



AL-Raida

Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, LAU

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20 Women's Centers in the Arab World

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ABOUT IWSAW

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was established in 1973 at the Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College). Initial funding for the Institute was provided by the Ford Foundation.

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

PROJECTS: IWSAW activities include academic research on women, local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures, and educational projects which improve the lives of women and children from all sectors of Lebanese society. The Institute houses the Women's Documentation Center in the Stoltzfus Library at LAU. The

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

ABOUT AL-RAIDA

Al-Raida is published quarterly by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) of the Lebanese American University (LAU), formerly Beirut University College, P.O. Box 13-5053/59, Beirut, Lebanon; Telephone: (01) 867-618, ext. 288; Fax: (01) 791-645. The American address of LAU is 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1846, New York, NY 10115, U.S.A.; Telephone: (212) 870-2592; Fax: (212) 870-2762. e-mail: 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.

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

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

S U B S C R I P T I O N
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	<i>Editorial</i>	27	Women's Studies Programs: The Middle East in Context
4	<i>Opinion</i>	35	Focus: Women's Centers
5	<i>Research</i>	39	Interview: Soukeina Bouraoui
6	<i>Quote, Unquote</i>		
7	<i>Newsbriefs</i>		
8	<i>IWSAW News</i>		
	<i>File</i>		
9	Introduction to the File		
10	Women's Organizations in Egypt		
15	Women's Centers in Jordan		
20	Interview: Eileen Kuttab		
23	Yemen: Women's Research and Studies Centers		
			<i>Special Features</i>
		41	Insiders/Outsiders - Emic/Etic Study of Women and Gender in the New millennium
			<i>Book Review</i>
		62	Mi'at 'Am Min Al Riwaya Al-Nisa'iyya Al-Arabiyya
		64	Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait

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Lebanese American University

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The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World: Academic Research and Community Action

By Samira Aghacy
Chairperson, Humanities
Division,
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University

The Middle East is at the moment one of the areas where women's studies are expanding, and women's organizations are increasing at a fast rate. Over the past three decades or so, an impressive number of women's organizations have appeared on the public arena. With the emergence of civil rights movements in the Arab world in the 1980's and the rise of the Islamic revivalist movements since the mid-1980's, a new phase in feminist thought and practice began to take shape. Since then a new theoretical framework began to emerge that challenged conventional Western views that regarded Arab women as faceless, voiceless and nameless. At the same time, pressure emerging from other parts of the third world to break Western stereotypes of the non-Western world further induced women to interrogate the Western paradigm that views Arab women as an undifferentiated group and overlooks the wide disparity that exists among women in the Arab region, within each society, and across national borders.

Accordingly, women began to articulate their differences from Western feminism. It became clear to them that it may be counterproductive to echo uncritically the themes of Western scholarship such as the critique of sexuality, marriage, the family etc, and overlook the realities around them. It became clear that gender studies in the area cannot and must not be isolated from their social, political and historical context, and must be dealt with in relation to class, race, ethnicity, cultural patterns, religion, war, immigration, displacement, etc.

Accordingly, Arab women began to write in their own voices and challenge simplistic images of Middle Eastern women. Refusing to be excluded from public discourse, they became intent on making their own active contribution to society, history and culture. They began to articulate the view that far from being a uniform and cohesive group, women differ from one culture to another and within the same culture. For instance, the introduction of illiterate Arab women into the scene, whose voices are beginning to be heard for the first time, is bound to challenge the simplistic view that sees Middle Eastern women as one homogeneous group.

If Arab feminists have challenged western perceptions of Arab women as submissive, passive and marginal, they have made it a point not to overshadow the ongoing critique of patriarchy and its manifestations within the family, communities, organizations and workplaces. In this context, one could say that the desire of many Arab feminists to communicate with honesty the miseries and oppression that their culture confers on them- in an attempt to empower women and give them their rights - is coupled with the general fear and apprehension that such an ideology is imported and not intrinsic or relevant to our culture and that can lead to the corruption and disintegration of society. Therefore, there was a feeling that what is needed in order to fend off such charges- that Arab feminism is an offshoot of Western phenomena- is not only to contest the prevalent theoretical works used in Western scholarship, but to put them within the cultural and historical context, specificity, and particularity of the region.

Thus women have had a double role to play: to articulate their difference not only from Western feminism, but also from their own native, traditional contexts. Within this framework, they needed to clarify the point that criticizing their society's drawbacks is not an attempt to erase one's culture, but to improve it. As Uma Narayan puts it: "We all need to recognize that critical postures do not necessarily render one an 'outsider' to what one criticizes, and that it is often precisely one's status as one 'inside' the culture one criticizes, and deeply affected by it, that gives one's criticisms the motivation and urgency" Women have been excluded from areas of public activity that have generally been associated with men. Even in areas where they are not excluded, their contribution has been represented as second rate and inferior to that of men. Therefore integrating women's contribution into the mainstream will be an enriching experience since it will not merely extend the arena of knowledge, but will result in a shift of perspective enabling us

to see a separate, but multifarious and diversified picture at the same time. In other words, one could say that women's experiences are bound to fill the gaps in our knowledge about women's lives, and history as well as about Arab history and culture, and present a richer and more complex image of Arab societies than the ones that have already been projected.

In addition to promoting women's active contributions to society, history and culture, feminist discourse needs to enhance the general understanding of women's role by attempting to emphasize the need for a strong, theoretically informed analysis of gender relations by building on the small, but growing body of critical feminist work developed in the region. Lila Abou Loughod notes the "dangerous tendency these days to denigrate the academy or theory in favor of an unexamined activism. The reason this makes me afraid is that we slide too easily into assuming that we already know what we need to do for women's situation here or anywhere... Women's studies is a critical enterprise ... and it must be intellectual."²

Within this general frame, one could say that the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World has responded to the demands of women by taking into consideration the particularity of women's experiences in the area without neglecting or overlooking the debates taking place in the West. Far from turning a blind eye to oppressive measures practiced against women, the Institute always took active and resolute stands by denouncing defects and shortcomings even at the risk of reinforcing Western prejudice about the superiority of Western culture. Since its inception in 1973, the role of the Institute has been that of enlightenment and consciousness raising. As a pioneer Institute in the Arab world, it has played a major role in promoting academic research and enhancing community action to promote the cause of women in the region. It started off as an academic unit to design curricula, conduct research, sponsor conferences on women's issues and facilitate networking and communication among individuals, groups and institutions concerned with the status of women in the Arab world. If it is an institution that embraces women's issues at all levels, it is not an activist organization. As the President of the Lebanese American University, Dr. Riyad Nassar, refers to it in an interview with *Al-Raida*, "The Institute was more of an intellectual, academic, research, documentation institute than a lobbying place for women's rights. Universities usually try to shy away from the political arena. For instance, we did not want to be lobbying for the amendment of discriminatory laws against women; not because we did not believe in it, but because we thought independent organizations would be more effective in exacting change than an academic institution. However, this did not stop the Institute from working towards increasing people's awareness on women's and children's issues."³ If the university is a space for thinking critically and analytically, the aim of the institute was to stimulate research, and development without extricating itself from the concerns of the actual lives and issues that affect women. Accordingly, it has succeeded in making the link between academia and community, and theory and practice, imperative goals for the success of its development projects. The outbreak of the war in 1975, forced the Institute to respond to new challenges generated by a violent and unstable situation. In order to help the vast number of women who were displaced from their homes and villages, it undertook community work and programs to assist them. Furthermore, it has engaged in various income-generating activities since 1985 to provide poor women with skills that will help them earn an income. In addition to the massive work done on women, the Institute extended its activities to include men, children and families. Furthermore, the Institute set up rural Development programs that include workshops to develop social and political awareness, income generating activities and social and legal literacy programs. Based on numerous surveys normally carried prior to workshops to investigate market needs, the Institute has so far managed to train around 3000 women in various skills. In addition to woman-centered projects (including Basic Living Skills, an education program to deal with social literacy), the Institute has embarked on numerous academic and research programs. Now, it is in the process of establishing a minor in Women's Studies program that consists of a package of six courses: "Women in the Arab World: Social Perspectives", "Issues and Debates in Feminist Theories", "Women and Economic Power", "Psychology of Women: A Feminist Perspective", and "Representation of Women in the Arts and Media." These courses address different issues related to women and gender, and are useful to students in the different disciplines. At the same time, they can serve as electives for students in the various fields of specialization.

If the war interrupted the initial drive and impetus of the Institute's activities, it has not succeeded in impeding its determination to respond to the challenges and press on towards advancing the cause of women in Lebanon and the Arab world.



Endnotes

1. See *Contesting Cultures: Westernization, Respect for Cultures, and Third World Feminists* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
2. Cynthia Nelson and Soraya Altorki, eds. *Arab Regional Women's Studies Workshop. Cairo Papers in Social Science*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998), 65-66.
3. *Al-Raida*, Vol. XVI, nos. 83-84, (Fall/Winter, 1998-1999), 57.

The Boy and His Soul

By **Abir Hamdar**
Journalist

It is night-time. There is a bloody fight outside. A little girl cannot sleep. "Tell me a beautiful story mama," the little girl says. "Dear child, I know not any story ... except our story," the mother replies. "Then tell it mama. Tell me any story," the girl pleads.

Once upon a time there was a young boy called Muhammad Al Dura who lived in a land they called Palestine ... once upon a time no one knew the story of the young boy, nor listened to the sound of his land. Once upon a time, things just changed ... The young boy wrote a story and the land produced a voice.

The story began when the young boy screamed ... they say young boys are not supposed to scream ... young boys are meant to dream. Mohammed was different. His screams rocked heaven and hell ... his fear shocked the balance of earth ... his tears wiped the life out of many alive. And so the story began. The angels of death arrived. They took the boy on a far away ride. They say the journey was long and hard. The boy would not stop screaming ... his heart would not stop beating. The angels of death did not know what to do. They cursed man and the blood of man. They damned the hand that killed before the predestined time ... and on and on the journey went ... still the boy would not stop screaming and the heart would not stop beating.

At last they reached that place ... the place that resembled no other place. The angels of death were so tired ... and the boy and his soul were on fire. Nothing could be done ... and help was needed from anyone above and beyond. The angels of love were quick to help. They bathed and cleansed the pained body. They cooed and cuddled the frightened soul. It took them a thousand and one days ... and a thousand and one nights ... to try to calm the fire. But the mission was never accomplished, and the boy and his soul shivered from the fire.

When night fell and the angels went to sleep, the boy and his soul crept and wandered. They entered dark lanes and empty plains ... they asked about the face of Palestine ... they searched for the wombs of Palestine. The boy and his soul would not die for a single hour.

A messenger from earth brought terrible news. He said Palestine was still in mourning. Its wombs refused to conceive ... its soil refused the birth of children and the sound of children. Palestine was in terrible pain and nothing had been the same ... not since the young boy who trembled and screamed in vain.

The angels of heaven and hell decided to meet. They said man had upset the young boy's scale of life and death ... they said when the scale is disturbed before its time, man will forever wander in a place that is neither life nor death. The boy was like an outsider to things above and beyond...

A messenger again brought terrible news. He said Palestine was still in mourning. Its wombs were dying ... its soil was decaying. The land was confused ... it looked like nothing dead or alive. The mystery was finally solved. The angels of wisdom said the boy and his soul would not find peace ... not until the scale of life and death is balanced ... and the balance can only be restored when Palestine is finally restored.

The secret to the riddle was ever so simple. Give Palestine its lost pieces and the scale will automatically find what it is seeking. So it was decided ... Palestine needed the boy and the boy sought Palestine. They say the angels kept the body in that place ... and sent the soul to its other place. The soul arrived in the middle of the night. It knocked on every single door ... and entered every single home. It found its way to the wombs. In the morning, no one knew what had happened. The wombs began to conceive ... and the land to give us children.

The children became young boys and girls ... the boys and girls became men and women ... and the men and women went in search of the pieces. In the meantime, Palestine and the soul waited for what has to be complete.

and so the story went on ...

Outside, the bloody fight goes on. A terrifying sound explodes. "Why do they want to kill us mama," the little girl asks. "They do not want the young men and women to find the pieces," the mother says. "Can they really do that," the girl whispers frightfully. "Not as long as the soul of the young boy lurks in our wombs," the mother says. "But when will the soul go back to the body in that other place," the girl again asks. "When the lost pieces of Palestine are brought back and the balance of life and death is restored," the mother replies.

Recent Publications

- Amireh, Amal and Lisa Suheir Majaj (eds.). *Going Global: The Transnational Reception of Third World Women Writers*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000.
- Arnold, Rebecca. *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.
- Crawford, Elizabeth. *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Kandiyoti, Deniz and Ayse Saktanber (eds.). *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.
- Smith, Bonnie G. (ed.). *Global Feminisms Since 1945*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Call for Papers

Feminist Media Studies is preparing a special issue on Women, HIV, Globalization and the Media. All those interested in contributing should send their submissions no later than April 16, 20001. The aim of this project is to highlight the important contributions feminist media scholars have introduced to critical perspectives on the Aids epidemic by bringing together work concerned with the structures, inequalities, and geographies of globalization. The areas of emphasis are varied; they include: different forms of media and their implication in a variety of institutional and/or community settings; the relationship between women and gender as analytic categories, the relationship between media, activism, and public policy, feminist methodological and analytical frames, new technologies and issues of accessibility, issues of production, distribution and reception, etc.

For further information please contact Cindy Patten at cpatten@emory.edu
Completed papers should be sent to the following address:
Cindy Patton
Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts
Emory University
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USA

Films

Four Women of Egypt

How do we get along with each other when our views collide? A timely question, and a universal one. *Four women of*

Egypt take on this challenge, and their confrontation redefines tolerance. These four friends have the same goals - human dignity and social justice. They are inspired by love of country, but each adopts an approach radically different from the others. Muslim, Christian, or non-religious, their visions of society range from wanting a secular or socialist state to an Islamic one. But these four women won't demonize one another or treat one another with disdain. They listen to one another's views and argue openly, without ever breaking the bond that unites them, and they laugh through it all. Deeply committed, these four women, together are the living antithesis of political correctness. Amina, Safynaz, Shahenda and Wedad have not accomplished all their political goals; they are not complacent in their self-assessment. At the stage in life when one tries to make sense of it all, these four Egyptian women are not triumphant - they're joyful.

The Place

Using no narration or commentary, only images and music, the scene is set by grief and regret over a lost heaven. A young woman who has been thrown at an empty deserted road recalls her lost city by biting her nails and wailing. Heaven is then revealed through an ariel shot of deserted houses and towns. In heaven the film takes on a more personal turn where the directors' grandmothers' house becomes a haunted space by exiled relatives. *The Place* is a filmmaker's attempt to negotiate the effect of the exiled collective memory on her ability to live her day to day life.

Tentative de jalousie / Attempt at Jealousy

Attempt at Jealousy is a short video poem. The poem is by Marina Tsvetaeva, a Russian poetess, written in 1924. The theme of the poem is the cry of a woman left by her lover for another. The film is an attempt to reconstitute the sharp intensity of Tsvetaeva's style in the form of the film itself, instead of merely illustrating the poem with images and underlying its meanings with appropriate music. The choice was to mix images as well as the written text which appears as part of the construction of the images themselves. Images of men's bodies are mixed with images of nature. The French recitation is mixed with bits of the Russian text and the music plays with these two voices sometimes even competing with them, in order to recreate the intensity, confusion and anger of the woman's feelings. The words like the images pour out, as if uncontrollably, like an insistent hammer, in order to recreate this outcry of pain, of a woman jilted and deserted by her lover.

“... Women’s studies as a course and a discourse in the Middle East could benefit from the vast literature produced by Western feminists, without being either daunted or swamped by it or being lured into imagining that feminists anywhere have found the solution to all women’s problems. It would be wrong and misguided to assume that Western feminism only applies to the West. Nor is post-modernism invented by and is exclusively for the West. ... it is essential for Middle Eastern women to find their own solution to their own problems. Despite all our differing priorities, still, sisterhood is global. But at the same time possibilities, priorities, and strategies are different in every country and every region. What feminism in the next century will need, and what we need to offer the students that we educate for the movement in the future, is to have tolerance and understanding and the wisdom not to be lured by prejudices, be they Western or Eastern, or by the mere tools of academia, which include grant theories. Feminists have to learn to mend and make alliances where and when they can.” (Haleh Afshar, *Cairo Papers in Social Science* vol. 20, No. 3, p. 57)

“The creation of a women’s movement in each Arab country, capable of mobilizing the women in every home, village, town or city, of drawing into its ranks the illiterate peasant woman, the female factory worker, the educated professional woman, will mean that the Arab movement for democracy, progress and socialism is capable of reaching every woman, and is attaining the stage where it is a real mass movement and not just the instrument of a specific class.” (Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, p. xvi)

“In the ongoing debate about how to build a democratic society of equal citizens the WSP contributes to gender awareness and to the development of policies that address the social, cultural, economic, and political issues confronting Palestinian women. Various tools have been identified that are useful in accomplishing these goals. One is gender planning training of government officials, and of members of nongovernmental organizations and international agencies. ... Another tool is the organization of workshops and seminars on policies affecting Palestinian women ... Yet another tool is the use of local mass media to circulate information for strategic importance to women and other marginalized groups. Finally, the WSP established a scholarship fund to support needy female students in an attempt to draw women from poorer segments of the society to higher education. (Eileen Kuttab, *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform*, p.99)

“Prospects for the future whether adoption of the Egalitarian Code or simply the implementation of reforms,

cannot be separated from the political realities of the Maghreb. The repressive character and poor human rights records of all three governments make it unlikely that the struggle to protect women’s rights will succeed; fundamental rights continue to be denied in most other spheres. Even if the government appears to join forces with women, as in Algeria, or to observe silently, as in Morocco, the ever-present menace of political Islam in the region makes women’s rights the most suitable area in which governments can make concessions to Islamists without paying a political price. The elusiveness of a political solution to the conflict in Algeria has gone unremarked by its neighbors, who have followed dual policy of repression and concession in an effort to avoid igniting internal conflicts of their own.” (Fati Ziai, *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform*, p. 81)

“... definition of a network ... Any group of individuals or organizations who, on a voluntary basis or for professional reasons, organize themselves to share knowledge and other resources, exchange information or undertake joint activities around specific interest areas so that they empower themselves, individually or collectively, to reach their social objectives or to meet their professional goals.” (*Women’s Information Services and Networks: A Global Source Book*, p. 22)

“Women’s Studies owes its existence to the movement for the liberation of women ... The uniqueness of Women’s Studies has been and remains its refusal to accept sterile divisions between academy and community, between the growth of the mind and the health of the body, between intellect and passion, between the individual and society ... Women’s studies ... is equipping women not only to enter society as whole and productive human beings, but to transform the world into one that will be free of all oppressions.” (*National Women’s Studies Association Constitution*, p. 84-85)

“The women’s movement has my soul and my spirit. We have a right to have our opinion matter. When I think feminism, I close my eyes and I think of laughter. Women’s laughter cuts through everything. For me, feminism is equality in the eyes for the law, and of employers; it is a broad notion of family protection in the community. Do I like a lot of the languages and style of feminism? Not always. But if I was defining myself by my actions, bloody right I’m a feminist. My daughters are feminists. I know because of their language and their relationships, their anger, their sense of moral outrage.” (Erika Muhammad, *Ms. Magazine*, December 2000/January 2001, p. 79)

Saudi Arabia Becomes a Signatory to CEDAW

Saudi Arabia signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in October. As expected, some reservations were introduced because they were in contradiction to Saudi Law namely with regards to women giving their nationality to their children and freely choosing their husbands. During the past couple of years, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been moving towards securing more rights to its women citizens. (Nad Regional News, October 2-8, 2000)

Jordan Highest Rates of Honor Crimes

Jordan still ranks highest in the world when it comes to honor killing rates. Twenty victims were killed this year, by their relatives, in an attempt to cleanse the honor of the family. This year's death toll is no different than the previous year where 20 Jordanian women lost their lives in similar crimes. According to Rana Husseini: "We are currently studying, together with the government, a new strategy to obtain the abrogation of this law in 2001." (Nad Regional News, December 4-31, 2000)

News Release Issued by the International Secretariat of Amnesty International

As of today, a woman whose human rights have been violated under the Women's Convention will be able to take her complaint to the UN to seek justice and reparation, Amnesty International said today welcoming the entry into force of the Convention's Optional Protocol.

Until now there was no right to individual petition under the Women's Convention (formally known as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. They must have already exhausted domestic remedies and the state accused of the violation must be party to both the protocol and the convention.

Women whose rights under the Women's Convention have been violated may petition the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. They must have already exhausted domestic remedies and the state accused of the violation must be party to both the Protocol and the Convention. The Committee may also initiate a confidential inquiry procedure into alleged grave or systematic violations.

The Committee will make findings against a state party which are likely to include recommendations ensuring that justice is served and reparation is made. The state party will be obliged to report to the Committee on its progress in implementing the recommendations.

"The Women's Convention already speaks powerfully to the nature and extent of discrimination experienced by women simply because they are women, and imposes legal obligations on states to prevent and prohibit such discrimination. Now, with the advent of the Optional Protocol, women who are the actual victims of human rights violations will have a louder voice to project across the international stage." Amnesty International welcomed that 13 states have ratified the Optional Protocol and 62 have signed it so far.

Amnesty International will continue to campaign for the ratification of the Optional Protocol. "Governments should be reminded that women's rights are human rights, as they themselves reaffirmed at the Special Session of the General Assembly in June marking Beijing +5. We urge those governments that have not yet done so to sign and ratify this protocol without further delay."

Background

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Women's Convention) was adopted by the UN General Assembly and opened for signature on Human Rights Day, 20 December 1999. It enters into force, on 22 December 2000, three months after the deposit with the UN Secretary General of the 10th instrument of ratification. As of December it has been signed by 62 states and ratified by 13 (Austria, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Mali, Namibia, New Zealand, Senegal, Slovakia, Thailand).

The Women's Convention was adopted in 1979 and has 166 states parties. Article 17 of the Convention establishes a committee of 23 independent experts of "high moral standing and competence in the field covered by the Convention," who together review the reports that state parties are required to submit periodically on their compliance with the Convention. This is the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

In June 2000 the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly was convened to appraise and assess the progress achieved since the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. (22 December, 2000)

Reception in Honor of Anissa Najjar President of the Village Welfare Society

Anissa Najjar, founder and president of the Village Welfare Society, received the Women's Creativity in Rural Life Prize for the year 2000. She is one of the 34 nominees who received the award that is granted on an annual basis by the Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF). At the recommendation of IWSAW, Najjar won the award that she very much deserves. To honor her, a reception was held on October 16, 2000 in which IWSAW director, Mona Khalaf presented her with the badge sent by the WWSF.



IWSAW Director Mona Khalaf and Anissa Najjar



Minister Bechara Merhej, Mona Khalaf, Rouhi Baalbaki, Anissa Najjar and Khaled Najjar

Hanan Al Shaykh Debating

On November 7, 2000 IWSAW organized a discussion in which writer Hanan Al-Shaykh and journalist Doha Chams participated. Al-Shaykh spoke about her childhood that had a tremendous impact on the woman she became, her daring and controversial writings, her marriage and family life, etc.



Mona Khalaf, Doha Chams and Hanan Al-Sheikh



Women's Centers in the Arab World

The idea of a *Raida* issue on women centers in the Arab world has been on our minds for a long time. The reason for this is because we are very much aware of the pioneering role that these centers have played to enhance the rights of women and to make space for them within the frame. Women's Centers in the Arab world have been active at various levels and have contributed to alleviating discrimination against women, enhancing and developing their status in society, and increasing awareness. Women centers have worked to fight illiteracy, improve women's access to cultural and social services, and health education, inform women of their basic rights within the law, coordinate programs that provide care for women, and enhance women's involvement in politics. Moreover, they have continued to search for gender equity, and social justice by forming pressure groups that influence decision makers and have also worked on the organization of workshops and training programs to improve the skills of poor and rural women which have given them an effective role within the local communities. Furthermore, they have helped develop knowledge by facilitating research and applied studies as well as practical training and legal and economic consultations in order to locate problems and propose solutions. Finally, they have offered insights into the status of women through the publication of journals, and the establishment of academic centers dedicated to teaching, training, and research.

The first article in the file "Women's Organizations in Egypt" by Nadjie S. Al-Ali's focuses on the role of secular women's centers in Egypt and the various problems they are encountering in the face of contradictory state policies towards women. Abir Hamdar's "Women in Jordan" deals with the vast amount of work that women centers in Jordan have accomplished at the social, political and cultural levels of society. "Yemen Politically United, Scholarly United: A Consecrate Interest in Women Research and Studies" by Rania Al-Abiad focuses on the success of women's centers in the Yemen precisely because they have maintained a strong experimental orientation with a strong emphasis on field research work, and thus have remained close to the immediate problems of Yemeni women. The interview with Eileen Kuttab, Director of Women Studies Institute at Birzeit University focuses on social as well as political issues since the Palestinian women's movement has always been an integral part of the national movement. "Assessing Gender/women's Studies: A Comparative Perspective" by Nahla Abdo addresses the experience of Canadian Women's Studies programs and assesses their applicability and challenges to the Middle Eastern context. The file also includes a survey of other women's centers in the Middle East that have worked for the promotion of women's cause. This *Raida* edition also includes under "Special Features" the challenging and thought-provoking Thematic Conversation entitled "Insiders/Outsiders-Emic/Etic Study of Women and gender in the New Millennium" coordinated by Sherifa Zuhur. It revolves around transformations in research methodologies and pedagogical approaches in the study of and teaching on women and gender of the Middle East. The participants in this thematic discussion are scholars (Arab and non-Arab) on Middle Eastern Women's studies from various universities in the U.S.A. and the Arab world.

Women's Organizations in Egypt:

Emerging Women's Movements or Social Clubs?

By Nadje S. Al-Ali

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Introduction

A close look at the content and context of women's organizations in contemporary Egypt sheds light on the ambiguities and contradictions existent in contemporary Egypt. On the one hand, women's organizations began to flourish since the 1985 UN women's conference in Nairobi, and particularly during the preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994. During this time there was increasing pressure on the Egyptian government by international organizations and western governments to adhere to UN conventions concerning women's rights. At the same time, a huge number of international donor organizations, NGOs and government bodies provided funds and resources for specific projects and campaigns related to women's issues. However, the increased confrontation with Islamists has pressured the Mubarak regime to legislate and implement more conservative laws and policies towards women and to diminish its support for women's political representation. It is no surprise then that women's organizations have been caught in the midst of contradictory state policies towards women and towards Egypt's growing NGO sector.

These tensions became apparent throughout my wider research among Egyptian women's organizations upon which this article is based.¹ Women activists constantly have to be on the guard and are fighting on many fronts at the same time. Any success with respect to increased

political freedom and specific campaigns related to women's rights is often followed by a backlash instigated by the government or conservative political constituencies within contemporary Egypt. It is not only Islamist voices but also secular nationalist intellectuals and politicians who accuse Egyptian women activists of following western feminism blindly and of side-tracking "more important issues" such as poverty, imperialism, Zionism etc. This way of arguing, of course, is not unique to the Egyptian context, but it does constitute a very powerful tool to discredit women's organizations and to hinder more constructive debates about women's issues.

Background to Research

My initial involvement with one women's group during my stay in Cairo (1989-1994) did not only influence my political outlooks but also led to nagging questions concerning the alleged goals and priorities of existing groups, their social make-up, their alliances and animosities, the actual projects and campaigns they were engaged in and the political debates and discussions within and between various groups. These questions resulted in a research project that involved interviews with about 80 women activists as well as participation and observation of diverse activities carried out by different groups. Trying to balance out the relative weight given to Islamist constituencies within much of the recent scholarship on Egypt, I decided to restrict my research to secular-oriented women's organizations and

networks. It was not my intention, however, to suggest that all women activists have to be secular or that Islamists could not be women activists. Rather, I wanted to look more carefully at the meaning and variations of the term secular within Egyptian contemporary political culture.

With 'secular-oriented' I refer to the attempt to separate between religion and politics, the rejection of the *shari'a* (Islamic law) as the main or sole source of legislation, and the use of civil law and human rights conventions stipulated by the United Nations, as frames of reference for political struggle. This, however, does not necessarily denote anti-religious or anti-Islamic positions. Indeed, the actual level of religiosity and adherence to religious practices varies greatly among secular constituencies - both Muslim and Coptic women and men.

