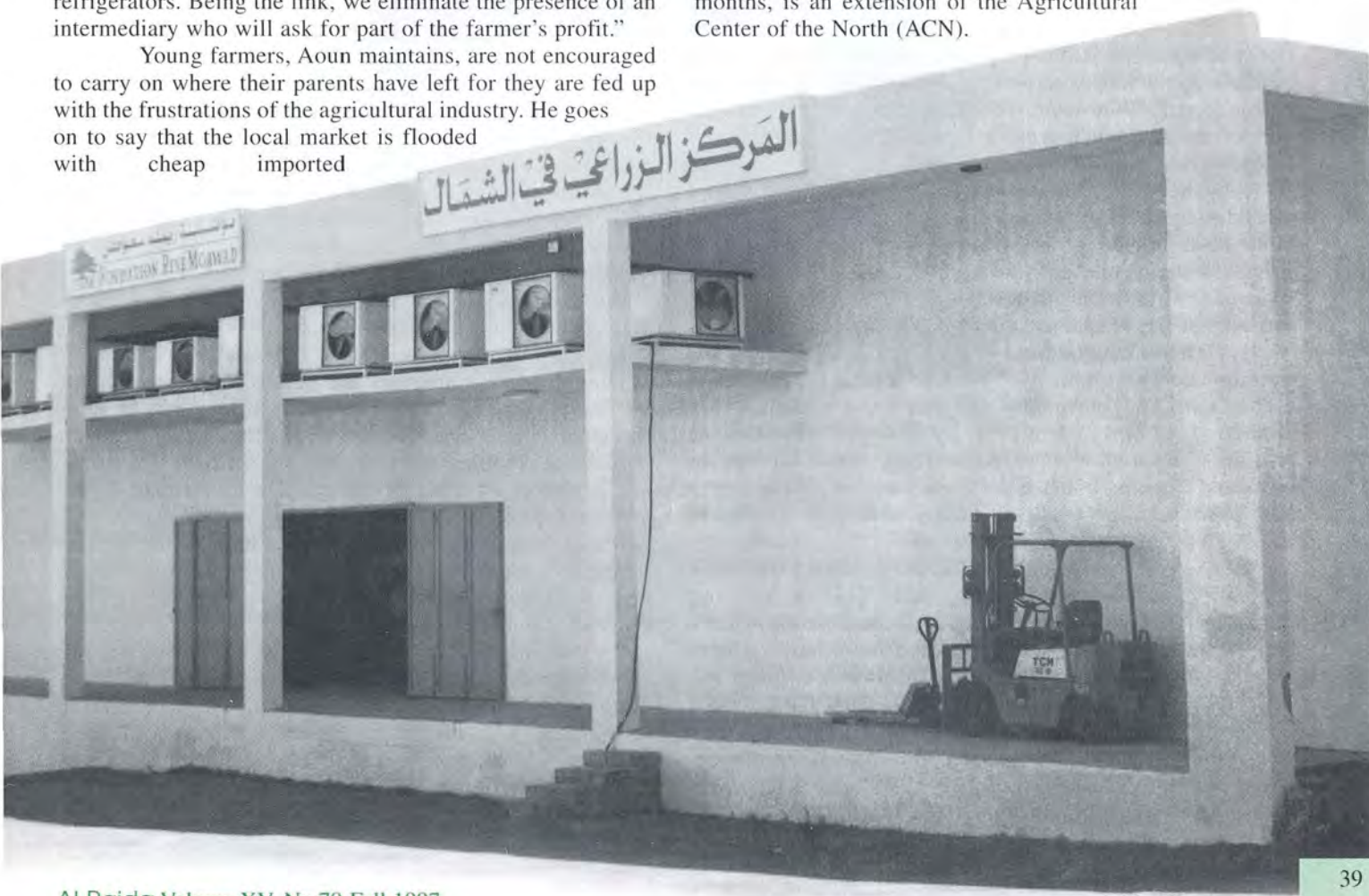
products, hence, young Lebanese farmers find increasing difficulty in selling their merchandise. Besides, the meagre revenues and benefits yielded from agricultural work, according to Aoun, force farmers to abandon their fields and migrate to the city. Aoun holds: "At ACN we try, as much as possible, to lessen rural exodus to the cities. By providing farmers with facilities at the lowest price possible, we minimize costs of production enabling them to make more profits."

