AL-Raida

Lebanese American University

Al-Raida Volume XVII, No. 88 Winter 2000 *The Pioneer* الرائدة

Arab Women and the Media

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 illetrate 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: al-raida@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.

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 Submissions will not be published if they have been previously published elsewhere.

SUBSCRIPTION

THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FEE FOR *AL-RAIDA* IS US $ 30. SUBSCRIPTIONS BEGIN IN JANUARY AND END IN DECEMBER.

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Editor: Samira Aghacy
Assistant Editor: Myriam Sfeir
Designer: Zouheir Debs

P.O. Box 13-5053/59
Beirut, Lebanon
Telephone: (01) 867-099, ext. 288
Fax: (01) 791-645
e-mail: al-raida@beirut.lau.edu.lb

Editorial

Sara's Husband

Samira Aghacy
Chairperson, Humanities Division, Lebanese American University

I can never forget a tragic incident that occurred when I was fourteen or fifteen years old. I was paying a visit to my aunt when Sara (my aunt's niece), looking pale and anxious, burst in to tell my aunt that her husband who had been released from prison had been threatening to kill her. She said that he kept asking about how she managed to look after the family in his absence and where she got the money from. Strangely enough, my aunt was neither moved by Sara's tears nor by her plea for help. Instead, she flew at her and said: "This is your husband and your duty is to put up with him." The following day Sarah was brutally murdered with a kitchen knife in the presence of her four children who were threatened with the same knife should any one of them dare to open his mouth. Having heard the news, I, a girl of fourteen, felt abused and outraged. The image of my aunt collapsed there and then, and I felt a surge of anger and frustration take hold of me. The "angel in the house" was suddenly transformed into a monster who, in my eyes, was no less guilty than Sara's own husband. As far as my aunt was concerned, marriage was a timeless, unbreakable bond, and no amount of abuse would ever justify a wife's leaving her husband since her duty was to bow to the inevitable and submit to him even at the cost of her own life. Since the murder was considered an "honor crime", the husband was scot-free six months later, and Sarah was forgotten. Even now, after thirty years or so, honor crimes continue to plague our society and give men both the power and the license to do as they please. The society is on the man's side to the extent that he who murders a wife, sister or daughter is often justified for defending the family's honor and purging the community from vice and shame. The life of a woman is simply worthless when the supposed honor of the man and family are involved.

For many years, such crimes went unreported, but today there is a real chance for change. Regardless of obstacles, one cannot overlook the growing importance of the media as a political, economic and social force. Not only have the papers reflected honor crimes, but in many cases, they have influenced the direction society is taking by breaking the walls of silence surrounding physical and sexual abuse and making it a public issue. In many instances, the press have played a major role in challenging the general complacency about our moral values and about the sacred family by breaking the silence on domestic violence and launching awareness campaigns that would help to alleviate women's suffering. Among the major contributions of the press in Lebanon, is the extensive coverage of a conference that was held in Beirut in March 1998 in which women from the Arab and Islamic world recounted their harrowing stories and their suffering at the hands of men. One unforgettable story is the ordeal of a Kurdish woman married to an Iraqi who related how two of her husband's brothers who hated her "held me while a third used a knife to slice my nose off" (**The Daily Star**, March 16, 1998).

In addition to news related to domestic violence, the press have highlighted news of pioneer women who have made contributions to society such as Municipality Member, Roula Ajouz, Beirut Municipality council member; May Kahale, President Haraoui's female press attache; Nimaat Kanaan, Director General of the Ministry of Social Affairs; Nayla Tajer, the first to head the North Lebanon Order of Dentists; and Reem Haddad from the **Daily Star** and Huda Kassatly from the now defunct **L'Orient Express**. The press have also introduced the public to women working in male-dominated environments who have managed to break cultural taboos such as Virginie Asmar, a taxi driver; Marcelle Mhenneh, director of car repairs; and Nidal Aad, a carpenter. The press have also highlighted the problems these women encounter in a conservative, oriental society. When she was elected Municipality Member, Roula Ajouz, tells us that rumors related to her private life began to circulate: "Some claimed I had an illegitimate child." (**The Daily Star**, November 21, 1998). While May Kahale maintains in a Conference on women's role in public life that when "I started my job at the presidential palace I often heard people asking if there was a lack of men in the country for the president to have appointed a female as his press secretary" (**The Daily Star**, November 27, 1997). Many of these women agree that a woman has to work twice as hard as a man to prove that she deserves the job. Men are allowed to make mistakes, but when a woman commits an error they blame it on her sex. Another piece of news covered by the press is the telephone hotline of the Lebanon Family Planning Association that helps thousands of women cope with family and sexual problems and provides expert advice whenever needed.

Scot-Free

In addition to coverage of news, the press have provided information about the laws and other official procedures, and have published statistics provided by the police as well as results of studies on domestic abuse and the physical and psychological effects on women and children. For instance, **Al-Nahar** (September 30, 1997) "breaks the wall of silence" regarding incestuous relations within the family and publishes a sample chart of cases of incest and adultery (1994, 1995) provided by the police. At the same time, the paper gives a list of legal sanctions that could be taken against perpetrators of such crimes. The papers also report details that may help other potential victims avoid attacks or encourage them to resort to legal action against the abuser. One could say that in some cases, the press - together with Women and Human Rights Organizations - have succeeded in pressuring the government to amend laws and pass new ones that give women human dignity and justice as well as visibility and prominence. In other words, one could go as far as to say that the mass media have not only managed to be a mirror, but in many instances, a major force behind change.

In addition to objective reportage, the press have gone as far as adopting and appropriating particular issues such as the one related to housemaids in Lebanon, be they foreign or native. Reem Haddad is a reporter for **The Daily Star** who has pursued the case of Sri Lanki maids in Lebanon and has recently received an award from the Sri Lanki government for her diligence and care. **Mulhaq Al-Nahar** (June 21, 1997) had a lengthy report on the state of Sri Lankan housekeepers in Lebanon. One example is the reaction of the parents of a young man who was accused by the housemaid of attempting to rape her. His parents dismissed the complaint as ridiculous since "it is impossible that he should do that with a Sri lanki." This extensive coverage in the press has succeeded in putting pressure on the government not only to make sure that the law is implemented, but also to amend other laws related to foreign laborers in Lebanon.

In fact, the media stirred public outrage regarding child labor in Lebanon following the ordeal of a ten-year old housemaid. MP Nayla Mouawad, head of Parliament's Children's Rights Committee, called on the government to pass a law banning employment of children under fourteen. The Lebanese Women's Council outlined recommendations to protect juveniles, and the Lebanese Union for the Protection of the Child urged the government to provide free education for all children and to raise public awareness through the media.

Despite the contribution of the press in raising awareness and pressuring the government to take action, one notes the disproportionate treatment of issues related to women in comparison with other topics. If there is a clear majority of women on Lebanese televisions where emphasis is placed on beauty and appearance, it is a completely different situation in the written media where men dominate the scene. This was a major topic of the Regional Conference on Gender and Communication organized by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in association with the World Association for Christian Communication in November 1999. One speaker, May Elian, a reporter with **Nahar Al-Shabab**, was quoted as saying that "'editors, political and economic writers are usually men, whereas women are given the "softer," less serious, fields of culture, society and environment'" (**The Daily Star**, November 13, 1999).

No wonder the press have not given women's problems the consideration they deserve. Although victims may be in the spotlight for some time, the reasons leading to their victimization are not covered since the press is monopolized by men, and accordingly, politics remains the major subject of coverage and interest. Therefore, the present definition of news should be expanded to include more coverage of women's social, political, and intellectual activities locally, nationally and internationally. Women's problems as well as contributions should not be used as fillers in certain sections or back pages of a newspaper or magazine, and the media should make special, sustained efforts to seek out and promote news related to women. What is required is not one article on women's problems once in a blue moon, but rather a continuous interest in women's issues and general awareness campaigns that would promote women's contributions at all levels.

Silence ...
and Worse Silence to Come...

By Abir Hamdar
Journalist

It all happened a year ago, or maybe it was just three months ago ... yesterday...today or even tomorrow. I do not remember ... Perhaps I just don't want to remember.

The newspaper I worked for asked me to write an article on female sexual abuse in Beirut. I was ecstatic. I've always loved investigative articles...probing into causes, effects ... facts, explanations ... I've always been so naive.

I rushed to a police station. One situated in the heart of Beirut, and where nothing escaped its notice. The best way to learn the truth is to go through police records. To talk to those who really know what's going on ... or do they?

The officer was extremely cooperative. He invited me into his grand office. He offered me coffee ... I do not drink coffee. "It's our duty to put a stop to these abuses," he boasted. "It's our duty to warn others," he insisted ... He brought me tea. "What an excellent article it'll be", he exclaimed...He offered me biscuits.

I asked to see the official records. The officer said there's no use seeing them ... the phenomenon has long been curbed....there are only a limited number of cases ... "Women have changed," he repeated, "they deal with abuses themselves"... I drank the tea ... we talked about the weather ... we became friends.

Again I asked to see the official records...again the officer said it was no use checking them. He admitted I shouldn't rely on them ... the numbers weren't reliable ... weren't accurate really.

"You know how things are", the officer said ... I didn't know. "You understand we just can't report everything"... I didn't understand. "You should see how vital secrecy is!" ... I didn't see ... So the officer let me know... he let me see ... he let me understand.

The officer said victims were advised to remain silent ... to forget the incident ever happened ... to refrain from filing a suit. After all, it was such a long and complicated procedure. The interrogations ... incriminations ... the press learning about it ... journalists not sparing the tiniest detail. And the name of the family ... the victim's reputation in the mud ... Yes, victims were definitely advised to remain silent. To wake up the following day and forget there was ever a day before.

Of course that didn't mean the aggressor escaped unscathed. "We give him a severe scolding," explained the officer.... "We even beat him," he said proudly. And of course, the officer couldn't prevent some cases from being reported...what could one do when a victim insisted... "except let her face the consequences of her decision", he said regretfully.

We shook hands...I thanked the officer for being so cooperative. He said he was only doing his job. He offered me more biscuits... he insisted I take one more...we shook hands again. At the door he urged me to continue writing such excellent articles.

I told my friend everything.... I raved, I ranted, I swore. My friend nodded his head, arched his eyebrows, and smiled every now and then. He also said I was over reacting... I was too sensitive... I needed a psychotherapist.

I went on complaining. My friend went on trying to convince me the incident wasn't worth the anger... the pain. I cursed the world...society... discrimination. I cursed them all. My friend admired the officer... his sound advice to victims...his insight into our society. He admired everything. "You're too young to understand the ways of the world," my friend said over and over again.

My friend also said he wouldn't want his sister to drag such a shameful affair to the police. The knowledge would destroy his family name...it would make him lose his mind.... Wouldn't even be able to face his sister. Wasn't it best to spare them all ...to spare their peace of mind. Yes, wasn't it best to remain silent?

I didn't persue my investigation. I didn't seek other organizations. I didn't check other records. I didn't write the article. Really there wasn't much to write about...Just a number of unreliable records... an officer with a sound advice and a bunch of friends who thought it was best to keep silent... who urged me to keep silent....so I keep silent. So silent I forget the sound of sound. But that is not all.

Sometimes when I am in a crowded place, I hear total silence. I see lips moving, hands rotating, expressions changing.... I hear no sound. So I scream. I scream so hard, I scream so loud. I scream until I hurt my vocal cords, my lungs, my chest...yet I cannot break the silence...I am too weak to break a history of silence and a future of worse

Recent Publications

Afshar, Haleh. Islam and Feminism: An Iranian Case-Study. New York: St. Martin's Press. 1998
Baker, Alison. Voices of Resistance: Oral Histories of Moroccan Women. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998.
Danielson, Virginia. The Voice of Egypt: Umm Kulthum, Arab Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.
Roded, Ruth (ed.). Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999
Tucker, Judith E. In the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
Wilcon, Lynn. Women and the Holy Quran. California: M.T.O Shahmaghsoudi, 1998.
Zimmermann, Susan M. Silicone Survivors: Women Experiences with Breast Implants. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998.

Conferences

The University of New Engalnd/Westbrook College Campus is holding an interdisciplinary conference entitled "Women's Private Writing/Writing Women's History" from 15-18 of June 2000. The Keynote speaker will be Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Harvard University. For further information visit the conference web-site at http://www.une.edu/library/mwwc/conference.htm

Queen Arwa University in collaboration with the Consultative Council, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education will hold, from May 16-18, a conference on non-governmental higher education in Sana'a, Yemen. Topics covered will include building capacities for higher education; policies, curricula, scientific research and performance evaluation.

Awards

Feminist Studies will be granting, on a yearly basis, a graduate student prize namely the Feminist Studies Award. This award will honor the best essay submitted throughout the year to the journal by a graduate student. The award will enable one both to encourage and learn from a new generation of feminist scholars.

Graduate students researching any aspect of feminist scholarship are invited to submit a paper. All papers received will be judged by our editorial board who will announce the winner in January 2001. The winner will have his/her essay published in **Feminist Studies** and will be awarded a prize of $ 500. The submission guidlines are the following: the paper should be maximum 35 double-spaced pages (including footnotes). Three copies ought to be sent along with a cover letter indicating graduate affiliation by school, department, and the expected date of completion.

For more information visit the women's studies home page at the University of Maryland.

Call for Proposals

On October 23, 1850 The First National Woman's Rights Convention was held in Worcester, Massachusetts. Women 2000 is a call for action to continue the dialogue begun in 1850. It aims to provide a forum for discussion on the present status of women and hopes to explore future challenges and opportunities. The conference will address the areas of women's education, employment, government/politics, and health/relationships. All those interested in presenting a paper should send a brief biography along with a one-page proposal with objectives.

Send to:
Nancy Kane
Worcester Women's History Project
One Salem Square
Worcester, MA 01608
or email wwhp@famtree.com

Films

"Umm Kulthum, A Voice Like Egypt": This documentary directed by Michal Goldman and narrated by Omar Sharif recounts the story of Umm Kulthum the most prominent and well respected Arab female vocalist of all times. The film traces her rise to stardom where she became not only a symbol of the aspirations of her country but of the entire Arab world. It also explores her astonishing connection with her audience who adored her. Four million people attended her funeral in 1975.

"**On the Edge of Peace**": In this ground-breaking Israeli-Palestinian co-production, three Palestinians and three Israelis were given video cameras to document their lives and the lives of their communities during the turbulent first year of the Israeli-Palestinian peace accord, from the signing of the accords in Washington to Arafat's arrival in Gaza.

"When we started the century women couldn't vote; we're ending it with every politician concerned about the gender gap. Women used to be excluded from huge numbers of jobs; now virtually all jobs are done by some women." (Ellen Bravo, Ms. Magazine December 1999/January 2000)

"I think the very restrictions which were put on woman which made her emphasize the personal world caused something very good to be born. Whereas men dealt in terms of nations, in terms of statistics, abstract ideology, woman, because her world was restricted to the personal, was more human. Now that she is beginning to step beyond her confines, I hope she can bring to the world the sense of the personal value of human beings, some empathy and some sympathy." (Anais Nin, A Woman Speaks)

"Sexist advertisements are the norm with industry and advertising agencies who reap huge profits at the expense of women. A sexist advertisement is one that depicts half of the human race as inferior; it is discriminatory, it degrades and humiliates one sex in relation to the other. This form of advertising has become an important tool in the perpetuation of male western culture, and it exploits women's sexuality and their physical appearance ... Local media appear to be no different. Time and again, in our advertisements, women are depicted as vain and seductive, as sex commodities, dull-witted, in constant need of approval (almost always by men) and ultimately best left in the home or kitchen." (Women and Media: Analysis, Alternatives and Action, p.31)

"Women are resentful of the exploitative use of the female body in advertising. They feel that the use of the female body as a mere decoration or as an attention-getting device diminishes women's self esteem and ignores other aspects of women's personality and their human potential." (Mass Media: The Image, Role, and Social Conditions of Women, p. 9)

Stereotyped attitudes expressed in statements by men talking about women media workers:

"I had a few women reporters, but all of them were awful! Women have no initiative. They are slow, have no sharpness. They don't fit into journalism and , particularly in politics, they are terrible." [Radio Manager]

" I don't know a single [woman photographer] who is capable. They are timid, uninformed about the event to be covered. When I assign them to cover police, political incidents, and similar events, they ask 'for the love of God' not to be sent, and will do anything to exchange the task with a male colleague, saying that 'these are subjects for men and not for ladies'." [Newspaper editor]

"I don't like to work with women in radio. They are quite irresponsible. They don't come to work regularly, and don't finish their tasks. They are unpopular with the listeners, particularly the women ... I have two daughters working with me. They tried the radio, but didn't succeed. Today, both are doing administrative work and doing it well ... It seems to me that their boyfriends dislike the whole thing and I believe both will leave the organization." [Director of Radio Station]

"Radio is for men, because women have problems with working hours and radio is on twenty-four hours a day. They won't accept unpredictable working hours. They only want to do programs for women ... And they do it so badly that they go home in the evenings with no regret. They have no persistence; they give up easily ... it is a pity ." [Radio Announcer]

"When most of my women students enroll in the university they already have the idea that women are talented only in the areas of health, children, social events cooking and such matters ... Only exceptionally are they interested in economics, politics and so on. They say they are uninformed about these subjects ... Some believe that such subjects are for men, and they even add 'for old men." [Journalism teacher]

"Women are good in the domestic sphere - taking care of the house, children, husband, the family, the home. When they leave this area, they become 'difficult' and normally forget their major responsibility: the home." [Newspaper reader]

"I've found women quite timid. There was one who came by after three weeks' work, and told me: 'The subject [international politics] is difficult and dangerous; it's not for me. I am a woman with children and a family to care for. This editorial may cost me my life and I'm too young to die.' After that she took over the social column. Today she is one of the most sought-after journalists by the political and institutional jet set of Quito ... It was a pity, because she was such a wonderful writer!" [Newspaper editor, international politics]
(Women and Decision Making: The Invisible Barriers, 1987)

From Jordan

The National Jordanian campaign to eliminate 'Crimes of Honor' reported that two married Jordanian women were killed in two seperate crimes of honor last week. The first aged 40 had just completed her three month prison sentence. She was charged with adultery. Upon arriving from prison to her village she was shot by her father and was killed instantly. The other woman aged 21 was murdered by her brother who was suspicious that she was having an illegitimate affair. Rana Husseini, head of the campaign to eliminate crimes of honor, asserted that the number of women murdered has risen to 7 this year. Officail statistics show that 20 women are killed in Jordan each year to cleanse the honor of the family. Even though Jordanians are demonstrating and protesting to amend and abolish article 340 of the Jordanian penal code, the majority of deputies at the lower house of Parliament have voted against it. Despite this fact, the momentum for change is growing with the increasing pressure both nationally and internationally to withdraw such a law. Human rights activists and campaigners have recently managed to collect 15,000 signatures to a petition in which citizens request the abolishment of such a law.
(An-Nahar Newspaper, Tuesday April 25, 2000)

From Lebanon

The Lebanese Committee for Peace and Freedom organized a sit-in on February 28, 2000 to protest against the Israeli aggression on Lebanon. During the sit-in the members and their president Mrs. Anissa Najjar submitted an appeal to the UN Security Council to take the necessary measures to make Israel comply with the security council resolution 425.
The sit-in was a success nationally and internationally. Both Bruna Nota, International President of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and Edith Ballantyne, convenor of the WILPF standing Committee on the Middle East special adviser on United Nations matters sent letters in support of the sit-in.