Ideological Differences

The women I interviewed generally distinguished between *al-harakah al-nissa'iyyah* (the women's movement) and *al-harakah al-nassawiyah* (the feminist movement), the latter being a recently coined term. The majority of women activists perceive this newly invented concept of *nassa'wiyah* (feminism) as only being concerned with *abawiyah* (patriarchy)², but not including analyses or critiques of economic and political inequalities. In contrast to "the feminist movement", they argue, "the women's movement" entails the concern with national independence, class struggle, and other social and political issues. A small, yet growing number of women reject the way the term *al-harakah al-nassawiyah* (the feminist movement) is generally represented and understood. They consider themselves self-proclaimed feminists, or *nassa'wiyat*, and cautiously stress that their feminism does include the struggle against all forms of social injustice. They are not, they also emphasize, men-haters. Yet another group of women describe themselves as *nassawiyat Marxist* (Marxist feminists), emphasizing that they are Marxists fighting patriarchy, as opposed to feminists fighting class inequality.

Within these very broad labels, there exist obvious resonances with western feminist categories which correspond to the divergences between women who emphasize "equality" (liberal feminists), those who stress "difference" (radical feminists) and those whose concern extends to women's exploitation in the broader sphere of politics and economics (socialist feminist). A rigid separation of the three categories liberal, radical and socialist feminism has been hard to sustain in the West and is even more problematic in Egypt. The terms however are not devoid of meaning in either place, deriving as they do from similar broad dimensions of oppression to which women have attested in many societies.

The struggle to remove obstacles to equality - women's rights activism - manifests itself in various campaigns to change existing laws which reflect and reproduce gender inequality. It also aims to improve women's access to education and paid labor, and increase political participation.

The "women's rights" approach constitutes the main form of engagement among contemporary Egyptian women activists, since concern with legislation and equal access to education etc., is also part of the agenda of socialist-oriented activists. However, socialist activists differ from their liberal counterparts in that they reject the idea that reforms will bring about women's equality; instead they perceive women's exploitation as part of structural inequalities which are rooted in class divisions, capitalism and imperialism.

As for the western category of "radical feminism" which broadly encompasses opposing patriarchy, emphasizing differences between women and men, and focusing on sexuality as a site for women's oppression and liberation, it has not found great resonance among Egyptian women activists. Even the few activists, who have addressed the culturally sensitive issue of sexuality, cannot be characterized as separatist and do reveal a concern with women's exploitation in other spheres. Several of the liberal and socialist-oriented activists have increased their concern with sexuality, but none has made it her focus. Ironically, however, a number of women who altogether reject the label feminist for being too narrow and separatist, increasingly seek the company of other women in their social worlds and frequently express their grievances and frustrations with "men", thereby quite often inadvertently essentializing differences.

Aside from a few groups, which can be placed on either side of the spectrum in terms of emphasis on equality in the liberal tradition and a concern with political economy as part of the socialist orientations, these strands do not present clearly bounded categories. I could detect a great deal of overlap and flux among and within various groups, which also applies to the specific forms of engagement within women's activism.

Terrain of Egyptian Women's Movement

The contemporary women's movement in Egypt is extremely varied in terms of activities and institutional frameworks: NGOs with clear structures and decision-making bodies exist side by side with more loosely organized groups; ad hoc networks mobilizing around specific issues or tasks are formed and dissolved by activists, who are often simultaneously involved in other groups or activities; several women's committees exist which are attached to political parties, professional organizations and human rights centres; and a number of individual women intellectuals and artists work independently through their specific profession or are loosely affiliated with specific groups and might co-operate on specific projects.

Varying political orientations can be found among women's organizations, such as *Markaz Dirasat Al-Mar'a Al-Gedida* (the New Woman Research Centre), *Rabitat Al-Mar'a Al-'Arabiyya* (Alliance of Arab Women), *Markaz Dirasat Al-Mar'a: Ma'an* (Women's Study Centre: Together), and *Gam'at Bint Al-Ard* (Daughter of the Land Group). The

Alliance of Arab Women, whose members are mainly professional upper middle class women in their 50s and 60s, exists on the most liberal end of the broad spectrum of feminist approaches, endorsing both welfare work and women's rights activism. Others, like the New Woman, Together or the Daughter of the Land Group initially grew out of previous political activism: members of the Daughter of the Land group were initially mobilized around the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982), while the founding members of the New Woman and Together had been involved in socialist politics during the student movement in the 1970s.

In addition to these groups, which are, to different degrees, involved in advocacy, research and grassroots projects, there exist service-oriented NGOs with a special focus on the role of women in both development and underdevelopment.⁴ Egyptian women's activism is also channeled through professional organizations.⁵ The Women and Memory Forum also falls between advocacy and professional work, as it consists of a group of women researchers who aim to re-write Arab history through a gender sensitive perspective. Furthermore, women activists working within the framework of human rights organizations tend to be

involved in reformist women's rights activism; however, many are simultaneously involved with other women's groups or networks, and their specific analysis of gender inequalities is diverse.⁶ Members of women's committees affiliated to political parties are, to different extents, also involved in women's activism beyond party politics. Aside from women's organizations, groups and networks, there

exists a number of individual women who are active through their respective professions (lawyers, academics, doctors, journalists, artist etc.). Some might be temporarily affiliated to specific networks or issue-led campaigns, while others prefer to work individually. Often women are part of more than one network or organization, and many are hopelessly over-committed and over-worked.

By and large, the different women's organizations as well as individual activists are united by their middle-class background and their commitment to retain and expand their civic rights and equality before the law. They share a secular orientation and a concern about growing Islamist militancy, but their actual position vis a' vis the various Islamist tendencies and discourses are variable as much as their specific understandings and interpretation of secularism (Al-

Ali, 2000: 128-148). A great range of positions and attitudes towards personal religiosity and observance can be found among secular-oriented activists who oppose religious frameworks for their political struggles. Generational differences may be discerned concerning a woman's specific attitudes towards secularism and religion, where younger women tend to be much more open to the idea of reinterpretation of religion in order to counter conservative male interpretations. Older women activists of the generation that was involved in the student movement in the 1970s, by and large, tend to be more reluctant to engage in religious discourses of any kind (Al-Ali, 2000: 128-148).

Goals and Activities of the Egyptian Women Activists

Most of the goals and priorities of the Egyptian women's movement are related to modernization and development discourses. These goals range from the alleviation of poverty and illiteracy, to raising legal awareness, and increasing women's access to education, work, health care and political participation. Some groups also aim at raising "feminist consciousness". In recent years, some Egyptian women activists have systematically put previously taboo issues, such as women's reproductive rights and violence against women, on the agenda (Al-Ali, 2000: 149-160).

The problem of violence against women has been one of the most controversial issues as it touches precisely the core of what has been side-tracked for so long: forms of oppression within the home, within the family. It comes to no surprise then that not only conservative and progressive men, but also many women activists themselves dismiss this concern as a western imposition, not relevant to their own context. Others tend to relativize its significance by acknowledging the problem as such, but pointing to more pressing priorities such as poverty and illiteracy. Yet, those activists who have engaged in research about different forms of violence against women, such as wife battering, rape, physical and verbal abuse have become convinced of the urgency of the issue and consequently expanded their campaigns and networks.

The different goals and priorities within the women's movement are translated into various projects: income generating projects and credit loan programmes; legal assistance programmes; legal awareness workshops and publications; campaigns to change existing laws (particularly the Personal Status Law and the Law of Association); the establishment of a female genital mutilation (FGM) task force; setting up a network to research and campaign around the issue of violence against women; organizing seminars, workshops and conferences to address certain issues and raise awareness about them; design and convey gender training packages among NGOs; the publication of books, magazines and journals; and the establishment of Women's Media Watch.

Limitations

In the context of the Egyptian women's movement, the very

Women activists constantly have to be on the guard and are fighting on many fronts at the same time



term “activism” glosses over a variety of involvements and activities, which, if considered in isolation, are not all forms of “political activism”: charity and welfare, research, advocacy, consciousness-raising, lobbying and development. Certain forms of activity, such as research, might develop into more political engagements, such as advocacy or lobbying. Moreover, groups and individuals, at any given point of time, might be involved in different kind of activities (Al-Ali, 2000: 6).

One overall problem seems to be the lack of specific institutional targets in many of the campaigns which, consequently, tend to become diffused. The translation from raising certain issues, suggesting ramifications, to actual implementations is impeded by both, the state’s ambiguity and lack of commitment and the women activists’ own failure to adequately retain momentum and display solidarity amongst each other. Competition and rivalry - often revolving around the wish to guarantee funding and resources, but also in terms of claims to ideological and political truths - frequently blocks collective action. In some instances, it seems a legitimate question to ask whether some activities remain short-lived because they respond more to international agendas than local ones. However, it needs to be stressed that the two might not be mutually exclusive and might, if constructively used, feed into each other (Al-Ali, 2000: 182-83).

Linked to the problem of implementation, is the issue of the relationship with what has been coined as “the grassroots”: the majority of Egyptian women of low-income backgrounds who are living in cities and in the country-side. Those most critical of the women’s movement question that it was a movement altogether, and perceive it more as a social club for the privileged few who are totally out of touch with the every-day realities of ordinary women. Although there is certainly a grain of truth in the discrepancy between the social backgrounds of women activists and the majority of women, the women’s movement is far more heterogeneous today than it used to be historically. Furthermore, the preparations for the International Population and Development Conference (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 is generally perceived to have constituted a turning point in the relation between Cairo-based women activists and women in other parts of the country.

Unfortunately, the feelings of hope and success before and during the ICPD in Cairo were soon shattered by a severe backlash triggered by the government, the Islamists and cer-

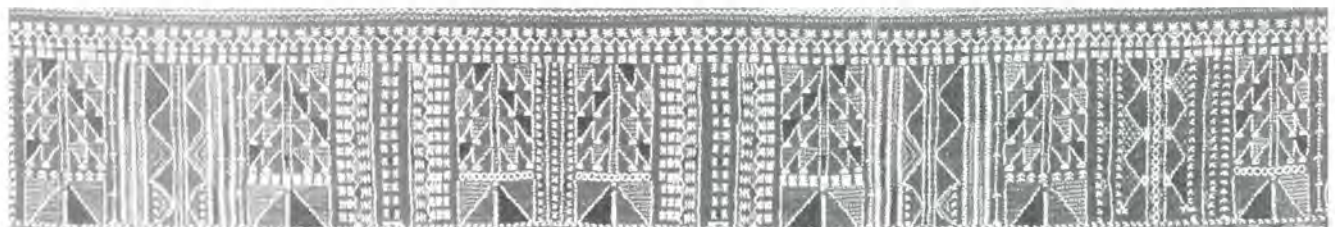
tain actors within the NGO movement. Yet, maybe more significantly in this context, is the fact that some groups more so than others are very much involved in grassroots activism and try to strengthen their links through concrete projects and programmes. In other words, while there are certainly women who spend more time sitting in hotel lobbies and conference rooms, it would be unfair to generalize this phenomenon to make a statement about Egyptian women’s activism at large.

The Role of the Egyptian State

Despite Mubarak’s official pro-democracy policy, repressive measures have not only been directed towards Islamic militant groups and communists, but also towards women activists. A number of laws, first established under Nasser, continue to regulate the establishment of voluntary groups, associations and organizations under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Affairs.⁶ These laws oblige women activists to operate either as informal groups or as officially registered organizations which are subjected to the control of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The approval of the Interior Ministry is required for public meetings, rallies and protest marches. The Ministry of Social Affairs has the authority to license and dissolve “private organizations”. Licenses may be revoked if such organizations engage in political or religious activities. For example, since 1985 the government has refused to license the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR), on grounds that it is a political organization (Al-Ali, 2000: 79-80).

The level of control varies depending on the political climate. It was during the Gulf War - a period during which the Egyptian government experienced a crisis of legitimacy by aligning itself with the Anglo-American war efforts - that the government banned Arab Women’s Solidarity Association (AWSA). Nawal El-Sa’dawi had been very outspoken against the war and the Egyptian government’s position on it. The influence of state power on civil society organizations through the Ministry of Social Affairs and the apparent randomness with which organizations are allowed to operate, has been restrained by the international arena which has largely contributed to the professionalization of the traditional voluntary sector (Al-Ali, 2000: 80).

Several women’s groups have preferred to circumvent Law 32 and the danger of being dissolved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and registered with the Office of Property and Accreditation as research centers or civic non-profit companies as opposed to private voluntary organizations (PVOs)



or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), thereby avoiding the control and restrictions set by the Ministry of Social Affairs. This legal loophole had been endangered by recent amendments to the ill-reputed Law 32 of 1964.

Increasing opposition to the Law of Association, especially on the part of Egyptian civil organizations but also international constituencies, compelled the state to declare repeatedly that it intended to reconsider the law. An "NGO Forum for Civil Action" was formed in the summer of 1998 in reaction to a drafted bill by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The proposed bill did not meet hopes and expectations of Egyptian NGOs. However, the ministry engaged in a series

of consultations with the NGO Forum which resulted in an agreed upon compromise on both sides. However, in spring of 1999 the Ministry of Social Affairs sent a bill to the Egyptian People's Assembly which starkly differed from the one agreed upon by both sides. The bill, which passed within days, prohibits associations from carrying out any political activities; it increases the ministry's power to control and intervene in Egypt's civil society, and it

Socialist activists perceive women's exploitation as part of structural inequalities which are rooted in class divisions, capitalism and imperialism

restricts regional and international activities. According to a statement by a group of Egyptian NGOs, the law, when placed in the current political context, is "merely a reflection of the government's general intention to further restrict any form of independent association, be it in political parties, unions, professional syndicates, or NGOs." This newly passed law constituted a severe blow to Egypt's NGO movement in general and to the women's movement in particular. It was therefore with great surprise and relief that the most recent decision to revoke the restrictive law on the basis of its "unconstitutionality" was received.

Conclusion

Recent developments within Egypt's wider 'civil society', namely the arrest and defamation of the political sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim and a number of his colleagues from the Ibn Khaldoun Centre, have affected social and political activists in Egypt at large. Women's organizations have become even more vulnerable in an atmosphere where foreign funding is linked to imperialism, the imposition of western agendas and 'spying'. These allegations are not new, of course, but they have obtained a more threatening and immediate tone in Egypt today. While the debate around foreign funding has been regularly used to discredit certain groups and activists, it is now paradoxically the

Egyptian state that prevents activists to seek funding from international organizations. This being the same state that is the largest recipient of US Aid after Israel, which implements IFM structural adjustment policies and tries to encourage privatization and foreign investment.

Research itself - an important tool for women activists in identifying problems and solutions - has been criminalised in the media. It is not only researchers who suffer intimidation but also those who have co-operated with various researchers. Despite these difficulties surrounding women's organizations in contemporary Egypt, their continuing search for greater equity between the genders, social justice and women's rights might be the only ray of hope within Egypt's gloomy political landscape.

Endnotes

1 See Nadjé Al-Ali *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: the Egyptian Women's Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000).

2 I have adopted Heidi Hartmann's definition of patriarchy as 'a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men, and solidarity among them, which enable them to control women. Patriarchy is thus the system of male oppression of women' (1979:232).

3 These NGOs, such as Gama'at Nuhud wa Tanmeyyat Al-Mar'a (Association for the Development and Enhancement of Women, called ADEW) and Markaz Wasa'il Al-Ittissal Al-Mula'ama min agl Al-Tanmeyya (Appropriate Communications Techniques, called ACT), combine concrete development projects with political campaigns. Markaz Qadaya Al-Mar'a Al-Masriya (Centre for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance) provides legal assistance for women at the grassroots level and also offers literacy classes.

4 Among the professional organizations are Lagnat Al-Maria fi Ittihad Al-Mohameen Al-'Arab (Women's Committee of the Arab Lawyers Union), Gama'iyat Al-Katibat Al-Masriyat (the Egyptian Women Writers Association), Dar Al-Mar'a Al-'Arabiyya Nour (the Arab Women Publishing House Nour), and Gama'iyat Al-Cinemat'iyat (the Egyptian Women in Film Society).

5 For example, Markaz Al-Dirasat wa Al-Ma'lumat Al-Qanuniyya li Huquq Al-Insan (the Legal Rights and Research Center - LRRC), Markaz Al-Qahira li Dirasat Huquq Al-Insan (the Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies-CIHRS) and Markaz Al-Mussa'ada Al-Qanuniyya li Huquq Al-Insan (the Center for Human Rights and Legal Aid (CHRLA)).

6 These laws, most notable law 32 of 1964, have restricted the formation and activities of voluntary organizations with regard to their field of activity, number of members allowed, number of organizations in a particular region, record keeping, accounting and funding. Law 32 has also given the government authority to intervene by striking down decisions by the board of directors or even dissolving the entire board. Several women's groups preferred to circumvent Law 32 and the danger of being dissolved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and registered with the Office of Property and Accreditation as research centres or civic non-profit companies.



Women Centers In

Jordan

By Abir Hamdar

During the past decade, Jordan has witnessed a rise in the number of centers and programs that cater to the needs of women in various sectors of society including economy, health, education and politics. Not only have these institutions enhanced, developed and increased public awareness regarding women's issues, they have also achieved much in terms of implementing and executing strategies. In 1974, Jordanian women were given the right to vote and the right to run for general elections. In 1980 the government signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and this was later ratified by parliament in 1992. According to UNICEF's 1997 Progress of Nations, women in Jordan make up 6% of top level government positions, while the regional average for the Middle East and North Africa is 2% and the world average is 7%. The labor sector has also undergone a marked improvement. Statistics show that the participation of women in the labor force has more than doubled rising from 7.7% in 1979 to 15% in 1993. This number increased to 16%, according to the Population Charter of 1994. In the maternal and child health service, the percentage of women who received neonatal care rose from 58% during 1978-1983 to 89% during 1992-1996. Also, the percentage of women who gave birth under medical supervision rose to 93% during 1992-1996. Even life expectancy of women increased from 64% in 1980 to 70% in 1994. But that is not all.

In a 1996 Geneva speech, HRH Princess Basma Bint Talal - an advocate of women's rights and head of some of these centers - said that literacy among women in Jordan exceeded 80%, adding that there are as many girls as boys in primary and secondary education. Princess Basma also said that almost one third of all females in the higher age group category (18-23 years old) are in higher education or have completed it. This is one of the top figures of women's participation in higher education anywhere in the world. Yet, all of this would not have been made possible without the intensive efforts of members of the various women's committees and through their public campaigns, publications, studies, conferences and workshops. In short, the women's movement in Jordan has opened the way and is still aiming for more. Today, Jordan is home to a number of centers that work towards further increasing women's status and role in society. Below is a list of some of these major and minor centers as well as their objectives, responsibilities and activities. The list is based on the date each center or committee was established. (Statistics taken from the Hashemite Royal Court of Jordan. Last Update in Aug. 1999.)

Jordanian Women's Union (JWU), established in 1945 Headed by director Asma Khodor, is a non-governmental organization that advocates women's and children's rights, political awareness and poverty alleviation. Located in the capital Amman and with representatives dispersed across

the country. JWU has several objectives and responsibilities. These include: alleviating all forms of discrimination and oppression against women (honor crimes, physical abuse); enhancing and developing their status in society (alleviating illiteracy); providing the training required to care for a family; and supporting women's right to motherhood. The Union also works towards increasing women's knowledge in areas such as law, politics and culture. According to the Unions rules and regulations, any Jordanian woman is eligible to membership as long as she is above 18, supports the laws of the organization and helps in its numerous activities. Since its creation, the JWU has been organizing conferences, workshops and campaigns to promote women's issues. For instance, it was very active in



campaigns concerned with women and the family as well as in advocating the implementation of a law that permits women the right to travel without prior permission from male relatives. It was also one of many centers to participate in the Fourth Women World Conference in Beijing, China. Tel: 568-7037, Fax: 568-7061, Email: JWU@go.com.jo

The Business and Professional Women's Club (BPWC), was established in 1976. The National Federation, in cooperation with the Noor Al Hussein Foundation, started small business counseling which offered business advice and financial support for women entrepreneurs. It also offered a legal consultative service office and an information and documentation center for women's studies. The BPWC's programs, which cater to the personal and professional needs of working women from all segments of life, include hot-lines, service centers for small businesses, free legal aid and technical training for women. The club's activities are not restricted to women, since men too actively participate in BPWC's programs and events, particularly in seminars, lectures and training courses. Queen Noor is the Honorary President of the National Federation of BPWC and Rasha Barguti is the director. The center is located in the capital Amman. Tel 551-1647, Fax: 553-0093, The Royal Palace, Email: bpwcamm@go.com.jo

The General Federation of Jordanian Women (GFJW) was established in 1981. GFJW is a national non-governmental organization of women's associations and societies that works towards enhancing the status of women in different domains. These include improving her status in the political, economic and social field. The Federation's membership includes over 80 societies, committees and headquarters in each of the 12 governorates all of which mobilize women's efforts to play an effective role in political decision-making. Not only does the Federation offer educational opportunities and guidance in family welfare and health, it also advocates legislative reform favoring women and initiates income-generating activities in collaboration with other non-governmental organizations. GFJW has also established a National Information Center for Women

which contains a research unit, an interactive library with audio-visual aids and access to the Internet, as well as a consultation and information department. The latter provides researchers with information on national, regional and international organizations concerned with women's affairs. Queen Noor was the Honorary President of the Federation but after the death of His Majesty King Hussein, she gave up the presidency of some of the national organizations, in order to devote more time to the rest. She remains the Honorary President of the Business and Professional Women's Club (see above). P.O. Box 9796 and 921687, Jabel El-Hussain Amman. Fax: 962-6-694-810. Tel: 00962-6-66-68-97 Email: nicw@gfjw.index.com.jo

The Jordanian National Committee For Women (JNCW) was established in 1992. The JNCW is the highest policy making body for women in Jordan and is hosted by The Queen Alia Fund For Social Development (QAF). It is located in the capital Amman, presided over by Princess Basma Bint Talal and directed by Hiam Kalimat. The committee also includes representatives from public and private bodies concerned with women's issues. A major priority in the work of this committee has been the drawing up of a National Strategy for Women in Jordan. Thousands of women across Jordan contributed to this strategy and are now involved in it. This strategy was also the outcome of various studies, meetings and seminars conducted throughout the kingdom, and its main principles are building on the provisions of the Jordanian constitution, the Jordanian National Charter as well as Islamic values and principles of human rights. (The National Strategy for women aims to improve women's status, involve them in the national development and economics activities, promote their legal status and increase their participation in decision-making processes.) JNCW's main objectives are: amending legislations obstructing women's participation in development, and enacting new legislations that guarantee their full participation; unifying the efforts of organizations working on women's issues; coordinating programs that aim to provide care for women; evaluating these programs and following up their implementation. The committee also works towards creating public awareness regarding the importance of women's roles and their status in the progress of the Jordanian society, increasing their participation in development and creating job opportunities for them in the public arena. So far, JNCW has been one of the major centers struggling for the promotion of the status of women in Jordan. In 1993, the committee held three seminars in the central, northern and southern parts of the country to ensure participation in the drawing up of a National Strategy for Women. As a result, the strategy was endorsed by the government, thus providing the central point towards which all national efforts would lead. During 1994, JNCW formed several technical committees to prepare short and medium term programs of action. Also in 1994 JNCW, in collaboration with ESCWA, organized a workshop entitled "Workshop on the Tentative Plan of Action Based on the Jordan National Report of the Beijing Conference." In 1995



a seminar entitled "The Role of Women in the Development of Human Settlements," was held. This seminar centered around the Arab Declaration of Human Settlements. The committee has participated in over 15 seminars, workshops and training courses that deal with women's issues. 962-6-825241, Fax 962-6-827350 P.O. Box 5118 Amman 11183 Jordan. E-mail: qaf@amra.nic.gov.jo and asma@nol.com.jo

Jordanian National Forum For Women (JNFW) was established in 1995. The JNFW is governed by a Higher Council chaired by HRH Princess Basma and has a current membership of more than 120,000 women. The forum consists of representatives of the committees of each of Jordan's twelve governorates as well as other women leaders. These representatives are elected nationally every four years and serve on the Higher Council. In general, the council is involved in determining the policies of the forum while the committees set the plans of each governorate. These plans are later implemented by the co-ordinators who are spread in headquarters around the country. The co-ordinators provide a "meeting place for the women of the governorates and provide free consultative services." Thus, the main objective of JNFW is spreading awareness among Jordanian women of the content of the National Strategy which was ratified in 1993. (See JNCW for more information on the National Strategy.) JNFW aims at raising awareness on health, education, culture, legislature, economy and politics. It also works towards increasing awareness among women regarding their rights and responsibilities in accordance with Islam, the Jordanian Constitution and the National Charter. But the list of objectives does not end. JNFW also seeks to help Jordanian women realize their potentials, increase their participation in development at various levels and provide them with opportunities that gets them involved in decision-making, or in forming pressure groups that influence decision makers. In addition to these main objectives, JNFW has a list of activities it has been implementing and advocating. These activities are training programs that improve the skills of rural women, the ability to campaign for judicial amendments and organize meetings with local MPs to discuss women's issues. Needless to say, JNFW has been very active in achieving the goals it has set for itself. For instance, in 1995 the forum lobbied for the participation of women in the municipal council elections. Thus, for the first time in Jordanian history twelve women ran for the elections, ten were elected – nine as council members and one as mayor. Also in September of the same year, ten representatives of the committees attended the Fourth World Conference on Women in China and were able to recount their experiences and the progress they have achieved so far. At present, the main aim of JNFW is to change legislation affecting women, and increase women's democratic institution of the country.

Princess Basma's Women's Resource Center (PBWRC) was established on March 8, 1996 on the occasion of International Women's Day. It is a support mechanism for policy makers and women's groups in Jordan. Located at

the Queen Zein Al Sharaf Complex for Development, the center supports women's groups, youth groups or anyone who is active or interested in women's issues in Jordan. Not only does it have access to national training facilities and the expertise of the staff of Queen Alia Fund For Social Development, it also helps individuals and groups identify needs, plan activities, gain access to technical assistance, and create interactive relationships nationally. According to a speech by director of PBWRC, Farah Daghistani, the aim of the center is to "enhance the roles of existing national institutions, through its own function, hence complimenting the overall machinery of the advancement of women." (quoted in PBWRC *Quarterly Newsletter*, Issue 1, 1997.) Other aims include: assessing women's needs by gathering and analyzing information; enhancing effective policies concerning women's issues by providing decision makers with reliable information; raising public awareness on women's issues; increasing the participation of women in the development process and promoting discussion on women's problems. This is made possible through education, awareness materials, campaigns, workshops, seminars and research. Furthermore, creative, recreational and cultural activities that focus on what's happening in Jordan have been part of the activities that the center makes use of to succeed in its mission. In addition, the committee has implemented a number of specific programs. Top on the list is "Women in Decision Making," which – as the title suggests – is a program that increases the role of women in decision making through enactment of skills and raising awareness of their rights. In general, this program targets professional women, young women in schools and universities, candidates for municipal and parliamentary elections as well as community leaders. Another program which the center offers is "Women In Development." The latter aims to integrate women into the substantial development process by increasing their awareness of issues such as income, health, education and poverty. Finally, "Policy Project," aims at involving women groups in promotion work at the community level. The project, which was implemented in co-operation with The Center For Development and Population Activities (CEDPA) involves training workshops. In terms of research related activities, PBWRC also has a Research and Studies Unit which works towards establishing permanent devices for data compilation in each of Jordan's governorates. Qualitative research that provides up-to-date information on the true status of women in Jordan is the unit's top priority. These information are used for needs assessment, program evaluation and monitoring. One of the many studies this unit has been involved in is a study for the Development and Employment Fund (this was part of a project to alleviate poverty.) PBWRC has been true to its words. It has organized various activities including seminars and lectures. For instance, it has hosted a seminar in which students from the Jordan University for Women, Philadelphia University and Al-Isra University discussed with members of the press topics ranging from stereotypes in the media, to social issues, to career opportunities for women in the press. But that is not all. In 1995 and in con-

junction with the British Embassy and the British Council, PBWRC also held a 5-day workshop entitled "Women's Political Participation," that included 65 women participants. Also, a workshop on the topic of leadership and reproductive health, which was funded by UNFPA, was held in the governorates to target rural women. A workshop on starting one's business was also held. Target groups in this workshop included representatives from the Ministries of Social Development and Agriculture, QAF and JNFW. Tel: 505-2431, Fax: 505-8199 Email: PBWC@cns.gov.jo

The Sisterhood Is Global Institute/Jordan (SIGI/J) was established in 1998. SIGI is a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It seeks to deepen the understanding of women's rights at the local, national and regional levels and has members in 70 countries. Jordan hosts one of SIGI's offices and resource centers which is located in the capital



Amman and headed by coordinator Asma Khader. The center was established to bridge the gap in "information technology and knowledge accessibility between women in the industrialized countries and the Muslim world." In general, SIGI's objectives are as follows: Informing women of the basic rights guaranteed to them under international human rights conventions and empowering them to attain those rights; increasing public awareness and concern about human rights abuses committed against women; facilitating the direct participation of women from the Global South in international debates concerning their rights; encouraging women from all cultures, religions, races, classes, ages, and abilities to work together to define and achieve common goals; facilitating research and providing training models for women from the developing world in the areas of human rights education, communication and leadership. So far, SIGI/J has been working towards its objective. It has been providing Jordanian women active in human rights causes and other interested women training for and access to the internet and other communication technologies as well as courses on using computers and internet, to aid them in research and basic interactive teaching and learning skills. SIGI/J has hired support staff and purchased communication technology tools and made them available to representatives working on issues pertaining to women. The SIGI/J resource center has also provided access to human rights documents and networks, and research materials concerned with violations, strategies and advocacy. These documents are open to the public. Finally, SIGI/J office is developing criteria for a data bank on women's human rights information. This information includes who's who in women, articles, bibliographies and lists of organizations and projects regarding women in Jordan and the Arab world. 5 Nadim Al-Mallah Street, Jebel El-Lweibdeh, Amman, Jordan. Tel/Fax: 962-6-462-3773. Email: sigi@firstnet.com.jo

Jordan University: At the start of the 1999-2000 semester, the University of Jordan started a new masters program in Women's Studies which presented a unique opportunity for students to explore and understand women's issues. The program - the first of its kind in a local university - was launched in cooperation with the Women's Studies center at Britain York University and is "an independent entity," from the university's faculties of humanities or sciences." According to the program's administrative supervisor, Raghida Shreim, Arab women's affairs are scattered in various fields, and the new program provides a cross-road for those interests to meet, (quoted in *Jordan Times*, March 2, 2000.) It is also an attempt to create objective awareness regarding women's issues and looking at their specific problems, as well as coming up with possible solutions. Thus, the courses the program offers are: Gender Issues (defines gender and the main contemporary issues related to it); Women in Politics (highlights the meaning of power, politics and its relation to gender, and evaluates women's status in different positions); Women and Development (tackles theories of development related to women and analyzes women's role in implementing strategies); Women in History (a detailed historical view of women from all parts of the world); Women in Literature (analyzes the image of women in world literature with special emphasis on the literature of the Islamic world); Women's Health (discusses the health needs of women of all ages). Other courses include: The Psychology of Women, Women and the Law and Women in Society. Professors teaching the courses have both the academic and practical experience required to enable them to shed light on the above issues. Even though the courses are mainly theoretical, students are still encouraged to find ways to apply them locally. So far, the program has made a modest success. Already five males and twenty-nine females have been enrolled. Since the program "does not aim at cornering men, rather, ensuring men are not enemies of women," (*Jordan Times*.) it has caught the interest of both sexes. P.O BOX 11943, Fax: 5355599, Tel: 5355000 (Ext: 3153, 3157, 3159).