Last but not least, through GRANJA¹, the experimental farm, owned by RMF at Alma, Zghorta, the foundation strives to ameliorate the standard of living of farmers. Aoun holds: "At GRANJA we work on improving goat and sheep production through modern techniques of intensive breeding and artificial insemination. Moreover, grazing is confined to particular enclosed places in order to preserve the forests and encourage re-forestation."

Among the future projects being prepared at RMF are small dairy industries, irrigation, establishing artesian wells and agricultural roads, as well as supplying drinking water to villages, etc. The foundation also plans to construct a professional center to acquaint women and girls with agricultural transformation techniques.

ENDNOTE:

1 GRANJA, which has been operational for the past three months, is an extension of the Agricultural Center of the North (ACN).



AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF BEIRUT

Maha Milki Wehbe, Ingenieur Agricole

Thirty three years ago, **The Parks and Public Gardens Department** was established in the Municipality of Beirut. During the war period, the only male agriculturist in the Department quit and the Director, himself a professional, kept the work going exclusively by himself and without the aid of a secretary. In short, the scope of work in the Department was minimized to a near standstill.

I was the first woman to set foot in a predominantly male territory. Since I was employed, serious attempts by the Governor of Beirut, Nicolas Saba, have been made to consolidate the Department. Three young females and two male agriculture engineers were hired successively, all AUB graduates forming a homogeneous cooperative team in charge of forging a new picture of a war-torn city by introducing more plantations, flowers, and tidiness in public gardens.

Presently, the Department is in charge of every single green plant on side-walks (12,000 trees), medians between streets and the 13 public gardens in the city, in addition to the newly re-planted 300,000 square meters of *Horch* Beirut (Pine-wood Park). In the future it will take care of the downtown green area which is currently under the auspices of Solidere.

The job to be undertaken is really challenging considering the limited resources available. Some trees have been left to grow without pruning; some are in private domains and constitute a hazard to inhabitants, in which case the Department has to prune or cut them with the help of the Fire department.

The Department's fifty workers, with their average age of 60 have really depleted their potential and enthusiasm. They have spent the war years without being able to do their work efficiently and thus are used to tardiness and a slow work pace. Their whole outlook to work and working hours is different from ours - the newly employed- who are whole-heartedly willing to indulge in it.

Yes, it is difficult, at times, to make the older generation work within the new philosophy and discipline. Being a female is one of the obstacles; such people are not used to taking orders from a lady - young or old. To quote my colleague, Dana Mansour, the majority of the workers come from traditional backgrounds in the South and Mountain villages, and they are not very willing to obey a female superior and think it is either preposterous or funny.

Another problem is the lack of confidence in us.

As Dana often tells me, when she goes to any of the gardens with a technician, workers flock around him and are eager to take orders from him, although she happens to be the engineer and he her subordinate.

Mona Ammach, on the other hand, who is in charge of the Pinewood Park, was often not taken seriously by the agricultural technician, a young man employed by the Park's contractor. She had to shout at him to coach him into accepting her interventions.

Another major difficulty is the shortage in workers. For example, in the 20,000 square meter Sioufi public garden in Ashrafiyye an area I am in charge of and which hosts the department's main offices, only two workers are in charge of keeping it well-maintained and clean. Asking them to do something within their job-description takes, at times, the form of a personal request. At other times, they promise to finish a certain task but only accomplish a minimal part of it, and all sorts of health excuses are readily given. By way of punishment, the senior staff have the authority to deduct from their wages depending on the magnitude of the failure.

As days pass by, everyone in the Department is realizing that big changes are taking place. Personally, I am able to cooperate smoothly with other departments within and outside the municipality. Furthermore, fruitful cooperation takes place especially in one-shot events whenever the work load is intensive; cleaning workers, plumbers, electricians, fire department technicians and vehicles, truck and other facilities are then readily placed at our disposal. Help is also sought from Sukleen, and the water and electricity departments.

With time, patience, flexibility and more communication, employees are positively responding and becoming more used to the presence of females. Although the work is still at a slow pace, much is being done; the gardens are looking more beautiful especially that women are in charge of most of the green areas around Beirut. They are proving that they are up to the responsibility given to them. Our male colleagues help in the nursery, irrigation group workers, planting medians in the streets, and other jobs that have to do with trucks, motors, transportation, etc.

Challenges of different nature face women if they want to obtain good results and match those of their male colleagues. Fortunately, at the end, their talents are recognized. I speak from personal experience where, ultimately, I was appointed to the position of Assistant Director of Parks and Public Gardens Department of the Municipality of Beirut. It is finally "paying off".