From Egypt

A Date with History

1800: women demonstrate in Rosetta, demanding the right to use public baths and better treatment from their husbands.
1873: opening the first primary school for girls.
1893: release of the first women's magazine in Egypt, Al-Fatat.
1899: Qassem Amin publishes *Tahrir Al-Mar'a* (Women's Liberation).
1901: Qassem Amin publishes *Al-Mar'a Al-Gadida* (New Woman).
1911: Malal Hefni Nassef puts forward ten demands to Parliament. All are rejected.
1914: establishment of the Women's Teaching Union.
16 March 1919: five hundred women protest in the streets against British occupation.
1920: opening of the first secondary school for girls. Twenty-three girls are enrolled at the Shubra Secondary School in its first year.
1923: Huda Sha'rawi and Ceza Nabarawi lift their veils as a symbol of women's emancipation. The incident is replicated throughout the country.
16 March 1923: Huda Sha'rawi and other women establish the Egyptian Feminist Union demanding rights as equal citizens, women's rights to education, the right to vote, and reform of the Personal Status Law.
1924: a new chapter is issued, stating the right to free primary education for both boys and girls.
1925: Ceza Nanarawi and Huda Sha'rawi publish L'Egyptienne in Arabic.
1938: The Middle East Women's Conference is held in Egypt.
1944: The Arab Women's Union is established, under the leadership of Huda Sha'rawi.
1947: Huda Sha'rawi dies.
1951: Members of Doria Shafiq's Bint Al-Nil organization stage a sit-in in front of the parliament, calling for women's political representation.
1953: Dissolution of all political parties
1956: The new constitution enshrines women's right to vote and to run for election.
1957: The first woman enters parliament.
1961: Free university education announced.
1962: Hekmat Abu Zeid becomes Egypt's first female minister (of social affairs).
1979: A new election law assigns a 30 seat quota for women in the parliament.
1979: The Local Administration Law is reformed to include a 10-20 per cent quota for women.
1980: Of the 210 members in the new Shura Council, seven are women.
1979-80: The Personal Status Law is reformed, with some gains in women's rights.
1985: The High Constitutional Court rules on the unconstitutionality of the reformed Personal Status Law.
Dissolution of the new law's most important gains.
(Source: Arab World Books in the News March 16, 2000)

Regional Conference
Gender and Communication Policy

A five day regional conference on "Gender and Communication Policy" in the Middle East and North Africa was jointly organized in Beirut, by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World. Thirty participants from eight countries attended the conference. The discussions focused on media and media policy in the Middle East, media contest and violence, women's representation in the media, globalization of the media, and strategies for change.

Conference participants

Julienne Munyaneza (WACC) and Mona Khalaf (IWSAW)

Participants with WACC representatives and Mona Khalaf

Seminar
Making Women's Rights a Reality:The Lebanese Case

"Making Women's Rights a Reality: The Lebanese Case" is the title of a two day seminar organized by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and Amnesty International. During the seminar Arab experts, from Bahrain, Egypt, and Lebanon, along with 30 representatives of non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations discussed several themes namely crimes of honor, optional civil marriage, Lebanese labor law, and the situation of women in Lebanese prison.

Lebanese participants with Amnesty International representatives

IWSAW Director Mona Khalaf and Dr. Nabeel Haidar Vice-President for Academic Affairs, LAU

Nada Moghaizel-Nasr infront of her mother's picture Laure Moghaizel

International Women's Day Photo Exhibit (Women Pioneers) March 6-20, 2000

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut Campus held a photo exhibit in commemoration of women pioneers in Lebanon. The exhibit included seventy black and white photographs of fifty-five women. These women have played an important role in cultural, social, political, scientific, as well as artistic domains. The exhibit is the first phase of a project "Our Feminine Memory" which the Institute is undertaking and plans to complete by the end of year 2000.

Nadine Becdache posing next to the photo of her mother Janine Rubeiz

Lama and Anbara Salam looking at the picture of their aunt and grand mother

Ibtihaj Kaddoura, Zahiah Salman, Rose Kettaneh, and Laure Tabet during a women's conference in Uzbekistan

Aliya Zaouk among her colleagues in the Child Welfare Association in Tripoli during the late 1940's.

Arab Women and the Media

By Samira Aghacy

> Society does everything it can to drum into her head the fact that she is only a body, and that special care must be taken of everything that concerns this purely physical shell. Newspapers, magazines and advertisements, when addressing themselves to woman, speak to her as flesh covered by a layer of skin that requires constant massaging with different kinds of creams, and as lips that have to be painted an appropriate hue. (Nawal El-Saadawi, p. 75)

Despite changes emerging in contemporary society regarding women's role and contributions, the images of women represented in the media have not reflected these changes sufficiently enough. Women have generally been presented within the restrictive mold of domesticity and subservience reinforcing traditional roles and behaviors where a woman is defined in relation to men who see her within the framework of marital, maternal and sexual roles.

In varying degrees, the media present a highly stereotypical image of women and fail to give priority to women's issues. Television programs, for instance, emphasize the rigid image of woman as decorative object and as a domesticated and passive being dependent on man for financial and emotional support. It reiterates and sustains the prevailing sex-role division as both fitting and logical.

In newspapers and magazines, the items commanding the woman's pages are food, society news, entertainment, parties and fashion which are perceived as women's chief and principal interests. The traditional concepts of news do not include women as active participants and effective forces in society. In the media, particularly in television news, only female public figures and victims are portrayed.

Nevertheless, being female has recently become an asset in the hiring though not in the promotion of women since higher positions remain an exclusively male domain. If the feminization of various sectors of the media have not ensured non-stereotyped treatment of women, the increasing number of females in the media will, at least, provide a better chance for the eventual emergence of new images of women.

Because of the alignment of authority with masculinity, women's access to the top functions in the media is hampered, causing them to remain mere subordinates with very little power. This why the need arises for making those in control of the media aware of the need for a balanced work force that includes both sexes.

The time has come for the media to adopt a more active role of creator rather than reflector of culture by challenging and interrogating traditional sex roles and portraying women in a wide variety of roles rather than within the constraints of limited male-imposed roles.

The file in this issue includes the proceedings of the regional conference on "Gender and Communication Policy" in the Middle East and North Africa which was jointly organized in Beirut by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and which took place at the Lebanese American University (November 9 - November 12, 1999). Owing to space restrictions, we have selected only a limited number of papers. The remaining papers, however, are published in summary. Among the papers included are: Teresita Hermano's presentation on the formulation of gender-sensitive communication policy; Mariz Tadros' paper on the reporting of rape in the Egyptian press; Dima Dabbous-Sensenig's work on Lebanese viewers and repercussions of their exposure to dual messages, Lebanese and Western; Magda Abu Fadil's paper on the globalization of the media; May Elian's paper which provides statistics on the hiring of males and females in the Lebanese media; Maria del Nevo's report on the international day of monitoring the representation of women on TV, radio and in newspapers which took place on February 1, 2000; and stereotypical representations of women in United Arab Emirates Mass Media by Amina Khamiz Al-Dhaheri. The file also includes an unpublished thesis "Family Relations and Physical Encounters in Arab Soap Operas" by Dina Toufic Hakim. This issue of **Al-Raida** also includes a special feature "Asmahan's Secrets: Art, Gender and Cultural Diputations" by Sherifa Zuhur on the life and achievements of Asmahan, the Syrian/Egyptian actress and singer, and two book reviews by Lynn Maalouf.

Family Relations and Physical Encounters in Arab Soap Operas

By Dina Toufic Hakim, Assistant Deputy Manager, Al-Mawarid Bank

Soap operas, whose viewers have been on the rise globally, are potentially a major force in the transmission of values and lifestyles and sexual information to young viewers. The purpose of this article is to introduce the reader to the content of Arab soap operas in terms of family ties and physical encounter. It examines the themes of various Lebanese, Syrian, and Egyptian soaps and describes the differences, if any, in the portrayal of the three sub-societies. Soaps as entertaining or educating, as well as dealing with political events or with the livelihood of the average citizen will be examined thoroughly. Finally, special reference will be made to the case of Lebanese soaps, which portray different images of family ties, and sexual encounter than other Arab soaps.

Methodology

A. Sample Selection

For the purpose of this study, nine soap operas produced in three Arab countries (Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria) were monitored, in such a way that three different soaps were chosen from each country. The soap operas selected highlight issues and problems related to the present era. They address problems of change and development in the Arab world, and more specifically they deal with and address youth in the social (family relations, interpersonal relations…), cultural, and economic contexts.

The main criterion for choosing the above soaps is their popularity among the Lebanese audience (STAT IPSOS, 1996). The analysis of the programs will, hopefully, provide a meaningful picture, particularly of youth in the Arab world. The analysis of soaps from three different Arab countries will also identify differences, if any, in the portrayal of youth within each Arab country. The study of these soaps will, hopefully, provide an image of the nature of the messages that the Lebanese viewer is receiving, and the values that he/she is acquiring.

Two general categories were used as points of comparison: family relationships and physical encounters among young people. The coding emphasized youth in relation to their parents and other relatives and described their sexual attitudes and behaviors. Each category was divided into several variables. Physical encounter was defined as the physical appearance of youth (dress, hair, shoes, make-up, and accessories) while social proximity referred to the state of being physically distant or close or indulging in sexual activity. Sexual behavior, on the other hand, includes eye contact, holding hands, kissing, necking or touching and making love.

In order to have a comprehensive picture and a full understanding of the patterns of family relations and physical encounters among groups portrayed by the Arab soap operas, I had to rely on several sources of information. Though few Lebanese journalists have analyzed the content of Arab soap operas presented on the Lebanese screens, some have tackled the issue of the increasing popularity of soap operas in Lebanon. Therefore, I benefited from relevant newspapers, periodicals and other magazine clippings, which refer to the popularity of soap operas. To expand my understanding of the issue, I interviewed a number of journalists and recorded their personal views on Arab soap operas presented on the Lebanese screens.

Though only few references to such collected data was made here, I cannot deny the importance of such information in allowing me to widen the scope of my work. These clippings and short interviews also informed me about the differences in the content within Lebanese soap operas. As Lofland and Lofland write: "conscientious naturalistic investigators not only scan the immediate data site for words and actions but are also sensitive to the possible value of a wide range of supplementary information that may come their way." (1995:13)

Finally, STAT IPSOS provided statistical information on audience viewership of soap operas in Lebanon. Thus, quantitative analysis provided the necessary information of frequency counts which, when triangulated with interviews, newspaper clippings and statistical information from statistical companies in Lebanon, yielded interesting results for the present study.

Findings

A. Youth and Family Relations among the Arab Soaps.

The topic of family relations does not receive the same degree of emphasis in the soap operas examined since it is

portrayed differently in different Arab countries. Among the three types studied, Syrian soaps emphasized the Arab family including family ties, structures, and relations among its members. In 53.6% of the Syrian scenes examined-as compared to 31.6% and 34.2% of the Lebanese and Egyptian scenes respectively- family life is the basic theme.

The characters live in a family and their joy and sorrow take place within that all-embracing structure. In the Syrian soaps, most of the daily activities take place within the family setting and more specifically at the father's home; two or three adult sons continue to live under his roof along with their own families. All live there even though they have the means to establish their own homes. It could of course be argued that this is just convenient and economical plotting which allows the characters to meet regularly without overstraining the audience's credulity. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that this emphasis on the family/home is not the rationale for action chosen by the Lebanese soaps.

In the Lebanese soaps, though 31.6% of the scenes describe interactions among the family members, the setting is not necessarily the father's home or the private sphere. For instance, in *Al Assifa Tahubbu Marratein* (Lebanese soap), whenever Mayssa wants to talk to her father -Nader- she goes to his office because she believes that it is the only place where she can discuss personal issues without interruptions. Moreover, in *Nissa fi Al Assifa*, (Lebanese soap) the daughter and the mother meet more than once in a café or restaurant to discuss personal matters; a similar scene has never been encountered in any of the Syrian soaps.

In the Egyptian soaps, family members, especially parents and children, are more likely to meet at home, yet, sisters and brothers, or relatives within the same age group often meet in a public place. For instance, in *Al Mal Wal Banoun*, Susanne meets her brother Ibrahim every day in the afternoon at the club, *Al-Nadi*. In the Egyptian soaps, *Al-Nadi* is an important place, which in addition to being an indicator of social status, is a meaningful place for the youth which symbolizes freedom, independence, and escape from the parents' authority.

The qualitative analysis of the soaps yielded a description of the general pattern of relations within the family, as well as variations of that pattern by gender, age, religious affiliation, and degree of closeness to the nuclear family first and then the extended one. The relations among the members depend mainly on the sex of the person: the male is often more respected than the female being the decision-maker, and the main authority in the family.

Al-Jawareh

In the Syrian soaps, more specifically in *Al-Jawareh*, the father, Abu Iquab is depicted as a highly moral character, well-known in the neighborhood for his goodness and piety. He is described as a true believer and as truly generous. Yet, he imposes his authority on his wife as well as his children. The children believe that their duty is to love, obey, and respect

Al-Thurrayya

their parents. All the family is centered on an authoritarian father who sets the rules of conduct and behavior for all the members of the family. A similar relationship is portrayed in Naguib Mahfouz's famous trilogy depicting life in the family of Ahmed Abd al-Jawwad between the two world wars:

> when the father departed on a business trip, a strange atmosphere of release and relaxation enveloped the household... Each member began to think about how he or she might be able to spend this wonderful day, a day of freedom from the ever-present, ever-watchful eyes of the father (Barakat, 1985: 101).

The father should always be obeyed, regardless of the son or daughter's age. For example, Abu Iquab punished his son Iquab who refused to go to war by rejecting him as a son, and forbidding him from seeing his mother, sisters and brothers. Furthermore, Iquab lost his right to inheritance and was despised by the people in his neighborhood. Similarly, in *Al-Thurrayya* (Syrian soap), Thurrayya was kicked out of the house and considered a shame to the family because she married against her parents' will. As the daughter in *Khan Al Harir* argued:

> In our house you go along with parental decisions or you are punished-it is as simple as that. I have one brother who was a rebel, and my father would beat him. My mother usually goes along with whatever my father says because I think she is scared of him, too (*Khan Al Harir*, episode 3: scene 17).

> When I bring up a subject that is "taboo," and we are around other people, my mother gives me the cold stare as though she would deny it. When we are engaged in a one-on-one conversation, she ignores me or changes the subject. We've never talked about these rules or topics directly. I doubt we ever will (*Khan Al Harir*, episode 2: scene 21).

In the Lebanese soaps, the case is completely different. The Lebanese father is not a traditional, oriental and conservative figure. The relation between the father and the children is very flexible: the father is considered more of a friend than a form of authority. There is a two-way communication between the father and the children, and obeying him is desirable but not obligatory. In other words, if any of the parents is disobeyed, the punishment is simple and most of the time it is disregarded. In *Al-Assifa*, Nader (the father), loves his only daughter, Mayssa, a great deal. He never shouts at her; she is free to do whatever she wants and does not have to abide by any rule of conduct or behavior.

In *Nissa Fi Al Assifa*, the father as an authoritative figure has virtually no role. Even though he has children, he is referred to as Nahla's husband, and appears only occasionally in the episodes. In *Ramad Wa Meleh*, Najem refers occasionally to his son Mazen who lives abroad, but in no way is the family centered on the father.

It seems that fathers and children have different preoccupations. They both prefer to spend time with friends, away from home, and thus, they rarely interact. However this lack of interaction is not deliberate. In other words, one might think that children consciously and willingly avoid the father because they hate him or are afraid of him (the traditional and oriental mentality depicts the 'father' as an authoritarian character who is always feared and constantly obeyed). In *Al-Assifa*, whenever present, the father is an equal person to his children; he is portrayed as a friend rather than an authoritarian person. The young son or daughter behaves freely in the presence of the father, expresses openly his/her opinion and shouts at the father whenever angry or in disagreement.

Moreover, the findings revealed that from the Lebanese scenes which show family ties, only 16.0% portray child-parent relations. The percentage is almost the same in the Egyptian scenes (16.2%). However, in the Syrian scenes, 23.1% show a child-parent relation. Even though the Lebanese and the Egyptian scenes show almost similar percentages, the qualitative analysis yields somehow different descriptions. In the Lebanese soaps, the interaction between the parents and the children is not really meaningful. In other words, the subjects of discussion are general, superficial, and usually not oriented at any problem solving. The needs of the children are too often addressed at a superficial level or are altogether ignored. The infrequent appearance of children is generally arranged so as to stimulate discussion and evaluation of one's husband/wife or lover/lover relationship. Even though the type of communication is two-way, the content is banal. Mayssa, in *Al-Assifa*, for example, goes to her father's office to discuss the possibility of hiring a second driver because the first one does not have enough time for her and for her mother!

In the Egyptian soap operas, the family serves up a menu of child-centered problems. Growing up, getting along, learning to cope, as well as the parents' response to those problems are a major preoccupation in Egyptian soaps. The soaps touch sensitive areas of sexual repression and frustration; they have the function of bringing to the fore what has been repressed in the name of the family, and allowing the expression of the needs and desires of its members which are normally considered inimical to the family's continuance.


Al Assifa Tahubbu Marratein

If we look at the overall total, the findings reveal that, in terms of family ties, the modal type of relations is the child-parent (19.0%), while the child-child relations is infrequent (5.4%). The child-older relative occurs in 12% of the scenes and 3.4% for the child-other relative relations. Clearly, it appears that the soaps are centered on nuclear rather than extended families.

Yet, if we compare the three types of Arab soaps in terms of relations outside the nuclear family, the findings show that the Syrian soaps have the highest percentage of relations with relatives: 27.5% to the Syrian soaps as compared to 8.3% and 11.7% to the Lebanese and Egyptian scenes respectively. Unlike the others, the Syrian soaps continue to portray extended families. Moreover, the members of the extended family have a structural and organizational effect on the household, that is, an ideological and functional impact. In *Al- Jawareh*, the grandfather *Al-Hajj*, the *aamam* (paternal uncles), the *khwal* (maternal uncles), and the *abnaa 'amm* (father's brothers' sons) all live in the same household. *Al-Hajj*, the oldest male in the extended kin group, is the ultimate authority and is responsible legally and financially for the women and children. He is not only the most respected male of the household but is its chief decision-maker and de facto head. Relatives remain closely interlocked in a web of vertical relationships that leaves limited room for independence and privacy. This arrangement in the kin household renders family members symbiotically interdependent.

Finally, if we consider all the Arab soaps examined, 60.4%

of the scenes do not portray family settings or relationships among family members. The highest percentage, which does not portray family relations, is in the Lebanese soaps. Although soap operas (especially Arab ones) pay homage to the family as an institution, the familial relationship does not appear to be the most crucial. It seems that the soap operas analyzed, especially the Lebanese ones, contrary to expectations, have different themes to discuss, and the subject of the family is not one of the most insisting and important issues in Lebanese soap operas.

Lan Aich Fi Gilbab Abi

B. Youth and Physical Encounters among the Arab Soaps

Lebanese soaps, as compared to the Syrian and Egyptian soaps, portray liberal physical behaviors and attitudes. Physical encounters include three variables: physical appearance and type of dress, type of social proximity, and type of sexual activity.

1. Physical Appearance in Arab Soap Operas

Having analyzed the dress of the female characters, the findings revealed that 62.2% of the women in the Syrian soaps were veiled. 34.0% of the women in the Syrian soaps wore conservative clothes: long and large skirt with long sleeved shirt, and thick black socks noticed only when the woman sat down. Moreover, not a single scene portrayed the Syrian woman in a liberal or modern type of dress. Only 3.8% (11 cases out of 291) wore a moderate dress (skirt below the knees, and shirts with short sleeves,). 'Liberal' or modern dress is when women wear tight pants, short (not mini) skirt, and high heels.

Ramad Wa Meleh

In the Lebanese soaps, the case is different. 14.7% of the women were depicted in a very liberal dress. The 'very liberal dress' is considered whenever women were seen in a swimming suit or wearing a tight mini skirt, with a tight shirt or with no sleeves at all. Moreover, 29.7% of the Lebanese women were portrayed in a liberal type of dress.