A Historical Overview:

The first women society was established in Jordan in 1944 under the name of the "Women Solidarity Society." The society, which had no headquarters and held its meetings in members' houses, played a major role in relief work for Palestinian refugees. In 1945, "The Women Federation Society" was founded as part of the Arab Women Federation and aimed at improving the status of women in society. In 1949, the two women societies merged into one, under a new name, the "Jordanian Hashemite Women Society." The 1950s in Jordan was considered the decade of voluntary movement which led to the establishment of the Union of Voluntary Societies in 1959. In 1950 the "Young Women's Christian Association" (YWCA), was founded to serve all women regardless of social, religious or racial affiliation. In 1952, the "League to Defend Women's Rights" was founded to raise Jordanian women's awareness of their political role and the need to defend



their socio-economic rights. In 1954, the first Arab Women Federation in the Kingdom was announced which aimed at eradicating illiteracy, building ties between Arab women and women of the world, advancing peace, and promoting women's political rights.

The Young Women's Association (YMWA) was established in 1972. YMWA is a non-profit organization that was created under the patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Sarvath El Hassan, who is also its president. Almost 200 persons work at the organization: 150 are paid staff and 45 are volunteers. Also 75% of the staff are women. According to Khadijeh Siraj, executive committee of YMWA, the aim of the organization is to provide community services and training in education, and to set up centers that cater to Jordanians from all segments of society, especially the socially disadvantaged and intellectually disabled. Today, and after 28 years of intensive work, YMWA has been true to its mission. It has set up several educational centers and institutions and has contributed to the training of qualified individuals. These centers are: YMWA Center for Special Education, which was founded

in 1974 and was the first institution to satisfy the educational and vocational needs of mentally disabled students and provide training to over 175 students from an early age. According to Siraj, the pre-vocational training section includes wood work, weaving, ceramics, and domestic sciences. Another achievement of YMWA is the Princess Sarvath Community College which was established in 1980 and which, according to Siraj, offers a two-year academic program for young women from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In the year 2000, and along with the New Brunswick Community College, it won the Canadian International Development Agency's Award of Excellence. YMWA also established a Sheltered Workshop in 1987 in the Amman Industrial Estate for the mentally disabled graduates of the center for Special education. The workshop is recognized as a region model by the International Labor Organization (ILO). Finally, in 1995 YMWA created the National Center for Learning Difficulties whose aim is to train teachers in the field of learning difficulties, promote public awareness on learning difficulties and offer diagnostic/remedial services to learning disabled children.

Forthcoming

Arab Women and Politics

Eileen Kuttab,
Director of Women Studies Institute at Birzeit University,

Recounts

Myriam Sfeir: When did the Women Studies Institute come about and what are its objectives?

Eileen Kuttab: The idea of the Women Studies Institute came as a culmination of a long Palestinian women activism which has developed as an organic component of the national liberation struggle against the Israeli occupation. To make this context clear, it is important to have a brief historical background to tie it to the recent developments. Since the beginning of the century, the Palestinian women's movement emerged as an integral part of the national movement. Different women's institutions have been established to provide basic services to the devastated population as a result of the 1948 and 1967 wars. Most of the services were provided by the women's charitable organizations, led by educated women of the upper classes who adopted a welfare strategy and actively responded to the immediate needs of the political situation.

Two decades following the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the national struggle witnessed a process of democratization where new organizations were established in order to widen the base of the resistance and involve the different sectors of the society. Different sectors of the society were mobilized mainly students, workers and women, and new mass-based Palestinian national institutions were created to address specific issues and needs of the society in sectors like health, education, agriculture and social services. This process of democratization known as the New Movement, was instrumental in the formation of the women's committees which were led by educated women of the middle class. Although theoretically, the connection between the national and social liberation struggles was made by the women's committees, the complexity of balancing the national and the social agendas while under a colonial/settler occupation was not easy to achieve. The Israeli occupation and its oppressive policies made the implementation of a feasible systematic program impossible. This unholy marriage between feminism and nationalism was further exposed by the Intifada of 1987 as it was obvious that when the Intifada moved away from mass mobilization and activism, the women's movement was marginalized.

The decline of women's broad participation, and women's effectiveness has been analyzed by different scholars and activists and have been attributed to a variety of reasons, including the nature of the Israeli occupier, the male dominant character of the National Movement, the lip service that the political left parties have made towards women and women's issues, and the emergence of the fundamentalist movement which posed a challenge to the social agenda of the National Movement. It was obvious that in the Intifada period, social and gender issues were dealt with with high sensitivity within the national movement which systematically seized the opportunity of promoting the social and gender dimension of the struggle. This situation, posed a variety of challenges on the women's movement, and class and gender issues became more politicized. It is at this stage in the early 1990's that a development of women's consciousness crystallized and expressed itself clearly in a gender context. This gender activism became more visible in the establishment of different platforms like women's research centers, counseling centers, and development centers that integrated gender as a component on their agenda.

In this context, some current members of the Women's Studies Institute constituted the nucleus of some of these centers such as Women's Studies committee at Bisan Research and Development Center in Ramallah which held the first national conference of its kind. It called for the legitimacy of promoting social issues in a national liberation struggle and questioned the nature of the PLO as a male structure which has misrepresented women in its hierarchy, the phenomena of early marriage in the Intifada etc. A second organization is Women's Studies Center in Jerusalem, which has promoted issues like violence against women. These centers dealt for the first time with gender issues in the national liberation struggle like women's representation in the national movement, violence against women, early marriage, female drop-outs from schools ... etc.

After Oslo, and with the establishment of the national authority, the new transitional stage brought new issues to



the forefront. It became clear that the time had come to pressure the adoption of a women's agenda by the Palestinian leadership and make sure that it was responsive to women's needs and requirements. Amidst all these changes and challenges, and with the indefatigable efforts of the women's organizations and women's centers, it was clear that the development of an over-all women's strategy and specific issue-oriented strategies required a new level of research and analysis, as well as consistent and continuous debate and discussion. Responding to the current political changes, and the community needs on one hand, and practicing an academic interest in analyzing some of the theoretical issues concerning gender relations in the region, on the other hand, the Women Studies program was launched at Birzeit University in 1994 by a group of women academicians who were already engaged in research and action on women's issues. Recognizing the need for an academic institute dedicated to teaching, training, and research on gender issues, the women studies was launched at Birzeit University because of its long experience with quality academic performance and democratic heritage that made it the only candidate to umbrella such a serious program that is unique in the Arab world.

The program started in 1994 within the Faculty of Arts offering a minor in Women Studies. In 1996 it was declared to be an independent Women Studies Center directly supervised by the Vice president of Academic Affairs, and in 1998 it was declared an Institute, having fulfilled the requirements according to the by-laws of the university: offering a masters degree in Women Studies. Hence, in addition to teaching undergraduate courses and conducting policy research and gender intervention in community, it has developed its Masters program in Gender, Law and Development, as a basic requirement for becoming an autonomous entity inside the university.

Objectives of the Program:

1. Define and develop the field of Women Studies as an Academic field in the Palestinian and Arab society.
2. Increase scientific knowledge on Arab and Palestinian women through research and teaching and developing gender awareness to enable men and women to change their realities.
3. To enable researchers to use analytical skills that can enhance the understanding of gender relationships in Palestinian society.
4. To investigate the complex reality of Palestinian women through research that is action oriented and geared to promote policies for changing the status-quo.
5. To familiarize students and researchers with women's issues and gender relations by expanding their knowledge on other world experiences.
6. To be able to make gender intervention possible in national and international policies that define future gender roles and relationships.

MS: How many staff members do you have?

EK: The Institute team is an interdisciplinary group coming from different faculties: sociology and anthropology, linguistics and literature, political science, health and journalism. The program's council is made up of nine members, with only four core members who have a full-time status in the program and the rest serving as council members and actively participating in the research and other activities held by the Institute.

MS: What kind of students enroll in the program?

EK: There are two kinds of students who enroll in the program:

On the undergraduate level, we offer a very popular course entitled "An Introduction to Women Studies" that serves as an elective to the whole university population. Each semester, three to four sections are open to respond to the demand of the students. This course serves as a core course for mainstreaming gender issues in the student's population. It is team taught and it opens the opportunity for a serious debate around most sensitive social issues between female and male students. On average, around 45 students register in each section per semester, 50% of whom are males.

Other courses are given to different students in different departments. In the Sociology department we offer a course entitled "Women in the Arab Society" and it is cross-listed with the sociology department. We also offer a course entitled "Women and Psychology" in the Psychology Department, and it also serves as an elective for the faculty of Arts students. In addition, we offer a course entitled "Women and Discourse or Women in Literature" for students mainly from the English or Arabic departments.

Students register in women studies courses for different reasons: some want to explore the area as an academic field and are curious about the kind of readings and debates that these courses can promote. Others coming basically from traditional settings especially the rural areas want to challenge the issues and ideas promoted by these courses, while others mainly enroll in these courses because the timing happens to suit their program. Whatever the reason, we feel that the course is serving its objective as it opens up the field to an academic debate and promotes the interest of students in the area.

On the Graduate level, our masters program in Gender Development and Law offers its courses to working students who want to enroll in the program because of its direct relation to their profession. They either come from NGO institutions or national bureaus such as the different ministries, or they are independent researchers interested in developing their skills in gender issues. At the same time, the program gives the opportunity to human rights activists who have the legal expertise and would like to join the program. In this manner, it is serving the objective of mainstreaming gender in different areas of expertise and in formal and informal policies. In addition, the program has

developed some conceptual and research skills that can eventually create a network of researchers that can promote successfully social issues with gender perspectives.

MS: What are the problems faced by the director and staff?

EK: Administrative level:

In the early stage of the program, we faced obstacles such as explaining to the different academic councils at the university the importance of launching Women Studies as an academic field. Despite such problems, there were no real obstacles to impede or delay its establishment, since the administration supported it.

Being an academic institution, it has a strong impact on students and the community in the teaching, research, workshops and seminars it holds at the university, though the structure and bureaucracy of the university pose different levels of problems that are minor in comparison with the benefits. For instance, the heavily male structured bureaucracy can challenge the program in its content and plans and, at the same time, delay the work. Although the university administration encourages the program to respond to community needs and demands which are vast, the structure itself cannot offer effective policies to enable members to cope with the pressure of teaching loads or load reductions, consultancy fees that are competitive to the market prices, and advocacy work such as preparing for workshops, seminars, or support activities for the women's movement.

Societal Community Level:

Because the program is one of its kind, and having acquired its academic prestige through quality work and commitment, the market demand to acquire our services is high, which puts the program under too much pressure. The international and national organizations have for the last three years intensified their activity in Palestine around mainstreaming gender in its future plans and strategies. In turn, to respond to the demands of the international donor community which has put gender intervention as a condition for funding, our agenda and our priorities were redefined to cope with this pressure. Although these activities have put more pressure on us, they have exposed us to the outside community, the international programs and plans for Palestine which were gender blind. Such activities like reviewing the World Bank and other international organizations or looking at the ministry's programs gave us the real opportunity to impact national policies that are being formulated and that will define the nature of the future Palestinian state. At this stage, even before the recent "Intifada of Independence" these activities became marginal as most of the plans were not implemented owing to the collapse of the peace process. Hence, we were forced to minimize our input into these activities since it has become obvious that formulating policies on paper is much easier than implementing them under the occupation.

MS: What are the courses offered?

EK: On the undergraduate level the following courses are offered:

- 1-Introduction to Women Studies
2. Women in the Arab Society
3. Women in the Family
4. Women and Psychology
5. Women and Discourse
6. History of Women's Movements
7. Gender and Development
8. Women and Law
9. Feminist Theories
10. Special Topic
11. Seminar

On the Graduate level the following courses are offered:

1. Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Development
2. Theoretical Approaches to Gender and Law
3. Data collection and Analysis for Gender, Law and Development
4. Local and Regional Dimensions of Gender, Law and Development: Palestine and the Middle East.
5. Sectoral Issues in Development
6. Gender Planning and Policy Intervention
7. Gender, Democratization and Human Rights
8. Gender Law and Economic Relations

MS: What are your future plans?

EK: To be able to maintain our relatively positive contribution to the political situation, we will be continuing the work at the following levels:

1. Pursue our gender representation in different national and international commissions that produce sensitive reports that impact social development in the future. For instance, we will resume our role in the National Poverty Commission which is conducting a Participatory Poverty Appraisal to be able to define the poverty map of different communities of Palestine within a gender perspective, and be able to make an in-depth analysis of the causes and effects of poverty on the different sectors in order to impact national policies. At the same time, we will continue our active role in producing the annual Human Development Report in Palestine, maintaining gender as a category of analysis ... etc.
2. Prepare for the publication of our book on the "Palestinian Household" which will come out next year. The book is based on a research project that started two years ago by a team of Institute members and some external researchers. The work is trying to define the ongoing coping strategies of the Palestinian household, and the structural and attitudinal changes that occurred in the Palestinian family over a period of time .
3. Assess the new needs of the community and gear research, teaching and gender intervention to suit these needs. Change the theme of our Masters program, and implement an in-depth assessment and analysis.
4. Continue to work with the Palestinian women's movement on achieving a new agenda that copes with the new political and economic realities and builds strategies for achieving development for all.



Yemen:

A Consecrate Interest in Women Research and Studies

By Rania Al-Abiad

Graduate Student, AUB

Introduction

The Yemen Republic: A vision that was shared among the Southerners and the Northerners for years until that 1990 Aden May day when the dream became a reality. Now unified, Yemen is the most populous country on the Arabian Peninsula with 15,915,000 citizens of which 7,943 thousand are male and 7,972 thousand are female according to a 1996 census.

With approximately half of its population being female, it is understandable why Yemen takes a rooted interest in the issues and concerns of women. This interest manifested itself in many forms in the community not the least of which is the establishment of research and study centers dedicated solely to women related matters and the creation of specialized factions within universities for advancing the status of women and education specialists in the same field.

Two such establishments demand particular attention and a closer look considering their contributions to the Yemeni society and women in particular. Notwithstanding their achievements, what makes them quite unique is their location, one being situated within the Adeni community and the other within the Sana'ai community.

The Republic of Yemen is considered to be one of the most education oriented societies in the Arab world. With several privately funded universities and three government-owned ones, as many as 97,190 Yemenis attend the public universities of which 16,752 are female according to the 1996 census. In addition, Yemen benefits from foreign educational and training experts thus introducing the country to diverse models and educational schemes and granting the society high level standards in educational and training experience, not to mention the fields of theoretical and empirical research.

A- The University of Aden, Foundation and Development

Aden was the capital of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen until 1990, when the two Yemens merged and it became the country's economic capital. Located on the Northwest shore of the Gulf of Aden, about 160 km east of

the Bab el-Mandeb, it is the country's principal port. It is also one of the country's two major cities embracing women studies centers. Embodying around 441,880 inhabitants, the region saw it both essential and beneficial to erect a center dedicated to women's issues. This came about in the form of a research and studies center within the University of Aden, the major university of the region.

On September 10, 1975, law No. 22 ratifying the founding of the University of Aden was passed. The university was founded with the main aim of providing the country with the manpower needed to raise the economic, social, educational and developmental levels, as well as to augment the educational opportunities for the growing secondary school graduates.

With education, agriculture, economics and administration forming the nucleus of the University, it now comprises fifteen faculties- six of those are dedicated to education, and the rest to agricultural sciences, economics and administration, medicine, law, engineering, arts, and oil and minerals- and ten scientific centers providing training, consultancy studies and other services to citizens as well as government and private institutions.

In chronological order of establishment they are: Yemeni Research and Studies, the Computer Center, the Continuing Education Center, the Language Center, University Consultancy Center, Center for British, American and Translation Studies, Center for Environmental Studies and Sciences, Science and Technology Center, Agriculture Constanacy Center, and the Women Studies and Research Center.

The Women Studies and Research Center

The establishment of the Center was dictated by the objectives that directed the work at the University.

Built to train quality cadres in various specializations, to develop knowledge through research, to satisfy the needs of the society and the requirements of the development plans, and to contribute towards the development of the society

and promote national unity, the administration recognized it as pivotal to have a unit dedicated to the cause of the tender constituency of the Yemeni citizenry.

In recognition of its role in service of the local community, it was finally decided that establishing a Women Studies and Research Center could not be further delayed. Thus came about the Center in 1998 to join the other equally important centers that make up the organizational framework of the University. Although the Center's main interest lies in the problems facing women in general and Yemeni women in particular, it seeks to approach these problems within a general analysis framework of the social roles of the two sexes alike. It does so through extensive research and applied studies, practical training offered in the form of short courses, and legal and economic consultations offered to the society at large as well as solidifying the Center's information bases.

1. The Center's Objectives

As every establishment is created with a focus which directs its work and shapes its efforts, the Women Studies and Research Center has at its core three directives that assure its course. First and foremost, the Center is interested in conducting and carrying out strategic research and studies. These are aimed at locating the roots of the existing problems of women in the society and proposing solutions and remedies for them. Through analysis and studies done on a regular basis, the Center ensures that the information gathered is up-to-date and that the problems are dealt with before they become too damaging.

In addition to preparing women to meet the challenges that face them in their social, political, professional and personal lives, the Center's second guiding principles is offering training to women and enhancing their capabilities in the political and economic fields. Although it is necessary to educate women, it is equally necessary to develop their leadership qualities and enhance their political and economic understanding of the world around them.

Participation in the process of building up academic and scientific establishments as well as creating and maintaining relations with the national government and non-governmental organization is another essential objective of the Center. While it is important to build up the capacities of the members of the Center, it is equally important, and essential, to build up the capacities of the University and the society at large. Far from being a self-sufficient and self-contained entity, the Center is a platform for shaping a more aware and more concerned society.

A final end towards which the Center progresses is inventory observation and classifying data information particular to women. This objective forms one of the core responsibilities of the Center. Given its nature as a research and study center, it is natural that the Center be interested in gathering information. Once gathered, this information needs to be

properly archived and adequately displayed, and when it is publicized, it is in a position to serve both the members of the University and the community.

2. Fields of Interest

Although the Center is first and foremost interested in researching and studying matters relating to women, there are particular fields of interest that demand special attention and primary focus.

Reflecting on Yemeni women's participation in the political life and decision making tops the list of interests of the Center. With women around the world gaining more and more leeway into the political sphere and demanding more decision-making opportunities, it is understandable that the Center direct its energies to study how this reflects on Yemeni women and how they compare to other women around the world.

If women's role in the political and decision-making spheres is important, their role in the fields of development and production is equally important. This is why the Center has devoted some of its resources to investigate this role and document it. With health issues gaining momentum worldwide, the center focuses on ways in which Yemeni women could have access to health education, cultural and social services. Conducting studies of this type allows the Center to form a better picture of the status of women and thus be better able to propose alternatives and solutions to the problems being faced. It also allows it to be a more reliable mirror of the reality of things and thus a more indispensable unit in the society.

Examining the participation of Yemeni women in science and technology is a further priority of the Center. With science and technology traditionally reserved for the males of any society and with the increased schooling of women in all the society, it is vital to maintain how this reflects on changing the established status quo. Since women cannot possibly ignore their household responsibilities, the Center finds it substantive to study family conditions and the different pressures faced by the family during periods of economic, social and political change.

Relating the obstacles that impede more participation on the part of women in the different fields as well as proposing ways to cope with these obstacles, form the last area of particular interest that the Center focuses upon.

The center encourages an inventory of collections and translation of research and studies linked with women's affairs in the Arab world and the world at large to form a basis for a library specialized in women's affairs.

3. Organizational Structure of the Center

The Center is considered to have an independent status within the larger framework of the University of Aden whereby it is directly linked to the Presidency of the

University and is governed by its laws, rules and regulations. The organizational structure of the Center is constituted of seven directorates.

At the head of the hierarchy of the Center is the Administrative Council of the Center. This is followed by the Executive Director from which the Deputy Executive Director branches. From thereon four independent departments branch, each administered by a separate head and responsible for different sets of tasks and priorities. These are the Department of Training, Legal and Economic Consultation, the Department of Documentation and Information, the Department of Financial and Administrative Affairs, and the Department of Research and Applied Studies. All these then constitute the Head of Voluntary Research Groups which is at the lowest end of the hierarchy.

Thus established and organized, the Center caters to the well-being of women both on the national and regional levels. It is the pride of the University of Aden and a center for interest and attraction to those attached to matters pertaining to women. With memberships in international organizations including the Arab University Union, the Islamic University Union and the International Union of Universities, the University of Aden hopes to press forward with its focus on women making the Center a bigger success than it already is.

B- University of Sana'a, Foundation and Development

Following the unification of the earlier states, Sana'a became the political capital of the country. The city, which lies 2,350 m above sea level in western Yemen, is a road junction and market center for coffee and fruits. Sana'a retains most of its traditional Islamic character with one of the most breathtaking landmarks of the region being the Great Mosque of the 7th century. With as many as 1,851,858 inhabitants, Sana'a has retained its status as the political and religious center of Yemen since the first century AD. This unique standing that it enjoys gives a unique status to its most important university, the University of Sana'a.

The Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center

Two abortive attempts to establish an academic concentration in Women's studies at the University did not dissuade efforts that it could be done. Rather, these attempts gave vigorous impetus to implant this seed within the University which ultimately brought the Center for Empirical Research and Women's Studies into being. The Center is considered a hallmark of a new true beginning of objective scientific knowledge concerning the realities of Yemeni women. It is also considered the grass-root for defining the problems women face and drawing out solutions and retributions.

1. Creation and Development

In January 1994, a Unit for Social Research and Women's Studies was established at the University. This Unit was under the auspices of the Sociology Department and not a

separate entity by itself. With the funding of the Royal Netherlands Embassy, the Unit prospered with course offerings leading both to a Master's degree in Social Research and Women's Studies and a graduate level Diploma in the field. Not only was the Unit pioneer on women's studies in Yemen, it also marked the birth of the first academic program of its kind fully integrated within a national university system anywhere in the Arab world.

With an eye to develop a cadre of highly skilled and motivated social researchers in women's issue and to document and analyze the situation and participation of women in the society, the University kept close watch on the Unit's development and saw to it that it did in fact develop. And indeed it did. In 1995 the Unit was officially upgraded and reconstituted as a Center for Empirical Research and Women's Studies. Now the Unit was detached from the Sociology Department becoming an independent, degree-granting Faculty within the University.

2. Academic Curriculum and Regional and International Partnerships

With continued financial support from the Netherlands and new, though limited funding, from other international agencies, women's studies at the University of Sana'a developed an academic curriculum offering courses on selected subjects. The topics of focus, carefully selected to reflect the particular needs and conditions of the country with research methodology and gender theories woven into the lectures, cover six areas of interest. With women as their primary focus, the courses relate to development, law, media, education, language and literature, and Islam.

Not only does the Center by itself represent a standpoint in the University, it also stands as an enticement for other disciplines to incorporate gender issues into their own courses. Thus the Center has succeeded not only in itself but also as part of a greater whole to raise awareness to the existence of women's issues, to their importance and to their relevance to and inseparability from other disciplines and considerations. With its regional orientations, international student and faculty body with scholars and academicians coming from such countries as Jordan, Iraq, the US and the Netherlands, links to the national and international development community in Yemen, and partnerships with other universities in Europe and the Arab world (such as the close and active partnerships with the University of Tilburg in the Netherlands and with al-Hassan University in Rabat, Morocco), the Center for Empirical Research and Women's Studies has forged deep and mutually beneficial connections between Sana'a University and the world beyond.

3. The Center's Journal, Dirasat Niswayah

In addition to extending educational formations in women's issues, the Center offers insights into the status of women through the publishing of a journal on women's studies entitled *Dirasat Niswayah*.

The Journal is bilingual, in Arabic and English, and is intended to provide a channel for publishing outputs of the Center researchers as well as best papers and theses produced by its students. It is published twice a year with issue zero having come out in October 1998.

4. The Documentation Center

Moreover, and to further enhance partnerships with universities elsewhere in the Arab world, the Center for Empirical Research and Women's Studies has developed its own documentation center. Complete with up-to-date equipment and Internet facilities as well as library resources including books, articles and periodicals related to the field of women, the Documentation Center established links with similar documentation centers in al-Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates. Under the auspices of



the Arab Council for Child Development, the Documentation Center resources are available to all members of the University irrespective of their faculty enrollment.

5. Encountered Problems

Although the experience of establishing a Center such as this seems free of problems, the reality of things is different. There were in fact several problems that the Center faced during its founding years, some continue into the present.

One of the most pressing and pertinent problems that has faced the Center since its inception was the linguistic obstacle. Given that the majority of the sources on women's matters are in English and that Yemen is foremost an Arab country, high levels of English competency were demanded of both the faculty and the students in the field. This was not an easy task to achieve since language deficiencies abound among the members of the Center, and special funding had to be allocated to combat them. Now additional English courses are required for students of the Center, and upgrading the faculty's English proficiency is a top priority.

Not only is the linguistic obstacle manifested in the need for an excellent command of English, but also in the vital need for translation from English to Arabic and vice versa. Adopting a consistent method of Arabisation was one way in which the Center attempted to overcome the pressing

need to make available all compiled information to the Yemeni public at large and the students of the Center in particular. The Center's Journal aids in diffusing this developed vocabulary across the country and the Arab world as well as helping in exposing the problems encountered in Yemen to outside non-Arabic speaking countries.

6. Reasons For Success

It is believed that one of the greatest surprises about the Center is that "it exists and thrives, fully integrated into the national university, in one of the most conservative Islamic societies in the world today." Where other universities failed, the University of Sana'a succeeded for three basic reasons.