Special Features

SITT ANISSA RAWDAH NAJJAR

FOUNDER OF THE VILLAGE WELFARE SOCIETY

By Myriam Sfeir

"You have pioneered in a most fundamental movement, persevered in nourishing its growth with dedicated purpose and sacrifice, in spite of many difficulties, and you have triumphed. You deserve the best reward Lebanon can offer - the recognition that you have made a major contribution to the revival of its village culture, without which there will be no Lebanon." (Afif Tannous)

"Prior to popular and widespread interest in development, the Village Welfare Society, since its inception in 1951, adopted rural advancement as its main goal ... (Maitre Laure Moughaizel)

For the past 46 years Sitt Anissa Najjar has been actively involved in improving the living conditions of rural women through the Village Welfare Society (VWS), a non governmental, non profit, and non secular organization she founded along with her colleague and friend Evelyne Bustrus. It started off as a commission under the umbrella of the Lebanese Women's Council and in 1953 the society acquired a permit and became an association.

The idea behind this project came about following several discussions, between Najjar and Bustrus, on rural women's issues, their rights, education as well as their role in rural life. The aim behind the Village Welfare Society was combating illiteracy and eradicating ignorance through "enlightening the mind." It sought to make use of the rural women's potentials in order to avoid rural socio-economic crisis and prevent rural exodus to the cities. Moreover, it called for the preservation of culture and the formation of a rural civilization that is distinct from the city civilization and able to face up to it.

After much investigation and deliberation it became apparent that illiteracy, ignorance, lack of sufficient income, deficiency in governmental curricula, boredom, etc. retard the realization of such a goal. In order to achieve the desired

objective, Najjar along with a group of women members started organizing workshops for rural women in three Lebanese districts namely the North, al-Shouf, and al-Metn. The training sessions included topics such as home management, child care, nutrition, rural industries, and hygiene. Women were also trained in income generating activities like sewing, weaving, household crafts, pottery, etc. and the goods produced were sold to interested buyers. The results, according to Najjar, were very promising:

"When the women participants began earning their income, they became more confident and developed a sense of leadership and equality." Although most of the women who joined were illiterate, they devised their own techniques in order to understand the sewing lessons. Najjar explained: "The women were taught how to write the numbers and instead of inscribing the items such as the collar, the waist, etc., they drew them."

The training sessions also contributed to a change in mentality on the part of the men. Given that the consent of the men' villagers was needed, Najjar along with her colleagues set out to gain their approval and support. After explaining to the men the

purpose of the project, the latter were convinced that education would result in better family relations and a more equitable distribution of household and parental responsibilities. Najjar asserted, "the men were so pleased to the point that they urged their women to attend our workshops. They also bragged to other men about the products made by their women."

With time, the work of the VWS expanded and through their activities they succeeded in reaching out to women in 22 villages in Lebanon. To insure the continuity of the work, Najjar and her colleagues decided to approach the younger generation by opening three schools for them in Al-Shouf² and the South.³ These schools offer, along with the governmental Brevet certificate, a distinct certificate called the Rural Brevet. The latter, devised by Najjar, incorporated various subjects in order to fill the gap resulting from the



shortcomings of the governmental educational system. According to Najjar, "although the curriculum adopted in public schools teaches one to read and write, it fails to create any incentive for further educational pursuits and neglects women's familial obligations and responsibilities."

The Rural Brevet, which aims towards the "literacy of the mind," introduces young female students to several subjects. Besides courses in health,⁴ nutrition,⁵ first-aid, child care, budgeting, home economics, home management, psychology, politics,⁶ literature,⁷ religion,⁸ agriculture,⁹ women's rights,¹⁰ girls are taught to be money earners and share in household expenditures. Moreover, they are instructed in household crafts such as jam making, canning, farming, pottery, sewing, and other money making activities.¹¹ Furthermore, girls are trained, through the women's agricultural extension program, in poultry raising, bee keeping, basket-making, silkworm raising, and silk weaving. Other school courses are also offered such as theater and music. The topics tackled in the Rural Brevet provide women with education which gives them initiative and improves their living conditions. Najjar asserts: "After acquiring the Rural Brevet, a woman matures and becomes a conscientious citizen and an emancipated individual enjoying a developed personality."