Physical appearance seems to be very important in the Lebanese soaps. Most of the young female characters encountered are slim and tall. In *Nissa fi Al Assifa*, Nahla, the heroine, is considered to have a beautiful and sexy body. In *Ramad Wa Meleh*, Madeleine, who has a leading role, was in the real world (outside the soap operas' world) Miss Lebanon 1998. The findings also revealed the presence of veiled women in Lebanese soaps. Even though the percentage of the veiled in the Lebanese soaps is very low (1.0%) - as compared to 62.2% and 22.6% in the Syrian and Egyptian soaps respectively-it is worth mentioning since it seems at odds with the high percentage of 'very liberal' and 'liberal' types of dress mentioned earlier. Yet, the qualitative analysis seems to justify this contradiction. In episode no. 128 of *Al -Assifa*, the three veiled women encountered had minor and insignificant roles. That is, one of the veiled women was the driver's wife, and the two others were her sisters. They appeared in one single scene, without mention of their names since they had no meaningful role to play.

Though the veiled women accounted for only 6.0% in the Egyptian soaps, they had a more significant role to play. The veiled women, in *Zilal Al Madi* (Egyptian soap), were the grandmother, Hajje Nafise, and her daughter. They appeared only occasionally, but were two of the most respected characters in the soap. They represented the wise women who give advice to women and solutions to their marital problems.

In the Egyptian scenes, 48.6% of the women wore conservative dress, and 35.9% were moderate in the way they dressed. Yet, a single case (0.4%) had a very liberal type of dress. In *Lan Aich Fi Gilbab Abi* (Egyptian soap), Rosaline, the son's wife who was living in the United States, wore a swimming suit in five consecutive scenes in episode 12. However, it is important to note that Rosaline, in episode 27, converted into Islam, changed her name to Amina, and started wearing conservative clothes. We may thus infer that future scenes portraying the same characters with a conser-

vative dress negate the very few scenes portraying characters with a very liberal type of dress.

2. Social Proximity in Arab Soaps

The difference in social proximity, which measures the physical distance between male/female characters, is meaningful in the soap operas analyzed. If we look at the overall total, 47.1% of the characters are physically close (18 inches to 4 feet) while only 39.4% are distant (4 to 10 feet). The findings show that in 65.1% of the Egyptian scenes analyzed, the characters are physically close, as compared to 37.1% and 40.2% in the Lebanese and Syrian scenes respectively. In other words, the characters in the Egyptian soaps cross each other's spaces, and intermingle in a zone of personal transaction. Ritualized touch is typical among them, and usually the other person is at arm's length, available to be grasped, held, or shoved away.

Though the Lebanese and the Syrian soaps appear to be similar since the characters seem to be in the same zone of impersonal transaction, they differ. Parallel to 33.9% as physically distant, 17.6% of the Lebanese characters are intimately close whereas only 2.1% of the Syrian characters are intimately close parallel to 57.7% distant. The intimate distance is usually the distance of playful wrestling and lovemaking. It is the voluntary selected gap between people who are drawn to each other. At this close range, vision is distorted and any vocalization is a whisper, moan, or grunt. In the Syrian soaps, this is not the case. In *Khan Al Harir*, whenever 'intimately close', the characters are simply exchanging admiration words, and wishing they were living abroad in a 'liberal' society. Vocalization is normal, vision is clear, and there is no insinuation for an exciting context. Once again, we may infer that the scenes of 'intimately close' are somehow negated in the Syrian soaps.

3. Sexual Activity in Arab Soaps

The findings revealed that 15.0% of the scenes analyzed depict sexually active characters. This percentage seems low, yet, if we consider Arab views of chastity and the importance of women's honor (*'ird*), 15.0%, becomes meaningful.

Having in mind the traditional Arab values of chastity, and the religious norms and practices, the sexual attitudes and behaviors in the Lebanese soaps analyzed seem very daring. The Lebanese characters engage in various sexual activities such as touching, kissing, and even love making. In 27.5% of the scenes in the Lebanese soap operas analyzed, (as compared to 6.2% and 10.2% in the Syrian and Egyptian scenes respectively) there is at least one form of sexual activity taking place. The findings revealed that in 6.3% of the Lebanese scenes there is at least one character intimately touching the other. The kind of 'touching' encountered contradicts the Arab traditional values of purity. For example, in episodes 43 and 99 of *Al Assifa*, Jamal and Nader engaged in erotic touching which included sexually romantic embraces and hugs, and sexual caressing of several parts of each other's bodies.

In the Lebanese scenes, the sexual activity goes to the extremes. Cases of 'in bed-love making' were recorded (3.8% of the scenes analyzed). For instance, in *Al Assifa*, Nader, (the father), is seen in bed with his mistress. Yet, their bodies, except the shoulders, are not seen being covered with a blanket. The most common type of implied heterosexual intercourse in Lebanese soaps occurred when two lovers were in bed embracing, and then the cameras cut to a commercial break or a different scene. Another common variant occurred when the scene opened on the two lovers in bed "the morning after", a night of implied lovemaking.

Similarly, the mouth-to-mouth kiss is not visualized, even though it is insinuated. In other words, there is an insinuation for a mouth-to-mouth kiss which is never fully seen: for example, Nader, in episode 157 of *Al Assifa*, kissed his mistress on the cheeks, near the lips, on the nose, and on the neck; yet never directly on the lips. The audience, thus, never watches a real kiss, yet, he/she is put in a sensual ambiance which necessarily anticipates a kiss, that has to be imagined.

Moreover, the type of sexual activity is meaningfully different among the soaps analyzed. In the Syrian soaps, eye contact, holding hands, and touching (5.2%, 0.3% and 0.7% respectively) were the only type of sexual activities portrayed. There was not a single case of 'kissing', or 'in bed-love making'. In the Egyptian soaps, 'kissing' was recorded in 0.7% of the scenes. In *Lan Aich fi Gilbab Abi*, episode 27, Abdel- Wahab kissed his fiancé, Rosaline, on the cheek to express his deep and true love.

Nissa fi Al Assifa

The findings suggest that sexual activities involving holding hands are higher in the Egyptian than in the Syrian scenes (eye contact: 7.0% in the Egyptian soaps as compared to 5.2% in the Syrian; holding hands: 1.8% in Egyptian as compared to 0.3% in the Syrian).

C. Type of Messages in Arab Soaps

The analysis of the Arab soaps by type of message showed that close to half of these (45.2%) had social and cultural subjects. Because of the nature of Arab society, and the prevailing political conditions which do not encourage exposing political problems, television seems to pay a great deal of attention to the daily problems of the average citizen. Though the percentages of social content seemed close in the three types of Arab soaps analyzed, (43.8% in the Lebanese scenes, 40.5% in the Syrian, and 51.4% in the Egyptian ones), the qualitative analysis showed somehow different interpretations.

In the Syrian and Egyptian soaps, daily problems of the average citizen are presented within a developmental context. *Lan Aich fi Gilbab Abi* (Egyptian) and *Khan Al Harir* (Syrian), discuss intensively the topics of housing, employment, and education which are primordial problems in both societies. The soaps describe the situation and the attitudes of the youth in relation to these subjects. For instance, the issue of the 'son-father' employment is discussed at length in *Khan Al Harir*. Abdel Wahab refused radically the idea of working with his father. He wanted a separate job because working with the father meant complete dependency, and the difficulty of self-fulfillment. Throughout the three episodes analyzed, this recurrent topic was seen from different angles, (the mother's, the sister's, and the uncles). Several solutions were also offered. The topic of housing is given a similar importance in *Al Mal Wal Banoun*. A number of young couples could not marry because they were not able to find a place to live in. Yet others had managed to overcome this obstacle and decide to live in the father's house, a gathering place for many couples (the sons along with their wives and children). In *Al-Thurraya*, and *Zilal Al Madi*, the importance of family ties, the Western cultural invasion, and the preservation of Arab values are prominent topics of discussion.

In summary, the Syrian and Egyptian soaps discuss issues of current concern to the average citizen, and portray the daily life along with the problems that the common individual faces in both countries.

In contrast, in the Lebanese soaps 'social' issues discussed are rather superficial and seem only relevant to a single and specific 'class' or segment of the Lebanese society. Going out at night, having fun, shopping (buying expensive clothes and accessories i.e. jewelry, bag), having an expensive and modern car (more than one car if possible), owning a 'chalet' at the mountains and another one on the beach, buying the latest technological instruments i.e. video, CD player, DVD, buying an expensive house in a prestigious area, having at least one driver and extra-marital sex, are some of the attributes of a particular social class that is presented in these soaps. In other words, the Lebanese soap operas convey an image of a consumer culture: improve

Ramad Wa Meleh

what you have, upgrade your possessions, renew your commodities. As Adorno (1991) asserts, it is the 'culture industry' in which all products are tailored for consumption.

Further evidence of the superficial and banal content of the Lebanese soaps comes from the absence of developmental messages depicted in the scenes (a scene does not convey any message of political or social nature). The findings showed that the category of 'none' (no message), was found to be higher (37.4%) among the Lebanese soaps analyzed as compared with the other Arab soaps (10.9% and 1.7% in the Egyptian and Syrian soaps respectively). As for the political type of message, the findings revealed that the analyzed Syrian soaps had the highest percentage of politically oriented messages (57.7%) as compared to 18.5% for the Lebanese and 37.7% for the Egyptian soap operas. As discussed earlier, the mass media system in Syria is strongly influenced by the ruling Ba'ath party, and the Syrian government believes that the mass media have an important role to play in the development of the Syrian society and in regulating it through a variety of licensing procedures, gatekeepers, and cultural guidelines (Afifi and Hammoud, 1994:17).

In episode 17 of *Khan Al Harir*, Murad, having been released from prison, goes to lieutenant Tarek to meet his communist friend Rabih who is still in prison. Tarek tells him: "It seems you hate us, as much as you hate unity - *Al-wihda*." Murad replies: "It is true that I hate you, but I do not hate *Al-wihda* ... no, you are not *Al-wihda* ... you are enemies of *Al-wihda*". Similarly, Ahmed (a member of the Ba'ath party), is tired of rebelling in order to achieve 'unity', especially that he was obliged to quit the army because he was a Ba'athist. He decided to give up politics and go back to studying law. Yet, when he felt that 'unity' was threatened, he led the rebellion/revolution once again against the 'opposition'. Moreover, in the last scene of this soap opera, the inhabitants of Aleppo (city in Syria) fight against one another: some fight in the name of President Jamal Abdel Nasser and in the name of 'unity'. To them, 'mistakes' do not minimize the importance of unity. Others fight for independence, because they believe that unity cannot be achieved once it is emptied of its political meaning. *Al-Thurraya*, deals with an important political era in Syrian history, namely the Ottoman defeat and the take-over of the Arab government under French supervision. It describes the social and economic situation of the Syrian people during this era, with a focus on the political pressures to which the Syrian individual was subjected. Through a description and

a re-evaluation of a past political era, the Syrian soap aims at directing the audience to the ideas proposed by the ideology of the party ruling Syria.

On the other hand, Egypt is a republican system where the ultimate power is in the hands of the President of Republic. The situation of the Egyptian media shows a substantial improvement in freedom but not an unlimited one. In the Egyptian soaps analyzed, the political context is not as obvious as in the Syrian ones. Political messages of Arab patriotism and unity are conveyed indirectly. They are rarely discussed overtly, yet they appear in monologues representing the characters' hopes and dreams. In other words, the context in the Egyptian soaps is not political, yet political messages are reflected in the 'minds' of the characters: Arab unity is the dream of Abdel Wahab, Hussein, Rosaline and Nafisa (representing the young generation in *Lan Aich fi Gilbab Abi*).

Finally, in the Lebanese soaps, the political 'messages' are simply reminders of the civil war, and of the multitude of political ruling groups. Lebanon represents a republican system of government in which different religious sects are struggling for power and where freedom of the media is prevalent. The political aspect is not discussed, only hinted at in a superficial manner. For instance, in *Al-Assifa* , a leading character representing an important political figure is shown in his office, surrounded by bodyguards, preparing for his meetings. The audience has the impression that meaningful political messages are going to be conveyed, but practically nothing is said and the scene automatically changes to another context.

D. An Overview of Lebanese Soap Operas

After having given an overall picture of the Arab soap operas, I now turn my attention to the Lebanese soaps in particular. Because of increasing Arab competition in the production of developmental soaps, the most recent Lebanese soap, namely *Ramad Wa Meleh* contains more 'meaningful' messages than the older ones (*Al Assifa*, and *Nissa fi al Assifa*), and is more sensitive to the problems and concerns of the average Lebanese individual.

1. Family Relations in Lebanese Soaps

The qualitative analysis suggests that the scenes in *Ramad Wa Meleh* are more deeply rooted in the tradition and values of the Lebanese society while those in the other two soaps are superficial scenes with no meaningful message to convey. In *Ramad Wa Meleh*, Sarah (the heroine), who was living in Paris because of the war, insisted on helping the people of her Lebanese village by sending them financial aid, and taking care of the young Lebanese immigrants by providing housing and financial assistance in the education sector. In episode 7 of *Ramad,* Sarah, referring to the young Lebanese immigrants, maintains: "They are the people of my country, they are my family. It is my duty to help them, and it is an honor for me to do so. It's true that I left my home, but my heart is still in the village, with my father, with my uncles, and with every Lebanese individual who is suffering in order to safeguard Lebanese values, family ties and Arab patriotism. From Paris, I will personally struggle to protect all the Arab values that I have acquired in my home; I will raise my children the same way I was raised; I will teach them the importance of family ties along with the duties that each member of the family-whether nuclear or extended- has toward the other." The nostalgia that Sarah has toward her country and her family is very obvious.

This attention to Arab values is similarly reported in the type of language used in the Lebanese soaps. In *Ramad*, in 76.1% of the scenes analyzed, the language used was 'normal', as compared to only 47.9% in *Al-Assifa* and 47.1% in *Nissa*. 'Normal' is considered when the participants exchange routine or personal information without using obscene terms i.e. cursing, using sexual vulgar terms that might be traditionally considered offensive, and shouting at an older person. Indeed, the findings revealed that, as compared to the old soaps (*Al-Assifa* and *Nissa*), *Ramad* was found to have substantially the lowest percentage-almost half- of the obscene type of language used namely, 20.4% as compared to 45.8% in *Al-Assifa* and 46.2% in *Nissa*.

2. Physical Encounters in Lebanese Soaps

Categories discussed earlier, namely physical appearance, social proximity and sexual activity will be analyzed in the following section, in the context of Lebanese soaps only.

a. Dress in Lebanese Soaps

The findings revealed that the most recently produced Lebanese soaps namely, *Ramad Wa Meleh* had significantly the lowest percentage of the 'very liberal' type of dress. That is, only in one case (0.9%) in Ramad a woman does appear in a daring and sexy dress as compared to 20 cases (20.8%) in *Al-Assifa*, and 25 cases (24.0%) in *Nissa*.

Cast of Al Assifa Tahubbu Marratein

Ramad Wa Meleh

Similarly, in *Ramad* only 15.0% of the scenes analyzed portrayed a 'liberal' type of dress as compared to 28.1% and 47.1% in *Al-Assifa* and *Nissa* respectively.

The 'moderate' category was the most significant in 53.1% of the *Ramad* scenes analyzed. The characters had a moderate type of dress while in *Al-Assifa*, 31.3% had moderate dress, and in *Nissa*, only 21.2% dressed moderately. Finally, the 'conservative' type of dress was respectively 31.0%, 19.8% and 4.8% in *Ramad*, *Al-Assifa*, and *Nissa*. However, strangely enough, the only Lebanese soap that depicted 'veiled' women was *Nissa*. Thus, the soap that had the highest percentages of 'very liberal' and 'liberal' dress had also the highest percentage (2.9% as compared to 0% for the others) of the most conservative type.

b. Social Proximity and Sexual Activity in Lebanese Soaps

The same extremity discussed earlier concerning the type of dress, is found in the type of social proximity. In other words, the highest percentage of physical distance between actors of opposite sex is for *Nissa*, that is 46.2% as compared to 15.0% and 42.7% in *Ramad* and *Al-Assifa* respectively. The same soap that portrayed the most physically distant characters had in 16.3% of its scenes, sexually active young characters. It is true that the last percentage reported is not the highest among the three Lebanese soaps analyzed, yet, it is significant. *Al-Assifa*, which is the oldest produced of the three soaps, had the highest percentage of sexually active characters. *Al Assifa* had 24.0% of its scenes portraying sexually active people as compared to only 13.3% in *Ramad*.

Contrary to the expectations of the researcher, *Ramad* had significantly the lowest percentage of physical distance of actors of opposite sex, that is, 15.0% as compared to 42.7% and 46.2% in *Al-Assifa* and *Nissa* respectively. The soap that had the most moderate type of dress, and the most normal type of language as discussed earlier, had also the lowest percentage of 'physically distant' characters, and the highest percentage of 'physically close' characters (39.8% in *Ramad*, compared to 33.3% and 37.5% in *Al-Assifa* and *Nissa* respectively). Having in mind the proxemic variations among cultures (the Arabs being 'contact'people), the high percentage of physically close characters in *Ramad* becomes understandable and logical.

Among the three Lebanese soaps analyzed, *Ramad* was the most conservative in indulging in sexual activity. In 12.4% of *Ramad's* scenes, a mild sexual activity took place, whereas in 47.9% and 25.0% of *Al-Assifa* and *Nissa* respectively, a sexual incident was encountered. Moreover, among the types of sexual activities taking place in *Ramad*, eye contact was the most common (8.8% as compared to 1.8% for hand holding and touching). Not a single case of 'in bed' or even 'kissing' was reported in *Ramad*.

The analysis of *Al-Assifa* yields different findings. The percentages of all the types of sexual activity were the highest in *Al-Assifa*. For instance, the highest percentage of the category of 'in bed' (which is the most extreme type of sexual activity analyzed), that is 9.4% was reported in *Al-Assifa* (2.9% in *Nissa*, and 0% in *Ramad*). The category of 'kissing' was also found to be the most significant in *Al-Assifa* (5.2% as compared to 1.9% in *Nissa* and 0% in *Ramad*). Similarly, the findings revealed that the 'holding hand' category was higher in *Al-Assifa* (10.4%) than in the other Lebanese soaps (1.8% in *Ramad* and 4.8% in *Nissa)*. Finally, even the simplest and purest type of 'sexual activity', namely eye contact, had the highest percentage in *Al-Assifa*.

c. Type of Message in Lebanese Soaps

If we consider both types of messages conveyed (political and social), we find that *Ramad* was the richest in messages' content among the three Lebanese soap operas analyzed. 91.2% of *Ramad's* scenes had at least one type of message, while *Nissa* had only 38.5% as compared to 54.2% in *Al-Assifa*. Moreover, in *Ramad*, 67.3% of the total percentage were social messages. With the end of the civil war in Lebanon, it seems that the most recent Lebanese soap opera analyzed, tries to deal with political issues within a social context (23.9% of the scenes discussed political matters as compared to 67.3% for the social issues).

Yet, the comparison of the three Lebanese soaps yielded the following: the highest percentage of political type of message is reported in *Ramad*. In fact, *Nissa* had the lowest percentage, 12.5% as compared to 18.8% in *Al-Assifa*. The qualitative analysis might explain this apparent contradiction. In episode 21 of *Ramad*, five complete scenes were devoted to politics in Lebanon. Though the content of the political messages is not really 'meaningful', the simple fact of discussing politics 'openly' (i.e. conveying political messages or even simply creating a political context in soap operas) seems constructive because it reduces the tension and possibly creates an atmosphere for communication.

Conclusion

The media industry has turned into being first and foremost a business firm responding to market forces. The media have become preservers of the status quo giving audiences what they want rather than what they need thus, not serving as vehicles advocating change. Striving to sell their productions to as large an audience as possible, they fail to come out with 'meaningful' developmental messages. From here, derives their wish to preserve the status quo and their aim to please and entertain the audience without portraying messages of concern to the average citizen.

Lebanese soap operas are catering to a consumer audience. They are produced in order to be sold in a competitive market. They do not portray adequate and 'real' images of reality but rather contain low-culture messages that are sold and exchanged in the market. They reflect alien values and are mainly concerned with sensational issues. In the Lebanese soap operas, it is the 'culture industry', which is directed to consumers, and to targets in the market forces, that prevails.