Because the Center was first established as an applied branch of the Sociology Department at the University, it was given enough time to ground itself and establish a solid background. This is considered to be one of the main reasons that made the Center the success it now is and that gave it the sense of permanence it is thought to enjoy.

The maintaining of a strong focus on empirical research is believed to have drawn out the success of the Center. Being rooted in experimental and field research work the Center kept close to what really mattered to Yemeni women and thus did not lose focus or direction. This is considered to be greatly germane to the prosperity of the Center and its success not only in the view of the Yemeni society, but also of partner universities

and donors.

Finally, the fact that the Center, through its focus, curriculum and activities, was able to attract and retain funds both for itself and the university at large was attractive to the administration of the University. This gave it extra instigation both to maintain and develop the Center making it the accomplishment it now is.

In the years since its establishment, the Center has achieved various notable attainments in areas ranging from institutionalization and international recognition, to regionalization, human resource development, Arabisation, documentation, and national and international outreach. What makes the Center so particular and successful is the fact that it derives, and will continue to derive its focus and direction from the realities and priorities of women in Yemen and the Arab world. The Center is now in a position to influence issues and concerns of greater relevance to the local and regional environment and to contribute in an indispensable way to the international dialogue on gender issues.

To learn more about Yemen, the University of Aden and the University of Sana'a as well as their related women research and studies centers refer to the following web-site <http://www.y.net.ye> or contact the Center for Empirical Research and Women's Studies at: research@y.net.ye



Assessing Gender/Women's Studies: A Comparative Perspective

Women's Studies Programs: The Middle East in Context*

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Introduction

The academization/institutionalization of Women's Studies has emerged as a result of the need to legitimize, develop, and further promote the feminist movement. Western feminists have considered this phenomenon the culmination of their long struggle: as enabling a credible and legitimate voice to a large sector of society that has long been silenced. Bringing women's issues and concerns to the University has accorded feminist academics a platform to undertake research, publish studies, and develop different conceptual and methodological tools to deal with traditionally ignored social phenomena.

The Western experience of Women's Studies particularly the North American, has shown remarkable progress. In Canada, for example, Women's Studies programs are found in every province, every major city, and at the majority of universities. Such programs have also spread into most community colleges. The result has undoubtedly been felt both at the national and the international levels. Nationally, in addition to a marked increase in students interested in the program, feminist scholarship has made a major entry into the policy and decision-making processes, particularly within the spheres of economy, education, law, and politics. Similarly impressive has been the international recognition such scholarship has begun to command, as Canadian women and feminist academics have taken an increasingly public profile in bringing women's concerns to international academic and political forums.

More specifically, the incorporation of women's rights and histories within institutionalized knowledge has been cul-

turally and historically distinct. The context of the liberal democratic bourgeoisie in the West has been crucial to the development of Women's Studies programs. This setting did not only create a space for such phenomena to occur, but also ensured that the developing institutions would express and even reproduce existing ideologies. This contextual relationship has ensured a dialogical process, where changes in cultural and historical circumstances induce changes to these institutions as well. It is not surprising, therefore, that currently, under the pressure of global capitalism and an increased drive towards privatization, a number of feminists are beginning to cast some doubt about the process of institutionalizing Women's studies. In fact, some feminists who pioneered in the establishment of these programs, including Dorothy Smith and Greta Hoffman-Nemiroff, are rethinking the true value of such institutions in terms of addressing and alleviating the concerns of women in general (Hoffman-Nemiroff 1994; Smith 1993). Some of the questions posed include: Have Women's Studies institutions become an academic exercise only, removed from concerns of the actual lives and issues that affect women? In addition to these "subjective" considerations, new objective realities, expressed in globalization, have also become a concern. A number of institutions are under the threat of closing down. The pioneering Simone de Beauvoir Institute in Montreal, for example, has found itself at the head of the chopping board in a period of institutional downsizing.

Within a framework of increasing correspondences in global economic and socio/political trends, this paper will address the experiences of Canadian Women's studies pro-

grams and examine their applicability and challenges to the Middle Eastern context. The paper will also examine the cultural and historical context for the development of Women's studies institutions in the Middle East.

Women's Studies: The Canadian Experience

While itself an outcome of the Canadian women's movement, the practical need for Women's Studies courses in Canadian universities emerged after the recommendations of two national investigative surveys into the status of women. The first, conducted in English Canada and known as the "Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada" (1970), linked female social and economic inequality to sex-role stereotyping, as well as to traditional vocational and educational choices for women. A second report "Pour les Québécoises: égalité et indépendance", conducted in Quebec and released in 1978, also concluded that Women's Studies programs were essential for the improvement of women's opportunities for learning (Begin 1997). The report recommended inclusion of such programs in every discipline having content related to the status of women. Without going into detail of the history of the establishment of Women's Studies programs in Canada, it is nevertheless important to emphasize the influence of two particular forces that contributed significantly to the success of the programs. On the one hand, over the past two decades the Canadian feminist movement has been able to elevate women's concerns to the highest levels of politic. Research into women's economic, educational, and health conditions, as well as the concerted work around violence against women, have found inroads into various governmental legal and political structures. This has resulted in a number of legal reforms. For example, while still a topic of judicial debate with regards to the full extent of their application, domestic violence has been criminalized, and anti-discrimination laws have been put in place within the labor market around such issues as equal pay, maternity leave, child care, sexual harassment, etc.

The second and equally important force that consolidated Women's Studies programs has been the development of a structure, or rather a number of structures, intended to foster and monitor progress in women's issues. The first such structures, intended to foster and monitor progress in women's issues. The first such structure originally appeared in the form of a Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, established in 1971. However, affected by various economic and political changes, the Ministry was reduced to the Secretary of the State for the Status of Women in 1993. While the relationship between academic feminists and the government-funded and government-run structure has not been without tensions, the Secretary of the State for the Status of Women has provided undeniable support to women's concerns (O'Neil and Sutherland 1997).

Nevertheless, this office has not been immune to major criticisms levied against it by various sectors from within the feminist movement. The most important criticism of the

Secretary of the State for status of Women has been that it is a liberal structure aiming to serve primarily white middle-class women, and ignoring other sectors of the population. In Canada, where multiculturalism/multi-ethnicity is officially recognized, such criticisms have found widespread support. A large segment of the socialist feminist movement particularly those concerned not only with the poor and working classes, but also with immigrant women of color, aboriginal women, and other marginalized groups, demanded a more grass-roots structure that would address the needs of the various women's communities. In response, another structure was put in place: the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. With the consultation and help of various community groups, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women conducted major research and produced important documents on the conditions of immigrant women's social, economic, political, and legal status. The primary mandate of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women was to concentrate on poor, immigrant, and other marginalized groups of women.

Not unlike other forms and structures of community services with a public nature, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women's mandate was cut short. In 1995 it was closed down and its mandate was absorbed by the Secretary of State for the Status of Women. Currently, a major debate within the Canadian feminist movement has arisen again around issues of funding and research. Some of the major questions include: Where should research priorities be placed: on policy-oriented research, namely, research perceived to be in the benefit of the government and other private sectors; or should priorities be placed on community and women's empowerment research? Also being debated is the credibility of researchers: academic feminists are often perceived as being isolated from the daily lives of the community. Whereas community-based researchers, often lacking the "academic" credentials, are nonetheless seen by grass-roots women activists to be closer to the daily struggles of women. The impact of this debate and the consequences it will potentially have on Women's Studies programs have yet to be seen. Nevertheless, there are two points that need to be made at this juncture. First, there is little doubt that the party in this debate that is often critical and even militant in its position is largely represented by women's groups and organizations who have less access to research funding. In some cases this can include Women's Studies students who consider themselves activists as well as academics. For example, in a recent national workshop organized by the Office of the Status of Women and attended by feminists representing Women's and Gender studies, academics, community activists and independent feminist researchers, a heated discussion erupted around the various aspects of this debate. Questions raised, particularly by activists and community representatives, included issues of voice authenticity, representation, legitimacy, and credibility.

Second, I would like to suggest that such debates are often bridgeable at the theoretical or discursive level, within the



sanctuary of academia and the four walls of Women's Studies courses. Within my own experience as a feminist having one foot in academia and another in community activism, I find it possible to link the theoretical and the practical, and tie the academic with the community. Such a possibility is made easier by the very nature of Women's Studies curriculum, i.e., its interdisciplinarity. The interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies, as the following section will illustrate, enables academics teaching Women's/Gender courses to articulate women's concerns at various levels of analyses. Thus, in addition to the inclusive nature of teaching which—one would hope—should address the diverse classes, races, nationalities, ethnicities, and sexualities. Women's Studies courses can be ideal places for the incorporation of praxis, namely, the articulation of intellectual/academic exercise with the practical daily-life experiences of women activists.

Women's Studies: The Interdisciplinary Nature

The question of whether Women's Studies courses should be taught within a program, an institute or in a separate and independent department is a reflection of the wider debate around the issue of feminist methodology(ies). Feminists continue to debate whether there is an independent feminist methodology that is separate and radically distinct from other social science methodologies. Shulamit Reinartz's text *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (1992) sums up this debate, reviewing a wide range of feminist research methodologies. While such an anthology examines the various interventions, innovations, and insights brought into social science research from feminist perspectives, it tends to rule out the presence of a separate and independent feminist methodology. Although considered one of the most inclusive texts on feminist methodology, this thick volume has, at least in my experience, raised more questions than it is able to answer. The question of what distinguishes feminist research methodology(ies) from other social science methodologies became a topic of lively debate in a recent graduate course on feminist methodologies in which I used Reinartz's book as a required text. The major question for most of these students, who were also involved in community activism, could be summed up in the following: "Why undertake feminist research if the latter is not going to have direct impact on the lives of the women/subjects researched?" Prioritizing practical research or research with a focus on social change is particularly favorable among Third World students and students working on issues of gender/women and development.

Feminists who supported the idea that Women's Studies be placed in a separate category and treated as an independent discipline, have also supported the idea of establishing Women's Studies as an independent department. The majority of feminist academics, however, both for tactical and strategic reasons, have maintained that Women's Studies are of an interdisciplinary nature and, therefore, must take the form of a program or an institute with linkages to all other academic disciplines.

The need for interdisciplinarity in Women's Studies programs is both practically and theoretically sound. Factors such as the freshness of the program, the relative paucity of feminist scholars in every university, the limited numbers of students, etc., have all contributed to the program's interrelatedness with other academic disciplines. The issue of interdisciplinarity, moreover, is theoretically and strategically necessary if women's or gender issues are to be recognized as legitimate social concerns.

The range of interdisciplinarity of Women's Studies programs vary between one university and another. While it is commonly noticeable that social sciences, arts and humanities, are the most likely linkages for Women's Studies, various universities, particularly those with strong feminist faculty in "non-traditional" departments such as Law, Engineering, and Medicine, have succeeded in extending the linkages of the programs to those disciplines as well. In Canada, most Women's Studies programs confer a major degree with a minor in other Arts or Social Science Faculties. Graduate courses and degrees in Women's Studies are also available in various Women's Studies programs in Canada. For example, the Universities of Laval, Memorial, and Simon Fraser offer Masters degrees in Women's Studies, the University of British Columbia offers an Masters in Gender Studies, while York University offers a Ph.D in Women's Studies.

The interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies involves more than cooperation in course offerings by faculty from various disciplines. In fact, the whole structure of the program, in terms of the composition of its executive council, board of directors, management—its decision-making bodies—is made up of faculty from different departments. One of the interesting points often raised is the role of male faculty in such decision-making structures. While there is no one answer, some programs extend their definition of feminism to include male faculty who advocate women's concerns and rights in these courses; others tend to limit their governing bodies to women only. Corresponding to this issue is the question of the relationship between women and gender.

Although most feminist scholars recognize the difference between sex and gender, and realize the fact that gender is the social construction of the relationship between the sexes, such a position is not clearly articulated in the platform of most Women's Studies programs. Some programs are advertised as catering to both males and females, while others are primarily oriented towards the female population. Personal experience of teaching in Women's Studies departments has highlighted the paucity of male students attending their courses; and if they do participate, male students tend to take it out of curiosity rather than out of commitment or as a major. Such a dilemma is also evident in the way some institutes refer to their programs, be it Gender, Feminist, or Women's Studies. These issues, I believe, are not semantic or superficial. Quite to the contrary, this has

been an issue of debate among feminists at levels of high theory, particularly—although not exclusively—between Western feminists and Third World feminists or feminists working with and in developing countries. For some feminists replacing the concept Feminist or Women's Studies with Gender Studies might be seen as undermining the feminist movement. Radical feminists associated with this position argue that if we are to conduct Women's Studies from a gender perspective, instead of a feminist perspective—with a focus on structures of oppression—the uniqueness of patriarchy as the overall oppressive force will be diluted, and as a result the women's/feminist movement will be weakened.²

On the other hand, social feminists and feminists of color have tended to prefer the gender context over that of "women" because, in their perspective, such a context can guarantee the inclusion of class, race, and ethnicity; issues that have often been sidestepped by radical feminists.³ From this viewpoint, the structural must take predominance over the individual. Patriarchy, thus, is not the only or even most oppressive force: race, national, colonial, and (neo)colonial factors are seen as equally important—if not more so—to those of patriarchy. While gender proponents claim that their approach provides a wider context and a diverse representation of factors, forces, and structures over those suggested by adherents of the feminist or women's approach, they are yet to answer critics who accuse them of equally weakening the struggle by turning women's rights into a more general struggle for human rights.

Discourse and debates around issues of "gender" vs "women", as well as around the actual implications of Women's Studies programs' critical approach, boil down to one fundamental question, i.e. what is the representative nature of Women's Studies? As Dorothy Smith, a prominent feminist who was a pioneer in establishing the first such program in Canada, has suggested, this issue is one that might make or break Women's Studies programs.

In addition to the linkages that Women's Studies forges with other disciplines, and the debate around gender, the programs must pay attention to the difficult economic situation they find themselves in: they must be able to express what they have to offer to students. This issue is all the more important in the face of globalization, the decline of the welfare-state, the shrinking public market and the expansion of the private labor market. Promoters of the programs emphasize the unique skills Women's Studies offer, namely, introducing students to the differences and intersections between gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity and, culture. This unique feature of the program intends to promote analytical and critical thinking, and is often highlighted in the advertising, packaging, and selling of the program. Marketing Women's Studies has recently become a pressing issue. At this juncture of world economy and politics, with shrinking funding and resources to education, health and other public sectors, a number of programs try to emphasize

market values by "selling" the skills provided by Women's Studies. The American University in New York, for example, developed the following "sales pitch": "Managers often prefer liberal arts majors because they think they are better at abstracting, thinking, analyzing situations, organizing material, writing well, and making oral presentations" (AUNY 1996). In a similar vein, Women's Studies at Bishop's University in Canada advertises the program as one that "helps those who want to work with women in such numerous and diverse occupations such as, business and management, social sciences, health, education, government, and public policy" (Bishop's 1997).

The extent to which analytical and critical skills are integral to Women's Studies remains a most hotly debated issue in current feminisms. It is this particular debate that I believe is most relevant and important to Women's/Gender Studies programs in the Middle East. However, before addressing this debate, I would like to further examine questions of academic and community research in Women's Studies.

Women's Studies: Between Community and Academy

The debate referred to earlier regarding research priorities, the nature of research, and in whose interest research should be done, is replicated within Women's Studies programs, albeit in different shapes and forms. Women's Studies programs, which throughout the 1980s were seen as a most positive development in propagating women's issues, are currently being challenged around the issue of representation. Women of color, aboriginal women, and other marginalized women have formed an articulate voice for challenging the white, middle-class, Eurocentric, and heterosexual character of Western Women's Studies programs. In Canada, for example, these challenges are obvious at the level of curriculum. Since the early nineties, immigrant women and women of color have charged that their marginalization is not only the product of the male patriarchal and Eurocentric character of Western culture in general. Western feminists, they allege, have also colluded with existing structures and reproduced their marginalization, even within feminist institutions. Among the issues they point to are the nature and structure of a curriculum that pays only lip-service to cultural and racial differences. Feminist theory(ies) and methodology(ies), which are the major components of almost every program, remain largely Eurocentric, focusing on the experiences of white middle-class Western women, and marginalizing, if not totally ignoring in the process, the experiences and contributions of other women.

Such a debate, I may add, was not strange to my own experience at Carleton University. The almost exclusively white middle-class character of women involved in the University's Women's Studies Program resulted, in 1992, in a series of protests staged by a group of women of color who demanded the inclusion of a course on race-ethnicity and the Other to be preferably taught by a woman of color.



With support they gathered from other students and faculty members, they were able to pressure the program's Board of Directors to alter the program's curriculum and introduce a course that would deal with diversity (particularly race and ethnicity). The result was the introduction of "Gender, Race, Class, Ethnicity and Nationalism" as a core course in the program.

Another point of contestation consists of what native women and women of color refer to as the inability of most white feminists to recognize the importance and relevance of colonialism's relationship to the status of underdevelopment faced by these "other" women. Feminist authors such as Marnia Lazreg, Pratibha Parmar and others have gone so far as to suggest a collusion between Western feminists and cultural imperialism.⁴ This point is not specific to Women's Studies. In *Sociological Thought: Beyond Eurocentric Theory* (1996), following other feminists, I make a similar point, suggesting that Western social sciences in general is middle-class, male, Eurocentric and based on the exclusion of the Other. To remedy this I argued that sociologists must reject the mainstream discipline of the "Four White Fathers of the West" (often represented in the names of Compt, Durkheim, Marx, and Weber), and ensure that the courses include non-Western and female theorists. A mission which was modestly achieved in the above text.

Such debates, while at first glance perhaps seeming to appear irrelevant to a context such as that of the Middle East, nevertheless, I propose, hold important ramifications outside of the Western hemisphere.

Women/Gender Studies in the Middle East: A Cultural and Historical Context

Keeping in mind the Western experience discussed above, the following section will examine the cultural and historical specificity of Gender/Women's Studies in the Middle East. The focus in the following discussion will not be on the general features of the program, such as the various tactical and strategic moves and decisions adopted in developing the program around issues of program viz. department, the emphasis on linkages and interdisciplinarity, the need to "sell" the program and ways of "packaging" it, all of which I believe are generalizable and can be used as experiences to learn from. Instead, this section will concentrate on issues more specific and perhaps unique to the cultural and historical trajectories of the Middle East.

It is no exaggeration to suggest that over the past two decades the Middle East has been undergoing economic, political, and cultural turmoil. Factors such as the advent of international capitalism, expressed in a further penetration into Middle Eastern economy, combined with the Iran-Iraq war, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the destruction of Iraq, and the relentless Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, have all undoubtedly changed the socio-economic and political map of the region. Alongside economic dependency and political

instability created under these new conditions, the Middle East has partially responded with some of its own destabilizing forces, the most pertinent of which being the Islamicist movements. Expressed in the form of new political ideologies, these movements are trying to present themselves as the authentic voice of the region's masses. Islamicisms or Muslim fundamentalisms have gained a special momentum as they vie to be the region's alternative voice in the face of what they perceive is a hegemonic Western cultural penetration. Whatever their external or international platform—be it a response to the penetration of Western culture or Western economic hegemony, or a response to the political vacuum created by regimes perceived to be allied with the West—the internal or national platform of most, if not all, of the fundamentalist movements, whether in Egypt, Palestine, or Algeria, is largely the same: namely involving the silencing and domestication of women.

Under these circumstances, women in many Middle Eastern countries are finding themselves effectively squeezed in the grip of an increasingly tightening vice. Economic pressures such as high unemployment rates, reinforced by a political ideology that emphasizes women's "natural role as being at home", are combining to push more women out of the labor force, out of the public domain and into the domestic or private sphere, widening, in the process, the gap between "public" and "private". Such a gap, while varying from one country to the next, has not been left to economic or ideological forces alone, as it is often influenced by state policies. States in the Middle East have always maintained an ambivalence towards women's issues. At various historical junctures, and when it sees fit to do so, a state would use the "woman" question in a positive manner, promoting certain rights by legislating some pro-women laws (Abdo 1997b). At other times, for instance under the threat of fundamentalism, the state will tend to stifle, push back or even retract from previous positions on women's issues. This is particularly so when the state is also faced with hard economic circumstances. Or, alternatively, as witnessed in the recent history of Tunisia, the state can flagship women's issues as another tool or weapon to fight Muslim fundamentalism. Between the state on the one hand, and patriarchal fundamentalist movements and economic underdevelopment on the other, Middle Eastern women have often found themselves the objects of push and pull politics.

Having said this, however, Arab and Middle Eastern women are not the silent recipients of this imposed victimization. The womanist/feminist movement(s) in the Middle East has(ve) always been alive, capable of articulating women's needs and fighting for women's rights and demands, albeit with varying degrees of successes and failures. In fact, it is this determination to continue the struggle, as Hisham Sharabi, Valentine Moghadam, and Rita Giaccaman, among others have argued, that has kept the struggles for gender identity and women's rights, as well as that against gender oppression, on the political agenda of most Middle Eastern

states.⁵ Such an agenda, one might argue, will continue to be fluid and in flux as long as the Middle Eastern state itself, along with its economic, political and ideological structures, remains in a transitory and ever-changing position.

It is within the context outlined above that one must examine the potential of Women's Studies or of the institutionalization of women/gender issues in the Middle East, a certainly challenging experience with built-in contradictory tendencies.

Women's/Gender Studies in the Middle East

The academization/institutionalization of Women's Studies in the Middle East in general, and the Arab world in particular, is a relatively new phenomenon, and assessing the full potential of such an experience is not possible at this stage. However, it is important to note that developing such an institution or program will undoubtedly enhance the women's struggle and to a certain degree women's rights as well. The real challenge, however, is to articulate a program that in both its form and substance is, on the one hand, flexible enough to respond to the demands of the different women's constituencies at the national level, while being aware of existing debates and discourses at the international level. On the other hand, a Women's Studies program in the Middle East, in this case in Egypt, would also have to be strong enough or bold enough so as to not be hampered by the existing reactionary forces, nor by the many external pressures within which it is attempting to forge its own path.

Before attempting to articulate some mechanisms that I think might be useful in the actual setup of such a program, I would like to elaborate briefly on the challenge posed by internal reactionary forces. At both the national and international levels, Middle Eastern feminists have been, at least for the past decade and a half, busied with the debate over the "authentic vs the outsider" or "the orientalist vs the ethnocentrist". A great deal of ink, time, and energy have been invested in the questions of the symbolic meaning of veiling; whether the latter is imposed or of choice, or whether it is part of the authentic Islam or one patriarchal version or interpretation of Islam. A major outcome of such debates, which are by no means over, has been a limiting of the horizons of Middle Eastern feminist scholars in terms of issues of debate and discussion. The impact of Islamicism and the emergence of new movements of Muslim or more correctly, Islamicist feminists, as well as other women/feminists who for whatever reason have taken a traditional culturalist side of the debate, continue to linger on. The culturalist argument focuses attention on cultural imperialism and attempts to brand every feminist issue, including democracy, human rights, liberal and individual rights, and definitely sexuality, as imports of Western cultural imperialism. This brand of criticism has undoubtedly stifled the academic debate within Arab/Middle Eastern feminists circles. A careful examination of these debates reveals that much of the discussion continues to revolve around Orientalism and "Orientalism in Reverse", to use Sadeq Jalal el-Aziz's terms (El-Aziz

1981). Arab/Middle Eastern feminist responses to these questions have often been imbued with a sense of internalized Orientalism. Taking up issues of women's materiality, sexuality, violence against women and women's public rights in general has not only been discouraged and labeled Western or imported, but in some cases also made irrelevant as a research topic altogether. Women/feminists taking up these issues have been labeled Orientalists or Westerners, in an attempt to stifle their voices.

Nevertheless, certain secular feminists, such as Heidah Moghissi and Deniz Kandiyoti, among others, have chosen to release themselves from the shackles of this debate and have shifted their focus from the religious to the historical, national, cultural and material, allowing in the process, an open discussion of wider issues.⁶ Other significant social phenomena, such as the relationship between women and the state, or women and citizenship, have also begun to be addressed and debated.

Such a discrepancy in scholarship within the Middle Eastern context, I believe, is another important challenge for Women's Studies programs to address as they try to build their research priorities and articulate their curriculum. The following section will provide some detail on issues or research and curricular development within the cultural and historical specificity articulated above.

As the developing Women's Studies programs attempt to articulate their research priorities, it will be important to reach a balance between different research projects. For example, policy-oriented research, currently high on the agenda of various Women's Studies programs in Canada, is an important project as it generates funding resources to the program and enables it to develop in various aspects. The Women's Studies Program at Birzeit University, I believe, realized this when they included policy-oriented research as a component of their program. Nonetheless, as most policy research is funded by the state or by private corporations with particular agendas in mind, it is important to assess the relevance of such research to local women and weigh the pros and cons. This equally applies to projects funded by international agencies, particularly the U.N. and other donor agencies operating in the Middle East. A brief examination of certain relevant policy-oriented research projects undertaken by Birzeit University might be useful here. For example, the Women's Studies program at Birzeit undertook a critical reexamination of the World Bank Report, as well as analyzing the PLO economic plan from a gender perspective, both of which provide positive examples of a combination of policy-oriented research incorporating gender concerns (Kuttab 1997).

Academic theoretical research is of paramount importance as it keeps feminists at the local or national level in touch with and aware of debates and discourses at the international level. However, overemphasizing the theoretical and prioritizing it over the practical has the potential of removing



academic feminists from the local empirical issues. As pointed out earlier in this paper, this has become a thorny issue in feminist politics within the Canadian context. The balance between the theoretical/academic and practical/empirical has ramifications that go beyond the issues of the content and substance of research. Faculty in the Women's Studies programs, particularly those on full-time bases, will be under-pressure not only to satisfy the feminist/women's demands that the program is set to achieve, but they also find themselves under the pressure of having to produce and publish in internationally recognized academic journals; this for sheer survival in the academic world. As mentioned earlier, within the Canadian context, the debate between community or feminist activists academic feminists remains a most heated debate, one that is undoubtedly widening the gap between "academic" women's Studies and "real" women's issues.

While there is not blueprint or straightforward answer to any of these research concerns, it might be useful for new Women's Studies programs to consider questions such as: In whose interest is research being done? Is it for women's empowerment? For policy? For academic purposes? Who should do the research? Academics? Women's organizations who are close to the needs and reality of women's communities? Or, a combination of both? The Palestinian experience of Women's Studies programs that have maintained a strong component of community outreach as one of their primary objectives provide an instructive example for other programs to follow.

The issues of research presented above are also tied to questions of curriculum. What courses to teach, which subjects to emphasize, and what areas to prioritize, can also be highly contentious questions. As the Western experience demonstrates, the primary course in Women's Studies, namely Feminist Theory and Methodology, were and still are contested by women of color and others who charge that these courses represent white, middle-class experience and not the experience of other sectors of the population.

In the Middle eastern context, while the issue of race per se might not be as evident a concern, the issues of class, ethnicity, and religion are no doubt contentious issues. Moreover, the unequal economic and consequently social under-development that characterizes most Middle Eastern states creates a serious void between rural and urban sectors, and in other contexts among urban, rural, bedouin, and refugee sectors. This gap suggests the presence of different needs and demands, based on class and perhaps ethnic lines, which must be addressed. It is important to remember that although we tend to use culture, for instance Arab culture, as a unitary category, the fact is that each Arab country exhibits different cultural traditions, varying between class, ethnic, religious, and geographic boundaries. As I have elaborated upon elsewhere, multiculturalism is, to some degree, present within every "formal" culture (Abdo 1997a). In addition to the question of what local/national issues to con-

sider in developing, say theory courses for Women's Studies, there is always the controversial issue of the relevance of already existing feminist theory to the Middle East. While the debate on this topic is beyond the scope of this paper, one point is worth making presently. Western feminist research has contributed tremendously to epistemology, particularly within the context of humanities and social sciences. One such contribution has been the debate around "public" and "private" spaces, or "production" and "reproduction". Yet, as Deniz Kandiyoti has pointed out, it is in the Middle East where such a debate can find its most elaborate and detailed expression. Thus, while on the one hand these debates can be introduced and made use of, on the other, Middle Eastern scholars can take such debates and elevate them to a higher level by recontextualizing them within the cultural and historical specificity of the region.