The VWS nowadays faces heavier responsibilities and problems brought about by lack of funds, the ill effects of the war, and the scarcity of women and men willing to do voluntary work. Najjar holds that the Village Welfare Society started off with 60 members, but the number shrank during the war years, and nowadays, the society includes 25 members only: "Owing to the war and confessionism, I lost many very active and dynamic members. Some members fled to the Eastern suburbs of Beirut and others were forced to give up their work because they were threatened by political parties representing their sects. Given that I was the president of the VWS and belonging to the Druze sect, some of the members of the VWS were accused of collaborating with the Druzes. In fact the VWS is a secular association and we worked for our country Lebanon and never for our sects."

Najjar is currently preparing a booklet entitled "Literacy of the Mind" in which she describes the Rural Brevet offered at the Village Welfare Society and the courses it requires. The booklet contains instructions to teachers and

social workers on how to improve the situation of rural women, help them engage in rural life, train them in income generating activities, prevent rural migration etc. The booklet also includes various articles on literature, history, theater, etc. written by prominent academicians in these respective fields. It also contains some cooking recipes as well as instructions on how to use pesticides and fertilizers. "Hopefully, this booklet will help incorporate these subjects into the Lebanese curricula and will serve as the building block for devising a college certificate specialized in social work for rural women."

IDENTIFICATION CARD

Anissa Najjar was born in Beirut, Lebanon and brought up in a highly patriotic and secular environment. She attended the Ahlia Girls Schools until she received her Brevet certificate. She joined Beirut College for Women (BCW) for two years until she acquired her high school degree and graduated from the American University of Beirut (AUB) with a B.A in Group Seven, a major which included courses in Sociology, Political Science, Education, Economics, and Arabic. She also holds a minor in pre-medics. She participated in AUB's Village Welfare projects and edited the magazine Al-'urwah Al-Wuthqah at AUB. She traveled to Iraq and worked there for 5 years as principal of two schools namely Madrasat Karkouk Al-Mutawasitah and Madrasat Thanawiat Al-Mousil. She served in Dar Al-Mualimat in Iraq. She presided the Lebanese Women's Federation later known as the Lebanese Women's Council and served as its secretary for several years. She founded the Village Welfare Society and has devoted 45 years of her life to it.

End notes:

- 1 The father or spouse of the women participants.
- 2 In the Shouf district the VWS built an elementary school in Knaisseh and an intermediate school in Dairkousheh.
- 3 The school in the South is in Maarakah, Tyre.
- 4 Students are taught about their bodies and the transformations that occur from puberty to old age.
- 5 Students learn to detect the cheap nutritious goods, the ingredients that make up their daily food intake, and the importance of consuming fats, proteins, and carbohydrates, etc.
- 6 The history of the Arabs, the Palestinian cause, Arab nationalism, etc. are topics studied in this course.
- 7 The aim behind this course is to try to erase the inferiority complex rural women suffer from by acquainting them with prominent women in history and literature and the roles they played in society.
- 8 The different religions prevalent are introduced and students engage in discussions concerning the significance of religion, the rights of women in religion (Islam, Christianity, and Druzism), etc. Such a course renders students less confessional and more open minded.
- 9 Students are taught how to make use of accumulated waste and transform them into fertilizers, and how and when to use pesticides and fertilizers.
- 10 This course provides women with knowledge of parliamentary rules, inheritance laws and civics in order to join public life. The women students also receive Robert's Rules of Orders, on how one forms an association and participates in municipal life.
- 11 Elementary courses for beginners.

FATMEH KASSEM

CHIEF OF THE WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT UNIT, UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

By Myriam Sfeir,
Assistant Editor

With the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) returning to Beirut after more than fifteen years,¹ I had the chance to meet Fatima Sbaity-Kassem,² Chief of the Women and Development (WAD) Unit at ESCWA.

Ms. Sbaity-Kassem joined the United Nations Economic and Social Office of Beirut (UNESOB)³ in 1970 as a research assistant in international trade and regional cooperation and moved up the ladder in that field until 1990. In 1993, she assumed the functions of Chief of the WAD Unit of the Social Development Issues and Policies Division⁴ (SDIPD) at ESCWA.⁵ This division deals with four areas:

human development, population and demography, human settlements, and women and the family.

When asked whether she, being a woman, suffered from any discrimination during her 28 years of service at the UN, Ms. Sbaity-Kassem asserted that she faced no discrimination in the workplace. Serious efforts are being exerted in the UN Secretariat towards equal opportunity in recruitment and promotion of women in order to implement the General Assembly resolutions calling for a 50-50 target in the UN Secretariat by the onset of the twenty first century.