Because of the civil war in Lebanon, confusion and chaos have prevailed for a long time, and different political and religious groups are competing over the financially prosperous media institutions. The major concerns of television officials have been financial gains. The government, on the other hand, has been interested in asserting its control paying little attention to the kind and quality of the locally produced programs.

Soap operas are reproduced in multiple copies; they have no new messages to offer and no artistic or developmental orientation to yield. Characters in Lebanese soap operas are all similar, mere prototypes not defined by individual traits or in a social or historical context. Since the Lebanese audience has no real and meaningful model to imitate, no cultural values are conveyed to the public.

Lebanon has recently gone out of seventeen years of civil war. One could argue that the post-war situation has led the Lebanese citizen to want to escape from reality and from real life problems. All what they need is to be entertained momentarily and to rid themselves of worries and sufferings. They sit in front of the tube (watching soap operas), and become mesmerized by what they watch: the more vulgar the content, the more it appeals to the confused and uncertain audience. The cultivation theory of Gerbner states that television provides lessons of what to expect from life. Television soap operas serve a symbolic function and contribute to the symbolic construction of people's reality. If the content is as vulgar as the analysis yields, the audience's expectations are misdirected. Again, since the ultimate aim is amusement, the thought that there is any alternative to the status quo is put aside. The Lebanese viewers are helpless and compliant victim viewers who become mere absorbers of television messages than creators of them.

However, if we look at the analysis of the most recent Lebanese soap operas produced - *Ramad Wa Meleh* - the negative image underlying the Lebanese soaps can be somehow attenuated. Even if still in a very shy way, *Ramad Wa Meleh* reflects developmental messages that would help in the construction of a better society. This can be attributed to the financial success and the great appeal, to the audiences of Syrian soaps that carry development messages. In other words, the potential for better and 'constructive' soap operas is clear. Yet, time will be the only judge.

Furthermore, the image of a conscious audience is reinforced by the simple fact that the audience who watches the 'superficial' and 'banal' Lebanese soaps is the same audience that watches the Syrian and Egyptian soaps which have interesting development messages to portray.

It is important to note that because Syrian soap operas are managed by the Syrian government, they portray developmental issues such as housing, child problems, education, women's liberation. In Syria, the mass media are strongly influenced by the ruling Ba'ath party and geared toward sustaining and promoting Arab culture, patriotism and nationalism.

Television represents a growing and powerful socializing agency in our society. If channeled in the right direction, it can contribute to the desired changes and the achievements of preset goals. Nevertheless, change cannot be induced and achieved only through policies and theories of social action. Social action is a crucial and vital component in the struggle for change.

The findings and conclusion of the present research might inspire producers of soap operas to join together and raise their efforts for a progressive portrayal of meaningful and development oriented soap operas that may present models of action for the Lebanese audiences as well as cultivate in them a developmental orientation. Moreover, the results might be of interest for the planning of future media policies, which would take into consideration the powerful socializing effects of various media and especially television.

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The Beirut Declaration

A regional conference on "Gender and Communication Policy" in the Middle East and North Africa was jointly organized in Beirut, Lebanon, by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), at the Lebanese American University, from November 9 to November 12, 1999. Thirty participants from eight countries attended the Conference.

On the basis of the country reports presented, participants voiced their concern over:

- the stereotyped and traditional image of women and their sexual objectification as reflected in mass media;
- restrictions on press freedom and the invisibility of women in the media in some countries;
- the role played by the media in creating and perpetuating a culture of violence;
- gender disparities in the communication industry, be they at the level of employment practices, training, opportunities or access to decision-making;
- the high rate of illiteracy among women in some countries of the region which limits their access to the media;
- the globalization of media and its impact on gender issues;
- the lack of gender-sensitive communication policies.

Participants agreed that, despite the different socio-economic and political contexts, there is an urgent need to formulate a common set of recommendations aimed at stimulating the formulation of communication strategies using a gender approach.

There was a strong consensus on the necessity of implementing the following recommendations in order to achieve gender equity in human rights, freedom of choice, greater access to mass media and full participation in the process of decision-making.

Training

- Provide NGOs with adequate training to enable them to interact and build linkages with the media;
- offer gender sensitivity training, to communication personnel at all levels;
- urge schools, communities and NGOs to initiate media literacy training in order to help civil society become a more critical user of the media;
- facilitate capacity building of women in the media through specialized training for strengthening gender equity and promoting full participation in decision-making.

Advocacy

- Establish media watch groups to monitor women's representation in the media;
- encourage the formation of media women's associations or unions in various countries in the region to promote women's rights;
- request the media to produce programs that would highlight the multifaceted role of women;
- raise awareness about the impact of media globalization on women and use the opportunities it offers for greater access;
- call upon media organizations to develop codes of ethics that would include gender portrayal;
- demand that media institutions introduce equal opportunity policies that aim for gender parity in recruitment and specifically prohibit unfair discrimination based on gender or marital and parental status;
- promote greater media debate and coverage of the issue of violence against women in society;
- urge media groups to establish guidelines on the reporting of violence against women.

Networking

- Encourage the creation of networks at both the national and regional level to exchange information and share experiences on women and the media;
- create a regional committee to monitor and follow up on the recommendations of the Beirut Declaration;
- prepare a directory of women's communication groups and organizations interested in women and media issues to facilitate interaction with the media;
- establish alliances between women's groups and key media personnel who are supportive of women's issues.

In Search of Gender and Communication Policy

By Teresita Hermano
Director for Services and Women's Program, WACC

In Thailand, children learned recently from a popular TV soap opera that in order to get their estranged parents back together again, it is perfectly all right for the estranged father to drug the mother and rape her. In Malaysia, a sports car ad entices male buyers by featuring a woman purring, "I'm all yours." In Chile, newspaper reports of crimes against women trivialize the violence through the use of humorous language and jokes. In Uganda, unmarried women running for political office are hounded by journalists to produce boyfriends or fiancés for media coverage. In Zambia, female newsreaders are expected to model clothes from sponsors and are generally treated as mere ornamental accessories to serious news programs. And in most countries in the South, the majority of rural women, who are invariably poor, have neither access to the media nor see themselves in it.

These are among the many concerns voiced by media practitioners, women activists and policy specialists from the academe and government in the first three regional conferences on Gender and Communication Policy held in Anglophone Africa, Asia and Latin America. Organized by the World Association for Christian Communication, the conferences have highlighted the problems of sexism, inequity in media employment and training, women's lack of access to the media, and commodification and stereotyping of women's images in the media. They are part of a special three-year Women and Media Program undertaken by WACC with the support of Evangelisches Missionswerk in Hamburg and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and will involve conferences in six regions and some related publications on media and gender. The program is a follow-up to the global conference on "Women Empowering Communication" organized by WACC together with two international women's groups in Bangkok in 1994.

WACC's Women and Media Program is also a response to the recommendations made both by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and the Mexico Declaration approved at WACC's second World Congress, also in 1995. The Beijing Platform urged mass media and advertising organizations "to develop, consistent with freedom of expression, professional guidelines and codes of conduct and other forms of self-regulation, to promote the presentation of non-stereotyped images of women". Taking this a step further, the Mexico Congress recommended that WACC launch a series of regional workshops on media policy to cover not only gender portrayal but also media control and employment patterns. WACC, a London-based international network of over 800 member organizations and individuals, has had an active Women's Program of workshops and projects since 1987.

Teresita Hermano

Preparing for the conferences turned out to be a monumental task. Most of the countries did not have any existing self-regulatory guidelines, much less any national policies, on gender issues in communication. But participants at the conferences were unanimous in their belief that media policy needed to be developed in their countries.

In Asia, the first regional conference on Gender and Communication Policy was launched in the Philippines in July 1997, with Isis, a locally-based women's network, as co-organizer. The conference brought together 26 participants from eleven Asian countries: Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. In most of these countries, media have been seen to have a "developmental" role, which in the face of increasing globalization and economic

pressures, have shifted their concern and responsibilities away from the rights of individuals to the support of national and regional economies. Newly emerging political systems such as in Mongolia, have not made provisions for gender issues in their constitution or media practice. Tumursukh Undarya of Women for Social Progress recalled that when Mongolia opened its doors to the global market economy in 1990, Western media and commercial systems flooded in, giving rise to concerns about the increase in pornography and media violence. Nevertheless, if older, more stable legal systems such as Japan's have better developed provisions and guidelines on media and gender, they are disregarded in practice. Toshiko Miyasaki of the Forum for Citizens' Television noted that there is a proliferation of pornographic and violent material in Japanese programs and cartoons, yet rape is a crime hardly reported in the media because it is not considered serious enough to warrant attention. Even the word "rape" is not used in the Japanese language; the media use is "itazurasuru" meaning "doing mischief", as if referring to children who do something naughty but relatively harmless.

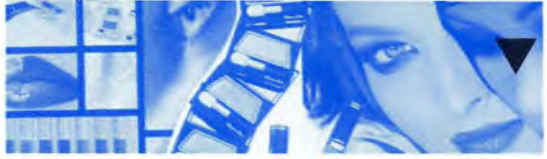
It would seem natural to expect a greater diversity of voices with the advent of globalization, but Asian participants claimed that the blurring of national boundaries has only led to a diminishing national accountability for sexism in the media. Mega-mergers in recent years have concentrated power in a few media conglomerates that are able to present their world view, reinforcing the same news values, marginalizing further the already marginalized.

In Latin America, the regional conference was organized by WACC, WACC-Latin American Region and the communication research group La Calandria in Lima, Peru in late January 1998. A total of 36 women participated from 11 Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay. With their focus still on policy, the Latin Americans chose the theme "Gender, Communication and Citizenship" in order to emphasize their rights as citizens - since their right to communicate, their right to information, to participate with true equality, all hinged on their right as citizens. After the UN World Conferences on Women in the recent decades, most governments in Latin America created "women's ministries" or "women's departments". WACC -Latin American regional secretary Maria Elena Hermosilla, who is also a member of the National Television Council of Chile, pointed out that this has created "new spaces for women's initiatives", so women must take advantage of these opportunities and offer new strategies and policy ideas for the advancement of their communication rights. Videazimuth President Regina Festa from Brazil reported that women's NGOs in the region have clearly stepped up their lobbying of media and government. The Lima Declaration, which participants endorsed and agreed to submit to their respective governments after the conference, fully asserts these rights: "We claim our right, and that of all citizens, to participate in drawing up the regulations in different countries to tackle the quality of communication and its realization so that the dignity of women and all human beings is respected and recognized."

The Anglophone Africa conference was held in Cape Town, South Africa in June 1998 and was co-organized by Mediaworks, a media monitoring and training group. It was attended by 29 participants from 10 African countries: Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Their reports and discussions showed that their biggest struggle is to gain more access for women in the media. While conceding that the most serious barriers to access are illiteracy and poverty, they also claim that access is denied in other ways: there is very little coverage of women in the media and there are very few women employed in African mass media, and almost none in management positions. WACC - Africa Regional Secretary Dorothy Munyakho, who is also executive director of the Kenyan rural news service Iris, cited African studies as showing that in the Kenyan daily press, only 10% of journalists are women (1992, 1993), and in Senegal, the figure is also 10% (1989). The statistics for African broadcasting are hardly better: in Togo 12% of TV personnel in programming, production and engineering are women (1992); and in Zambia, women constitute 22% of the entire staff of the national broadcasting corporation (1993). More than any other region, Africa has seen the successful formation of national and sub-regional media women's associations and many of them were represented at our conference. But despite the valuable support that such organizations provide, participants acknowledged that they are no match for the sheer pervasiveness of Africa's media sexism. Inequities in reporting assignments, job promotions, wage levels and training opportunities are compounded by the high incidence of sexual harassment. In Uganda, for example, female journalists who stay in hotels in the line of work are reportedly regarded with as much suspicion as women who sell sexual services.

Why do Women and Media Issues Matter?

All of the conferences so far have ended with strong declarations and plans of action. Most of them call for the formulation of gender-sensitive communication policies that will address many of the issues raised in the regions. But will new policies solve these problems? It is possible that media and governments can turn a blind eye even to existing policies. However, if governments are committed to



these policies, then they should have some effect. Even media self-regulation works better when encouraged by government. NGOs and mass movements have also found that they must hold their governments to their promises by monitoring implementation of international agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Follow-up is part of the plan of action in all of these conferences. In Asia, Latin America and Africa, the participants agreed to disseminate widely the Declarations they produced. Participants were also encouraged to pursue policy ideas in their own countries. WACC would facilitate networking by sharing information by e-mail or through publications such as the Media and Gender Monitor which report on the progress of the regional conferences and other activities under the Women and Media Program.

There have been two more conferences since then: in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Each new regional conference brings more insights and issues into the huge body of knowledge and experiences already gathered from other regions.

Although the Program has already shown some tangible results, WACC is aware that policy development is a long process and this is only an initial step in that direction. There will certainly be an assessment of the effectivity of the conferences at the end of the Program. It may be that more follow-up is needed to bring the issues to a higher level of mass media owners and governments.

Why do women and media issues matter? Because media - both local and global - have for years influenced our opinions and attitudes about ourselves and the world around us. Media choose what they consider important enough to be news - and most of the time, women are absent from them. Media promote and propagate ideals of beauty and thinness which many people try desperately to achieve. Media and advertising can objectify and commodify women. Media contribute to a culture of violence which affects many people's lives. Yet women are avid users of media, and they need the media for their own entertainment and information, as well as for their campaigns and causes. On the other hand, we must not forget that there are millions of women who, because of poverty, illiteracy or oppressive structures, have no access to mass media at all. Perhaps they are the women most affected - as they lack access to information that can help them in their daily lives and needs.

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Reporting on Rape

By Mariz Tadros
Jornalist, Al-Ahram Weekly, Egypt

The last twelve months have seen an unprecedented surge in press coverage of rape - be it opinion articles, columns or front page stories. Normally, rape stories appear regularly on the crime pages of both government-controlled and opposition newspapers, be they leftist or Islamist oriented. But two events brought rape to the forefront this year - a fatwa or religious opinion on the rights of rape victims made last November and the revision of the penal code dealing with rape in April 1998.


Mariz Tadros

In late November, the Mufti of Al Azhar, issued a *fatwa* supported by the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar that women who have been raped are the victims of great injustice inflicted upon them by society and that "it is up to society and the state which failed to protect a raped woman to repair what was damaged through an operation to restore her virginity". The highly controversial *fatwa* helped break the silence on this issue - the fact that the highest representatives of the Islamic establishment were talking very openly about what was a highly stigmatized hush-hush subject. Having avoided reporting or writing about it altogether in our newspaper, the *fatwa* gave us the mandate to use that as a peg on which to address the issue. It was the same for many newspapers in Egypt.

The content of the *fatwa* was fiercely debated by those who supported it and those who fiercely opposed it. Both sides had one thing in common - their concern for anyone and anything but the suffering and welfare of the woman. Those who supported the decree were supporting it on the basis of *satr* - or protection of the family honor and to a much lesser degree the woman's marriageability. As for the articles and viewpoints, they widely expressed their opposition to the *fatwa* in many newspapers - their argument was in defense of the rights of the victims' future husbands. Hymen repair, they argued, meant that the women pretended to be real virgins when they were not - and this was an act of sheer deceit. Thus, the victims were no longer the women subjected to assault, it was the poor men who were victims of cheating operations. In the intensely patriarchal debates that followed in the press, it seemed almost impossible to shift the focus from men as the center of the debates to talk about women. Many articles failed to get beyond the obsession with virginity - represented in - a piece of a tissue imbued with all kinds of cultural symbols of religious uprightness and defense of traditions and social customs. In the light of that, it is no wonder that one or two articles openly suggested that the Mufti's *fatwa* legitimizing hymen repair for victims of rape was legitimizing sexual promiscuity. If women believed they could get away with "faking" their virginity, what would stop them from pursuing all kinds of illegitimate relationships?

Though there were some women's voices in the press commenting on this issue, they were few. Many female activists, social workers and psychiatrists welcomed the Mufti's and the Grand-Sheikh's recognition that the assault women were subject to is through no fault of their own. However, they also argued that rather than suggesting hymen repair, social beliefs - and the obsession with the hymen - should be addressed, challenged and uprooted from the social fabric of the country.

Round about the same time as the Mufti's *fatwa*, serious talk in the press began about rape as a phenomenon. So-called experts (most often male) began to give reasons why they think we have so many rape cases today though official statistics on incidence of rape are humorously low, so low that nobody believes them. Many social workers, psychiatrists and women activists believe that the low rape statistics in the country are due to the fact that only women who cannot hide "the scandal" report assault. If you manage to hide it, you don't report it. I strongly believe that the press has a role to play in this. It would not take a great deal to convince a woman reading the crime page that if ever she was subject to any kind of assault she should make sure she doesn't report it, because if it ends up in the newspaper, she will be accused of having asked for it. Except in few rare cases of gang rape and assault on children, reports always construe women as having done something to bring about their predicament.

These statements can sometimes be very explicit like "it is believed that the woman was involved in an amorous/emo-

tional relationship with the man accused." You can guess what the message the reporters are trying to get across. Implicit suggestions of women having provoked it tend to be many: i.e. she was returning home late from work; she was walking in a dark street; she was reputed to be out of the house a lot; she was dressed inappropriately.

I believe that if the press continues to portray victims of assault as lewd, liars and pretenders, - we can rest assured that the percentage of women who report rape will continue to be low. Virtually every day, women are reading reports which instill a sense of shame and guilt about any exposure to assault- subconsciously, this must have an impact.

Interestingly enough, there was one small positive move: there were more reports appearing of cases of women reporting rape and then dropping charges when their assaulters offered to marry them. There were a couple of famous cases this year that provoked a mass public outcry when the victim married one of the rapists who gang raped her and dropped all charges. It came more or less in the dawn of the repeal of clause 291 of the penal code. Clause 290 of the Penal Code stipulates that rape is punishable by death; however, clause 291 says that if a rapist offers to marry the victim, and she agrees, all criminal charges are automatically dropped. The repeal of the clause was approved by Parliament last April which sought to put an end to rape crimes. They will no longer be able to commit their crime and get away with it.

She was returning home late from work ... She was walking in a dark street ... She was reputed to be out of the house a lot ... She was dressed inappropriately.

Many articles hailed the move as a significant gain in women's rights. But there were also articles arguing that the repeal of the clause was a bad idea because it took away a form of *satr* - or protection for the woman and her family from social stigmatization. Her psychological trauma, her subjection to continued rape etc. were mostly kept out of the writings. Again, the repeal of the clause increased press discussion of causes of rape and the means to decrease rape incidents. These articles are distorted since rape was not examined as an act of violence but the outcome of sexual frustration/deprivation/arousal. Dr Aida Seif el Dawla, a prominent Egyptian feminist and psychiatrist, noted that there is often a pornographic element in the reporting of rape in the details of what made him do it, how she resisted, how he overcome her etc.

An interview with the rapist who raped a housewife, featured in a magazine a few years ago, had a subheading which read something like: "she was white, plump and beautiful" - the purpose of it was not to shock but indulge readers in voyeurism. And since rape is discussed as an act of sexual deprivation, many of the opinion articles suggested that if you help youth get married early - i.e. fulfill their sexual desires rape would be on the drop. If the government provides jobs for the youth, they will not have to live so many years without the prospects of getting married, and of course once they are married, they won't be suffering from sexual frustration and will not rape women.

Rapists are referred to in the press, not as men but as wolves. A very interesting point about rape is that so far, I have not seen one report about it where the rapists were not referred to as wolves: "three wolves committed a savage crime", "the wolf kidnapped a young girl" etc. By referring to them as wolves, Aida Seif el Dawla insists, they are categorizing them as different from the rest of the men, who would never do that. I am not saying that reports should be written on the premise that all men are potential rapists, but this "wolves" business is out of touch with reality - since happily, married men with children do commit acts of rape too.