What I believe needs to be most seriously considered in curriculum development is what was referred to earlier as questions of women's materiality within the Middle East; namely, issues of women and labor force participation; the relationship among women, the state, and citizenship; the critical examination of women and the law, not only Shari'a law, but also civil law; women's sexuality, reproduction, reproductive technologies, violence, abuse, clitoridectomy, and other such concerns that are long overdue for critical examination. The crucial importance of Women's Studies role in undertaking this sort of research is highlighted by events such as the recent decision made in Egypt to overturn laws prohibiting female circumcision (HRW 1997).

Finally, while I do not doubt the fact that every new Women's Studies program will pay more than sufficient attention to issues of national concern, such as the historical and current role of women in defending and building the nation, issues of women and national development and so on, it is important to always remind ourselves that defending and building ourselves as persons and women is of paramount importance.

Conclusion

Without any claim to inclusiveness or conclusiveness, this paper has attempted to contribute to the feminist debate that tries to challenge the long overdue Orientalist thesis that "West is West and East is East and the twain shall never

*The need for
interdisciplinarity
in Women's
Studies programs
is both
practically and
theoretically sound.*

meet", whether the proponents were Western, Eastern, or Middle Eastern.

Women's Studies Programs, this paper has argued, are the culmination of Women's struggle and the feminist movement(s) and as such they mark an important achievement for the women's movement internationally. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, in the West these programs or institutes have become a part of the wider social structure that gave rise to them in the first place. The implication of this being that the very same forces that might have encouraged the establishment and development of these institutes, can also potentially lead to their demise. Unlike other established disciplines in the social sciences that remain largely main-stream and male-stream, Women's Studies is critical and is fundamentally anti male-control. This seed of anti-establishment inherent in most, if not all, of these programs, carries with it the potential for marginalizing, if not totally destroying them.

The status of Women's Studies programs in both the West and East, or Middle East, is very much contingent on the socio-economic and political trajectories of our times. As elucidated in this paper, globalization, privatization and downsizing, catch words that embody the "name of the age" in the West, have a negative influence on Women's Studies programs and can threaten their very existence. Similarly, the further economic dependency and political subordination of Middle Eastern countries to international economic powers can have the same result. In fact, one might argue that the transitory and unstable character of most Middle Eastern regimes has further exacerbated the status of these programs. In other words, both the objective forces that have led to the development of these institutes, as well as the forces that might lead to their demise, are quite borderless. These forces know no geographical limits or national identity: they are common to all countries, nationalities, and cultures.

Having highlighted the similarities or commonalities between the West and the Middle East, this paper has also attempted to demonstrate the historical and cultural specificity of the Middle East. Without any elaborate discussion, this paper has taken for granted that Women's Studies programs are also a part of the Arab/Middle Eastern woman's long struggle for her right to lead a better life and play a more pro-active role in shaping and reshaping her society. In doing so two major arguments were advanced. On the one hand, the paper has tried to go beyond the seemingly stymied debate around Orientalism and internalized Orientalism, which continues to frame women's issues within a religious framework. The socially tabooed issues of sexuality, reproduction, and other concerns pertaining to women's well-being are long overdue for academic inquiry, and ought to come to the surface as scientifically researched areas so that proper policies can be formulated and actions taken to address them. On the other hand, this paper has argued that the historical specificity of the Middle East, where most countries are still underdeveloped, makes the link between academia and community, and theory and

practice, imperative goals for the success of any development project, including Women's Studies programs.

Finally, as I open this paper for comments, suggestions, and criticism, I also hope it has contributed to the general feminist debate among Middle Eastern and Arab women in particular. I hope its discussions and issues it has raised can be useful and practical to Women's Studies programs in the process of developing, such as that at the American University of Cairo, for which this paper was written.

Endnotes

- * This article is reprinted by permission of the American University in Cairo Press. It previously appears in the proceedings of the Arab Regional Women's Studies Workshop Cairo Papers in Social Science Volume 20, Number 3.
1. For more on the history lobbying the Secretary of State for the Status of Women and the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women see Amy Gotlieb (1993), "What About Us? Organizing Inclusively in the National Action Committee on the Status of Women" in Linda Carty ed. *And Still We Rise: Feminist Political Mobilizing in Contemporary Canada*. Toronto: Women's Press.
 2. For an interesting discussion of some radical feminist perspectives on Women's Studies programs, see Warren Shibles (1989), "Radical Feminism, Humanism and Women's Studies", *Innovative Higher Education* (14)1 Fall-Winter.
 3. See for instance, Nitya Iyer (1997), "Disappearing Women: Racial-Minority Women in Human Rights Cases" in C. Andrew and S. Rodgers, eds. *Women and the Canadian State*. Montreal: McGill-Queens's University Press: (241-261); Shelley Wright (1993) "Patriarchal Feminism and the Law of the Father", *Feminist Legal Studies* (1) 2 August: pp: 115-140. For a more general discussion of the feminist/womanist divide see Bell Hooks (1984), *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
 4. See, Marnia Lazreg (1988), "Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria", *Feminist Studies* (14) 1, Spring: 81-107; Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parma (1984), "Challenging Imperial Feminism", *Feminist Orientalism or Orientalist Marxism*", *The New Left Review*, No.120; Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonialist Discourses" in C. Mohanty et al, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds. (1992), *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
 5. See Valentine Moghadam (1993), *Modernizing Women*. London: Lynne Rienne Publishers; Margot Badran (1993), "Independent Women: More than a Century of Feminism in Egypt" in Judith Tucker, ed., *Arab Women*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Hisham Sharabi (1988), *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. New York, Oxford University Press.
 6. See for instance, Haideh, Moghissi (1994), *Populism and Feminism In Iran: Women's Struggle In A Male-defined Revolutionary Movement*. Basingstoke: MacMillan; Deniz Kandiyoti (1991), *Women, Islam, and the State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.



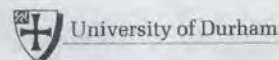
Graduate
Studies
in

Middle
Eastern
and
Islamic
Studies

Focus:

Women's Centers

By Myriam Sfeir
IWSAW Staffer



United Kingdom

University of Durham Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

Since its inception in 1833, the University of Durham has promoted the study of Middle Eastern languages and culture. Moreover, degree and diploma courses in Arabic were introduced at Durham more than 70 years ago. In 1962 the Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies was established. Its main goal was to encourage, develop and co-ordinate research in Middle Eastern studies in several departments of the University, including the school of Oriental Studies and the Departments of Anthropology, Economics, Economic History, Geography, Politics, Sociology and Social Policy. In 1988, the Center, in addition to its research activities, became a teaching department in its own right with responsibility for undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses in Arabic, Middle Eastern History and Islamic Studies. In 1993 a range of new undergraduate and postgraduate courses in politics, international relations and political economy of the Middle East was also introduced. The Center now has more than 100 undergraduates, 50 full-time postgraduate students and a number of part-time postgraduate students from Britain, Europe, the Middle East, North America, Asia and Africa.

Postgraduate supervision is offered in various fields one of which is Middle Eastern Women Studies. This emphasis highlights contemporary gender and women's issues in the

Middle East, women and Islam, women and human rights in the Middle East, and gender and politics. Furthermore, M.Phil and Ph.d. students can benefit from supervision in various areas such as Gender and Development in the Middle East, Literature and Gender, Arab Women's Writing, Creative Writing: the Women's Dimension, Women in Islam, Gender and Democracy, Women in the Military Establishment (Women Soldiers) Women and Islamic Law (shari'a) and Personal Status Law, and Gender and the Arabic Language.

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Sudan

Afhad University for Women

The Ahfad University for Women is the oldest and largest private university in Sudan. It may well be the only private women's university in Africa. It is dedicated to educating women and strengthening their role in national and rural development. Besides, it aims at achieving equity for women in Sudanese society and within the African continent.

In 1907, Sheikh Babiker Badri, a young Sudanese well known for his piety and religiosity, succeeded in convincing the British authorities to grant him permission to open a girls' school in Sudan. His was the first private school in Sudan. His school, secular in its nature, was situated in a mud hut, and the students that first attended were nine of Badri's daughters along with eight other girls who were daughters of his neighbours.

Babiker's Son Yusuf followed in his father's footsteps and established the Ahfad University College for Women in 1966. The university started off with 23 students; now it has over 4,600 students. The undergraduate program includes the School of Family Sciences, the School of Psychology and Pre-School Education, the School of Rural Extension Education and Development and the School of Medicine. At the graduate level, two programs are offered namely Human Nutrition and Gender and Development. Furthermore, Ahfad University also has six special units: the Women's Studies Unit, the Women's Studies Documentation Unit, the Teacher Research Resources Unit, the Early Childhood Development Center, the Center for Reproductive Health, Family Planning and the Eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices, and the Computer Center.

The Women's Studies Unit

The Women's Studies Unit offers a masters degree program in Gender and Development. In addition, it undertakes coordinating and teaching all required undergraduate women's studies courses to the various schools of the university. Last but not least, it strives to maintain the Bakiker Badri Scientific Association for Women's Studies as a means for achieving empowerment and equity for women in Sudan.

Given that research work is of utmost importance, the Women's Studies Unit along with the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands are developing a program that includes research on peace, conflict, gender, diversity and ethnicity. The program aims to provide up-to-date documentation of women's lives in Sudan and help empower women and women's organizations at the grassroots levels in rural areas. The program will also teach women the importance of peace and will encourage them to maintain peace in Sudan. Last but not least, it will increase Ahfad's research capacity through the various publications and articles published.

Women's Studies Documentation Unit

Established in 1989, this unit serves as a data bank for information, references, and research related to gender issues, women in developing countries, and most importantly Sudanese women. The center also organizes conferences, seminars, and other activities related to developments affecting Sudanese women.

Sudanese Women's Museum

The Museum, founded in 1996, falls under the jurisdiction of the Documentation Unit. The staff working at the museum received their training at the Sudanese National Museum. The Museum is being developed in cooperation with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums; the institute of African and Asian Studies and the Department of Archaeology, University of Khartoum; and the Museum of National Folklore.



Among its objectives are to:

- preserve Sudanese women's heritage and culture
- exhibit the material culture of women in earlier and contemporary periods
- preserve records and document the life history of prominent women figures in the Sudanese Women's Movement
- support research on issues concerning women
- serve as a documentation center and data bank on historical information that will benefit the future generation.

(Source: <http://ahfad.org/specialunits/WSU/>)

Syria

The Arab Center for Strategic Studies

The Arab Center for Strategic Studies was established in April 1995. The center came about in response to the growing need for a research center that concerns itself with the study of the Arab region.

An increasing need for promoting women's status was felt by most scholars. Hence, the first department to be set up at the center was the women and family affairs department. It was strongly believed that improving the status of women is not limited to appreciating the role of women as mothers, but also ensuring the mobilizing of all social potentialities to participate actively in the current changes at the international level, and cope effectively with the challenges of the coming twenty first century.

Objectives

The woman department aims at promoting the role of women in society through:

1. enlightening women about their political and legal rights and duties and emphasizing the importance of putting this into practice.
2. investigating discriminatory acts and combatting discrimination against working women in various fields.
3. eliminating the prevalent false stereotypes about women's capabilities and roles through consciousness raising and thus improving the status of women in society.
4. teaching women the importance of education since a good education is the best guarantee for a well-integrated family as well as for the utilization of all human resources.



Fields of Interest

1. Arab women's participation in political life, decision making, development and production, etc.
3. Women's access to health education, culture, and other social services
4. Family conditions and the different pressures faced by families during economic, social and political changes
5. Current political trends and their repercussions on the status of women in society
6. Obstacles that impede women's participation in the different fields of life and ways of coping with these obstacles

Activities Undertaken

1. Preparing studies, conducting research, and organizing conferences and symposiums on women and family issues
2. Setting up training programs that help women acquire certain skills
3. Implementing action programs as well as social, educational and health policies that boost the role of women and families
5. Analyzing the way Arab mass media present the status of women
6. Contributing to the creation of societies and bodies that concern themselves with women and family issues with a view to exchanging expertise
7. Co-operating with Arab and international research institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, in the preparation of studies and symposiums as well as in participating in symposiums and meetings held on women and family affairs.

Achieving this objective is a must. Once women's organizations be they Arab or international, governmental or non-governmental join hands and cooperate they will reach the desired outcome.

(Source: Brochure of the Arab Center for Strategic Studies) Damascus - P.O.Box: 36843-36844 Syrian Arab Republic Fax: 6621039 Tel: 2248422

Bahrain

In 1955 the first women's association in the Gulf region was founded in Bahrain. It was followed by other women's organizations including:

An Nahdad Association (Bahrani Women's Awakening) The association came into existence in 1955 and is a pioneer in the region. An Nahdad Association strives to empower women through educational and cultural programs such as eradicating illiteracy, resolving marital disputes and divorce problems, providing day-care facilities for working mothers, etc. With the passage of time and after several young educated females joined An Nahdad, it's policy started to change. The approach became more radical, with members calling for social change and more involvement in the social and political life.

Awal Association

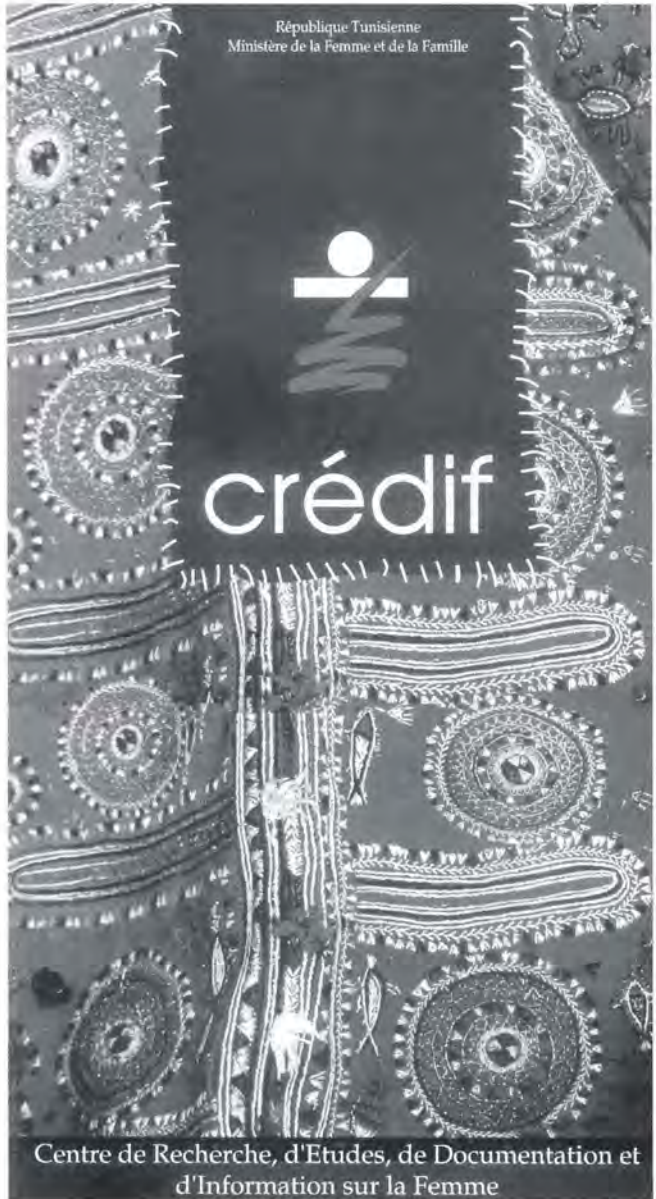
Established in 1970, Awal association is committed to social and political work. Members of Awal are involved in the cultural, social and political activities taking place in their society.

The Child and Mother Welfare Association

Established in 1960, the Child and Mother Welfare Association is a conservative organization whose members are housewives. Most of its women members come from influential families in Bahrain.

Rafa Cultural and Charity Association

This association was formed in 1970. It's primary concern is charity work, though it also aims at promoting cultural activities.



International Women's Association

In 1975 the International Women's Association was established. It is primarily engaged in charity work and humanitarian activities.

United Arab Emirates

The Abu Dhabi Society for the Awakening of Women

It is the first women's association in the UAE that aims at creating spiritual, cultural as well as social awareness. After its establishment several branches started mushrooming in many areas of the country.

United Arab Emirates Women's Federation

It was established in 1973 by Sheikha Fatima, the wife of the ruler of Abu Dhabi, as an umbrella organization covering women's societies functioning at the emirate level. Today member associations are: Abu Dhabi Women's Development Society, Dubai Women's Development Society, Sharjah Women's Development Society, Umm Al Mou'meneen Society in Ajman, Umm Al Qaiwain Women's Development Society and the Ras Al Khaimah Women's Development Society. At present there are 31 branches of the six societies, many of which operate out-reach programs in remote rural areas. The Women's Federation is concerned with working women's conditions as well as education. It also lobbies for change in personal status laws.

(Source:<http://women3rdworld...world/library/weekly/aa103199.htm>)

Kuwait

Women Cultural and Social Society

In 1963 a group of Kuwaiti women joined hands and established the Women Cultural and Social Society. It is the first non-governmental organization (NGO) in Kuwait that concerns itself with women's issues. It currently has 300 members, all of whom are volunteers, who work to promote the status of women in society. This society strives to improve the status of Kuwaiti women by empowering them economically, educationally, culturally and legally. Furthermore, it



highlights the active role Kuwaiti women play as family members and citizens.

This society has been officially approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. It is run by seven board members who are elected every two years. The work is undertaken through various committees namely the cultural, social, nursery, zakat, health and media committee. Funds are provided by donors as well as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

(http://www.ecssr.ac.ae/04uae.women_organizations.htm)

Tunisia

The Center for Studies, Research, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF)

CREDIF operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. It is engaged in conducting research, surveys, reports and studies on Tunisian women and their status in society. Moreover, CREDIF serves as a data bank that disseminates information on women, their rights and conditions in Tunisia. Last but not least, CREDIF recently launched a training program on Gender and Development for Tunisian and African women and set up an observatory in order to monitor the development in women's conditions.

Egypt

Institute for Gender and Women's Studies American University in Cairo (AUC)

The Institute for Gender and Women's Studies, AUC, is an interdisciplinary center with a multi-purpose vision. It serves as a resource center for scholars, activities and policy makers interested in gender and women's studies. Among the work undertaken at the Institute is conducting research projects and educational programs, organizing conferences, workshops and seminars as well as encouraging policy debates on gender and women's issues.

An Interview with CAWTAR's Executive Director Soukeina Bouraoui



Myriam Sfeir: I would like to know more about your educational and family background?

Soukeina Bouraoui: I am Tunisian and was raised in a family that had a tolerant and relatively liberal vision with regards to women's rights. Given that I was the eldest, I had to set the example for my younger siblings. I was fortunate enough to receive a higher education at the time when most of my female colleagues were marrying, either willingly or unwillingly, and devoting their lives to their families. However, this did not stop me from marrying, having children and starting an academic career. I had to juggle between my various duties given that I was a career woman with a family and often feeling guilty in the process. This feeling is quite common among working women. Yet, with time and owing to my husband's open mindedness and understanding, I learned how to cope and better organize myself.

MS: When did you join CAWTAR and what is your current position?

SB: I joined CAWTAR in July 1999. Prior to that I was Director of the Center for Studies, Research, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF) from 1991 until 1997. I am currently Executive Director of CAWTAR.

MS: Where do you get your funding from?

SB: CAWTAR has a Board of Trustees whose members are either sponsors or fund raisers. It is sponsored by the League of Arab States, the Tunisian Government, the Arab Gulf Program for United Nations Development (AGFUND), the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund, and the European Union. The president of the board of trustees is HRH, Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz.

MS: What is your mission statement? What are the objectives of CAWTAR?

SB: Founding CAWTAR was a must essentially because the Arab world required a regional institution whose mandate

In 1993 the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) was founded. CAWTAR, whose head office is in Tunis, is an independent international NGO operating regionally. CAWTAR collaborates with the government, other NGOs, research and documentation centers, the United Nations as well as regional and international institutions. It has two main missions namely conducting research and disseminating qualitative and quantitative information on Arab Women. Furthermore, CAWTAR produces academic reports on Arab women and the issues affecting them.

is scientific. Our aim is to make CAWTAR a reference center on gender issues in the Arab region. CAWTAR strives to improve Arab women's conditions by highlighting pressing concerns affecting them and disseminating information that will lead to consciousness raising. CAWTAR also calls for in-depth research into the gender question where it encourages governments and NGOs to introduce gender issues into policy and development programs. Moreover, it raises awareness on the importance of bringing women to the forefront. We are molding CAWTAR to become a center that aims at raising awareness among planners of the need to insure that women are brought into decision-making at all levels, and are able to contribute to the development process effectively. Last but not least, CAWTAR wishes to serve as a link between the different parties involved in promoting the improvement of women's status.

Our objective is to make CAWTAR a permanent resource center in the Arab World whose main mission is to promote gender advocacy and networking. Through networking CAWTAR will serve as an interface linking institutions working for the promotion of women be they governmental, non governmental, academic, media related, etc. CAWTAR aims to adopt a leading position in promoting and advocating priority themes in the Arab world.

MS: What are the focus areas currently favored?

SB: The focus areas currently favored are:

- devising research programs and studies on the role of Arab Women;
- founding a data bank and information center with the latest technological advances;
- creating a communication strategy that will enable the media to project an objective and non-stereotyped images of Arab women;

- founding new networks that aim at promoting women's status and sustaining already existing ones;

- signing agreements and conventions with various national, regional and international parties and working jointly with them

MS: What are the obstacles and challenges faced by CAWTAR?

SB: The obstacles stem from the

national, regional and international frameworks in which women's issues are discussed. Indeed there is lack of understanding and vagueness when we talk about women's



issues. Our role as we see it is to find the best possible way to teach women and gender issues without sacrificing our principles in the process. For example, when we talk of gender we take into account both men and women. In doing so, we are adopting a fair and equitable approach.

The real challenge is to eliminate auto censorship among women. In other words women should be able to talk openly about all the problems they face in society at large and in their societies in particular without any hindrances. Another challenge is to make men and women aware that national and international progress can only take place when both sexes are taken into consideration.

MS: What are your future plans?

SB: Among the main activities for 2000/2001 are

- producing two reports, one on globalization and women's economic conditions in the Arab region and the other on Arab adolescent girls;
- setting up two networks, one on globalization and women and the other on Arab adolescent girls. This network will serve as a forum for exchanging information and data with different NGO's, research centers, governmental bodies, media bodies and experts working on the subject at hand;
- forming a network of research and information centers working on Arab women's issues;
- founding a specialized documentation unit and developing CAWTAR's data base;
- exchanging information via the Net.

Women should be able to talk openly about all the problems they face in society

Insiders/Outsiders-Emic/Etic Study of Women and Gender in the New Millennium

Sherifa Zuhur¹

AMEWS President, Visiting Scholar,
UC Berkeley

Thematic Conversation Description

This Thematic Conversation will assess the impact and changes in a significant and ongoing debate within women and gender studies and related disciplines. This debate concerns the insider vs. external observer in the study of and/or teaching on women and gender of the Middle East. Within anthropology it is described as the emic vs. the etic approach to observation and understanding. Now that a broad and varied body of data and publications on the topics of women and gender of the Middle East has appeared in the last quarter of the twentieth century, it is fitting that transformations in the methodologies of research, academic discourses about these topics, and pedagogical approaches should have occurred in various ways. The intent of the Conversation will be to assess the value of the emic/etic debate in different areas of this multidisciplinary field and consider whether recent versions of this debate can further new directions for research (or new approaches to teaching on women/gender).

1. Sondra Hale's² presentation involves the differences and similarities in teaching about gender and women in the Middle East and in the U.S., teaching about Middle Eastern and Muslim women in U.S. academies, and the social location of those who are doing the teaching, i.e., "insiders" and "outsiders." The development of women's studies, which is closely associated with the "Western" academy, is based on modernist notions of emancipation and progress toward an end. Although some of the research agendas of Middle Eastern women's/gender studies programs and centers may appear to be, and are thought to be, very different in research agendas and methodologies, I argue that there are striking similarities, as well as possibilities for some shared goals. The differences may reflect our choices about the starting points for our enterprises and the differential centering of such concepts as "women," "genders," and "feminism(s)" as critical perspectives and as strategies of representation.

First, it is often argued by education policy-makers and curriculum builders that the concentration in the Middle East should be on "gender studies," and not "women's studies," and that research agendas in the Middle East should be practical and tied to policy. Yet, it is the very modernist component that gives them a similarity: i.e., the stress on developing women's power in a linear way, ideally, from low to high, toward equality (or emancipation, depending on the political ideology). For certain, there are differences: e.g., the Western feminist agenda of subverting the frame, unsettling the concepts, or blurring the borders versus the emphasis of Middle Eastern societies on making space for women within the frame.

We could argue, also, that some of the subjects rarely dealt with by Middle Eastern scholars in the academy may be the bread and butter of Women's Studies/Gender Studies in the U.S., e.g., sexuality, at least as it has been defined by the "West." Perhaps more importantly, Western programs are said to be woman-centered; whereas in some areas of the Middle East, gender studies are said to be society - or community-oriented. This woman-centeredness requires an emphasis on process over product, and although praxis has faltered, process in the form of liberatory pedagogy has not. However, in the Middle East, such a personalized, emotional, subjective, and non authoritarian classroom may be seen as antithetical to the kind of respect that gender studies seeks.

Women's studies in the West has become increasingly abstract and separated from community; whereas Middle Eastern gender studies may be more derived from community needs. What does this mean for the teaching strategies of the "insider/outsider" or emic/etic approaches in our pedagogies, practice, and theory-building?

2. Jennifer Olmsted³ maintains: As someone who grew up in Lebanon, I have always felt that Beirut was my home. When I came to the US, I felt very much like an outsider. And yet as a researcher, returning to the region as an adult, I have come to realize that I am still very much an outsider in the Middle East. Because of my childhood experience, I am neither a total outsider nor a total insider in either part of the world. As such, my experience challenges the dualist construction of the insider/outsider concept. In my presentation I will discuss how I feel caught between the categories of insider and outsider, not only in terms of my research and definition of 'home,' but also in terms of my disciplinary training. In addition I

will discuss how my insideout status plays itself out in the 'field' and at 'home.' Finally, I will explore how this experience has shaped my research and teaching. I will draw both on the literature on 'insiders/out-siders' and 'third Culture kids' which discusses children raised outside their 'home' culture.

3. According to Eleanor Doumato⁴ for the historian, the insider vs. external observer debate needs to be laid to rest. There is now too much convincing evidence that the two perspectives represent a false dichotomy, as no observer is wholly one or the other, and no observer is without a point of view (Doumato, AbuLughod). As to the types of sources with which historians work, at least two longitudinal studies show that the idea of a "genre" in the form of Western outsider narratives with a singular critical perspective is false (Melman, Tidrick), while information gleaned from court cases, an "insider" source, is skewed by the injection of legal fictions (false information to satisfy a legal requirement), the use of proxy, and the barrier of gender to unfettered access to the courts. (Tucker). Yet to be written is a survey of "insider" narrative sources, but I'm confident such a survey would reveal the same variety in point of view shown to be the case with "outsider" writings, without necessarily bringing more close-at-hand information. The historian has to go with what there is, and be satisfied that all of what there is has been read and weighed in relation to its time and context. Recognition of the essential falseness of the insider vs. outsider dichotomy needs to be brought to the question of classroom teaching.

4. Sherifa Zuhur claims: My response to the theme of insider/outsider - etic/emic positioning differs from my fellow historian, Eleanor Doumato. If the historian may be defined as an observer and recorder, s/he is also consistently an interpreter and creator of discourse concerning women. I doubt that a neutral narration of women's history exists, whether political, economic, cultural or social. But I also agree with her observations on the lack of purity, that one is never solely outside or inside of the area of research; that one cannot faithfully represent the subjects of study if one does not enter into dialogue with them.

Here I will consider how the agenda set by research has followed and reflects, often unconsciously a bifurcation of the worlds of women — "pure", rural, traditional women, supposedly cut off from the globalization process, and representing all that should be transformed according to the proponents of modernity. These may be opposed to the cosmopolitan and hybrid world of urban women. This is an interesting, widely-held and also false dichotomy, yet it affects research agenda in several ways. It continues to illustrate linkages between social practice, gender ideologies and modes of production, but is supposed to serve liberal capitalist development agenda.

If all women are now hybridized and globalized (if not cosmopolitan) then where are the most common meeting points of their worlds? One arena is in the marketplace. Another is in the area of domestic service, often occupied by foreign nationals rather than poorer women working for richer women of the same nation. A third is in the area of legal restrictions over women, now the subject of some very interesting reform campaigns in the Middle East, and an area in which academic research needs to catch up with political activism. I will utilize examples from Egypt and Lebanon within the discussion.