Ms. Sbaity-Kassem did not stop working when she got married and started a family because her mother-in-law was able and willing to take care of her kids during her absence. She admits that she would not have been able to pursue a career and raise a family had she not had her mother-in-law to help her out.⁴ Her career, she continues, was never promoted at the expense of her family and children. There was never a trade off. Both, she and her late husband, with the help of her mother-in-law raised the children. In her opinion, the family is the cornerstone of the society and is its most important unit. Therefore, preserving the family unit and forging the ties among its individual members will, by necessity, shield the society from social disintegration and decline. Ms. Sbaity-Kassem argues that "the Arab family is the society's safety net and the source of great strength for its individual members." While elsewhere in the World people resort to "group therapy" in order to overcome their problems, in the Arab World the extended family and friends provide the therapy and are the safety net. The Arab society has many positive dimensions including its value system. Westernization and adopting Western values and social standards indiscriminately by the Arab society should be handled with caution since this is akin to introducing a foreign implant into the body which the body is bound to reject. The Western model should not be the yardstick by which we abide.

When asked about ESCWA and its objectives, Ms. Sbaity-Kassem explained that ESCWA is one of the United Nations five regional commissions: ECA for Africa, ECLAC for Latin America and the Caribbean, ESCAP for Asia and the Pacific, ECE for Europe and ESCWA for Western



Asia. ESCWA acts as an advisory body to thirteen of the 22 Arab countries located in Western Asia.⁵

The main objectives of ESCWA are to foster regional cooperation, promote and encourage harmonization and coordination and assist member countries in achieving growth and economic and social development. These objectives are achieved by undertaking research, carrying out field studies and surveys, executing field and community development projects, and providing technical assistance and advisory services to member States. Activities are undertaken within a regional perspective while bearing in mind the national specificities of member States. They are undertaken within a holistic, systemic approach addressing political, economic, social and cultural aspects of development in a multidisciplinary, integrated and fully synchronized manner. Similarly and in the same vein, giving priority to economic development in line with the development theories of the seventies, without synchronization with political, cultural and social development has created a gap and tension in the polity and society and barred the countries from growth and development targets. This is why the recent approaches to development take an integrated and holistic approach which is being translated into efforts at mainstreaming a gender perspective into the programmes and projects of ESCWA.

The main objective of the Women and Development Unit is to assist member states in improving the status of women and promoting greater participation in national development. The WAD Unit is the focal point

for ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into all programmes and projects. The WAD Unit was the regional coordinator for preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) which was held in Beijing in September 1995. ESCWA urged its member States to set-up joint national preparatory committees composed of government bodies and NGOs to prepare for Beijing. ESCWA assisted its member States by providing them with the standard outline and common indicators to prepare their national reports on the situation of women containing national plans of action for submission to the Beijing Conference. Towards this end, ESCWA organized national workshops to formulate national plans of action. It also convened regional

expert groups and intergovernmental meetings in collaboration with the League of Arab States and CAWTAR in order to formulate the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005. This constituted an input into the Beijing Platform for Action. Also, ESCWA encouraged its member States to establish permanent national machineries to monitor and assess the status of women, and to follow-up on the recommendations of the Beijing Conference and implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The activities of the WAD Unit following the Beijing Conference focused on followup and implementation of the Beijing recommendations and pursuing a multidisciplinary approach for following up on all the global conferences which took place during the nineties (Population Conference of 1994, Social Summit of 1995, Women's Conference of 1995 and Habitat of 1996). Thus, in 1996 one year after Beijing, the Regional programme for Action was adopted focusing on according priority for the advancement of women to three themes: alleviation of poverty representing the economic dimension, strengthening the family depicting the social dimension, and encouraging women to share in power and participate in decision-making marking the political dimension. And organized an expert group meeting on the role of NGOs and prospects for networking before and after the peace accords in collaboration with Birzeit University in Ramallah (West Bank) in December 1997. In addition, as part of its annual economic and social survey, ESCWA incorporated a survey on the situation of women in the ESCWA region and published, in collaboration with CAWTAR, a publication entitled **Arab Women: Trends and Statistics**. A consultant was engaged to prepare a preliminary study to adapt the Gender Measurement Index of the UNDP to the regional specificities by incorporating the cultural dimension and traditional non-quantifiable indicators into the basket of indicators put together by the UNDP in its Human Development Report.