So, where is all of this leading to? The point I am trying to make is that the *fatwa* and the repeal of the clause were two relatively progressive steps forward in favor of a more humane treatment of victims of rape, but the press messed it up. They could have taken this opportunity of breaking the culture of silence on rape to address why victims have such a grim predicament and how that can be changed - but they didn't. Instead, the myths and biases were reiterated, and the press, in some ways, only confirmed reactionary ideas that if only women were more out of the public eye, if only they went back home, so many of our social ills - such as rape - would be avoided.

Important questions such as why we don't have shelters, why we don't have a hotline, how sensitive are our police stations and judiciary system were all left out of the debate. It was not about women; it was about women's bodies, and the preservation of certain power relations in society.

We must work to dispel the myths, have active NGOs collaborate more with the media in getting through the facts right, and training journalists, especially crime journalists on reporting the facts regardless of prejudice. The last word must be to the women who read the most sensationalist distorted articles about rape and do nothing to complain to the newspapers.

Portrayal of Women

Dima Dabbous-Sensenig

By Dima Dabbous-Sensenig
Lecturer, Media Studies, Arts and Communication
Lebanese American University

Women are either represented as loving mothers, obedient daughters, or as belly-dancers and prostitutes.

Generally, women are portrayed in the media as being submissive, passive, dependent, inferior, and subservient to men. Cross-cultural research, moreover, has found great similarities in these portrayals between western industrialized countries, eastern communist (or ex-communist) countries, and southern developing countries: women are overall underrepresented in the media, in production as well as in content.

However, such generalizations, though justified, can gloss over important differences in representation, especially when a country like Lebanon is concerned. Reliant on Western (mostly American) imported programming and enjoying a wide range of communication technologies, including satellite television, to receive predominantly American and Egyptian programming, Lebanese viewers are exposed to dual messages as far as women portrayed in the media are concerned:

1. Whether on commercial national television or on American satellite television, Lebanese viewers are exposed to a 'Western' representation of women where women are beautiful ornaments (à la James Bond Girls), threatening femmes fatales, but also and increasingly modern, assertive, liberated, and especially in control of their bodies and sexuality.

2. Women in Arab (mostly) Egyptian fiction are, by contrast, more submissive, passive, and dependent. Most importantly, their portrayal is restricted in range: women are either represented as loving mothers, obedient daughters, or as belly-dancers and prostitutes. Even when an Arab woman is portrayed as emancipated and assertive, with a career of her own, she is never so without staying virtuous and keeping her hymen intact.

This difference in representation can be related to the difference in the socio-cultural contexts of the film or program production. While Western societies have been sexually revolutionized since the 1960's, with, as Helen Brown wrote, 'sex [being] a powerful weapon for a single woman in getting what she wants in life', and where sexual knowledge and practice has replaced virginity or sexual innocence, the same cannot be said about Arab societies. These societies still retain a strongly conservative character, where sex, especially female pre-marital sex, is still unacceptable, a sin still punishable by law or by society itself in several Arab countries, including Lebanon, where religious values and laws are still dominant.

Ideally, the varied, often contradictory media portrayal of women in Lebanon should be seen as reflecting a variety of

in the Media

social attitudes and behaviors and of providing viewers with a more complex, differential representation of women. The media is considered to reflect reality not when it singles out one reality and neglects another, but when it provides us with images of men, women, and various groups in all their complexities and differences. Any one-sided representation, whether entirely positive or entirely negative, can only mean that the media are mis-representing reality and are engaged in stereotyping humanity.

However, the 'mixed', if not contradictory representation of women in Lebanese media can be quite alarming for viewers in a Lebanese context. Lebanon is, on the one hand, the most open of all Arab countries to Western cultural products, and on the other hand, its criminal and civil laws are just as restricting to women (here I am referring specifically to the crimes of honor and adultery which punish women, often by death, and largely exonerate men). Thus, while Western films that represent a sexually liberated womanhood are banned altogether in other Arab countries, Lebanon is relatively permissive with such portrayals, with censorship only cutting out scenes of complete nudity or non-heterosexual love. As a result, we are in a society whose media products, mostly imported or modeled after Western products (Lebanese soaps literally copying the plot, mood, and values of the Mexican tele-novelas are a case in point), are entirely out of sync with the society we live in and the laws that govern that society. Our media cannot promote sexual promiscuity and liberation for women as long as we have laws to punish such behavior for women. There is an alarming gap in the case of Lebanon between the messages that our youths, especially female youths, are exposed to and encouraged to adopt in films and advertising alike, and the society and laws that condemn sexual liberation. What is to be done in this case?

Since the beginning of the conference, there has been much discussion of the role that media workers can play in order to change the stereotypical and generally negative representation of women in the media: most solutions were seen to lie in the hands of responsible journalists and media workers. If more women participated in cultural production, it is said, and if female and male media workers alike were trained to become aware of women's issues and improve the representation of women in the media, then the problem of under-representation of women can be solved, at least to some considerable extent. However, these solutions are oblivious to the following points:

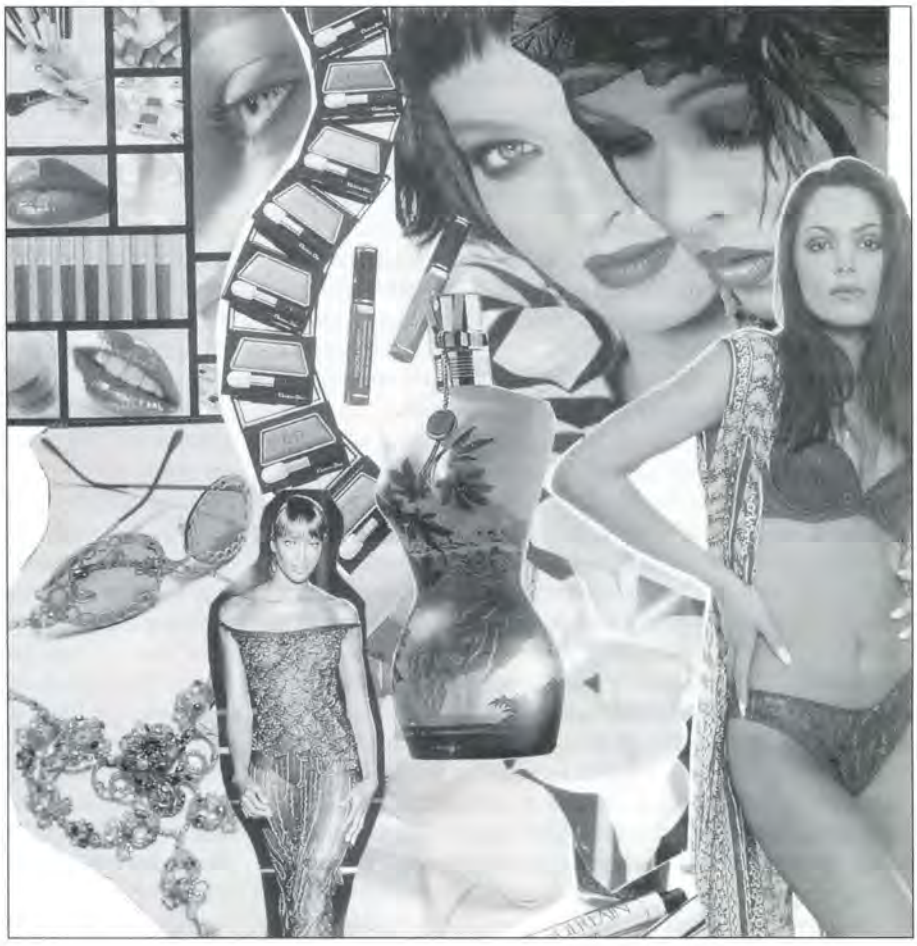
1. First, equal opportunity for women in the media, at least on its own, has proved incapable of improving the way women were represented in the media. In Lebanon, 80% of journalism students are female and 25.5% of major employees in Lebanese television stations are women (of whom 17.9 are in a decision-making position). Despite this considerable female presence in the field, research in Lebanon and elsewhere has shown that female media workers continue to work in a male environment, are subjected to male power, and often perpetuate male values. In short, as one media critic put it, 'when one stresses the role of individuals manning the system, one is tempted to await a Messiah who will come over and help transform the system'.

2. This emphasis on individuals (broadcasters in this case) and their integrity, as opposed to structures, in fact ignores the various pressures affecting broadcasting choices and outputs, and consequently prevents them from seeking the appropriate solutions to the problem of women in the media. Two such pressures are ownership and advertising. I will start with the ownership factor, especially that the comparatively 'free' character of media in Lebanon has been emphasized repeatedly. One is naturally tempted, when looking at the media landscape in Lebanon, to equate the significant number of different media outlets with pluralism and freedom of expression. But a closer examination of the patterns of ownership and control in Lebanon reveals a different picture: while it is true that we have a relatively high number of broadcast media, these are exclusively owned by politicians, their relatives, and business partners in other ventures (bankers, contractors, industrialists, lawyers, etc.). Moreover, the dividing of the 'media cake' in Lebanon reflects the power division along confessional lines in the country. Each of the licensed broadcast media is associated with one of the major confessional groups or political leaders in the country.

As a result, these media, though they apparently differ in their output and thus convey a climate of freedom and plurality unique among other Arab countries, are deceptively free and democratic. It has been said that 'freedom of the press belongs to the man who owns one'. In Lebanon freedom of the broadcast media belongs to the politico-economic elite associated with one major religious community or another. Each medium has become a mouthpiece for one of the powerful factions and is free to disseminate views particular to that faction without believing in freedom of speech (other than for themselves). Therefore, thinking that we are dealing with free media in a free country is a misconception: we have different media with each championing on its own its own freedom of speech. These media exist not because freedom of expression is consecrated in the Lebanese Constitution but

because the multi-confessional government of the day was able to distribute as many broadcast licenses as there were powerful or significant confessional groups (non-powerful political, economic, or confessional groups were naturally denied license and excluded from public debate).

While patterns of ownership account for the existence of different political orientations in broadcast media and a pseudo-mood of political freedom, advertising is probably the major influence on non- political programming. Lebanese broadcast media abound with programming and advertising that heavily promote a certain image of womanhood at the expense of others. The emphasis on the female body, beauty, and sexuality, even though it exists in contradiction to the country's laws and social norms, is a direct influence of advertising which offers consumer happiness and satisfaction with a beauty product or a fashionable item that can be bought in the market. This interconnectedness between the media image of an essentially sexual/physical womanhood and the advertising world is crucial to understanding why women are represented mostly as sexual objects in our media. Expecting that commercial broadcasters can be properly trained and counted on to change that image is asking them simply to bite the hand that feeds them.



Having explained some of the major constraints that affect our media output, I suggest the following multi-faceted approach to redress the imbalance in the representation of women:

1. There should be an increased awareness among broadcasters, male and female, through workshops and training sessions, of the existing imbalance in the representation of women in the media and the need and ways to improve it. Efforts should not concentrate on broadcasters alone, though, for the reasons mentioned above.

2. Spreading awareness on women's issues should extend to the society at large, starting with children at school. Pressure groups should work towards eradicating (the still existing) sexist education at the school level by changing the textbooks that stereotype women, and working towards the implementation of feminist studies curricula or at least the introduction of feminist studies courses in journalism programs. Needless to say, these courses remain non-existent in a country boasting not less than six different universities offering journalism and communication degrees (the Lebanese American University is the exception here).

3. Pressure from outside the broadcast media can be more effective and free of the internal organizational and financial pressures that affect media output. Media watch groups and other lobbying groups should be set up to monitor media output and organize efforts with women and other human rights organizations to enforce anti-discriminatory media policies and the implementation of any similar existing laws.

4. Finally, though not directly related to the media, but equally pressing is the issue of the existing sexist laws. Lebanese law, like similar - Arab laws, strongly discriminates against women and denies them equal rights with men, especially where their sexuality or body is concerned (abortion law, crimes of adultery, crimes of honor, etc.). If we are asking our media to reflect reality truthfully, we cannot blame them when they send us back a picture as conflictual as our own reality.

Globalization of the Media

By Magda Abu-Fadil
Director of University Publications and Coordinator of the Journalism Program, Lebanese American University

Does globalization mean we're being conditioned into thinking only of CNN when disaster strikes and we need detailed news of the event? Yes, very likely, because many of our media in the Arab world fall short of the task of providing good, accurate news that is to the point. That does not mean CNN is the best, it just means it operates in a professional no-nonsense way, most of the time. The network has had its share of flops over the years, but success seems to outweigh failure.

A maverick on the scene in the Middle East is the relatively new all-news channel Al Jazeera, which many people love to hate. But I know of more people who love, than hate it. It's good, hard-hitting, controversial and calls a spade a spade - *al awar bi aino*. We need more of these media. But we need media that can also understand our cultural background and societal needs - i.e. those that strike a balance between accurate information and understanding of the story's background.

All too often reporters are parachuted into a country to cover a hot story without having any solid grounding in the subject. This applies to the Arabs as well as the Americans and Europeans. I've seen it happen all over the Middle East and in Washington and across the US. Arab Journalists need to learn American English fast and tune in to the nuances of official Washington before presuming to know how to cover the White House, State Department, Pentagon, Capitol Hill (Congress), etc. They also need to understand the intricacies of international finance and lending institutions if they're to cover the World Bank and IMF. They should be well versed in the language of international relations, treaties, history, geography, etc., before tackling the UN and its agencies.

Staying at home and reading the local papers, then regurgitating them to the folks back home in Beirut, Cairo, Riyadh, Amman, etc. won't do. It's cheating. There's a lot of leg work involved. Likewise, US. and European correspondents often arrive on our shores with no notion of what's happening in the country or the region. With little or no knowledge of Arabic (or French) they expect everyone to understand them. Some don't do their homework and don't read about the background that led to recent conflicts, as if they exist in a vacuum. It's a major failure on their part.

An American reporter I know, who was too scared to enter Tripoli during one of the major battles, took a taxi to the edge of the city, saw some exchanges of fire from a distance, ran back to Beirut, filed the story with a Tripoli dateline and proceeded to detail the raging battle which he never really saw. There are many such stories from all over the world.

Magda Abu-Fadil

That's a great disservice to the readers, viewers, and listners.

Mastery of languages is very important. They've helped me in many situations - Teheran, Moscow, Washington, Kyrenia, etc. If women are to prove themselves in the field - and many have excelled over the years - they should do their homework, and more. They should keep pushing that executive glass ceiling, by being, experts in areas not considered as "women's issues." I spent many years covering the Pentagon and enjoyed writing on defense and security issues. F- 15 and F- 16 aircraft, Stinger shoulder-held missiles, avionics, Abrams tanks, rapid deployment forces, low intensity warfare, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation.

Yes, men can feel quite insecure when they hear a woman discussing such matters. But so what? Have the facts ready at your fingertips. Ask intelligent questions, be persistent without being obnoxious and keep hammering away. Show inconsistencies in what's being said and done, document everything, be thorough. Kill them with your brilliance and charm. You'd be surprised how far you can go without doing something illegal, immoral or fattening.

Images of Women in the United Arab Emirates Mass Media

By Amina Khamiz Al-Dhaheri
Mass Communication Department
United Arab Emirates University

Women of the UAE are rarely represented in the media except on some occasions such as the celebration of National Day. Few programs are aired on T.V. and even fewer pages cover women's issues in the press though, educated UAE women are interviewed in the mass media for propaganda purposes. The general absence of women from television and the media can be attributed to the fact that the UAE mass media import almost all their programs, and that social traditions prevent women from making appearances in the mass media. Images of women in the media have been rarely discussed in the Arab world in general and in the UAE in particular. The paper will examine the way that women are portrayed in the UAE Media, particularly T.V. drama and music videos. Furthermore, some information will be given on images of women in the press and in advertisements.


Amina Khamiz Al-Dhaheri

One could say that women are represented from a male dominant point of view which perceives them as sexual objects. A study conducted by myself examined the way women were portrayed in the UAE local television drama between 1976 and 1990 and found that women were presented from the male-dominated point of view which devalued and oppressed women. Images of women in local UAE drama were presented from a stereotypical point of view, where women remained at home, took care of their children and served their families. The stereotype also holds that females are mentally inferior to males; men are shown as more knowledgeable, and thus more in a position to guide women and determine what is suitable for them. Because women are seen as less able than men, they have no choice but to follow and obey them. The same study found that UAE local television drama represented women as procreators, as well as villains and instigators. It also found that local drama conformed to the stereotypical roles of women as housewives whose first place is the home, and did not encourage women to participate in the work force.

T.V. drama embodied a male dominated ideology which sees women as second class citizens who need both protection and guidance. Men, on the other hand, are able guides who lead women and enlighten them by telling them what to do and how to behave. Local dramas on UAE television do not reflect the reality of UAE women. Even though women actually work outside the home, in schools, hospitals, ministries, companies, airports and in trade fields, the sampled dramas do not show women working outside the house except for two women who must have had problems in their lives since by leaving the house daily to work, their marriage is affected and their husbands are dissatisfied.

Another study, that investigated images of women in Arab Gulf music videos, found that they reinforced some stereotypes of women. The textual analysis showed that women in Arab music videos were presented as objects of the male gaze since their seductive power is the main factor that determines their role in a male society.

Except for few who were shown as dancers, women were presented in these songs as accoutrements. However, dancers were evaluated through the notion of sexuality in Arab culture; one dancer's "reactions were typical of a pervasive tendency for both men and women to evaluate dancers primarily through reference to notions of female sexuality rather than aesthetic criteria" (Lorius, 1996, p. 513). Most of these songs showed women juxtaposed with objects, such as the sea, clouds, cats, perfume, mirrors, flowers, and scarves. All of these objects indicated some similarities between them and women in Arab culture. For instance, women are similar to the sea in that both of them are considered unstable, passive and dangerous. The sea is beautiful when it is quiet and pleasant like a pure and virtuous woman, but it is also dangerous and deadly when it becomes rough. Women are dangerous like the sea when they are angry, and they make their lovers suffer from their ignorance and dissent.

Cats in Arab culture are similar to women in that both are disloyal and dishonest. Women are also like clouds in that they are mysterious and evasive. Women are beautiful and soft like flowers, and Arab culture considers beauty as the most important attribute for a woman. Mirrors and perfumes indicate that women are careful about their appearances, while scarves that are often worn by female models in Arab video songs can be viewed as tools of women's magical and seductive power over men.

Arab video songs also reveal the same stereotypical images of women. Since women are known to change their minds repeatedly, they are untrustworthy and dangerous particularly

when they desert or betray their lovers. Women are impatient, unstable, and careless about their lovers, and they are evasive when it comes to their relationships with men. They like to make their lovers live in suspicion and doubt.

At the same time, women in video songs are associated with animals as well as objects. For instance, women are compared to deer or flowers. In Arab culture, deer are considered the most beautiful animals in the world. For instance, the poet al-Husrey al-Qyrawani wrote; *kalef be gazal thee hayef kawaf al-washeen yousharidoh*, which means in English, "I'm enamored of a slender deer ... her fear of informers chases her away" (Shwshah, 1988, p. 204). Furthermore, Arab video songs highlight portions of the women's body particularly the eyes and hair.

Although this study does not compare female and male images in Arab music songs, two songs performed by female singers provide the researcher with an opportunity to briefly touch on this comparison. Males in these songs are presented in inconsequential roles compared to the female models. At the same time, males are shown in long shots, with no concentration on their bodies, whereas females are shown in close up shots. Thus, male bodies and faces are not portrayed as significant and are not a source of sexual attraction. Male models are shown along with women but not as objects in the manner female models are presented.