1. Comparative International Gender Discourses: How Do these Translate Out in Teaching by "Insiders" and "Outsiders"

By Sondra Hale

Because I think that it is always important to know the context within which we write, not only the audience intended, I would like to make a few comments about the origins of the topic of my abstract: A couple of years ago I was invited to attend an Arab Regional Women's Studies Workshop, hosted by the American University in Cairo. The workshop/conference was to be part of launching the Women's/Gender Studies Unit at AUC. Cynthia Nelson and Soraya Altorki were the co-organizers. In addition to these two scholars, participants included Boutheina Cheriet, Eileen Kuttab, Haleh Afshar, Lila Au-Lughod, Mona Khalaf, Nadia Wassef, Nahla Abdo (although she was unable to make it to the conference, but sent a paper), Rania Al Malky, Seham Abdul Salam, Shahnaz Rouse, Soheir Morsy, and myself. These are the people whose papers were eventually published in *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1997), but there were other participants who acted as organizers, discussants, and participants in the audience, e.g., Sherifa Zuhur, Malak Rouchdy, Barbara Ibrahim, Huda Lutfi, and many others. Soheir Morsy delivered the keynote address, which was on "Feminist Studies: Relevance for Scholarship and Social Equity in Arab Societies." I was asked to write on a comparison of the research agendas and methodologies for Women's Studies in the Middle East and in the U.S. I chose to compare and contrast what Women's Studies might (or should?) look like in the Middle East vs. what it looks like in the U.S. Quite an undertaking. I chose to minimize the differences, while stressing what the programs might have in common, what they might learn from each other, and the like. However, I did indicate that some of the teaching strategies in U.S. programs might be very different and why. I do not have time/space to go into the "why" part of the discussion, but I did indicate that feminists in the U.S. began their women's studies journey

using variations of what we came to call “feminist process,” a variant of Mao Tse Tung consciousness-raising and criticism/self-criticism pedagogy, in combination with Paulo Freire’s liberatory pedagogy (PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED). I asked if such strategies would work in the Middle East, since these are techniques that involved empowering the student, constructing a student-centered classroom, de-authoritarianizing the professor, minimizing or eliminating hierarchy in the classroom among students, and many other egalitarian processes. Of course, this was the ideal and was rarely ever applied in its “pure” sense in the U.S., not to mention that many women’s studies teachers never embraced that pedagogical philosophy. I imagined (never having taught women’s studies in the Middle East, only giving workshops on feminist ideas and teaching an anthropology infused with feminism) that some of these practices would be problematic in the M.E. classroom. I would truly like to have feedback on this thought.

I began to realize the complexity of my subject when I started to write the paper. As for women’s/gender studies in the M.E., were we referring to programs that are state-sponsored or state-controlled? Was the form of feminism in the country, state feminism? Would individual research agendas be supported, or should all of the agendas of the programs be community agendas? These are only SOME of the questions. As for teaching, I was aware I should be considering my own positionality (i.e., not just the methods) in terms of teaching ABOUT the M.E. in my U.S. classes; teaching Middle Eastern students within these classes—either about feminism or about women’s issues in the M.E.; teaching IN the Middle East about women’s issues or feminism. The permutations were perplexing to me. How many people can we be in our varied situations? “Insider/outsider,” then, becomes over-simplified. Are there pedagogical strategies that are “universal” in the teaching of women’s studies or any field?

One of the issues that I want to raise about what I have said above (as a form of self-critique) is that I have assumed a less egalitarian atmosphere for teaching in the Middle East. Is this fair? Or, more seriously, I have suggested that, if the atmosphere is less egalitarian, we might want to alter our egalitarian strategies. I am being a bit unfair to myself, but I would like to provoke a discussion on this.

Sherifa suggested that I might want to discuss my positionality. She wrote a brief introductory piece about me, but I could add more. My background is working class and populist, which is very important in my philosophy of teaching, i.e., in the insistence on egalitarianism and respect for students. My formal training is in African Studies, so my Middle Eastern research has been learned in a less formal way, i.e., through experience. I spent more than 6 years in northern, mainly Muslim, Sudan. I learned feminism in Sudan from Sudanese women and men. But I am also a North American feminist. I like to think that I bring both of these kinds of feminisms into my thinking and acting. As a leftist (I do not care if that is an old-fashioned word), someone who came out of the New Left in the 1960s, I am committed to liberatory ideals, including the emancipatory ideals of feminism. However, I am as concerned with issues of racism as I am concerned about class and gender. For all of these reasons it is important for me to continue to develop various forms of liberatory pedagogy, but to develop ones that are appropriate to diverse sociopolitical contexts. Is it appropriate/feasible/commendable/desirable for an “outsider” like me to offer liberatory pedagogical strategies while teaching in the Middle East? The big question for me is: How revolutionary can we be when we are teaching other people’s children?

Responses

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Dear Sharifa, Sondra, and participants in this thematic discussion. Thank you Sharifa for coordinating, and Sondra for your honest and open questions. I am glad that you provided the context of your Abstract. As I was about to write my response to your abstract (that was posted Fri. Sept 22,00) when I found your context. My response has not changed, and I will present it shortly. Two reasons for not changing my response despite the fact that you have provided new information about the context:

1. Starting with your : “The big question for me is: How revolutionary can we be when we are teaching other people’s children?” If we see teaching as an instrument of “consciousness-raising and criticism/self-criticism pedagogy in combination with Paulo Freire’s liberatory pedagogy ” then why should we discriminate between Middle Eastern vs. American students. True, we might (and should) alter the instructional strategies (syllabus) and tools (course material), but the goal should not differ. We cannot be revolutionary sometimes and in one context and not revolutionary at other times and contexts. Also, you have, in a sense, answered the question when you stated that this ideal has rarely worked in US women’s studies program, exactly because they were not true to the egalitarian aspect of the matter.

2. Your assumption that because most of the women’s studies programs in the ME are run within state-sponsored institutions they cannot be egalitarian is not always valid. This assumption is, I must say, part of the problem in our training as social scientists/humanists where everything has to fall into categories to be accepted as a “scientific” enterprise, or considered an authority.

Now, back to the Abstract. It is not clear how the “social location” defines the “insiders” (INS) “outsiders”

(OUT)? I will, for the sake of time and space, assume the definition of “Western” and “Middle Eastern” academy and academics as a neutral factor (static, stable variable). Assuming that both (INS and OUT) are starting from a “feminist” perspective as defined by the liberal view of progress towards an end, are we talking about those who are in a Power social location vs. those who are not? If this is the case, then we are actually (now, and in this context of the discussion) addressing two levels of the issue:

Level A,

where those with the position of power (including the teacher/researcher) are seen by those from outside that position of power (including students/researched) as “outsiders” because “gender” or “women” is perceived as merely a tool of a power struggle. Regardless of the method of teaching and/or research, those who are doing the teaching/research will always see themselves as “INS” while they remain to be perceived as “OUT.” This is so because they are taking the position, consciously or not, of the “expert” who is dictating the policy/the world view/philosophy and “the practical solution.” Obviously, there are two sub-levels, the individual and the group, which I cannot even start to analyze here.

Level B,

where those with the position of power are seen by others in the same position as “INS” because they are propagating the same end/agenda and “gender” is still the means toward achieving it. In this situation, as long as the individual remains a “team player” s/he remains an “INS” regardless how and what s/he teaches and/or research. Yet, once s/he begins to critique, argue against the stated “norms” of gender equality, actually apply the consciousness raising technique and the liberating pedagogy, or just be sympathetic with the “OUT” (that eventually results in giving some of the power to the “outsiders”), that individual automatically becomes an “outsider.” The end-results is that s/he not only loses her personal power struggle, but the theoretical grounding from which she was operating becomes shaky and often is perceived as implausible on intellectual or policy, practical levels. The group has no choice but distance itself from her/his views because it fears losing its theoretical grounding as well. In effect, “feminism” is perceived as an “outside” concept, an add-on, that can conveniently be discarded, once it does not fulfill the ‘expected power agenda.’

Thus, we are back again at point zero, the question of social construction, even of feminism, of gender, and of women’s studies. My re-framing the question, therefore, might pedagogically serve our purpose of this discussion (if I understood it clearly, as being to move the dialogue of Middle Eastern Women’s Studies towards both a stronger theoretical grounding and an effective policy-making/pedagogy): Where and how does “gender” fall in the equation of any academic discipline and in policy-making? Is it “inside” or “outside” the power and social position? Is it a tool or an end by itself? Can it be both an end and a means, and how?

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I cannot resist a few remarks here on the differences between the Middle Eastern context vs. the US. I agree with Ni’mat that ideally one should attempt to address students in both contexts with the same goals in mind. But the realities of the power structure within the university and other factors, like censorship, reduce the academic freedom of the instructor. Moreover, Sondra has mentioned just one example of a pedagogical technique — “feminist process” that was indeed unfamiliar to my Egyptian students. In a classroom setting, it can be utilized by asking for each member to respond to an idea, or a phrase (without commenting at first on others’ responses). I only encountered one student in Egypt who was familiar with this classroom technique — and she happened to be a former student of Sondra’s! Sondra also alludes to a difference in the relationship between instructor and student; I think she means that Western students might be more familiar with instructors who expected them to participate actively in shaping the class, and who tried to address students as peers, not setting themselves up as “experts.” I was only successful in the former goal by arranging and assigning points to students for oral presentations or leading discussions while in Egypt. The latter goal — relating to students as peers was complicated by students’ (and sometimes their parents or relatives) attempts to bargain about their grades, missing assignments etc. But I felt that many recognized my efforts to reach them and came to me frequently outside of class for comments, advice, etc.

Distinguishing the two groups on the basis of nationality bothers me. Many of my students were bi-national. And because AUC has a study-abroad program, some classes were bi-national. For the teaching of women’s or gender studies, the most important factor for me appeared to be previous exposure to readings or courses with a gender studies component—not point of origin. My colleague at AUC, Hoda Lutfi commented that there our students lacked the idea of “gender as a category” (the ref. is to Joan Scott). Some students and even some colleagues (both Egyptians and non-Egyptians) seemed to regard gender merely as a biological fact, a marker coded M or F. Some are aware of the social construction of gender, but regard the entire topic as one “owned” by women or feminists.

Beyond the fact of censorship (which limits the kinds of materials that can be practically utilized in the

classroom), and the realities of power (parents may interfere in the classroom, and colleagues may oppose or resent the introduction of 'new' pedagogical methods, or content that may be viewed as controversial, 'non-scholarly'). I attempted to address the problem by introducing mini-units on gender in my other classes. One example was a junior level course on nationalism. All of my students but one (these included Egyptian, American and bi-national students) simply skipped the readings, failed the quiz that I decided to give (on noticing their lack of involvement) and had a tough time writing a response paper to the readings. They seemed incredulous that they would be held responsible for readings on gender just like those on Syria, or Iran.

I visited a class of a colleague at AUB (Beirut) last year. Like AUC, it is not accurate to classify the students as being "purely" Middle Eastern. Many have studied in the West during the war years (in Canada or the US). This class was part of their core series, and they were to respond to a portion of Simone de Beauvoir's writing. One student (female) was able to answer the instructor's queries regarding the relevance of the gender issue to the ideas of liberation, self-will, and the existentialist programme. The others (who may or may not have taken the reading seriously) were then engaged in a discussion on the pressure to marry and socially conservative attitudes today in Lebanon.

This discussion reminded me of the more successful sessions at AUC also in introductory core tutorials where we try to introduce basic notions of gender inequality. When students were able to relate the issue to the realities around them, the discussions were both more controversial and meaningful.

I have enjoyed reading the material you have been circulating in this little group. I am a clinical psychologist and educator. I have been a college trustee and a political activist in the Arab American community. As such, I now come to the Middle East to train women who are running or consider them selves potential candidates in local or national elections.

In this capacity I have met many women varying in their perspectives from the more traditional in Qatar to the more liberal in Palestine. I have found the comment: "When students are able to relate the issue to the realities around them — the discussions were both more controversial and meaningful." I think the insider/outsider dimension is also very important but since there is not much one can do about one's position, I find it important to be sensitive to the limitations of one's role and opportunistic about its advantages—for, of course it has those, too. The women I worked with in the Middle East were struggling with gender issues as part of their empowerment. They were quite creative in their approaches, less bitter and acting less victimized than many of their peers in the West. I guess, it all goes back to "context", doesn't it?

I have a brief addition - more than a response - to Sherifa's comments about her teaching at AUC, which I think are also pertinent to Sondra's questions about how we teach and what we try to do. While I appreciate Sondra's sensitivity to possible differences in classroom expectations and how they play out in practice as one attempts to teach in a non-authoritarian manner, I also think that the issues Sherifa raises are very (unfortunately) relevant to college classrooms in the US. Teaching undergraduate "non-Western literature" (I didn't choose that title!) courses at the University of Illinois, I bring in gender as a category constantly, whether I'm teaching the *Shahnameh* or *So Long a Letter*. Some students respond enthusiastically, but many grouse, and so far, my favorite (!) teaching evaluation states, "She's way too feminist." The students who take this course are of all sorts of different backgrounds, nationalities, spiritualities, etc.; and quite often I do "get the message" that they feel the gender emphasis (one of a number of emphases, I should say) is an interruption, a diversion from "what's really important." Obviously, that very attitude spurs me to continue finding ways to insert, explain, and interrogate its relevance in ways that will be meaningful to them, and I do think that the personal experience "hook" is a useful one; but I simply want to make the point here that while we can either praise or criticize women's studies/gender studies programs in "the West" for particular interventions and outlooks, the by- now pervasive presence of gender as a category in the academy doesn't mean its pervasive acceptance as such by undergraduate students. Many of them - whatever their backgrounds - find gender in the classroom a "foreign import." I know I am not telling any of you anything new, but I do think it is important to recognize that the way students at AUC or elsewhere react is similar in at least some ways to students' reactions in - for example - Illinois. (As Sherifa reminds us, they are a diverse bunch at AUC, too.) And that also includes nervousness, sometimes, about nonauthoritarian teaching methods. After all, such methods usually require them to work harder and to think more!

This has been a very interesting conversation for me to eavesdrop ... as a Middle East historian who does not work in the fields of gender or women's studies, who is American, and who is a guy. I wonder about the insider/outsider aspect of my own position in this discussion, but I won't worry about it too much, except to say that I feel kind of like a spy.

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At any rate, in recent years I have incorporated in my courses materials related to gender and women for a couple of reasons. First, I intuitively believe that these are central issues in history and society. I don't feel the need to articulate a sophisticated theoretical justification. Pluralism in the academy is sufficient warrant. Second, I believe that much of the scholarship in these fields is the most exciting work in Middle East (and South Asian) studies.

My (mostly white) students (at a small undergraduate liberal arts college) respond in different ways to the materials that I introduce. Some men don't see the point of discussing "marginal" issues, some find it fascinating; almost all the women find it fascinating. One of the difficult obstacles I confront with all the students is their emotional response. For instance, my freshman seminar just finished reading *Khul Khaal* and the majority said that they found it "too depressing." I am curious to learn if others have met this emotional response, which is in certain ways more difficult to encounter than the cultural response (why are they so weird?)

Now to go out on a limb...on the non-authoritarian teaching method. This method has a number of advocates among the faculty here. I must admit that I find it puzzling and perhaps I misconstrue the sense intended. I agree that teachers learn from students, but in the college/university culture and the broader culture in which they are situated, I believe it is the case that teachers do have authority over students. Teachers grade students after all. Teachers and students are not peers. So I do not see how a non-authoritarian teaching method can really be something other than a pose that represents one's own discomfort with the notion of exercising authority in a responsible, non-oppressive manner. I am willing to be enlightened and converted.

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I would like to jump into the conversation that Sondra initiated with her abstract and commentary on her abstract. I am in my third year of teaching at the American University of Sharjah. Some of you may know a little about the university. It is a private institution founded by the ruler of Sharjah, Shaykh Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qassimi, who is himself a scholar with Ph.D.'s in history and geography from Exeter and Durham respectively. It is seeking accreditation in the U.S. through the Middle States Association, so its obvious models are AUB and AUC. It is one of the few gender integrated academic institutions in the Gulf. Our students come from the Emirates and the other GCC countries including Saudi Arabia, and other Arab countries; they are from Arab expatriate families resident in the Gulf as well as Indian and Pakistani expatriates living in the Emirates. There are some Russians and Central Asians and even a handful of Americans. The student body as well as the faculty are multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and religiously heterogenous although predominantly Muslim. Devising a strategy to teach successfully here is clearly a challenge.

For three years, I have been teaching a Women in History course. It is a pretty standard introduction to Women's History. It is comparative in focus — Europe and the Middle East. It is organized topically and moves chronologically from the Ancient World to the Modern. I had no idea what to expect when I taught it for the first time, e.g., how receptive or hostile the students were likely to be to the material and to the concept of gender as an analytical tool for understanding history and organizing the course. The first time I taught the course, the majority of the women students were either nationals, i.e., Emiratis, or women from other Gulf countries, who wear what seems to have evolved as the "national dress" of not only the Emirates but other Gulf countries, the abaya (cloak worn over street clothes) and the shayla (the scarf). There were two men. In the second and third years, the number of non-national women increased, primarily among the Indian and Pakistani students, and so did the number of men. I have about eight this semester in a class of 35. The number of students overall has increased each year; I could easily have added another 10-15 to my current class or opened another section of the course. In the second year I taught the course, I had in my class the only woman in the student body who was completely covered, by that I mean, she covered her face. She turned out to be one of the best students in the class, one of the most receptive to the material and with attitudes and an independent spirit that would clearly identify her in the West as a feminist. I learned and continued to learn a lot from teaching the class. One thing the class has confirmed for me is that gender as we understand it now is a universal. Although I use and have been influenced by post-modernist and post-structuralist ways of thinking, including the need to deconstruct universals and essences, gender remains for me one of the organizing principles of societies historically and an important analytical tool for understanding history in general. My students come into the class knowing that societies are characterized by systems of power that have been and continue to be dominated by men. They can't articulate this theoretically at first but they know that at any time in history, women may have had more rights and more autonomy, but they have never dominated those systems of power nor have relations between the genders been egalitarian. Students make the connection between the class — the readings, the theories, etc., — and their own lives through one issue in particular, and that's arranged marriages. I don't think there is a more powerful or emotional issue for many, if not most, of the women here and also for men. Women are being educated; they are moving into the workforce; but on the personal level, such as choice of marriage partners, they have a lot less autonomy or possibly no choice at

all. It's an issue for men, too, but as women students point out in the class, men have options women don't have or for social and/or familial reasons can't exercise easily or at all, such as repudiation/divorce or taking a second wife.

Concerning the issue of feminist or liberatory pedagogy, I'd like to comment on the recent suggestion that this could be a "pose." I agree that professors have power and authority; we begin to exercise it even before we walk into the classroom in the readings we select and the structure of the class, etc.. And of course, we exercise power and authority in the classroom in a variety of ways including the ultimate, giving the students grades. However, are attempts to create a more egalitarian learning environment a pose? Ironically, I think the structures of power within which we operate make it more not less important to make the classroom more egalitarian. I think it's particularly important in order to equalize power between male and female students, i.e., not allow males to dominate discussions and encourage women to speak up and participate.

This is really an issue here. Also, when the wider society does not allow the exercise of political rights or stifles debate, then what happens in the classroom can be very liberatory as well as empowering. Actually, I think we could bring Foucault into this discussion not only because of the connection between knowledge and power but also his contention that nothing exists outside of systems of power.

Amal Winter

I, at least, find the language of these discussions both new and intimidating although I am no novice to the issues themselves. I am a 58 year old woman who grew up in Egypt and survived the 1950s in the U.S.A. I was an intelligent hard working student who got her B.A. from Stanford at 19. Married at 15. I delivered and raised two daughters during my undergraduate years. I was fired from my waitress job when I got pregnant and was not allowed to apply to medical school because I had children! I have come a long way from thinking I must have been wrong for asking but that doesn't help me understand the gender lingo used in some of these discussions.

One of my personal interests is cultural and bicultural identity. The issue wormed its way into me from birth in 1942. My mother was American, my father Egyptian, (before there were marriages of that ilk). Grandmothers from both sides asked who I would marry. Intuitively I knew they were gauging my cultural allegiance. My answer? "A man from Venezuela." Little did it matter that I didn't know where Venezuela was! I went to British schools from the age of four and was 15 during the Suez war. I remember my brother saying, "They are bombing Cairo airport," And wondering who was they and who was we, (apologies to Martin Buber and Pogo)

I can't do much with the Insider/Outsider dichotomy except to admire the problem. It is a given. I think the creative tension it produces is exciting. Perhaps, because I am a psychologist, albeit sociologically oriented, I see identity as psychological as well as sociopolitical. For example, I believe I define myself in reaction to the context in which I find myself partly because I am oppositional by nature and partly because the context defines me. I tend to feel my American side more when I'm with Arabs and my Arab side more when I'm with Americans. Perhaps, I made a healthy, if narcissistically arrogant, adaptation to being "Other." Perhaps, as I became more politically active in America I was pushed into my Arab side by the sociopolitical reactions to my civil rights activities. If I were in Egypt, I'd probably do the AUC gig.

Sondra Hale

If you recall, I was asking if radical pedagogy travels and if teaching as transgression (to steal from bell hooks) is portable. By asking that question I was expressing my discomfort with the imposition of certain Euroamerican-originated feminist processes on the M.E. academic situation - to be blunt - the "outsider" teaching the "insider" (while recognizing that we are all both of these and neither of these in differing degrees) ways of "being whole" (one of the stated goals of Western feminism 'to make women whole'). However, I broadened the question in order to apply it to a geographically diverse set of teachers/facilitators and students and asked about transporting one's values, period, to other people's children.

One of the problems which may have led to Nimat's first and second queries, in combination, is that I failed to comment on the cultural content of consciousness-raising. I should have remarked that it is dangerous for us to believe that the ultimate political and pedagogical goal is to raise consciousness about a person or people's situation without contextualizing that "condition." So, if the ultimate goal is the "emancipation" of women, for example, and we have failed to consider the question of emancipation from what, or the quality of that emancipation, then our consciousness-raising strategies are culturally biased. For example, if I, as a secularist, choose to facilitate the raising of women's consciousness about religion so that they can be "emancipated" from religion, is this culture-neutral or situation-neutral? (I am dangerously close to sounding like a cultural relativist here, which I am not!). I am not trying to say that consciousness-raising pedagogy should be neutral; I am saying that it is not. And there is the rub, or, one of the rubs.

Sherifa and Marilyn at once expanded and narrowed the discussion of context by remarking on the political, sometimes authoritarian, nature of some M.E. academic environments. Nimat, however, has effectively brought into question the use of “authority” and “authoritarian.” She did misquote or miss cite me a couple of times, and I should clarify. I did not say that most of the women’s studies programs in the ME are run within state-sponsored institutions [and therefore] they cannot be egalitarian. She was right, however, that I drew a negative equation between “egalitarian” and “authority,” which I might want to rethink. I also did not say that “this ideal [of feminist process] has rarely worked in U.S. women’s studies programs...” What I said was that it was rarely applied in its pure state and some WS practitioners never embraced it. However, these changes I have made do not detract from Nimat’s points.

I was immensely stimulated by Nimat’s deconstruction of insider/outsider, especially her linking of these locations (and their fluidity) to the struggle for power (this is where the suggestion of calling on Foucault seems appropriate), and then linking these to feminisms and gender. My ending question was really intended to ask if ‘we’ have the right to teach concepts such as ‘gender’ and politics such as ‘feminism’ to other people’s children. Nimat’s ending question(s) is/are “where and how does ‘gender’ fall in the equation of any academic discipline ... Is it ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the power social position, Is it a tool or an end by itself.”

In fact, a number of us either directly or indirectly raised the question about the relevance/appropriateness of using ‘gender’ as a primary (or even secondary) concept in the M.E. classroom. Sherifa describes the difficulties, as do Marilyn and Mary Ann. Sherifa, in fact, cites AUC colleague Hoda Lutfi’s comment to her (and to me, in another geographical context) that [AUC] students lacked the idea of ‘gender’ as a category. Some, says Sherifa, “regard the entire topic as one ‘owned’ by ... feminists.” This same debate is being carried out internationally, as we know, and has surfaced at UCLA in the Institute for the Study of Gender in Africa. West African scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewumi and Nkiru Nzegwu debunk the usefulness or relevance of the gender concept in research on African societies. They seem to be trying to free themselves of the yoke of gender and to start again.

In our debate Nimat asks if ‘gender’ may be seen as just a power tool of the outsiders, who may, then, forever remain outsiders. I would add that women’s studies, feminist theories, gender studies, feminist process/pedagogy, etc., all are framed (the colonial frame) and controlled by the powerful (the forever “insider”) and have their set of rules and ways of being that are parceled out (e.g., in classroom teaching) to the “less powerful.” Whether or not recognizing and acknowledging this through stating one’s positionality, self-interrogating, deauthoritarianizing oneself, etc., are effected, this may not be enough. Enough for what?

What does it mean to me when a Middle Eastern woman student tells me that I have “changed her life”? Does it have the same effect on me or meaning to me when an American woman student says it? Are these qualitatively or quantitatively different in my perception? The answer to this question should tell me a great deal about the progress of my journey.

Sherifa grew uncomfortable with “distinguishing the two groups [insider/outsider?] on the basis of nationality”. I can acknowledge that. She, Amal, Marilyn, and Mary Ann all addressed the enormous diversity (in all its ramifications) in their classrooms both in the U.S. and in the Middle East. Since I teach at an institution (UCLA) which is now said to be the most diverse campus in the U.S. (But we all know how much Americans love superlatives!), I should be more cognizant of that when I generalize about classrooms anywhere. Therefore, I, too, am uncomfortable at the generalized idea that M.E. students “lack the concept of gender.” We can pursue this later.

2. The Insider Versus External Observer Debate

Dear Sherifa: It seems to me that the subject of teaching and the “insider-outsider” debate raises issues that are quite removed from this debate in relation to the use of historical sources. So in my response I think I’m really changing the subject, but I hope my comments will still be useful.

You ask, “Do you think that you might want to add any additional comments, or possibly examples of topics/writings/subjects that you hold to be “neutral” regardless of the positionality of the historian?” I thought it was clear that my position is that there is no such thing as “neutrality.” I hold no source to be neutral; what I question is the value of investing energy into determining the personal background of the author of any particular source. In my experience, the written work ultimately stands alone, apart from its author. For example, missionary writings: there could not be a more “orientalist” lens than that of the authors of the 1911 Cairo Conference, where the “woman as target” modus operandi was laid out. And indeed one can read the letters of, say, Eleanor Calverley, who was in Kuwait at that same time, and see the Cairo Conference as her blueprint, but if one reads her husband’s letters, or those of their contemporary Paul

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Harrison, one hears their authors' depth of knowledge and language facility, their sensitivity to, even empathy with, the people they write about.

Now there's Gertrude Bell, who strove to establish herself in a man's world as a British civil servant, and maybe and maybe not consequently, avoided women and barely included anything about women and society in her writings. Lady Anne Blunt similarly wrote little about women, though she was an adventurer who spoke Arabic and camped among bedouins and was a great Arabophile. How does "knowing where these people stand" help me to sift through their writings? Both are disappointing to the researcher wanting information of a social or cultural sort.

I should raise here the awkward question of who is an insider and who is an outsider? Hafiz Wahba was an Egyptian who spent some 10 years at the court of Ibn Saud and wrote extensively about Arabian society, and a lot about women. Yes, he's cynical, but is he cynical because he's an outsider, being Egyptian, or because, being Arab and a long-time resident of Najd, even Ibn Sa'ud's minister of education, he's an insider and he's knowledgeable?

It seems to me the historian needs to focus his/her attention primarily on the written source itself and not the writer. Trying to interpret what is written based on the writer's "positionality" presupposes, first, that one can know what that is, and that people's positions don't change over time, and second, that his/her positionality so skews the writing that the reader must know where the author's coming from in order to decipher it.

Finally, what about the complication of what the reader brings to the reading: I've recently read Billie Melman's fascinating *Women's Orient*, which looks at scores of British women travel writers on the M.E. in the 19th century and the genre they produced. As much as I admire the book, when it comes to her interpretation of these travelers' viewpoints as expressed in their writing, I am intrigued to discover that her interpretations are quite at variance with my own. ... not to end with too cynical a note, but I wonder if next time I sit down to do research I ought to see myself as part of a team effort: the writer, the written work, and me and my positionality. Responses welcome.