The WAD Unit will continue to build an integrated database on policies, measures and gender-disaggregated data and indicators of impact on women and the family. The activities of the WAD Unit during the current 1998-1999 biennium will continue to focus on an

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integrated follow-up to Beijing and the priorities established for the advancement of Arab women. Towards this end, a series of regional follow-up meetings to each of the global conferences including the Beijing Conference will culminate in one comprehensive conference for follow-up to the four global conferences in 1999. The WAD Unit plans to undertake a major study on the role of NGOs in implementing the recommendations and common objectives of the Beijing recommendations as well as recommendations of the other global conferences. Another activity of the WAD Unit will entail work on operationalization of the micro credit financing facilities for poor and rural women in the ESCWA countries. A study on gender and citizenship in selected ESCWA countries is envisaged during the 1998-1999 biennium. Another study on the role of NGOs in implementing the global conferences is also envisaged. This reflects the importance ESCWA accords to gender mainstreaming, partnership with NGOs, information dissemination and gender-disaggregated databases, as we enter the Twenty First Century.

Ms. Sbaity-Kassem points out that in effect the problems of women are the same; they only differ in their intensity across regions and among countries. She argues that the status of women is directly related to the level of development in each country. In a patriarchal society and in a developing world particularly in the Arab countries, women are not factored into the development formula early on. The issues of women are added on after the plans have been formulated, as an afterthought. In the ESCWA countries, the gender paradigm is yet to be. We are still at the "women in development" phase where women are an "add-on" to the development formula. By

Gender refers to the socially - constructed and dynamic roles that women and men play

contrast, in mainstreaming a gender perspective into programmes and plans, women's issues and concerns become an integral part of the development equation at the initial planning stage and are not an "added on" component to already formulated plans. In mainstreaming gender, all laws, policies and measures as well as personal status codes become "gender sensitive" or are conceived bearing in mind the impact on both women and men. Gender analysis will often reveal how policies, programmes, plans and development projects affect women differently from men while others may be gender neutral. It should be noted that, "gender" is not a synonym for "women". Gender refers to the socially-constructed and

dynamic roles that women and men play over time and across different geographic zones. This is the implication of the shift to the gender paradigm.

Moving from theory to practice and a more tangible front as that of women in national accounts, Ms. Sbaity-Kassem notes that "Women count but are often not counted"! Despite the fact that women work in housekeeping and family raising or in farming and agriculture is important; however, it remains undervalued and unrecognized as "productive" work. Women's work does not count in national accounts because their work at home and in the farm is unremunerated. However, efforts have been exerted by concerned international bodies to redress this situation by devising a formula to accord value to women's unremunerated work and to include this in the System of National Accounts. This will be reflected in a more realistic translation of women's contribution to the economy. But, by encouraging women to increase their participation in the labour market in order to raise their contribution to national development, the problematic of women's multiple roles (productive and reproductive) poses itself on the forefront. It is in this sense that, according to Ms. Sbaity-Kassem, women should be offered flexible hours in the workplace and/or pursue the "Third Choice" approach advocated by ESCWA in adapting working conditions to family needs.

The traditional male/female-labelled roles have been deeply ingrained in the minds of men and women. Women's self-perception and those of men about women and the society at large will only change slowly since social change is imperceptible and does not take place overnight. Multimedia communications play an important role in raising awareness to the changing status of women and for the need to change the negative stereotypical image of women. In addition, school curricula will have to undergo major revision in order to project an improved positive image of women and the dynamic socially-constructed roles and functions they discharge, particularly working mothers. This is when Ms. Sbaity-Kassem cautions: "One cannot move in leaps and big strides. Our steps ought to be small and measured but synchronized. This is when gender equality is attained and gender mainstreaming may be introduced."

Ms. Sbaity-Kassem concludes that what is really needed is a new research agenda on women, gender and the family to assess and monitor progress achieved, identify major hurdles and obstacles and propose action-oriented and realistic policies and measures for the advancement of women and improvement of their status in the society. The findings of future research and information databases should provide the necessary assistance and support and supply the requisite tools to national machineries for women in their efforts towards gender equality, women's empowerment and self-reliance,

and for determining the timely introduction of gender mainstreaming into the programmes and policies at the national level. Sbaity-Kassem stresses the active role women's institutes, research centres and NGOs could play in disseminating information, conducting research and acting as partners in the development process.