As a result, women in Arab culture are seen as the cause of social and moral problems such as family break ups, family deterioration, and prostitution. Accordingly, women should be veiled and should cover their bodies in order to protect men and the whole society. Arab culture sees women as sex objects and calls for covering and veiling women's bodies because of fetna, or chaos. Muslim men fear fetna because it is women's power aimed at controlling men:

> The nature of her aggression is precisely sexual. The Muslim woman is endowed with a fatal attraction which erodes the male's will to resist her and reduces him to a passive acquiescent role. He has no choice; he can only give in to her attraction, whence her identification with fetna, chaos, and with the anti-divine and anti-social forces of the universe. (Mernissi, 1987, p. 41)

Although women's bodies are taboo in Arab culture and thus should be hidden, veiled women are absent in Arab video songs. Arab culture is strongly patriarchal; thus, images of women in Arab video songs represent the patriarchal point of view toward women. In these video songs, women are used as attractive and decorative tools.

Culture plays an important role in forming character. In order to understand the position of women in Arab culture, one needs to know the forms of Arab families that have affected women. According to Lutfi (1982), the first form of Arab family was the kin form. In the kin form, people are loyal to the older persons in the tribe who control everything and where women have no freedom to express their opinions. The second form is the extended family which is independent, forming a social unit while maintaining the values of the kin form in which women are only tools for reproduction and support. In both forms, kin and extended families, women's role is limited to reproduction and taking care of husbands and children. The third form is the nuclear family, where women have some economic independence which enables them to work both inside and outside the home. Women work outside the home according to the modern values that allow them to be independent, and they work inside the home according to traditional values inherited from the kin and extended families. Most men still do not accept women's new role and the need to treat them as peers, and do not include them in family and societal affairs. In short, changes in Arab families have not been real or significant; they are superficial changes in keeping with the values and traditions of kin and extended families, where men remain in superior positions and women in inferior positions.

Arab values and traditions see women as the inferior sex. This notion existed before the Islamic era as Amal Rassam (1984) asserts and is supported by Islamic verses. One Islamic verse reads: *Ar-rijaalu qawwaamuuna ala-nisaaa bima fazzala laahu ba'zahum alaa bazin wa bimmaaa anfaquu min amwaalihim*. (["Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, Because Allah has given one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means"]) (Ali, 1990, P. 82). Rassam asserts that one Muslim scholar infers that God prefers men to women because of man's thinking capabilities. Accordingly, God entrusts men with prophecy and religious leadership tasks. Since women are said to lack good thinking processes and self-control, men carry the responsibility of protecting them as well as society. In Arab culture, for instance, beautiful women are referred to as *al-Marah al-Fatinah*, which means alluring. Fitna also means chaos in Arabic, and women may cause chaos if they are not controlled. Since they have strong seductive powers, women's bodies are taboo and should be covered and those who show their bodies are shameless and immoral. Women represent sex in Arab culture, and images of women in Arab music videos underline the strong association of women with sex.

Examining the images of women in the press found that the press carried the same images of women which most often portrayed them as wives, mothers and objects, and sometimes as employers. UAE press emphasize the issues of married women and family problems more than those of single working women. A large number of articles deal with relationships between husbands and wives as well as with chid care. The press always encourages women to submit to and satisfy their husbands by abiding by religious principles and obeying their husbands in the same manner that they obey God. Exploring press advertisements shows that women's bodies are used as instruments to sell products. Women's faces and bodies are most prominent in advertisements; they are depicted as seductive sex objects and their bodies are no more than mere commodities.

Gender and Communication Policy

By May Elian
Journalist, Nahar Al-Shabab

> Courage is the main virtue to seek the language of the world" [... Le courage est la vertu majeure pour chercher le langage du Monde ... (Paulo Coelho)]

Women's representation in the Media is gaining great significance in our region day by day. On reflecting on such an issue, many questions come to mind: Are women well proportionally represented in this field? Is their gender an obstacle to a career? Is it just a question of gender or capacity and qualifications?

May Elian

Even though women working in the field of journalism in Lebanon have managed to secure a place for themselves, leading positions are always reserved for men. Women reporters often cover fields that are considered less serious such as the environment, society, culture, women's magazines, etc.

Even though the majority of women are not in decision making positions, some Lebanese women have managed to reach top ranking and decision making positions. In fact the first woman Journalist in the Arab world, Afife Karam, was of Lebanese origin. She lived between 1883-1924 and worked for "Al Houda" newspaper owned by Naoum Moukarzel.

Working Women in the Field of Journalism

"We can say that the difference between the representation of women in news on television and news in the newspapers is that the former need to empower themselves through physical appearance and deal with the star system which is extremely competitive and can cause a hasty decline and eventual defeat. Meanwhile the press journalist is supposed to be serious, profound and cultured and should rely heavily on research. This kind of journalism demands hard work and a longer span of time to reach the ultimate goal of recognition ". (Gibrane Tueni, Chairperson and CEO of *An-Nahar*)

The number of female media professionals working in the news section at the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI) adds up to almost 70%. Besides, 85% of the news section staff at Murr Television (MTV) are women. Women make up 50% of the staff at the English news department at Future television (FTV) as opposed to 100% at the French department. Moreover, in the Arabic news department the distribution is 10 women to 3 men. This high percentage of women journalists working in Television contrasts with the fact that the top ranking positions have been and still are monopolized by men.

The Newspaper *An-Nahar* has 45 female reporters and 118 males among its staff. In spite of that Suha Baasiry has managed to become editor in chief at the International and Arab desk. Moreover, *As-Safir* newspaper has 53 men to 34 women. Mr. Yasser Nehmeh general manager of *As-Safir* asserts that "the representation of woman in the media has increased in the last ten years and women in the field have managed to gain this position after their success in television. In the past, the percentage of women working in the newspaper *As-Safir* was only 5%. In the 1990's the situation changed to reach around 40% women reporters. Seventy percent of the staff at the **Daily Star** are women. The situation changes at **L'Orient le jour** where all the editors are men. For their local page they have 9 men and 11 women as opposed to one woman for the international and economic page.

The Percentage of Female Students in the Faculty of Information

Dr. Ali Rammal Director of the Faculty of Information and Documentation at the Lebanese University (Branch 1) maintains that "80% of students in Media are women, and the reason is that they are more talented in languages than men."

Dr. Georges Kallas, Director of the Faculty of Information and Documentation at the Lebanese University (Branch 2) affirms that "85% of the students in the various Journalism and Communications fields are women. But Kallas main-

tains that female journalists work for restricted and limited years particularly that the work demands a huge effort that would interfere in their own work and home environment. One could say in this context that only very few women prefer their career to their family and private life.

Advantages of Being a Woman in the Field of Journalism

1. The report taken from UNICEF shows once again that the education field in Lebanon is virtually dominated by women. It's 77% for males and 84% for females. And then comes the United Arab Emirates with 74% for the males and 81% for females. This is one of the few countries in the region, where the rate of female education is higher than male education. Other countries include: Kuwait 64% males 64% females; Jordan 63% males 63% females; Egypt 80% males 68% females; Tunisia 63% males 59% females; Morocco 44% males 33% females; Turkey 67% males 45% females; Greece 99% males 90% females.
2. Women have the chance to access some sources of information, more easily than men, and sometimes exclusively.
3. The new generation of men tend to be more understanding about what this kind of work entails and are more supportive of their wives who work in the field of journalism.

Obstacles that Prevent Women from Access to the Different Kinds of Media

Young Lebanese female graduates in journalism are confronted with many obstacles. To be successful in the media is not easy for a woman and that is for several reasons: [The comments below are the opinions of some male and female journalists]

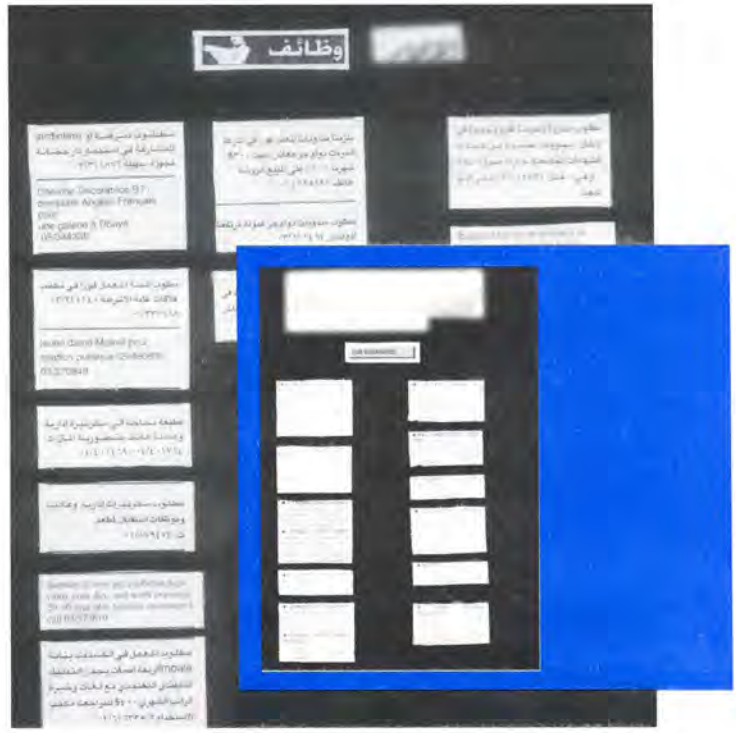
• Women journalists are (stereotyped as being) wrongfully accused of being shy and less aggressive. Thus they are given work in the cultural sector while politics is assigned for men.

• Women who apply for a job in Television are selected on the basis of their physical appearance which is detrimental to women who have the real talents and capabilities.

• Again if she is beautiful, a woman has the problem of not being taken seriously. At the same time, she is used as an attractive "merchandise" or an appealing "object" especially on TV.

• The woman is viewed as more temperamental than men which can be an obstacle in her work.

• Usually woman is not in the position of editor in chief since this kind of work demands a great deal of labor: she is supposed to spend more than 18 hours at work and most of the time work until after midnight.



My Own Experience

When I was in my first year in the school of journalism at the Lebanese University, most of the students were females. This was mostly due to the fact that men preferred majoring in money making fields such as engineering and medicine. The rate of women was high because most of them dreamed of fame or of realizing one of their most precious dreams namely appearing on television. The confusion started for the majority of them when they realized that journalism was about reading different kinds of books and newspapers and dealing with politics which most girls did not like. That is why most of my female colleagues did not have enough patience or passion to pursue the "career of trouble", as we refer to it in the field.

Some Solutions

We must try to integrate the study of Journalism into our schools, at least at the secondary levels, so that people and especially "young women" would not be misguided by what they know of television and journalism: a beautiful and well dressed up woman reading some information written by someone else. Despite all these problems, there are still Editors in Chief who are very supportive, that give you the chance to prove yourself taking you for your own qualifications and giving you a push once in a while and believing in you, no matter what your gender is. Finally, I would like to add here that for me, personally, it is not a problem of gender. What counts is the individual. As the Greeks used to say "our destiny is greatly defined by our character".

Summary of Conference Papers

By Dania Sinno
IWSAW Staffer

Women in the Media in Cyprus

Anna Andreou
Journalist, Cyprus News Agency

According to Anna Andreou, the representation of women in the media differs from that of men. Though all types of discrimination on the basis of sex, age or religion should be avoided, the gap between theory and practice is large. According to Andreou, though the number of women journalists has risen, the social structure and attitudes have not been altered to accommodate this change, and have always privileged men over women. Since many women journalists are trying to manage between their careers and their families, they prefer to work as freelancers and generally reject assignments abroad. Furthermore, women are seldom trusted to deal with politics. Instead, they cover other issues such as education, health and culture.

For Andreou, male professional expertise serves as the main criterion for selection in the TV business; in the case of females, they are selected on the basis of their physical appearance. Accordingly, Andreou sees the need to work on removing stereotypes as a major condition to improve women's status.

Women in the Media

Fatmeh Berri
Al-Manar Television

According to Fatmeh Berri, media and advertisement have not done justice to women; instead, they have victimized them in a number of ways. Women's participation in the press and audio media is restricted to specific domains, and they seldom occupy decision-making positions. As for women in the audio-visual media, they are visible in almost all sectors. Though they have achieved important leaps, some negative aspects persist. In fact, it is the woman's physical appearance rather than her intellectual background, tactfulness and communicative skills that are emphasized. In addition, the image of women as liberated, promiscuous and sexy often takes precedence over the traditional, housewife image.

As for women in advertisement, they are often depicted as commodities. They are also portrayed as lacking in responsibility and concerned with superficial matters such as physical beauty. Arab media and advertisement often tend to imitate the West without taking into consideration the distinct characteristics of each culture. Consequently, the imitation often turns out to be inadequate and far-removed from our traditions and norms.

Mecanisme de Suivi de L'Image de la Femme

Butheina Gribaa
General Director of CREDIF, Tunisia

'Women and Media' is a recent topic in Tunis. The Tunisian government has recently acknowledged the important role media can play in the diffusion of new values and has attempted to portray a more positive and objective image of women in the media. Extensive research has been conducted on the participation of women in various areas of information and communication. Findings suggest that despite the rapid feminization of various sectors of communication media, the number of women in decision-making positions is still low.

Gribaa presented the findings of a quantitative and qualitative study conducted by CREDIF (Centre de Recherches, d'Etudes, de Documentation et d'Information sur la

Femme). According to this study, the journalistic space reserved for women is minimal. News on women remain restricted to the cultural pages and is almost absent in the economic pages. In addition, women in official positions are more represented than other women engaged in more traditional roles.

Gribaa urged the press concerned with women's issues to adopt more challenging approaches and to give more value to feminine tasks by portraying more attractive images of women at work and at home.

Media Globalization

Najieh Housary
Journalist, Al-Hayat Daily

In this era of globalization, information is reaching a larger audience at a faster rate. This globalization cannot be ignored and must be used to the benefit of the Arab press. In recent years, the Arab press has witnessed a mounting use of technology: Desktop publishing and the display of Arab newspapers on the Internet.

Although the press is supposed to be the voice of the people in the Arab world, voices of males are more heard than those of females. In the media, women are still portrayed as victims or as sex objects. Therefore, the "invasion" of the media by women should not be considered an achievement so long as their conditions are not altered. Even though women's participation in the labor force is increasing, their working conditions remain worse than those of men.

Gender Communication Policy

May Kahale
Journalist, Former Information Advisor to the President of the Republic of Lebanon

May Kahale overviewed the state of the media in the Arab World and highlighted features of the Arab media in general and the Lebanese media in particular. In her view, the Arab media have always adopted common Arab causes that often turned out to be fatal weapons in the Arab struggle against others. However, the main deficiency lies in media coverage of the internal politics of each country. Here, the Arab media serve as official platforms promoting the image of the country's political leaders, totally disregarding the opposition. In this regard, Lebanon is an exception. Lebanese media are characterized by the coexistence of the official and the private. In her opinion, the Lebanese way of presenting the official as well as opposition stands on political and economic matters must be taken up by all Arab countries.

Finally, Kahale explained how the technological developments the Arab media have witnessed, especially in the audio-visuals, have been at the expense of audio media and the press. She also shed light on the failure of Arab media to address and propagate women's issues.

The Image of Women in Media

Azza Kamel
ACT Director, Egypt

Azza Kamel presented a historical background of women's status in Egypt. In her view, the economic and political situation in Egypt has severely affected the role of women in society. During the 1970s, the Arab defeat and the rise of fundamentalism had severe consequences on Egyptian women. The obstacles imposed on women in the name of Islam and the increasing pressures on female workers have marginalized the role of women. In the 1980s and 1990s, the participation of Egypt in major conferences on population and development brought women's issues to the forefront. Newspapers and journals became the arena for debates among opponents and proponents of women's rights.

Kamel discussed the portrayal of women in the cinema and asserted that the majority of movies have titles describing women as evil and decadent. Consequently, it is not surprising that violent scenes of physical abuse inflicted by males on females often receive the applause and approval of the audience.

Difficulties Faced by Turkish Women in Developing Communication Policies

Eser Koker
Faculty of Communication
Ankara University, Turkey

Eser Koker discussed women's representation in the printed press (dating back to the 1890's) and television.

According to her, women have had their own journals in which feminist issues were addressed. However, nowadays if women have reached editorial positions in major journals, few have made it to decision-making positions. Koker asserted that television too has acknowledged women's participation to the extent that some positions have been virtually feminized. Koker admitted that women in Turkey have a long way to go and suggested a few recommendations on how to shorten this way.

Gender and Communication Policy

Irene Lorfing
Lecturer, Saint Joseph University

Irene Lorfing stressed the need for gender and communication policy in the region. She recognized the crucial role media can play in challenging the perpetuation of unequal power relations in the Arab world. However, she insisted that most development programs focus on women's conditions, emphasizing immediate needs and paying little attention to communication strategies. In this manner, they reinforce patterns that eternalize inequalities. Another issue that she deals with is the role of media globalization in hindering the promotion of gender-sensitive local programs and the development of communication policies. Finally, Lorfing suggested a few tactics to promote effective gender communication; among these tactics, training and networking were emphasized.

Women in the Media in Iran

Nasrin Mosaffa, Director
Center for Graduate International Studies
Teheran University, Iran

Nasrin Mosaffa emphasized the important role Khomeini played in improving women's status in Iran. According to Mosaffa, Khomeini challenged the historical aspect of political philosophy and gave women the right to participate in the public sphere even without the consent of their husbands. This is mainly the reason why women have played a very important role in post-revolution Iran.

Media has always been regarded as the best place to alter people's attitudes. After the revolution, the media ceased to be an instrument for entertainment and became a means to propagate education, socialization, and to present people with new attitudes and new norms.

Mosaffe elaborated on the historical background of women's participation in the Iranian cinema, press and television. Whereas women in pre-revolution Iran were portrayed in the media as sex objects, in post-revolution Iran women play a much more important role. Today, in the cinema business, there are Iranian women directors, producers and actresses. In the press, female issues are often addressed, such as women's rights, their needs and the civil code. Mosaffa also argued that the percentage of women working in the press is significant, and that television in particular, has succeeded in addressing women's needs and concerns.

Violence in the Media and its effect on Women and Children

Ikram Saab
Women's Page
Almustakbal Newspaper

In her presentation, Ikram Saab focused on two main aspects: the effect of violence in the media on children and women and the role of media in preventing violence. Violence portrayed in the media has severe consequences on children in the first place. A high rate of suicide, juvenile delinquency, and other violent behavior are the result of violence portrayed on television.

In an attempt to imitate the hero or villain, children often end up committing crimes. Through the media, children and adolescents are learning to inflict harm on society at large, and women in particular. Saab recognized the importance of the media in uncovering women's issues and concerns. Indeed, the press have recently started devoting special sections related to women in an attempt to raise awareness about women's legal, political, and civic rights.

Images of Women in Moroccan Communication Media

Zahra Ouardi
Secretary General of Casablanca UAF Representation

According to Zahra Ouardi women in Morocco are subject to various forms of discrimination ranging from domestic vio-

lence, sexual and physical abuse, to high rates of illiteracy and a high percentage of mortality. To what extent were the media successful in reflecting these real images? For Ouardi, the Moroccan media in general do not give priority to women's issues and rarely cover launched campaigns for women's causes. Commercial magazines are only concerned with women's physical beauty, and in the cinema, women are portrayed as sex objects. However, Ouardi recognized that the second Moroccan Television channel has disclosed some of the injustices inflicted on Moroccan women. In addition, the Moroccan government and the ministry dealing with the family and with women's issues have adopted measures to improve women's status by including women in development projects.

Ouardi recommended changing people's mentality by starting to educate the new generation. She stressed on the important role female journalists should play in raising awareness on women's issues. She also stressed on the need to use the influential media to promote educational programs. Finally, she emphasized the necessity of collaborating with countries which have similar problems in order to exchange expertise.

Images of Women in the Lebanese Television News

Rouba Tok
Information Officer, Caritas, Lebanon

According to Rouba Tok, only female public figures or victims are portrayed in television news; however, the coverage of these two categories of women is often inadequate. Though the media cover the activities of female public figures, the audience often fails to understand the depth of women's concern with and interest in these public issues. The same applies to women victims. Though crimes committed against women are often covered in the media, a failure to provide the audience with an in-depth investigation of the social circumstances leading to their victimization is often noted.