Responses

Manal
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I have been reading the comments and enthusiastically absorbing the wide array of knowledge and experiences - so forgive me for my silence. The comments I will share now are more of an introduction of my own background and interests relevant to the discussions. I feel that there is so much to be learned on women and gender, and my passion as an American-Muslim-Palestinian woman is to find a way to balance my western teachings of feminism with my Arabic roots and my strong commitment to my religion. Although we are often told that the ideas are not contradictory or mutually exclusive, I have a hard time balancing all the hyphens in my identity.

My work and educational background has been primarily economics and development with a concentration in the MENA region. I have worked for UNESCO in Baghdad, and now work for the World Bank. Over the past few years I have realized the importance of looking at things from a gender perspective. Amazingly enough, my research into gender in the region, and more specifically, gender in Islam, have been more of a journey of self discovery than any academic or practical work approach. Although my primary work experience is more development than any gender issues, I have done contracts with USIA on women in Islam for embassies overseas, and work closely with American Muslim groups to incorporate the Muslim women's experience.

Sherifa Zuhur

I'm going to jump in and disagree slightly with Eleanor. While I agree that the historian's priority is to examine the "material," — historical description of events, persons, cultural issues, etc — it seems to me that to overlook the location of the source is to ignore what we have learned from historiography since Herodotus, if not earlier.

Historians ask certain research questions based on their own training, orientation, and knowledge which differs from one location to another. Even if that were not so, I believe that certain locations or (position- alities) cause one to interpret individuals and their actions, or events and their consequences in extremely different ways. This may not always pertain to the reporter's power, but to her/his vista.

Eleanor says that essentially there is no neutral voice — and if that is true, isn't it so because location (or positionality) — however blurred — matters?

A few examples: a certain reviewer from a journal from the US South identifies Nawal Saadawi's novel, *Woman at Point Zero* as being "picaresque" (the outsider's attack on society) — completely missing the

identification of the fallen woman protagonist with Egypt, herself, subject to exploitation and degradation by external sources.

A male critic from the 1940s analyzes the female singer, Asmahana as being an abnormal woman (unable to feel love), not out of personal knowledge, but with an assurance borne of his time, milieu, and gender that “true” women were not interested in their careers, only in protected and safe marriages. Perhaps some of you will think of other examples

Amal Winter

I agree with Sherifa. I think it is imperative to understand as best as we can the “worldview” of the writer in order to better understand the writing. “Worldview” includes personality (influenced by culture), time (when in history), and place. It’s interesting to read the abstracts and comments and find no mention of general systems theory which seems to have gone out of fashion. Amal

Nimat Hafez Barazangi

When I first used this argument in my paper that was presented at MESA ‘95, I used it in the context of the panel “Self-Identity of Muslim Women.” My exact argument was that because Muslim women had limited access to Islamic higher learning, they were denied their basic human rights as the human trustee. I emphasized, ‘Islamic’ vs. ‘religious’ exactly to distinguish some orientalists’ and Muslims’ (predominantly males who follow precedence) reduction of Islam to religion from the meaning of Islam as a worldview. I explained in the paper [that was unfortunately delayed, but finally published in Gisela Webb’s edited volume (Syracuse, 2000)] and in its sequel [in Afkhami’s and Friedl’s edited volume (Syracuse, 1997)] that my intention was neither the secular higher education, nor the religious education. I present Islam as a belief system, a world view that encompasses religion, and argue that because women were denied access to Islamic higher learning (i.e., deeper knowledge of the primary sources of Islam, specifically the Qur’an and its interpretation) they were denied their human rights as the trustee (Khalifa). By not having this deeper knowledge, Muslim women’s participation was also reduced to some religious rituals. In addition, they were denied the participation in the interpretation of the text and, consequently, in the political decision-making process. The end result is that the Muslim woman could not any more exercise her trusteeship nor her self-identify with Islam as a belief system, because ‘Islam’ has taken on a different meaning and was practiced merely as a ‘religion.’

Therefore, the self-identity paradigm that I was (and so were the other panelists) arguing for was intended to show how Muslim woman’s identification with the Islamic framework as a world view sheds different light on the question of human rights. Though at the time we were not specifically addressing the insider/outsider issue, one could see the implication of the self-identity paradigm on the “limited access to Islamic learning” argument on two different levels here: First, the Orientalist and the Muslims who follow precedence (Muqallidun) who reduce Islam to “religious learning” are in a sense outsiders to Islam. Second, women who do not self-identify with Islam as the over arching framework of a total belief system when addressing issues of gender within Islam are also outsiders to Islam, even when we call them or call themselves” Muslim women.”

Eleanor Doumato

I’m glad to read your responses because it helps me to clarify my own thoughts and also points to perhaps a difference in our understanding of the term, “positionality.” If I started off with an incorrect interpretation, my apologies.

One sort of “position” is physical: where does the writer stand physically in time and space in relation to his sources; was he there on the spot, which reports did he read, how far removed from the events were those who produced the sources he uses, and on whose behalf were those sources produced. I doubt that we would disagree that Herodotus’s information about North Africa was largely second-hand and dated, so that his history, being mixed with rumor, myth, and travelers’ observations, is one we would not take at face value.

The other sort of position is personal and internal to the writer, and this is the notion of “positionality” I have been talking about: what is his/her religion, where did he grow up, what are his political affiliations, whom did he marry, what does he tend to think about certain issues, in short, “where is he coming from?” I don’t doubt for a moment that one’s personal position(ality) causes “one to interpret individuals and their actions, or events and their consequences in extremely different ways.” My problem is in investing time in trying to extract meaning from discovering what that positionality is, first, because you will never get it right and even if you do the conclusions you draw are just as likely to be wrong.

Let me give you one example based on an issue that is near to our hearts at the moment: No political appointment of Bill Clinton’s was a greater insult to Arab-Americans than Martin Indyk as Middle East spokesperson on the National Security Council and then Ambassador to Israel. He was until then a career employee of the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, founder of the Institute for Near East Policy,

an AIPAC-funded think tank designed to lend legitimacy to Israeli policies with the media, the American public, and on Capitol Hill, and, even more insulting, he wasn't even an American citizen. Yet, as Ambassador to Israel he has evidenced a conversion of sorts, and in the spectrum of Israeli politics would be viewed as a Palestinian-leaning liberal. Therefore, how can one interpret based on his "positionality" his recent fall from grace? Is it due to his compromising American security by taking a lap-top home, putting himself in a position to share information with his Israeli comrades, or is he being gotten rid of by the Israelis who find him no longer in their camp? This example reminds me of a similar change of heart (perhaps not relevant to this discussion) on the part of his American cultural attachee for Gaza, who, when she was an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburg, went to a talk given by Edward Said just so she could heckle him, yet as a young adult working in Gaza she sought Said out to apologize to him personally and tell him she was wrong.

In further response to your comments, Sherifa, you say that "Eleanor says that essentially there is no neutral voice — and if that is true, isn't it so because location (or positionality) — however blurred — matters?" My answer is "yes, of course it matters, but, as I said above, you are unlikely to have a clear grasp of what that positionality is in relation to the written work, and highly likely to open yourself to misinterpretation. That I question your critique of the reviewer of Nawal Saadawi illustrates this point. I thought women at point zero was a real indictment of the poverty and powerlessness of women but I did not see the analogy between the fallen woman protagonist and Egypt, and what do you know about my positionality that could explain such a failure on my part? As for your second example, well, I'm not sure I see the relevance to the "positionality" of the reviewer. Cultural history is all about uncovering and understanding how different people at different times interpret the world around them. In Freud's case of Dora, Freud presumed that what is normal would have been for Dora to desire sex with a man, even an old one, but do we need to know anything about Freud's life or personal relationships to see that his view-point was male-centered and oblivious to the personhood of Dora?"

In answer to Nimat's question, "How is it possible to see the experience and the "depth of Knowledge" of Eleanor Calverly's husband as "standing alone"? Wasn't this knowledge the result of him being given access to the [male]courts while the women (his wife, for instance) were denied that access?" The work stands alone in so far as what I as an historian can do with it. Yes, it's good to know that women cannot access the courts and that that fact limits their access to information, and if I were writing about the relative merits of women's writings as opposed to men's writings as sources of information about the courts for the historian, that fact would be most pertinent. It would not, however, alter the usefulness of Eleanor Calverly's writings for me as someone who wants to know about the workings of the courts.

I try to show that the exclusion of women from higher religious learning also meant their exclusion or marginalization from all the professions that rely on religious knowledge, including healing professions, and from sacred space at the center of the community. At the same time, it also limited their ability to carve out and expand physical space that the community would regard as legitimate for women. With all best wishes,

**Nimat Halez
Barazangi**

I am still perplexed at Eleanor's insistence on seeing positionality as almost synonymous with a point of view or a political stance. What we are trying to emphasize is that the different world view dictates the understanding of the material before us, whether we are historians, educators, or political scientists, etc. We are not talking about merely the accessibility to the material/knowledge. That is exactly why I presented my argument to show the contrast between the world view that sees Islam as 'religion' and the world view that sees Islam as a belief system, an outlook on life.

Sherifa Zuhur

Dear Eleanor: I just have to reply. Here's the rub — a good historian should try to obtain a clear grasp of what that positionality is in relation to the written work. Yes, it might be difficult to do, but not impossible. Now, let's take my examples as I obviously did not amplify or add sufficient detail. The reviewer I mentioned writes for a southern literary journal, cannot read Arabic, is antagonistic to Nawal al-Saadawi's feminism in *Woman at Point Zero*. He explained the term "picaresque" — his description of the novel in reference to a tradition of novels in which a protagonist sets him/herself against society.

Nawal, as one could learn from her writing (or from reading lots of reviews of *Woman at Point Zero*) or hearing her speak, is essentially a third-worldist, and a socialist. She includes the systematic tearing away of each relationship the protagonist forms — her uncle subjects her to incest, her aunt marries her off to an old man, the "revolutionary" lover she works hard for in her factory job abandons her for the daughter of a wealthy man, her madam "Sherifa" exploits her, and she finally kills the pimp who would take away her right to earn her own income. There is one very strong scene with a prince from the gulf who is so terrified by her vehement assertion that she has killed a man that he calls the police who incarcerate her.

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Who is she, if not Egypt? Raped, humiliated, and turned out into the street where she can choose the highest bidder whether Gulf Arab or Westerner or local capitalist. Now why is it that I immediately understood this connotation of the novel, but you, who also read it did not. I suspect it is my teenage and young adult grounding in socialism and third-worldism, now considered passe, but definitely a part of Nawal's "world-view" and life experience in Egypt (this is many years ago, not just recently) during the years that Nawal published this book.

Now other scholars have written about and understood the frequent references to 'Egypt as a woman' (Beth Baron for ex.). But maybe it's shocking to outsiders to realize that a country could be compared to a whore — in sacrificing its people and their needs for gains from outside donors, whether Western or Gulf Arab — believing all the time as Firdaus does that she is in control & not as exploited as others. It is also a part of the world-view of the 1970s and 1980s from within Egypt and within the Middle East.

My second example concerned a man of one nationality — al-Taba'i (Egyptian) writing about a woman of another nationality, Asmahan (Amal al-Atrash a Syrian). He claims in his work to "tell her story (tarwi qissatha) i.e. in her own voice" but is not very familiar with her place of origin & claims to have gotten all the information from her directly. However, someone familiar with the events leading up and into the Syrian revolution, and the 1941 Allied offensive can tell from the specific mistakes in his text that he must have simply gleaned certain facts from other journalists. More importantly he misinterprets the purpose of her life & that, I think has to do with his gender and the writing of that period on the nature and temperament of female entertainers. But of the few biographies written of her in Arabic, his, though flawed and inaccurate is the best and most widely read. In re-writing her life-story, I had a responsibility to consider about his positionality as well as his presentation.

As for Freud, you and I may take it as a given that his view is male-centered and oblivious to Dora's personhood, but unlike al-Taba'i, Freud is still taught today as a part of the "canon" of Western thought & in the lectures I heard at AUC for ex. where he is included in the "Core Curriculum," lecturers made no mention of his male-centered views — we just can't take it as a given that everyone understands what might seem "obvious" in positionality.

Eleanor Doumato

In further response to you comments, Sherifa, you say that "Eleanor says that essentially there is no neutral voice — and if that is true, isn't it so because location (or positionality) — however blurred — matters?" My answer is "yes, of course it matters, but, as I said above, you are unlikely to have a clear grasp of what that positionality is in relation to the written work, and highly likely to open yourself to misinterpretation. That I question your critique of the reviewer of Nawal Saadawi illustrates this point. I thought women at point zero was a real indictment of the poverty and powerlessness of women but I did not see the analogy between the fallen woman protagonist and Egypt, and what do you know about my positionality that could explain such a failure on my part? As for your second example, well, I'm not sure I see the relevance to the "positionality" of the reviewer. Cultural history is all about uncovering and understanding how different people at different times interpret the world around them. In Freud's case of Dora, Freud presumed that what is normal would have been for Dora to desire sex with a man, even an old one, but do we need to know anything about Freud's life or personal relationships to see that his view-point was male-centered and oblivious to the personhood of Dora?"

Mary Ann Fay

Can I add a few comments to the discussion on positionality and insider/outsider. As a historian, I agree with Nimat and Sharifa about the importance of the historian's position in her understanding of the material she is dealing with. But Sherifa has taken this a step farther to note the importance of understanding the position of the author of the document which the historian is using. For example, in my Women in History class, we just finished reading the story of Turia, a Roman woman, whose lifestory comes entirely from what remains of the epitaph written by her husband and engraved on her tombstone. This brings up a host of questions, the most important of which is how to assess the details of her life when they are presented by a presumably grieving husband about his presumably beloved wife in the absence of other supporting evidence.

At the moment I am reading al-Jabarti's chronicle for the period of the French invasion when the positionality of the chronicler becomes quite important. However, can we move the discussion to another dimension, that of space? I am very interested in the work of Doreen Massey, the British geographer and her theories about space. What she and other theorists argue is that space is flexible not fixed which means that the borders that divide spaces are not rigid. If borders are flexible and permeable, then one can be both an insider and an outsider as the border between the two are constantly shifting depending on the relation between the researcher and others — woman/man; Muslim/non-Muslim; Westerner/Easterner, etc. For me, this makes insider/outsider not very useful theoretically. As insider and outsider are embodied in one

individual and she can be both, even simultaneously depending on circumstances, how useful is insider or outsider as a category? So I am suggesting that positionality can be de-linked from insider/outsider. Positionality is also embodied in the historian/ researcher and what is interesting to me is what particular facets of that position are the most important in any given situation involving research, interpretation, writing, etc. For example, Sherifa's reading of *Woman at Point Zero* is informed by her historical understanding of Egypt but also by her grounding in socialism and third worldism. In my opinion, her interpretation of the novel has more to do with positionality than with insider/outsider as does the reviewer who failed to see the connection between Firdaus and Egypt.

**Eleanor
Doumato**

Well, thank you for your comments, and I want to make a quick response.

To Mary Ann I want to again repeat what I have said from the outset: position is important, but there is a limit to what one can know about an author, and people change, so what you know about an author at one time in his/her writing career may not be helpful to interpreting a work written at another period. I have no disagreement with what you say, and I don't think anyone would disagree with the examples you give and would certainly present such appropriate information about an author to a classroom. Your observation about the fuzziness and limited utility of the insider/outsider distinction is also well taken: I said as much in my opening remarks, and used the example of the Egyptian Minister of Education in Saudi Arabia who can be considered either an outsider when he writes about SA or an insider, since he was a SA government minister. In the introduction to my book I give many similar examples illustrating the problematic of insisting on such distinctions when in fact most people can be categorized one way or another depending on how they stand in relation to the subject at hand.

The question of the role played by the positionality of the reader in interpreting a given text has also come up previously in this discussion, and I thank you for emphasizing this important point which the difference in Sherifa's and my interpretation of the same novel illustrates.

Sherifa, I appreciate your further explicating your interpretations of Saadawi and al-Taba'i, but now I suspect we are speaking in circles. Your interpretations are sound literary criticism, informative and insightful. Were I to teach either of these authors I would very much benefit from reading such analyses and would doubtless improve my own limited reading of the texts. Did I give the impression that I don't think serious biography, literary criticism, or studies of historical genre are valuable? Whenever extant, and wherever pertinent to the use of particular sources, these studies are the sine qua non of serious scholarship and interpretation, it seems to me. But our focus is the historian and the insider/outsider paradigm, and it seems to me that in our discussions the paradigm has been sufficiently de-constructed and its limited utility made clear.

3. "Peasant Blood Versus Hybridity and Cosmopolitanism?"

Sherifa Zuhur

I have been struggling with one of the dichotomies central to my recent research efforts in Lebanon. I've been familiar with it ever since my early studies in political economy in the center/periphery axis or rural/urban divide. Our discussion on positionality has helped me to realize that the title I gave this abstract reflects both my subjects and myself. Hybridity and cosmopolitanism - representing one end of a range of conditions, rather than "urban modernity" and "development" are current topics of scholarly interest in Europe that I have been able to discuss, albeit briefly with an Egyptian colleague, Mona Abaza, who is also working with these concepts.

The historian is an observer and recorder, and also an interpreter and creator of discourse concerning women. I believe (and have tried to demonstrate in my research methodology by obtaining oral histories and lengthy interviews) that one cannot faithfully represent subjects of study unless one enters into dialogue with them. Sometimes that means that one must shift emphasis in accord with the respondents' perceptions and in this case, away from religio-political identifications to current economic realities.

After some years of working on other projects in Egypt, I've shifted my focus back to Lebanon for now, returning to an area that fascinated me twenty years ago —the upper Biqā' valley. The civil war intervened, as did my long intellectual sojourn elsewhere. So as an outsider (but with insider roots of origin, lingering familial relationships and member of the same religious sect as the respondents) I am trying to understand the area in Lebanese terms in a peripheral zone, neglected through many administrations. The women that I have access to here are identified by their families and original villages, even if they now live in smaller towns like Ba'lbak, or Hirmil, or have now moved to Beirut.

Agenda set by research has followed and often reflects (consciously or unconsciously) a bifurcation of the

worlds of women — “pure”, rural, traditional women, supposedly cut off from the globalization process, and representing all that should be transformed according to the proponents of modernity. On the other side, we read about urban women living in a cosmopolitan and often hybrid world — which fits certain areas of Beirut (but not the areas where my respondents’ city cousins live — Nab’a, for ex.) This interesting and widely held dichotomy influences research agenda in several ways. It continues to illustrate linkages between social practice, gender ideologies and modes of production; it serves liberal capitalist development agendas and relates to the impact of “development” work “on” women.

If all women are now hybridized and globalized to some extent (if not cosmopolitan) then I want to look at common meeting points of their worlds. But to do that, the structure of my research impels me to return to the village/small town vs. city divide

My account is hardly neutral. I have naturally romanticized the area that I am studying, and compare it favorably or unfavorably with Egypt. I am an urbanized person with rural roots — not too many of my colleagues were taught to shoot a rifle at age five as I was. I know enough about agriculture to understand the dilemmas of dry farming, and to appreciate my informants’ distress with the low prices on produce levied because of the Lebanese-Syrian agricultural agreements. But I cannot simply characterize the area as “timeless” or unchanged, now that I’ve seen the Atari club in Hirmil, the current fashions of village girls (like teenagers in Cairo), the Imam Khomeini hospital outside of Ba’lbak, and the ruins of Shaykh Tufayli’s stand against the government in his “revolt of the hungry” in 1996 (Norton, 2000) — not so far from remaining black tents of the “timeless” *nawwar* (gypsies) — these being respectively features of globalization, and Islamization.

The rural/urban divide is supposed to affect gender ideology. It is taken as a given in both Egypt and Lebanon that country folk are more “conservative.” In terms of profile, rural women are expected to marry and bear children at a younger age. In the upper Biqa’ valley, women are more often party to an arranged marriage than they might be in Beirut. They may be “kidnapped” in order to be married (meaning that a young man takes off with a girl, and several of his friends. Once a night has gone by, the two families must meet, arrange a marriage and often bring in a mediator if there was opposition to a match in the first place). Disputes are more likely to be mediated by a family member (or Hizbollah [Hamzeh, 1993]) than brought to court.

The women that I interviewed understand the importance of their historical and political context, but it was more difficult for them to understand my interest in the gendered aspects of their lives. I found that the most articulate respondents were not more conservative than their urban counterparts, moved between town/village & city, and had reinterpreted supposedly “negative” gender practices (like polygamy) rationalizing them in terms of their own needs. (During the war, rural women resettled in Beirut, but also, some Beirutis with rural roots stayed in Hirmil or villages where it was safer, and this interrupted the process of alienation from the countryside that could have occurred in those years).

These women don’t see themselves as the “oppressed” in the language of Hizbollah (although they admire the party) or as the lowest stratum in society. Their air is clean and fresh, their diet and human relations with neighbors are preferable to those of the city poor. Those with the least income or “*wasta*” to the political representatives of the district and those experiencing downward mobility do see themselves as “neglected” by the central government, as indeed, they are. They attribute many of their economic problems to the enforced switch in crops and to the presence of Syrian workers and domestic laborers from rural areas of Sri Lanka and the Philippines (employed by their city sisters), and the lack of work for young men of the villages since the end of the war.

In the end, their location in space and history matters, which has simultaneously defined, and been defined by their Shi’i identity, tribal roots, and peasant farmer base. They are less hybridized and less cosmopolitan than their sisters and cousins in Beirut, but those adjectives do not aid in formulating solutions for improving the quality of their lives - if that could be the application of my research.

Responses

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On rural/urban divide and gender

If we are to understand urban/rural differences, we need to be very specific and not fall into facile generalizations.

1. The existence of rural/urban distinctions cannot imply that rural women and men are not affected by globalization. TV is everywhere, as are imported goods. We also need to remember that there is more to any society than “tradition” vs. “cosmopolitanism”. One society’s traditions can vary radically from another’s, as does the face of globalism.
2. In the Arab world, rural women (agricultural and/or herding economies) have historically had more

freedom of movement and easier access to public life than their urban counterparts. If we are to characterize them as more “conservative”, we have to be very specific how we define the term. It would also be useful to trace the history of this “conservatism”. Can it be traced in any way to responses to global influences?

In one rural community in Yemen, for example, women traditionally celebrated weddings by dancing all night (till 3 or 4 a.m.) for several nights. (Men also danced but in separate locales). Those with young children would negotiate with their husbands or mothers-in-law to baby sit. Sometimes male musicians played at women’s parties. This pattern began to change when professional musicians began to charge more (because they had the option of emigrating for work), thus cutting down the number of days of celebration. But the most radical changes were the direct results of urban and global influences. People who spent time in Yemen’s towns came back criticizing the presence of a male musician at women’s parties, and women’s celebrations from that time on employed only women musicians. Those who had spent time in Saudi Arabia as migrant laborers returned feeling that it was not “proper” for parties to last longer than midnight. My “Western” bias would call these trends increasing conservatism.

I guess the point I’m trying to make is that the terms “conservatism” and “liberalism” are loaded terms that do not necessarily help us understand what is going on on the ground.

Amal Winter

I have to say that the issue of rural/urban differences is very confusing to me. For example, I found that male/female relationships in the countryside in Egypt are more open and somewhat more egalitarian than those in the city. On the other hand, the rate of female circumcision, early marriage and high births are higher. In the bedouin tribes, women participate politically. There is a female mayor in the south of Jordan, for example, an area dominated by tribal interests, while women in Amman could not garner enough votes for election to parliament even with ethnic set-asides (Christian and Circassian) that favored them. I wonder if there is a model that can describe these amorphous (at least they are amorphous to me) phenomena?

Sherifa Zuhur

Now returning to Najwa’s comments on my abstract which concerned the terms used within it— I don’t see how one can drop references, or ignore the dimension of “liberalism” vs. “conservatism” with reference to women’s gender ideology (or men’s) when analyzing research data. Even if one could miraculously avoid the use of these terms in discussing women’s sexuality or degree of freedom of movement, for ex., those who “use” our work — students, publishers, editors, etc. would no doubt, re-introduce them. I mean that the rural-urban divide has acquired a life of its own.

Also, even in Najwa’s own work (in your 1999 piece, “Dance and Glimpse” and also in Zussman’s work on Tunisia), I noted the very clear distinction made in these societies (Yemen and Tunisia) between rural and urban personal qualities, diet, state of health. Similarly in Lebanon, peasants/farmers as well as urban scholars see a clear divide — it is reflected in food preferences, differences in dialect, musical and poetic styles, areas of knowledge, etc. So, if the dichotomy is false — it is also very much a source of insider discourse.

Moreover, degrees of hierarchy (and power) resting to some degree on a relationship to capital seem to be even stronger in the countryside than in the city (as in Gilsenan’s work on the Akkar region of Lebanon). So, the distinctions are important in trying to gauge the degree of women’s mobility. Yes, Amal, sometimes women seem to be “more free” in the countryside — but often this is when they have acquired status through age, marriage, or a reputation for assistance through network structures.

I did try to mention certain customs that have continued despite globalization — marital kidnapping and polygamy, and beyond the gender divide — serious feuding between families, and also sometimes, between villages. Amal, as with the issues in which you noted less change (less transformation) for women - I think that these continue because the basic rationale is rooted in the local patriarchal systems and that economic factors have not affected the family bases of power sufficiently to disrupt these practices.

4. Feeling Insideout on the Homefield - The Voice of “Third Culture” Kid

Growing up as a US citizen (and the child of European Americans) in Beirut, Lebanon of course had a great influence on my world view and my identity. In my comments I would like to follow up on some of the issues raised earlier, while bringing in the perspective of a ‘third culture kid’ (or TCK, a label used by some sociologists studying children of ‘ex-pats.’ While such a label may be somewhat odd, suggesting a third culture, rather than the straddling of two cultures, which might be more accurate, I use it in part because this is the label chosen by researchers working in this field and also out of convenience,

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as it provides a useful shorthand for describing some commonalities those of us straddling multiple cultures might feel.)

I guess it is pretty clear from this discussion, as well as earlier writings, that the dualism of insider/outsider, particularly along the lines of national identity, should be challenged. My own experience certainly reinforces this conclusion, as I consider myself in many ways as an 'outsider' both in the US and the Middle East. In my comments I want to follow up on a couple of threads raised in the discussion so far as well as introducing what I hope are some new ideas. I will start by following up on Eleanor's question about 'the value of investing energy into determining the personal background of the author of any particular source.' As a political activist who cringes when listening to the 'objective' news in the US and a scholar who works in a field where most of my colleagues still believe that they can carry out 'value free' research, I think it is still important to identify the positionality of an author/commentator, etc..

But that is not the major point I want to make. Instead, I want to point out that identifying someone's positionality may be used for various purposes: to provide context or reflection, but also to discredit or challenge someone's view; it can also be an act of empowerment. It was only after I came in contact with a colleague doing research on 'TCKs' that I had a better understanding of my own positionality. This researcher asked me to complete a survey, and through this survey and conversations with her which followed, she helped me both to understand some of my feelings of alienation and my unique perspective as a 'TCK.' This in turn helped me feel empowered, rather than marginalized. In our conversations my colleague pointed out to me that psychologists have viewed children who grow up outside their 'home' culture and then had to reenter that culture, as 'abnormal' and as having suffered a trauma as a result of this transition. Part of her motivation then was to focus not on the trauma of switching cultures, but on the positive outcomes of experiencing multiple cultures during one's childhood. Some traits which she felt 'TCKs' often exhibited included: ability to empathize, ability to pick up subtle cultural clues that others might miss, ability to be diplomatic. Given that we are becoming an increasingly global society and world, these traits, she argues should be valued and better understood.

While TCKs may make up a very small percent of the world's population, other groups, for instance immigrants and minorities, who are often also viewed as 'abnormal' for similar reasons, may also develop better abilities to pick up cultural clues and empathize with others, as they try to make sense of their multiple and often conflicting identities. (Of course the opposite also happens as individuals facing discrimination and attacks on their culture retrench and become less tolerant.) Anyway, I think understanding such experiences and how individuals react to them is becoming increasingly important as the world shrinks. Understanding positionality is I believe part of this process. Which leads me to my second, point, to revisit Sherifa's suggestion that 'all women are hybridized and globalized.' Yes, the economy is now global and technology is certainly making the world and as such our cultural experiences and exposure more similar, but I think that individuals throughout the world (but particularly in the US), remain quite closed in their ability to recognize the value of 'others.' As such, the traits of those who by their lived experience have gained a better understanding of crossing cultural and other types of boundaries may be even more valuable and should be recognized.