As a final message, the Chief of the Women and Development Unit at ESCWA calls upon universities and colleges in West Asia to accord gender studies more importance and to introduce courses on women's studies and gender into their curricula at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

ENDNOTES:

1 The Commission moved from Beirut to Baghdad in June 1982 and from Baghdad to Amman after the Gulf War of 1990-1991 before returning to Beirut in October 1997.

2 Fatima Sbaity-Kassem holds a B.A. in Business Administration (1965) and an M.A. in Development Administration (1970) from the American University of Beirut (AUB). Twenty years later she went back to school and acquired an M.A. in International Economics (1991) and an M.Phil in International Relations/Political Economy (1993) from Columbia University in the City of New York, where she is an 'All But Dissertation' Ph.D Doctoral candidate.

3 UNESOB, the small field office of less than 60 staff members, became in 1974 the fifth and smallest United Nations regional commission, the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA). With the addition of the social component in 1984, ECWA became ESCWA embracing more than 300 staff members.

4 Fatima Sbaity Kassem is the mother of two girls and one boy. Hana (24 years) is an architect from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) USA, currently working in New York. May (22 years) has a BA in International Relations and Art Serniotics (film) from Brown University and is doing graduate work in Script Writing at St. Joseph University in Beirut. Ramzi (19 years) is a Junior at Columbia University in the City of New York double majoring in Economics and Political Science. She has recently lost her husband, Ziad Kassem (55 years), Ph.D Economics, who also worked for the UN at ESCWA for 28 years in different capacities and was the Chief, ESCWA/UNCTAD Joint Unit on Transnational Corporations.

5 These include the six Gulf cooperation Council countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), the Mashrek countries (Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon and Syria), together with Egypt (who is also a member in ECA) and Yemen.

Upcoming in Al-Raida

Arab Countries' Outlook to CEDAW

Oral History of Lebanese Woman

The Agricultural Sector in Lebanon: Analysis and Perspectives

Towfiq Jabir

Al-Markaz al-Lubnani lil Dirasat, Beirut, 1997

Reviewed by D. Neuwirth

This book examines the current state of the agricultural sector in Lebanon. Analysing the Lebanese agricultural sector is a difficult task owing to the lack of statistics. As a result, much of the analysis is based on information which the author had collected from personal discussions with people acquainted with the agricultural sector and on field surveys he himself had carried out. This has helped cover some of the deficiencies though it has prevented him from going into the more intricate details.

In the first part, the book deals briefly with the Lebanese economy as a whole. It covers the geographical distribution of the land farmed, the economic importance of the agricultural sector, the structure of the traded agricultural goods and their composition, and the export markets. It also deals with the agricultural commodities produced and the factors affecting their production, the marketing of agricultural products, the intermediaries involved in the trade of agricultural products, the factors affecting their production, and the timing of crops sales.

The second part deals with government policies and programs on the agricultural sector. With the exception of the provision of infrastructural services as well as an agricultural trading calendar, the Government adopts, on the whole, a policy of non-intervention. However certain large scale programs were adopted in the past, like the Green Project of 1963, some irrigation schemes, as well as guidance and consulting programs. Only recently, has the government started subsidising certain crops like tobacco, sugar beet and wheat to encourage farmers to plant these crops instead of the illegal ones. In 1993, the Government adopted a five-year plan, with partial financing, aimed among other things at improving the net income of farmers, increasing production and improving the markets for agricultural goods markets. Further political and administrative decisions have been made, such as the

construction of ca. 100 km of agricultural roads per year, the reactivation of guiding and consulting services (which ceased in the seventies to be taken over by the importers of fertilisers, pesticides and other similar factors of production), and the filling of vacant positions at the Ministry of Agriculture and related institutions. As for the provision of loans at low interest rates, this was a policy implemented throughout the fifties and sixties but discontinued owing to the lack of funds.

In the third part of the book, the Lebanese agricultural sector is placed within the international perspective, introducing the WTO, the ever rising interest in ecological matters, the changing tastes of consumers world wide, and the different marketing methods in the lucrative export markets. These four points reveal the importance of developing the agricultural sector by taking the new world situation into consideration, particularly when it comes to product exportation. In addition, the competitiveness of the agricultural sector in Lebanon is investigated by examining product quality, macro-economic variables, government intervention, innovation, access to information, geographical location, development of the markets, and the state of the infrastructure and transportation. A good summary of the points of strength and weakness of the Lebanese agricultural sector is provided in tabular form in this section of the book.