In Tok's opinion, if the purpose of the media were to raise awareness among the audience, then light should be shed on the concerns and worries of active working women. In fact, though women participate in all media domains, their participation remains relatively low compared to men. Tok supported her argument by providing statistics on Lebanese women's participation in the media sector. She also acknowledged that if women were to occupy decision-making positions in the media sector, their working conditions would no doubt improve.

Tok went on to say that women working in the news sector are portrayed as educated, liberated, and successfully managing between their work duties and family responsibilities; however, these women fail to give precedence to women's issues. She insisted that the danger resides in the portrayal of women in the media in general. The media have the power to make the audience identify with the figures portrayed, and the often inaccurate portrayal of Lebanese women as traditional housewives or as sex objects may have severe consequences on the new generation of women.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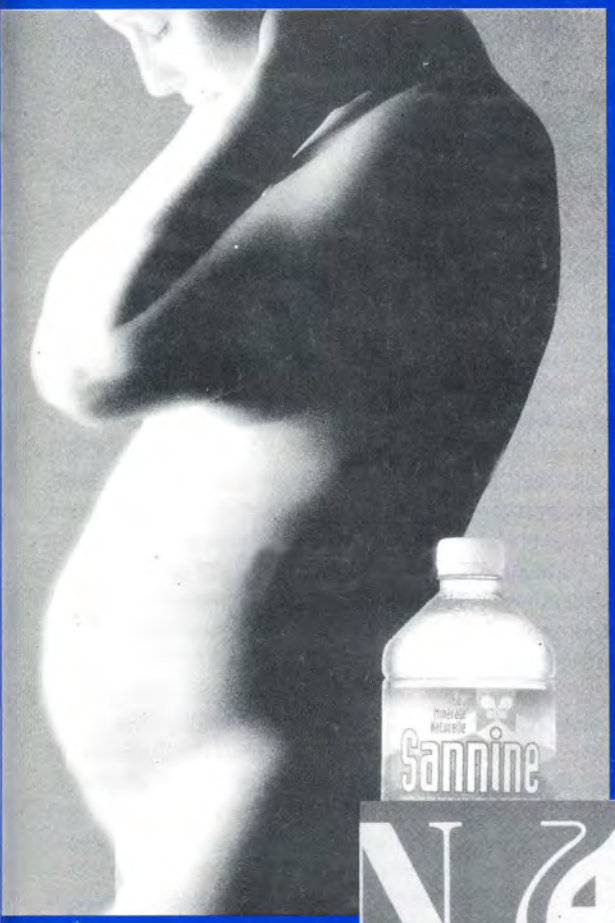

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ENT

The Global Media Monitoring Project

By Maria del Nevo
WACC

An international day of monitoring took place on Tuesday February 1, 2000 when groups in some 70 countries studied the representation of women in the news on TV, radio and in newspapers. The first GMMP, organized by Media Watch Canada, was held in January 1995 and this second study aims to analyze changes in the media situation in half a decade.

The project, organized by the WACC Women's Program took months of planning. The GMMP Committee, which also includes Erin Research and media specialist, Margaret Gallagher, worked tirelessly to revise the monitoring materials in an attempt to make the study broader in scope and more contextual. A successful pre-test in August 1999, involving groups in 6 countries, helped put the finishing touches to the materials which were then translated into Spanish and French.

In the first few weeks of 2000 there was a last minute flurry of activity as some groups raised queries about the coding system and the monitoring process. One or two dropped out at the last minute although replacements were found so that their countries could still be included in the study. As morning broke on the day of monitoring at the WACC Secretariat in London, the participants in the Philippines had already finished their day's work and there was a sigh of relief on the Women's Desk when an e-mail was received from Imelda Benitez at the Association of Salesian Cooperators in Manila to say that the monitoring had gone smoothly. Then two more e-mails arrived. One from Margaret Gallagher in Paris, which simply said "in Solidarity" and another from Erin Research in Canada, which said: "This is a momentous day. We're thinking of you and the many people all over the globe who are waiting to see what today's news will bring ... it's a remarkable enterprise". It did turn out to be a momentous day and one of real solidarity. Towards late morning more and more e-mails arrived at the Women's Desk, some obviously written in great haste as coders took a few moments away from taping the news or gathering their daily newspapers to write in and express their immediate reactions to the news, or simply to express their pleasure at being involved in such a massive global exercise. "I can't believe I'm having so much fun!" exclaimed a volunteer with the Interlink Rural Information Service in Kenya.

In the Netherlands the project was clearly a big deal. A bus took a group of monitors from Hilversum to the Hague where up to 85 people - students, journalists, women's organizations and ethnic minorities - gathered to take part in the monitoring. A press release about the project appeared in the news the next day which resulted in significant media coverage. In Fiji II volunteers participated; some met at the Fiji Women's Crisis Center to begin their monitoring whilst others who weren't able to attend monitored the news from their respective work places or from home.

Many universities regarded the project as an invaluable training exercise for their students. Maximiliano Duenas Guzman, a professor in communications in Puerto Rico reported: "All of my contacts were with universities and since most of the faculties saw the opportunity as one in which their students could participate, we decided that we would duplicate coverage so that each university could be involved".

Those groups with fewer numbers in their monitoring teams were not fazed by the amount of work involved. In Benin a team of two people were tackling eight newspapers, four radio and two TV channels. Neither were they put off by intermittent power cuts: "As soon as the electricity returns," wrote Nana Rosine and her coding partner Mich6e, "we will quickly run back to the exciting coding exercise".

The messages were forwarded and circulated to all of the participants, which increased the sense of global solidarity. Media Watch Canada wrote: "It's great to hear from the other countries, very exciting and we are proud to be part of this international effort". The excitement was evident from all corners of the world.

Many groups said that February 1, 2000 was a typical news day. In Spain, the top stories focused on their prime ministerial campaign, the Pinochet case, Austrian Nazis and the rape of a two-year old girl whose mother had exchanged her for drugs. In Africa and the US the news was dominated by air crashes while in the UK the face of Harold Shipman, a doctor found guilty of murdering 15 female patients, peered out of every newspaper.

Before coding had even fully got under way it was clear that the increased number of women journalists over the years has had little affect on media content and that women remain barely visible in the news unless they are victims of yet another disaster or crime.

The next step of the project is the analysis of the data, which will be carried out by Erin Research, and the preparation of preliminary results which are to be presented at Beijing +5 - the UN General Assembly's review of the Platform for Action of the 4th World Conference on Women, to be held in June.

February 1, 2000 was a memorable day and the enthusiasm and commitment shown by everyone who took part in GMMP 2000 will no doubt ensure that the results will be used in ongoing advocacy and lobbying for the democratization of media.

Asmahan's Secrets:

Art, Gender and Cultural Disputations

by Sherifa Zuhur
Ameican University of Cairo (AUC)

Asmahan, born Amal al-Atrash, of the Suwayda' branch of the Druze al-Atrash clan of southern Syria, achieved fame in Arabic music and cinema from 1938 until her death in 1944. My general acquaintance with Asmahan dates from my late teenage years, when I went mad for Arabic music. I learned one of her songs in the early 1980s from a gifted musician, my friend Simon Shaheen — "Imta Hata'raf Imta". Later I began work on a paper on her first film, Intisar al-Shabab, which was an exploration of themes of social mobility. I searched for funding to do a film version of her life in 1990 and at that point began to notice discrepancies in the sources and certain aspects of her mystique that intrigued me. In 1993 and 1994 I spent a Fulbright year on this project, interviewed her family members in the Jabal and in Cairo, consulted the various archival sources and private memoirs which shed some light on her activities during World War II, and have since tried to visit every physical location mentioned in her life-story.

For any listeners unfamiliar with her life story, Asmahan was the daughter of Fahd bin Farhan bin Ibrahim bin Isma'il bin Muhammad al-Atrash of Suwayda' and Alia al-Mundhir of Hasbaya, Lebanon. The birth dates of Asmahan and her brother Farid were not recorded accurately - a common problem earlier in the century. In her passport, Asmahan's birthdate appears as 1912, but is given elsewhere as 1915, 1917 and 1918. Her father was educated in Istanbul, and his marriage with Alia was his second. Fahd's return from a governmental posting in Anatolia to the Jabal Druze coincided with the end of World War I.

By 1927, Alia had already fled Syria with her sons Fu'ad, and Farid and her daughter Amal (whose stage name later on was Asmahan), first to Beirut, then to Haifa and on to Cairo, where she set up a household. But after being divorced and without funds, she began to sing for private musical parties with musician friends she had acquired in Cairo. Alia played the 'ud, and sang in both the Arabo-Ottoman and Lebanese folk genres. Asmahan and Farid learned these forms and were able to synthesize them with quintessential Egyptian vocal genres in their respective careers.

Their Cairene milieu included family friends like the composer Da'ud Husni who gave Amal her stage name, Asmahan; the pianist and composer Madhat Assim who established the first music programs on Egyptian radio and the 'awwadi Farid Ghusn. In this atmosphere, the young Farid and Asmahan were encouraged to perform first in private and later in public settings, the young man as an instrumentalist and Asmahan as a vocalist. She reportedly debuted at the Opera in a concert in 1931 and then began performing in the salon of Mary Mansur until her fledgling career was interrupted by a marriage with her cousin Hasan al-Atrash of Suwayda.

She spent six years in Syria with Hasan, but returned to Egypt to give birth to her daughter Kamilia and resumed her career which blossomed through performances of the compositions of Muhammad al-Qasabji, Riyad al-Sunbati, Madhat 'Assim and eventually her brother Farid al-Atrash. Hasan divorced Asmahan either before or after the appearance of her first film *Instisar al-Shabab* ("The Triumph of Youth") directed by Ahmad Badrkhan. Badrkhan fell in love with Asmahan and they contracted an *'urfi* marriage. But the marriage quickly disintegrated under the pressure of their two families.

At this time, in 1941 the German Afrikan Korps under Erwin Rommel had bolstered the Italian forces earlier commanded by Rodolfo Graziani and had pressed into Egypt's western frontier. The Allies were very concerned about German intentions in Syria and decided to invade Syria and Lebanon. British agents hired Asmahan to travel to Syria as a courier to the Druze to forewarn them of the June 1941 invasion by the Free French and British forces.

Asmahan traveled to Jerusalem and then up to the Syrian/Jordanian border where she transmitted messages to her family through her half brother Talal. Hasan al-Atrash made use of the occasion to ask Asmahan to remarry him - remarriage was forbidden by the Druze, but the clan hoped to reclaim her from her sinful life in the world of entertainment. She was briefly reconciled with Hassan, divided her time in this period between Damascus, Beirut and Jerusalem, tried unsuccessfully to obtain funds from the British and the French, attempted suicide and managed to return to Egypt as the wife of Ahmad Salim, later a Studio Misr director, in 1944 in order to complete her film contract with Studio Misr in the production *Gharam wa Intiqam* ("Passion and Revenge") released after her death in 1944.

According to her family, her marriage to Salim was contracted solely to secure a visa to Egypt, but apparently Salim

was not willing to release her. According to other sources, their's was a sincere if raucous relationship - both were out of control. Salim shot himself during one of their quarrels and while he was still hospitalized, she was killed in an automobile accident along with her friend Mary Qiladah on the road from Cairo to Ra's al-Barr, where the car went into an irrigation canal on the side of the road.

Rumors arose concerning her death, particularly that the chauffeur had survived the accident, having jumped from the car. These rumors concerned the singer Umm Kulthum, who saw Asmahan as her one worthy rival, the British, the Germans, and others. Her family members did not come under public suspicion in Egypt, but the Syrian side had already threatened to kill her because of her wild behavior, drinking, gambling, and associations with men. Sir Edward Spears wrote just prior to her return to Egypt:

> So the Druze wrote to me saying they had heard of goings-on which were a disgrace not only to the Atrash family but to the Druze in general; would I please inform the High Commissioner that their honor was sullied and they were going to send to Jerusalem and have her killed. This missive I sent on to Sir Harold MacMichael, and in due course I forwarded his short answer to the Atrash. "Palestine is governed under British Law," it ran. "Anyone committing murder is, if convicted, hanged. Please inform your correspondent of this, and that the law is strictly enforced.[1]

Asmahan's dabbling in espionage was far less important than her artistic output. Yet journalists and her public made much of this dabbling. Why? Espionage held great significance in her era and later - collaboration with the British was a means of discrediting various elements of the Egyptian elite, accurately or inaccurately. Although Egyptians could understand that Vichy control in Syria had created different perceptions of the Allies and that Asmahan might have been patriotic toward her own homeland, entertainers who collaborated with the British, or who sought favors from the Palace were simply living up to their reputation for patron-seeking. She received a great deal of money for this mission, 40,000 pounds according to one source.

The British and the French were much less interested in Asmahan than in her relatives although they did become nervous that she might contact the Germans on a trip she attempted to make to Turkey, and thus promptly arrested her. By the time of her death, there is little she could have known that could have compromised policy, although perhaps information concerning individuals might have been somewhat compromising.

Asmahan did not leave substantial correspondence, but there are two early biographies written in Arabic, both by men with particular agendae, who claimed to reveal her secrets and uphold her honor: Muhammad al-Taba'i, a journalist and entertainment critic, and Fumil Labib. The latter to whom her elder brother Fu'ad al-Atrash apparently dictated information about her life that contested some of al-Taba'i's claims that her family, and Fu'ad in particular had exploited and mistreated her and caused her to "go wild".

Al-Taba'i, entitled his book, **Asmahan Tells Her Story** (*Asmahan Tarwi Qissataha*) to entice prospective readers with the promise of an autobiographical account (this was an interesting new genre of Arabic literature that developed in the Twentieth Century). Asmahan does not actually tell her own story within this book. If the author had access to Asmahan - between 1939 and 1941 - he gives the impression of being a close friend, who was attracted to the uninhibited young artist. Both he and Labib make numerous mistakes, discrepancies which appear to be based on reports from other journalists. Asmahan also appears in the memoirs and notes of Sir Edward Spears, General Pauax, several British officers, and in two subsequent biographies in Arabic, one by al-Aynayn and in al- Jaza'iri's *Asmahan Dhatiya al-Istakhbarat* both of which borrow very heavily from the two earlier books. She appears in the few musicological sources in Arabic in Fiktur Sahhab's **The Seven Great Ones** which also contains some inaccurate biographical information, and in Samim al-Sharif s book in a chapter on al-Qasabji, and briefly in the analysis of *Layali al-Uns* by Jihad Racy.

Due to the transformation of Arabic music over the century, an appreciation of her prodigious vocal talents evidenced in some 45 songs and in two films is lost to those unfamiliar with the music of the era. Very few of the songs performed by Asmahan are remembered or performed in the repertoires of contemporary entertainers.

In terms of her art, a few comments are necessary:
1. Composers, performers and musicians of Asmahan's era participated in the modernization of entertainment - meaning both new musical forms and attitudes about music. For example, one can mention novel tempi, musical genres, instruments and efforts to play in sectional unison under a conductor. In film, new camera techniques were introduced, methods of lighting, better sound production, and the creation of highly paid stars, like Asmahan.
2. Asmahan acquired excellent sight-reading skills, and seemed by the late 1930s to have had better vocal technique and a wider range than Umm Kulthum, in terms of singing a composition as the composer intended it.
3. Asmahan's repertoire reflected several different styles - modernist compositions such as those of Muhammad al-Qasabji, others by Farid al-Atrash that moved from *lawn baladi to lawn gharbi to lawn tarab* — linear compositions with segments inspired by country melodies, Western themes or rhythms, and sections closer to the Arabo-Ottoman structures.[2]

Among her most memorable songs were
• compositions by Muhammad al-Qasabji: "Laita Barraq'Aina Fitra", "Asqanina bi Abi Inta wa Ummi" (with lyrics by Bishara al-Khuri) "Farraq Ma Baina Leh al-Zaman?" with lyrics by Ali Shukri — "Imta Hata'raf Imta" and "Tahgrid al-Balabil" known as al-Tuyur. This song with its coloratura section perhaps caused listeners to incorrectly identify Asmahan with the Westernizing of Arabic music.
• Madhat Assim's "Ya Habibi Ta'al al-Hiqni" and "Dakhilit Marra fl jinaina"
• Farid al-Atrash's "Raja'at Laka Ya Habibi" to the words of Yusuf Badrus "Ya Illi Hawak Shaaghil Baal!" sung in I.S. and "Layali al-Uns fi Fienna" to Ahmad Rami's lyrics in G I Sunbati's "Dama'at'ala Habibi" in the same film
The Studio gave her space to include her own unique style of singing in film, with the inclusion of the songs - "Ahwa Ahwa" and "Ya Dairati Malak 'alayna" in Gharam wa Intiqam. [3]

Asmahan's public saw her as a mysterious outsider who was part of the professionalization of music. A certain stereotype of performers had developed within the tradition of Arabic music history. If they came from outside the "trade" as Asmahan and Farid did, their hunger for and devotion to art was so overwhelming as to outweigh social distaste for entertainers. Both were part of a movement to characterize music as a calling rather than a trade — this is very apparent in Farid al-Atrash's lifelong emphasis on the musician as a symbol of modernity. Such artists were according to journalists or historians, often child prodigies. There was Umm Kulthum who sang for weddings and religious occasions when still a child. Layla Murad is also supposed to have made her first stage appearance at age twelve in 1930, and to have begun singing by 1934 on the radio.[4] Najat al-Saghira is said to have sung Umm Kulthum's songs at the age of seven (in 1940).[5] Fayza Ahmed reportedly sang Asmahan's and Umm Kulthum's songs at the age of six.

Dates are a problem in Asmahan's biography, but if we accept the idea that she became an "artist-in-spite-of herself" then stories of her perfect mimicry, as a child, renditions of Umm Kulthum's songs and professional debut at about age 13 fit in. There is some evidence that she was a bit older than the others. Muhammad abd al-Wahhab commented on the maturity of her voice and womanly delivery, and her brother Fu'ad became intent upon the idea of marrying her off when he saw men admiring her. However, far from being a wunderkind at the height of her fame in the late 1930's and early 1940's, she was a woman who absorbed lessons concerning achievement, frustration, isolation, and mastered many technical aspects of vocal music.

Her public associated her with eternal youth. Asmahan never aged — her untimely death preserved her image with its appeal and sexual allure intact. This was best remembered through her two films as Nadia, the lissome outsider who sought success in a foreign land, Egypt, and encountered social prejudice against entertainers in *Intisar al-Shabab*, and as the stunning Suhair in *Gharam wa Intiqam*, where in vowing to use a woman's weapons she ensnars both Anwar Wagdi and herself. Even today in Egypt, young people who may never have seen this film, use the expression "ey da? gharam wa intiqam walla ey? when, for instance one partner is too intently pursuing the other.

Besides her eternal youth, Asmahan steadily reflects a strong female power, attracting women who identify with her and men who desire her. If we contrast the image with Umm Kulthum, we find that the latter also dressed glamorously in these years and had various affairs, including that with Sherif Pasha. Nonetheless, Umm Kulthum managed to create and uphold a very respectable image for herself as she aged in full view of her public.

Asmahan's story expressed a deep conflict between her ascent in the entertainment industry and her natal family's insistence that only marriage to another Druze was an acceptable union. Her own mother's escape from her husband, and her brother Farid's support for her career were significant factors that encouraged her flight away from social reformation, after dutifully though unsuccessfully attempting to live as Hasan's wife.

For the history of women her story is important as a project of recovery, of revision (in my reshaping of the male accounts of her life) and of displaying the nuances of women's transition into the public sphere of the celebrity.

Her disruptive mystique as a woman 'who did it her way' in opposition to the norms of Middle Eastern society was tempered by her cinematic message of romance and danger, her musical import as an artist performing transitional genres, and by her vulnerability — she paid the price in several failed marriages, in a reputation for being "fast" or racy and in at least three attempts at suicide.