To expand on points made by Amal and Manal, I think it is important to recognize the positionality of individuals who do not come from a monocultural background (another term used by some studying TCKs), be this diversity based on race, religion, ethnicity, etc. Such individuals include 'TCKs,' immigrants, children of immigrants or mixed race parents, and many others. These individuals are likely to share some common traits as well as considerable differences. For instance, while as a TCK I was immersed in aspects of Arab culture, unlike most immigrants, I did not experience racism or anti-immigrant feelings. So my experience of crossing cultural boundaries was in many ways more positive than the experience of some. Anyway, this is by way of introducing some of my thoughts on these issues. I am afraid I am not really addressing the gender aspect of all of this, but these are the thoughts which come to mind as I read through what others have written and mesh them with my own struggles to gain an understanding of my own positionality and how that influences my experiences. I am also somewhat new to some of these debates and hope I am not simply rehashing material others have already gone over. Anyway, I am very interested in exploring further these questions, and in particular in trying to relate how my experiences and the experiences of other TCKs might be similar or different than those of immigrants, the children of immigrants, and others who have crossed one of the most obvious (physical) markers of identity - national borders.

Responses

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I have enjoyed the thematic discussion and learned from all the contributions. Sherifa booted me to join in. I find myself somewhat hesitant as much of such intensely complicated discussion so dense with personal experience that the thought of trying to engage by email to an audience whose eyes I can't see and whose body language I can not read is rather overwhelming. As I do know so many of you, perhaps, I will venture in.

Having grown up multicultural before such experience had a positive label, and now submerging my daughter in deeply in the waters of the world, I find myself always struggling to find the self. For some-time, I have thought to myself that the hallmark of Western culture, of capitalism, of contractarian liberalism, of the rational market, of private property, must be the idea of boundary. Boundaries are everywhere in these domains — boundaries around cultures, nations, states, institutions, cities, property, and ultimate, and most profoundly, around the self.

I have come to experience that not only is there nothing natural about boundaries, and not only is their invention and imposition constructed, in time and place [and thus always shifting], but also that boundaries must always do violence to invent and impose themselves. Whether that violence is symbol, material, physical, emotional, — there is a coercive process entailed.

The outcomes of boundaries, we have come to accept, or hope, are, in many instances, liberatory. In other instances, for me, the jury of life is still out.

I have read a number of articles recently about “global kids” — western kids raised in other countries — perhaps this literature has been around, and is catching my eye now because I have brought my daughter to Egypt and to Lebanon for extended stays. It is a literature which raises complicated questions — but is also based on some rather problematical assumptions. For one, some of that literature assumes there is a place in the world that is “a” [read singular, unitary, whole] culture. Can someone give me directions? Maybe I’ll retire there. Yet that literature is evocative and compelling.

Sometimes, I think the compelling notion of culture is a nostalgia for a time we never had, not at least in my memory. Was Lebanon in the 1940’s when I was born and lived there “a” culture? Was upstate NY in the 1950’s, when my parents moved us there “a” culture? Was California in the 1980’s when my daughter was born “a” culture?

I wonder, I wonder what I yearn for when I harken to history, to the past, to re-memberings? What is it about the present that eludes me? What is it about the complexity that we are that slips through our hands? Is it that it is too complex to behold? Why do I see complexity as fragmentation rather than its own wholeness?

I sometimes wonder whether the slipping through my hands is not only about my own incapacity to sustain the threads or whether the threads are being pulled away. If we look up, look out, what is out there for us to see? And I wonder whether the pull is not the demand of the political, the demand of power, the demand of organization to move, shift, control, manipulate, negotiate...

My apologies if this has been too abstract. Email is not my medium for reflection on those densely personal situations.

Manal

As I mentioned before, this particular topic of bi-cultural individuals is of interest to me - mainly because of my own attempts to understand what it means to me as an American Muslim woman of Palestinian heritage. Although I am probably considered among the “youth” or younger generation (I am 25), I feel that the generation after me has a greater challenge than the one that my peers and I faced. Most of the Arab-Americans I know grew up in secular homes, where religion was more of an identity than a way of life. The children of these families found a way to come back and embrace their religious and cultural backgrounds with pride. This has been my own experience, and as an activist in the community I find it quite common.

However, I feel that we had also learned to be critical of negative practices, and to understand the need to be realistic of the gap between theory and practice, rhetoric and reality. This is particularly true in the case of gender. There is a growing generation of American Muslim women who have entered professional fields; we have intricate networks among female lawyers, journalists, and workers in development that have probably not been seen before.

However, my tours of college campus, speaking on the issue of women and Islam has been met with significant criticism from young Muslim women who feel that I am adopting a “feminist” perspective. I find the comments amazing, because as a woman who chooses to cover and examine gender roles from an Islamic context, I have always rejected the “f” word. I have realized that the tendency to slap a label on women who speak out has caused many of the younger generation to withdraw from discussing women’s issues, and to do anything to disassociate themselves from gender issues. I think this trend is not only in the Arab or Muslim community. Recently, I was reading a book called *Daughters of Feminists*, that expresses the same de-linking. Many of the younger generation seem to be grasping on to Islamic values

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as they are taught to them by older leaders (mainly male), and losing the critical element and ability to question that I feel are the benefits of being a bi-cultural individual.

There is a greater need to emphasize that women who question roles, or seek to understand them are not challenging religious and cultural values. Many people feel that talking about women's rights is a "past fad" or at worst, some people believe it to be out of the lines of Islam. It is easy to dismiss these people, and to focus on the intellectuals or the other groups who have moved beyond questioning, addressing women's issues. But these are often the same audience that can make a change simply by shifting their views on gender roles. Women from Arab or Muslim backgrounds need to understand that they are fulfilling a long legacy of women who have done that in the past. I often emphasize that we do not question Allah but question humans. The Prophet Abraham stood apart from the others in that he was a 'nation in himself.' He was a 'nation in himself' because he dared to question the 'system' in his search for truth. More importantly, his questioning was not a questioning of Allah Almighty, but of fallible beings. In fact, Abraham questioned the system during his day precisely because he knew that Allah is just and therefore the injustice he saw was incommensurate with what pleases Allah.

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I don't actually know if I'm allowed to contribute, or if this is open to everyone. I wanted to mention that there is an excellent article (perhaps 2-3 yrs. ago) in the Atlantic Monthly by Pico Iyer in the first person on the increasing number of people with several identities, countries, affiliations, loyalties, etc. - people whose parentage may be mixed, have parents involved in academic research, who were born in one country, live in another, may go to secondary school or college in yet another place, etc. They are independent, comfortable with travelling and have a global cosmopolitan disposition. I see this as positive. What I have seen however, is that this is distinct from what we call 'ex-pat' kids. Having lived in ARAMCO in Dhahran for 5 yrs, I can attest to many of the kids, regardless of their nationality having identity problems, and also that the American minority has a kind of 'closing of the wagon trains' mentality, which is opposed to learning about the very environment they are in. Ironically, this includes outrageous discrimination against other ethnic Americans and nationalities, which would not be allowed in the U.S. Unfortunately, their children learn to adopt their parent's attitudes and eventually return to the U.S. not any more enlightened than if they had stayed in small town America.

Mary Ann Fay

I'd like to comment on the discussion of TCK's and agree with what Aisha has said. I think we should be careful in discussions of TCK's not to assume that they will become, by virtue to their living abroad, open-minded and tolerant. My son is on the way to becoming a TCK — he spent kindergarten at the Cairo American College and is now in his third year as a student at Sharjah English School where he will be finishing elementary school. He has actually had more of his schooling abroad (4 years) than in the U.S. (2 years). However, I can't say that the expat experience in and of itself fosters tolerance of diversity or even respect for the local culture. I am constantly shocked by the casual prejudice and racism I encounter among parents at my son's school as well as among his classmates. A few days ago, one of his friends said to me, "Don't Indians just annoy you?"

My response was to say no, not more than any other kind of people annoy me and to ask him why specifically Indians annoyed him. Of course, he couldn't be specific. Last year, my son, who is African-American, was being taunted by a boy in the class above him who was using the N-word in his taunts. Fortunately my son's friends stood by him and after he told me of the incident, I reported it to the headmaster who reprimanded the child and the taunting stopped immediately. This is in a school, although with a majority of British students, that reflects the expatriate community in the Gulf, with many Asian families as well as mixed families, i.e., Arab men married to non-Arab women. Although I found that Cairo American College was more active in promoting tolerance, respect for diversity and understanding of the local culture than the English School here, even at CAC there were many parents who objected to their children's learning about Egyptian culture. I think that expat communities can sometimes be enclaves of narrow-mindedness, prejudice and racism that promote a belief in Western superiority. It takes more than exposure to different cultures to foster tolerance and respect for difference.

Marilyn Booth

Hi, Sherifa, after some hesitation, I'm sending this for the conversation ... I'll add my voice here, to strongly agree - I wish I didn't have to - with Aisha and Mary Ann. Having taken my kids to Egypt for a year, and, as you'll see if you stay with me for a few minutes, having gone through a bit of this myself, I agree that expat experience in itself doesn't do anything and that in fact it can rigidify some lines. Yet, I also think it is worth emphasizing that often - not always, of course - when kids are exposed to different cultures, it opens up a lot of productive lines of thought, discussion, etc., and some of the most productive stuff comes out long after the experience. Of course, so much has to do with how it is all processed.

I wrote the passage below two days ago, I think, right after reading Jennifer's and Suad's comments. I then hesitated to send it: it seemed self indulgent and, because it is highly personal, it made me feel vulnerable (it opens some of those selfed boundaries) and also wonder whether it could be useful. (Let me rush to add that I do feel strongly that the highly personal is intrinsically part of responsible scholarship!! Something we've been saying in various ways, here, I think.) But now, I think I will let it fly through cyberspace, just to offer up one more voice on this.

Let me say, too, that I find it interesting that in this conversation we seem to have gotten away from the terms "insider" and "outsider." I think that is significant.

As the recent horrors have unfolded in Palestine, and with the generally awful coverage thereof in the US media, or that small part of it that I follow, I have been thinking back to my own short but very, very significant TCK experience, which shaped my life in ways that only gradually became apparent. Much of that shaping had to do with the kinds of boundary crossings that Jennifer talks about so feelingly, and with the questionings about what those boundaries and crossings meant to me and others, and how - thinking through Suad's passionate questionings, too - they get made and remade into differently defined boundaries by our selves and by others, imagining us. Taken to Beirut for one year at the age of twelve, and also that year spending a bit of time in al-Quds and Ramallah, I found a world that appealed to me, that troubled me, and that I wasn't sure I wanted to leave. But we did leave - on June 7, 1967, from Beirut harbor as the Shell depot burst into flames. What turned out to be even more important, I think, or which made the whole year even more of a shaping one for my future, was returning to the US so suddenly, now a thirteen year old, and talking to peers and older friends of the family and new acquaintances about Palestinians and about the war that had raged as we sailed toward New York. "Palestinians? Who are they?" was almost always the response, and it shocked me, over and over, leading me to question many things as well as to try, from that age, to deepen my knowledge so that I could respond quietly and at length. And then, later, as a college freshman, starting as a government major but unable to take the attitudes of those who taught me.

Obviously, the year in Beirut was an experience that impelled my later professional work, even if I have moved so far away from specifically public political interests (in terms of career though not, I trust, as a concerned, and angry, individual.) Yet, more intangible, harder to define, and closer to the bone are those questions of emotional linkages and what they mean; what they make possible and what they may also preclude. Many times I've asked myself - and no doubt, many times I've avoided the question - whether I draw on that experience, brief in time and much less brief in life implications, to validate things about myself, and if I do, whether thereby I'm exploiting it. What does it really mean for my larger political and intellectual commitments? Why do we do the things we do? Where are the lines (always shifting, of course, but that isn't always easy to see) between boundaries of self and world and how do they relate to our motivations? And, "insider" with regards to what? When asked that by-now very tiresome question "what made you decide to study Arabic?", I find that I avoid mentioning that Beirut time. Am I afraid it gives me too much credit? Or has it receded behind so many later factors and experiences? I do think it has significance for some basic empathies that, I hope and believe, underlie what I try to do; but talking about it to others can too quickly misrepresent what it means, or might mean, to me. In a not-very-connected way, I think - or hope - that this relates to some of the points that other participants have raised. Since I've already been self-indulgent here, I'd like to end with something perhaps more self-indulgent, a poem that more or less came to me as I sat on the porch yesterday thinking about Suad's questions to herself, and to us.

A still, orange morning
Of wings, calling out morning greetings
To other still forms, before the autumn
Forces emigration.
A tiny spider
Weaves a connection from the glistening table edge
To my teeshirt.
Fragile links to places and moments.
And I must leave, too, the strands clinging
To the rise of my skin.

Najwa Adra

In support of Mary Ann Fay's comments, my worst experiences of discrimination as a child occurred in the British Army School in Lybia, from English army brats (mid 1950's). They didn't know that Syrians and Palestinians were Arabs, but they knew that Arab was bad.

Manal, Anti feminism among youth is a national crisis. My fifteen year old son was trying to tell me last week that I was not a feminist, and I had to explain that feminism in our family goes back to his great grandmother who founded a secondary school for girls in Sulaymania in 1930.

Jennifer Olmsted

I understand that the format is that I now respond to the various posts that have been made following my initial post, so here goes... I am afraid I won't be able to address each post individually (not to mention that since I drafted this more have come in...), but I will do my best to address the various issues raised.

First, thanks to all who responded. I am particularly grateful to Marilyn Booth. When I first posted I too debated whether I was being too self-indulgent, while at the same time feeling far more vulnerable than I usually do when participating in such E-mail discussion lists, I guess because I was laying myself open to a discussion of my identity and my understanding of my identity. It wasn't until I read Marilyn's post that I recognized where some of my uneasiness was coming from.

I agree with Suad that some of the discussion of TCKs has been problematic, by reifying a dualistic notion of culture. And yet, while there is no denying that we live in a world where cultures blur and mesh, there is in my mind no doubt that we also experience 'culture clash' and 'shock' when we move between communities and this is something it took years for me to understand about my own experience of reentering the US as a teenager. Even knowing the boundaries are false, one cannot escape the feelings of culture as a dualistic construct at times. I also wonder how much of the construction of 'others' can be blamed on capitalism and how much is unfortunately, human nature (if such an essentialist concept does exist...)

In response to Aisha, Mary Ann and others, I never thought I would be defending expat communities... My parents certainly recognized the stifling nature of much of the expat community in Beirut, which is why they didn't send me to an American school. And at a more general level, the ties of many of these expat communities to colonialism and neocolonialist ventures (not to mention the aura of cultural superiority) cannot be denied. Still I think it is important to ask not are expat communities a panacea, but rather on average, do children who spend part of their youth in another culture (whom I am defining as the children of expats) become more openminded as a result. I am still hopeful that they do, and I believe that one of the goals of the TCK literature is to try to document that. I also think that the communities that some of you may be comparing these expat communities to (in assuming that they can get away with more prejudice) may not be very representative of the US experience. I think still today there are only pockets in the US (and many other places) where difference (in terms of race, ethnicity and sexual identity, in particular) are tolerated (and occasionally accepted). For instance, friends in a mixed race marriage (Asian/White) told me they returned to California because they felt it was one of the few places in the US where they felt comfortable raising their mixed race children.

Thanks also to Manal and others who raised broader questions about dealing with multiple and sometimes conflicting identities. Perhaps another strength of 'bicultural' individuals is their heightened ability to be critical about their own cultural experiences and to challenge the status quo. At least that is what I hope.

I know Sherifa is anxious to receive my comments so she can post them, so I will end by saying, thanks again for all the posts. And I will try, as Sherifa suggests, in the meantime, to think a bit more about the gender aspect of some of these questions.

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I've been interested in what was being said here over the past few weeks, but I've hesitated to say anything myself since I'm not a specialist on gender nor one on woman's history, although I am beginning to publish a few things on women's history in the Middle East almost as the natural course of things; I work on various aspects of the history of modern and contemporary Syria.

But, what I have to say is personal and I've hesitated because I'm not sure that my personal reflections would be appropriate here. Still, some friends have encouraged me to post the below remarks since they may go beyond a personal and individual experience. I do feel somewhat uncomfortable, however, giving these thoughts and ideas across cyberspace!!

For at least the past 15 years, I've been voicing my opinions in public forums in France in order to try and pass more correct information and give a more balanced view of the Middle East, not just the present situation but the whole history of the region (many years ago while I was a student, I began doing this in an outreach program).

And as Marilyn and Eleanor and others have said, I count myself also among the angry individuals who have felt caught up in a spiral of control (mostly political and social) and, for years now, I've been resisting, sometimes with success and sometimes without, even now. Yes, even now, I'm still amazed by the mis-information and vicious personal attacks, manipulations and all the rest that goes with it when, in some circles, ones dares to question the received wisdom.

About personal convictions being part of our scientific engagements, about the ex-pat community experi-

ence - I know about it not only from the adult's point of view but also for the fact that my two children spent over 3 years in the French elementary school in Damascus in the early 1990s. Albeit, I think that the atmosphere was a bit better than the American ex-pat and diplomatic one but it was still very colonial and mostly "let's be as French as possible"; most of the foreign community wasn't interested in the host country of Syria nor did they want their children's time "wasted" in the curriculum by studying Arabic and the history of Syria!! But, luckily, not everyone felt that way and there was genuine interest in Syria and the Arab world on the part of some non-scholars in the French community (even some scholars though took haughty attitudes about who they supposedly were and who the others were).

How did I get to this point. The story is long, I can't go into it all here, of course, I'm writing it down though, if only for my own clarification and understanding. I remember, as a 13 year-old girl living in NJ during the 1967 war, that frenzied atmosphere and the feeling of siege that the media and community groups were giving. And the screaming of victory over the enemy, but who was that enemy? And I didn't understand all those racist jokes and comments about the Arabs. It just instinctively felt wrong to me. I remember feeling very confused and somehow that this was some terrible show and that things were being hidden. Still, it took me many many years before I began to unravel it all and find my way and understand. It was only in 1974, despite dire warnings not to go there, that I visited just briefly the occupied territories and saw the terrible situation of life there and the enormous contrast with life on the Israeli side.

I know the history of both sides. I know about Palestine during the Ottoman era and before and the historical presence of different communities there. I also know about the Holocaust, its horrible truth that it happened but I also know about it being used to scare new generations of young American (and European) Jews and its use as a justification to wield misery in the Middle East.

This, by the way, is not just limited to Jewish communities. Shortly before I left for my first extended research stay in Syria in the early 1980s, I mentioned to an older Italian acquaintance in NYC that I was going to Syria. She was more than astounded, saying "why are you going over to the enemy (sic !), why would anyone want to leave the U.S. to go there, of all places", she said. In turn, I was astounded by these remarks. "The enemy", that was the way that people saw Syrians. The media saw to that. I hope that I've been coherent. There's so much more to say, that's why I've decided to write it down.

Endnotes

1. Sherifa Zuhur is an historian, previously Associate Professor in the Departments of History and Arabic Studies at the American University in Cairo. She published a book on the Islamist movement in Egypt and its import to gender ideology there (*Revealing Reveiling*, SUNY 1992), is contributing editor of two volumes on contemporary arts in the Middle East (*Images of Enchantment*, AUC Press, 1998 and "Colors of Enchantment" contracted with AUC Press for 2001). Her biography of a singer/cinema star, *Asmahan's Secrets: Woman, War, and Song* is currently in press at CMES, University of Texas and Al Saqi in London. She is the President of AMEWS, and has been involved with various free-speech, anti-censorship, political, and women's rights campaigns.

2. Sondra Hale's best-known work has focused on women in political movements in the Sudan. She has also worked on women in the Eritrean liberation movement and art in the Sudan. She has devoted herself to humanitarian, and liberatory efforts for many years. She is currently Adjunct Professor of Anthropology and Women's Studies at UCLA, and Past-President of AMEWS.

3. Jennifer Olmsted is a 'European American' citizen of the US who grew up in Beirut, Lebanon. She is currently a visiting Assistant Professor of economics at Occidental College. Most of her research has focused on the economics of Palestine, and more specifically on education, migration and employment patterns in Palestine. She has published in various journals, including *World Development* and *Feminist Economics*. She is currently the editor of *Middle East Women's Studies Review*, AMEWS' quarterly publication, and *Research in Middle East Economics*, an annual published by the Middle East Economics Association.

4. Eleanor Doumato is an historian and Adjunct Professor for International Studies, Watson Institute, Brown University, a past President of AMEWS, and former editor of the *Middle East Women's Studies Review*. Her new work is *Getting God's Ear: Women, Islam and Healing in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf* (Columbia, 2000). The book focuses on women's limited access to religious learning, sacred space and ritual performance, and the effects of these limitations on women's spiritual, mundane, and professional lives, particularly for their credibility as teachers and healers and for their ability to appropriate public space as women's space. It contrasts the Sunni and Shia towns of the Gulf with the Wahhabi Najd, and looks at ways women strive for agency and sacralize their own space in an effort to create a sense of community, to heal and be healed, and to find ways of getting God to hear them. Doumato has also written articles on gender, economy, Gulf politics, missionaries, Christian sources for the study of gender in Islam, and Arab communities in America, and has edited two volumes.

5. Najwa Adra is an anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork in rural Yemen and has just received a grant from the World Bank to conduct a pilot project on teaching literacy to rural women using their own traditions of oral poetry.

Mi'at 'Am Min Al-Riwayā Al-Nisā'iyya Al-Arabiyya

Author: Buthayna Shaaban
Dar Al Adab, 1999, 1st ed.

Reviewed by Abir Hamdar

Do you ever wonder who the first woman writer in Arabic literature was? Do you question the impact of women's writing in Arabic literature? And do you know the characteristics that differentiate Arab women's writing from men? If so, then Buthayna Shaaban's "Mi'at 'Am Min Al Riwaya Al-Nisa'iyya Al-Arabiyya" (One Hundred Years Of Arab Women's Novels) is definitely the book to read.

The 247-page book is divided into nine chapters that deal with the development of Arab women's writings. It also includes interesting anecdotes and problems that accompanied the realization of these writings. In short, Shaaban's book is a critical evaluation of a century of women's writings with a few stories that make it a beneficial read for those interested in women's literature as well as for the ordinary reader.

In the first chapter, Shaaban discusses the extent to which Arab women writers have been "marginalized". The author asserts that Arab women writers have, for decades, been accused of lacking the imagination and the creativity necessary for producing any work of literature. According to Shaaban, critics have repeatedly argued that Arab women writings are locked in within the themes of home, children, marriage and love (p.23). They have reiterated the view that women writers have failed in depicting the political and social reality around them. Thus, Shaaban insists her book is an attempt to "re-evaluate the significance of women's writings" (p.24). But how does she do that?

The author first presents a brief overview of the history of Arab women's poetry, exploring the reasons that overshadowed these women poets.

Since women's poetry in the Arab world was viewed as trivial and lacking in depth, little effort was made to document, explore and study it. As a result, a large number of good poems were lost to us. Shaaban also explores the complex relationship between critics and writings by women. We learn that critics played a major role in the "marginalizing" of Arab women writers and that few studies of major importance have been written on women's works.

In the second chapter, Shaaban begins the hard task of tracing the beginnings of Arab women's writing and investigates the major role they played in Arabic literature in general. Contrary to popular belief, Shaaban asserts that the first novel in Arabic literature was by the Lebanese writer Zainab Fawaz and was entitled "Hussn Al Awakib or Ghadat Al Zahraa" (1899). This contradicts many claims that Egyptian writer Muhammed Hussein Heykl's "Zainab" (1914) was the first work of fiction in Arabic Literature. Shaaban herself sets out to prove her claim and to re-evaluate Arab women's literature based on this discovery.

While the first two chapters review controversial issues related to Arab women's writings, the remaining chapters study major novels by women writers. The novels are analyzed according to chronological and historical events. For instance, chapters three and four discuss novels written between 1920-1950, while chapters five and six deal with novels between 1960 - 1969. The last three chapters cover contemporary women's writings. As she probes deeper into the characteristics of each work, Shaaban shows that

in spite of the different time spans of the novels, they still share common characteristics.

In chapters three and four, Shaaban notes that the period after the 1920's was one characterized by social and political tensions in the Arab world. Women, especially those from Syria, Lebanon and Egypt, were absorbed in these events. At the same time, they were struggling to liberate themselves from the dogmas imposed upon their sex, and women writers reflected all of this in their works. Shaaban explains that they wrote with the aim of liberating "themselves and men" from all forms of inherited discriminations, adding that men were not depicted as enemies but as victims of 'stereotyped ideas' (68-9). This form of fiction changed in the 1950's when women writers became more explicit in their call for the abolishment of all forms of discrimination against their sex. For instance, writers such as Leila Baalbacki from Lebanon and Collette Khoury from Syria challenged paternal power and male domination in their novels.

In chapters five and six, Shaaban refutes the belief that most Arab women's writings focused exclusively on love, children and family. By studying novels written after the 1960's, Shaaban reveals that these novels succeeded in portraying the political tensions, defeats and victories of the Arab world. The author insists that women writers were very much conscious of the political scene around them, as manifested in their works. The writers discussed include authors such as Lebanese Leila Osseiran, Palestinian Sahar Khalifa and Jordanian Leila Al Atrash. As she delves into the works, Shaaban shows that women who wrote about war did so from a human and social perspective. Thus, they brought to the novel in the Arab world a different perspective. A good example is Latifa Zayaat's *The Open Door* (1960) which, according to Shaaban, works on three major levels: the social, political and gender. Also Ulfat Idlibi's *Damascus Bitter Sweet*, (1989) beautifully combines the political and the personal.

Finally, the last three chapters explore contemporary women novels and their contribution to Arabic literature. The author affirms that women writers have come a long way and have accomplished much in the art of the novel, adding that their political awareness is as strong as ever. In fact, Shaaban asserts that, writers such as Ahlam Mostaghanami, Hamida Nafna, Sahar Khalifa, Emily Nassrallah and others not only write about the political and the personal, but also provide solutions to the complex events taking place around them.

"Mi'at 'Am Min Al Riwaya Al-Nisa'iyya Al-Arabiyya" is a literary exploration of decades of Arab women's novels and is written in a simple, comprehensive and extremely structured style. Those who choose to read it will gain great insight and understanding into Arab women's writing over the past hundred years.

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Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait

By Adele Khodr
UNICEF

One strategic objective adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995 is the generation and dissemination of gender disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation. This objective aims at ensuring that all statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analyzed and presented by sex and age and that they reflect problems and questions related to women and men in society.

It is within this context that a recent publication has appeared under the title of *Women and Men in Lebanon: A Statistical Portrait, in 2000*. The publication is part of a Regional Project for development of national gender statistics programmes in the Arab Countries. The project aims at strengthening the national capacities in the production, and use and dissemination of statistics related to gender issues at the national and regional levels, in an effort to influence policies and programmes and promote changes for the benefit of women. The project, supported by the UN, was executed in nine countries, including Lebanon.

The book makes use of a number of surveys that were done in Lebanon over the past five years. A historical overview of the progress in the situation of women and men is noted when data is available. The book takes into consideration differences among women and men in a number of areas, following a descriptive and analytical approach. It consists of six chapters, including a general introduction on the legal conditions of women in Lebanon and six chapters on the various topics, including demography, education, health, labor, economy and public life and leadership.

The statistics available indicate a significant number of findings. First, the increase in the average age at marriage

from 23 years in 1970 to 27 years in 1996. Second, the significant difference in the migration rates between men (1.3%) and women (0.2%). Third, the continuing differences in the illiteracy rates, 16% for women and 7% for men. Fourth, differences in favor of women in the enrolment rates although these are not coupled with a change in the types of educational specialties sought at higher institutions, wherein women are still concentrated in the areas of humanities and social sciences. Fifth, a significant improvement in the health status of Lebanese women, especially in terms of prenatal and natal care. Sixth, the rate of participation of women in the Lebanese labor force is 21.7%. Most of them are in the age group 25-39 years and are employed in the service sector. The participation of women in agriculture is underrepresented, as is the case in many countries of the world. Seventh, a very low level of participation of women in public and political life.

A number of cross-cutting themes run throughout the book. First, although there is very little discrimination against women at the legal level, i.e. in terms of laws, there are serious disparities between women and men at the practical level. Second, regional disparities are noted with respect to all variables and the remote rural areas are the worst affected.

The book is considered important because it represents the first attempt to compare the situation of men and women in Lebanon, and not merely to describe the conditions of women. It adopts therefore a typical gender outlook. Nevertheless, the real challenge is to ensure the mainstreaming of gender into the national statistical databases, thus rendering gender disaggregation of statistics sustainable.