The fourth part is a summary of the three previous parts with conclusions and recommendations. It recommends further research in methods of reforming the sector, the necessary political reform, export crops, domestic and export markets, production efficiency, and others. Among the recommendations made to the government are: preserving the overall growth of the economy, advocating the export of agricultural goods (i.e. that production become more export oriented), improving access to loans and to market information, increasing market competition, improving the infrastructure, providing consulting and guidance programs to farmers, bringing together people who are engaged in agriculture and who have similar interests, and encouraging exporters to get together and to co-ordinate their export activities and set quality standards for the goods to be exported. As for the exporters, the author recommends that standards for quality be introduced and be adhered to, brand names be created so that the high quality products could be differentiated in the lucrative international markets, and exporters be represented in the export markets.

Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Women's Groups in the Middle East.

*Edited by : Chatty, Dawn and Annika Rabo.
Oxford Internatianol Publishers Ltd. 1997.
Reviewed by Lina Alameddine*

If you are looking for a light, fictional book that will allow your imagination to meander slowly from chapter to chapter, then perhaps this is not the book for you. Instead, **Organizing Women** offers an in depth exploration of the nature of both formal and informal women's groups in the Middle East. This work aims to reveal the essence of women coming together for a particular cause, whether it is in a formal setting, or simply out of mere social circumstances.

Organizing Women begins with a thorough investigation of the basic reasons for which women's groups in the Middle East have been poorly documented. In general, the Middle East as a region has not been welcoming to any First World women initiated projects. There exists a specific antagonism between the Middle East and the West. The latter "sees men from the Middle East as suppressing and secluding their women and the Middle Easterner underlines the immorality of women in the West." This lack of communication and understanding on both sides has rendered it more difficult for groups in the Middle Eastern region to receive international recognition and funding.

Dawn Chatty, one of the editors of **Organizing Women**, asserts that the purpose of this book is "to explore the multiplicity of issues and constraints that women face when trying to organize themselves in the Middle East." (p.8). The issues touched upon are addressed, analyzed, and interpreted in different ways in each chapter. The contributors of **Organizing Women** make no claim to present a homogenous uniform view on the historical, current, and future possibilities of Middle Eastern women's groups. While each researcher differs in her mode of question and analysis, the contributions emerge as "united in their commitment to present women in the Middle East as active agents." (p.8). Hence, another purpose of this book "is to document case studies from the Middle East showing that despite constraints women do form groups or act collectively for their interests." (p8).

In a culture where women have been perceived first and foremost as wives and mothers, their formation into groups can only be perceived as acceptable when they conform to the social and cultural codes. However, this book attests to the fact that women have been forming into groups despite the constraints of state and culture, and gives us thorough and detailed information of both formal and informal women's groups throughout the Middle Eastern region. It also touches upon the rise and role of NGO's and PVO's, and the quality of female activity within these groups, and from all socio-economic perspectives.

Egypt is a specific example of a country where the contemporary economic order has little need for female participation in the public sphere. As a consequence, women face greater and more powerful opposition and constraints from the State when forming into groups. Furthermore, despite the urgent need for women to organize themselves for their cause, prospects remain limited in face of the law "which restricts the freedom of citizens (male and female), to form independent organizations." (p.164) The law grants the government a controlling hold over establishing, managing, financing, and/or terminating any Private Voluntary Organizations (PVO's), which do not abide by detailed regulations of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In the chapter entitled "Women's Group Formation in Egypt," Shahida El-Baz goes through and analyses all the stifling conditions facing women groups, which range from rural/urban disparities to legal constraints.

The contributors of **Organizing Women** are sensitive and thorough in highlighting many existing differences among the broad social category of Middle Eastern women. One can base these essential differences on religious, political or class affiliation, as well as the unequal access to social, economic, and political opportunities. In addition, the rural-urban disparity is of consequential importance. It is impossible to discuss Middle Eastern women as one homogeneous category, and the contributors of **Organizing Women** have managed to deal with these various differences.

The contributing authors of **Organizing Women** take the reader on an adventurous joy ride through the intricate weaving of female groupings in the Middle Eastern region. Just as you begin to feel comfortable with the situation of female group activity in Oman, you are thrown into the adverse situation of Egyptian women, and soon after that, you are comparing "Female Associational Patterns in Senegal and Morocco". However, despite the variety of themes and issues addressed, **Organizing Women** achieves its central objective of informing the reader of the nature of the relationship between both women and the state, as well as men and the state, and how they, in turn affect women groups.