A different way of understanding the importance of her gender is to compare her experience and popular image with that of her brother Farid. Farid, who achieved great success after the first of nine films that he made with the dancer Samia Gamal, was regarded by his Druze relatives as a cultural emissary. However, he began his career, under his sister's shadow and benefited from her renditions of his compositions and from his onscreen appearance with her in *Intisar al-Shabab* where she was the known star and he the novice.

Her demeanor was of greater interest to the public: her beauty was commented on far more often than his physical appearance. Unlike his sister, he was free to avoid marriage; he claimed that he was married to his art and included this notion in his films. His sister was not similarly free. To her Druze relatives, she remained a beautiful and troubling

memory. Abdullah al-Atrash said to me: "We hear her voice with regret; we were very conservative in those years." Even her friend, al-Taba'i made much of her drinking and smoking, and her public sensationalized and sexualized her, while perceiving her brother as a romantic figure.

Asmahan's performing status went hand in hand with many rumors: Tal'at Harb, King Faruq, and Ahmad Hassanain Pasha who was also supposedly enamored of Queen Nazli and others.

Was Asmahan, essentially respectable, but part of a 'fast' social circle that included her friend Amina Barudi? Or was she, as her relatives suggested to me, maligned? "Do you think that if she did anything, and I say, if, that she would let anyone know — both of her brothers were very conservative!" [7]

My quandary in characterizing Asmahan — whether to reclaim her honor or celebrate her escape from respectability - was complicated by some of my feminist colleagues as well. For example the Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi, saw Asmahan as a symbol of Arab women breaking free from tradition:

> Asmahan entranced both men and women with the idea that failure or success did not matter in the adventurous life, and such a life was much more enjoyable than a life spent sleeping behind protective doors.[8]

In all honesty I could not verify that this was Asmahan's primary intent -too much ambivalence and ambition co-existed with her wild side.

I also disagreed with one family version of Asmahan's story, which went something like this: Farid al-Atrash actually taught and encouraged his sister, composed for her and made her famous. He or Fu'ad made the contacts for her with the British. Lies were told about her because that is inevitable for women in entertainment. As a matter of fact, she was always in love with her husband Hasan.

This particular version claims Asmahan as the vessal or voice for her brother's compositional genius through which she communicated her undying love for Hasan, and is certainly a way of reclaiming an errant woman.

But another even wilder version of Asmahan is given by a certain British officer who claims that Asmahan was a wild vixen, holding orgies. Muhammad al-Taba'i 's exploration of Asmahan's personality is the most sensitive, although he too combines stereotypical ideas of women and artists. The artist to him, is an immoderate, sensitive, ego-centered personality, insecure or jealous of other women, and uncomfortable in elite society. Al-Taba'i failed to see that Asmahan's early poverty created a certain materialism, and hunger for success, and a need to spend wildly and gamble. He believed that she was incapable of real love because as an artist she has nothing in common with the ideal woman who needs a man and children for fulfillment.

The idea that all women share a monolithic nature, and aim at love and marriage rather than a career, could not but affect popular writing and thinking about Asmahan. And so those who tried to uncover Asmahan's secrets wrote most consistently about her problematic search for love, rather than her very evident satisfaction with her musical achievements, her fulfillment on-stage.

The public considered Asmahan a "man's woman," based on her cinematic character, the lyrics she sang, and the information they could glean about her life. However, she was not a loner, and she cared deeply for female friends and relatives, including her daughter, and non-amorous friends. Popular culture rarely views a femme fatale as a daughter, mother, or friend of other women.

Perhaps her greatest secret was her ability to shape her insecurity and those of others into expressions of emotion in her vocal and cinematic performances - after all these were the arenas in which she controlled breathing, rhythm, syllables, tones far more closely than in the events of her own life.

Endnotes

1. Spears, Fulfllllment of Mission, 172. Spears heard little about Asmahan from this period until her death. He relays a garbled version of her death - writing that she died on her way back to Cairo accompanied by "a Hungarian countess."
2. A list of Asmahan's songs appear in Sherifa Zuhur, **Asmahan: Woman, War and Song**. (Austin, Texas: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, distributed through University of Texas Press, forthcoming, Fall 2000) Chapter Six.
3. Sherifa Zuhur,"Asmahan: Arab Musical Performance and Musicianship under the Myth." in **Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East** edited by Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998).
4. Mustafa Fathy Ibrahim and Armand Pignol. **L'extase et le transistor: AY)ercus sur la chanson eizyptienne contemporaine de izrande audience**. (Cairo: Centre d'etudes et de documentation economique juridque et social, 1987) 17.
5. Fathy Ibrahim and Pignol, L'extase, 49.
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Interview with
Mishka Moujabber Mourani

By Myriam Sfeir

She is the only woman to have attained the rank of Senior Vice-President at the International College (IC), and the first woman at IC to have been appointed director of the secondary school. Moreover, she has served as educational consultant for various national and international organizations.

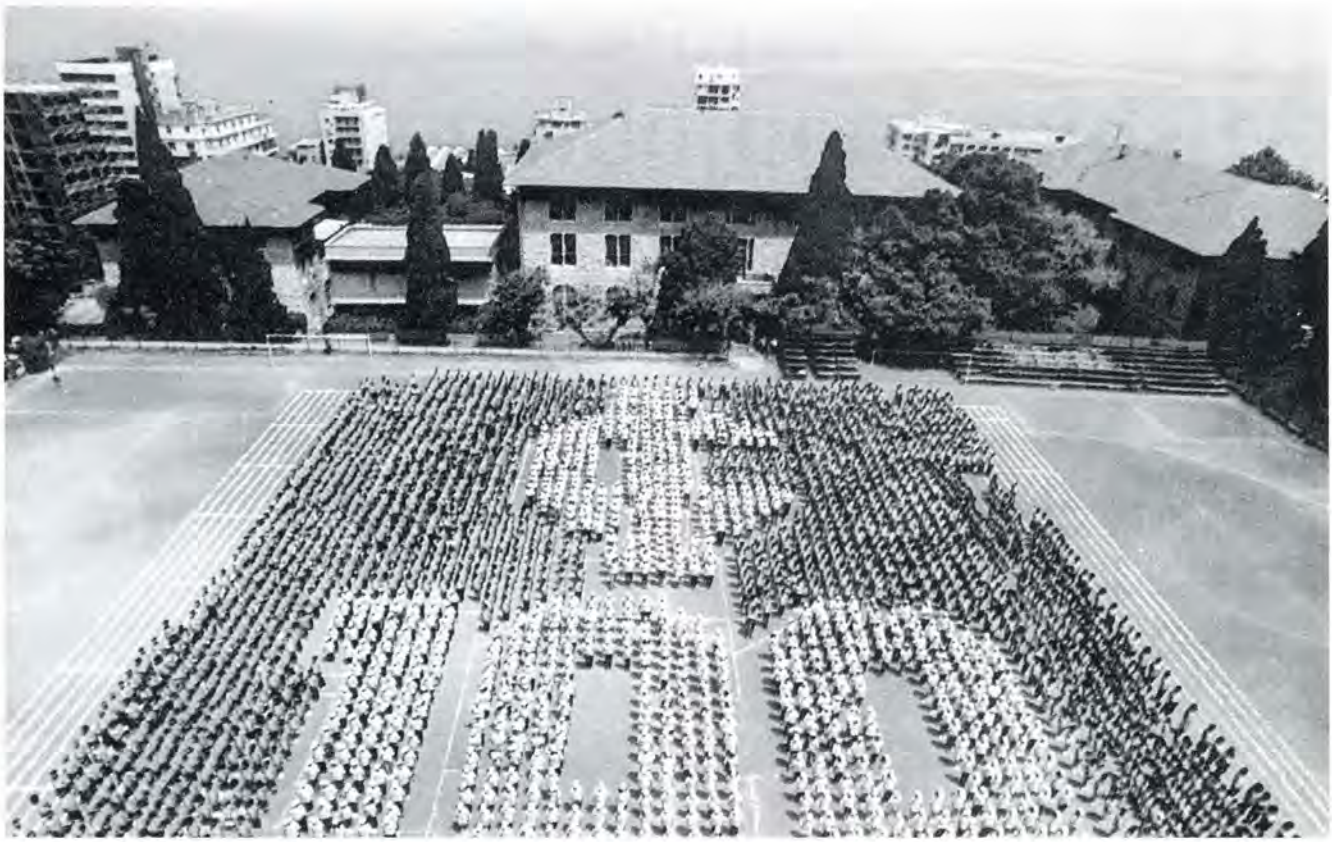
Given that Mourani comes from a mixed background, her mother being Greek and her father Lebanese, and having lived in several countries, she has managed to pick up five languages. Even though she lived in Australia for many years, her childhood was spent in Egypt and Lebanon. She recalls that her parents were very important role models. Her father never complained of not having a male heir and took pride in his daughters. Mourani asserts: "My father was a very liberal and open-minded man. He took pride in the fact that he had two daughters and was never bothered by the fact that he had no sons. All my uncles used to encourage him to have a son and his answer always was: 'I am very happy with my girls; they are as good as boys if not better.' Growing up and knowing that your father is proud of you no matter what your sex is made all the difference. It helped to shape our self image and was very crucial in determining our needs and expectations." Mourani was also influenced by her mother who worked both inside and outside the home: "My mother was a working woman. Even though she left work for a while when we were first born she went back as soon as we went to school. So this culture of a woman running a home, having a family, working and leading a social life was part of the life I grew up in."

Mourani studied at the American University of Beirut where she received her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts as well as a diploma in Educational Administration. While still a student at AUB she taught English at IC (7-12 graders). Upon receiving her BA she traveled to Oman and worked as a program Coordinator at the Sultan's School. She then returned to Lebanon and while completing her graduate work she taught English communication skills to AUB undergraduate students. Mourani also served as an instructor at the Civilization Sequence department at AUB from 1986-1988.

In 1985 Mourani was appointed chairperson of the English department at IC. Her job entailed training teachers and supervising the English program at all levels. In 1988 she served as Assistant Director of the Elementary School. She

was also chairperson of the academic committee where she coordinated and supervised professional development and curriculum projects. In 1990 she was appointed Director of the Elementary School, then she served as Director of the Middle School and after that as Director of the Secondary School. Mourani is currently Senior Vice President at IC.
Mourani explains that she stopped teaching at IC as soon as she became Director because her administrative tasks were numerous. She was the first woman to run the secondary school since IC's inception. She asserts: "It was an achievement for me to be appointed to be in charge of the secondary school. What was very unusual about my directoral appointment is that for the past 100 years it had always served as a male's domain." The prevalent misconception was that women teachers wouldn't be able to handle older students or male teachers, Mourani explained. However, "history has proven them wrong". She went on to say that when she first started working at IC women teachers were very few and the institution was run mostly by men. Nowadays things have changed because IC is changing with the times."

Four years ago Mourani was invited, by the National Center for Educational Research and Development, along with other colleagues in the private sector to work on the National Educational Reform Project. Among her duties was to supervise the articulation of the government curricula in both private and public schools at all levels elementary, middle and secondary. Her task also entailed supervising



the review of the official books and materials to be approved for use by the Lebanese Ministry of Education. Mourani maintains: " The committee strove to incorporate issues of gender, race, social relations and political realtions into the national curriculum following the principles of global education."

Mourani lived the war years in Lebanon; her work as well as her students gave her the incentive to go on. She recounts: "When the war broke out I took a conscious decision never to leave the country. One of the things that kept me sane throughout that period was a journal of poems that I kept in which I documented my war-time experiences and fears. The journal was a personal testimony that helped me come to terms with the civil war that tore me up." Mourani managed to publish her poems in a slim volume, and it is one of the achievements that she is particularly proud of.

Concerning her personal life, Mourani admitted that marriage was never a priority for her; however, it happened that she met the right person at the right time and they were both ready for a commitment. Coping with the double burden of a family and a career was not that hard according to Mourani. She explains: "I am a very energetic person by nature. Moreover, I am very organized and function well under pressure. Hence, I had no difficulty in maintaining a balance between my work and family. Besides, what helped me most is that I have a very supportive and understanding husband. We both share the responsibility of bringing up our daughter, for he too was raised in a family that strongly advocated equality between men and women. "

When asked if she views herself as a feminist she answered: "If someone has been historically discriminated against and disadvantaged and if feminism is a conscious action on the part of individuals to restore the balance between the sexes, then yes I am a feminist. I believe in the importance of human rights and everything that falls under it. Besides, people with equal competences should enjoy equal opportunities.

Mourani believes that Lebanese women can play an important role in the future of the country. According to her, even though Lebanese women are excluded from decision making positions in the political arena, because it is still a men's club, the important role they are playing socially and economically can no longer be ignored. Mourani admits: "The important role women played during the war and are still playing now is becoming an unavoidable reality. This is perhaps the only positive thing that came out of the war. While men were away fighting, women were left behind to fend for themselves. Women all of a sudden had to work not for leisure but because they couldn't afford to remain idle. Even though this responsibility was imposed on them, they rose to the challenge and managed to pick up the shattered pieces of war torn Lebanon."

The God of Small Things

By Arundhati Roy
London: Flamingo, 1997.
Reviewed by Lynn Maalouf

About the author: Born in 1961, of a Bengali Hindu father and a Christian mother from Kerala, Arundhati Roy spent her childhood in Ayemenem, the village where the book's story is set. Following her studies in architecture, she worked as a scriptwriter and a production designer. In 1996, she published her first novel, **The God of Small Things**, which won the notorious British Booker prize a year later. The book was thereafter translated into 16 languages. She is the first non-expatriate Indian author and the first Indian woman to win the Booker Prize. She lives in New Delhi.

Estha and Rahel: the story of two-egg twins, brother and sister, "us and we"; a story to grasp with the senses, with aroused intuition. There is no beginning, no end, nor any linear progression. The book is structured in a pure post-modern, deconstructed literary fashion. The chapters alternate between past and present, childhood and adulthood, dramatic moments and daily routines – Small Things and Big Things. Words oscillate from adults' complexity and hypocrisy, to children's inventive and fragile imagination. The novel combines a dextrous manipulation of time to human intimacy, with the interaction of a multitude of characters and their stories.

"It deals with our ability to be brutal as well as our ability to be so deeply intimate and so deeply loving".

Set in Ayemenem, a small Indian village, in the 1960s, **The God of Small Things** relates the story of the Kochamma family, their two 8 year-old twins, Estha and Rahel, growing up among their mother Ammu, a divorcee who had fled her husband's alcoholism, their grandmother and founder of a Pickle factory, Mammachi, their Oxford-educated uncle, Chacko, and Baby Kochamma their grandaunt, who nurtures substantial bitterness initiated by a one-sided love story, a bitterness that will eventually harm everyone around her.

The book depicts some of the traditional norms and social realities that existed at the time, with the 'untouchable' taboos and rules, and the people's ways of navigating between these rules. The Kochamma family business, 'Paradise Pickles and Preserves', is symbolic of this state, as Ayemenem is almost pickled in its customs. Time is chosen to coincide with the beginning of communism, as it begins pushing its way through, heralding the end of these rules and taboos, the end of a traditional era.

One such taboo is the relationship between castes. As such, **The God of Small Things** recounts the liaison between an untouchable handyman, Velutha, —"The God of Loss / The God of Small Things." (p. 274), and Ammu, the twins' mother and a factory owner's daughter, and the destructive power of the caste system, the hypocrisy of adults in dealing with it, as well as their savageness and unrelenting judgements.

The book is also about the end of another world, a more intimate world - that of Estha and Rahel and everyone else around them - an end, irrevocably damaging, instigated by a single event, the death of their British cousin, Sophie: the story revolves around the visit of Chacko's ex-wife, and his daughter, Sophie Mol. Tragic events that happen during the visit – the drowning of Sophie, a forbidden love affair, child molestation – alternate forever the course of the family's life, sending them each off on spinning trajectories of regret and pain. The drama happens when the Big Things weave into the frail, Small Things, destroying them forever: "It really began in the days when the Love Laws were made. The Laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much." (p.33)

The consequences of these intertwined events are terrible. Estha at some point stops speaking and isolates himself completely from any human contact; Ammu is banished from her home and separated from her children. Rahel drifts from one school to another, from one job to another, and similarly drifts into a marriage with a man who she ends up leaving.

Roy's treatment of her story is exceptional; this tragedy isn't recounted as such – the reader has to reconstruct it, comprehend it gradually through the children's perceptions and the constant rotation between past and present. Throughout the book, one can only sense the tragedy, not fully grasping it, which only makes it more dramatic and fascinating.

Memoirs of Grandma Kamal

By Kamal Abu Chaar
Beirut: World Book Publishing, 1999.
Reviewed by Abir Hamdar

In the spring of 1997, a 76-year old Lebanese woman was sitting in the study room of her daughter's home in California, with a modern computer at hand and a grandson willing to use his writing and technological skills to transfer his grandmother's memories and thoughts into a computer. The woman was Kamal Maalouf Abou-Chaar, and the result of that circumstance is a book entitled **Memoirs of Grandma Kamal**.

The 261-page book is a personal recollection of events and experiences that have shaped Abou-Chaar's life. Although the memories touch on some political and social events, the author insists in her introduction that there is "no intention of making them a historical record."(p.4). Thus, "Memoirs of Grandma Kamal is a personal journey into the life of a strong, intelligent woman who believes in the Arabic saying: "The day that goes by will never be duplicated."

Memoirs of Grandma Kamal is divided into 10 chapters. Each chapter encompasses different phases in Abou-Chaar's life: From the authors' early childhood in the mountains, to her family's move to Beirut, the strive for knowledge, marriage and children, as well as her memorable trip to Seattle, all of which are recounted in simple, uncomplicated language.

The first chapter opens during the author's early childhood years, in the mountain area of Al Mashra. Abou-Chaar describes a home with a great deal of activity going on all year round. It was also the home of an educated family where "certain revolutionary attitudes towards girls"(p.1), were in sharp contrast to the usual norms of the time. As we read the first chapter, we learn that Abou-Chaar's mother ran the house and the missionary school that her late husband helped establish. Abou-Chaar herself comes through as a smart child, striving to discover and make sense of the world around her. In fact, at three years of age the author is intrigued by the big eyes of a cow and cannot resist examining them with a straw. We later discover that this tendency for knowledge and understanding would accompany the author throughout her life.

As Abou-Chaar grows older, she is nurtured by the discipline of a serious mother and grandmother. She is also surrounded by guests who constantly come and go. The author mentions that one of these guests was political leader Antoun Saadeh, whom the young Abou-Chaar remembers as being her brother's friend and the man who sang with a rich, full voice.

In the later chapters, Abou-Chaar recounts her family's move to Beirut, and the fear and uncertainty of attending a different school, meeting new friends and proving herself in a strange environment. But the child is strong enough to overcome all financial and social obstacles. In fact, Abou Chaar was to later graduate with flying colors from several schools and colleges including the American Junior College (LAU). Not even marriage to Dr. Charles Abou Chaar, an AUB professor, and the expansion of their family could slow down her desire for knowledge. Yet it is in Chapter 6 that the reader fully comprehends the force behind Abou-Chaar's search for knowledge. The author asserts:

> I was feeling more and more a pressure to come to terms with myself. ... I needed to reach a decision but it had to be on my own steam. I had tried to walk in the footsteps of those who go searching for the truth. I had read philosophy books. These were enlightening, but left me searching. I had delved to a degree into science and mathematics. They helped, but I felt I had to keep up the search. I figured I might find it in music, and took up its study. This was a refreshing experience, but still left me searching... (p.154)

The constant search finally leads Abou-Chaar to a deep faith in God. The author says: "There is no problem that we can solve better than he can" (p. 155). And it is this deep, unquestionable faith that becomes the turning point in Abou Chaar's life and in her relationship with others.

Finally, **Memoirs of Grandma Kamal**, may be a personal recollection of Abu Chaar's life, yet at the heart of it the author captures the customs and ways of life long forgotten. She also evokes the image of Beirut as it had once been. A city "with cozy houses and large stretches of vegetables" (p. 112).