



AL-Raida

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

Volume XVIII, No. 92 Winter 2001

The Pioneer *الرائدة*

Feminizing Politics



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.

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Feminizing Politics

Fawwaz Traboulsi

Chairperson, Social Sciences and Education Division, Lebanese American University

Contributions to this special issue of *Al-Raida* deal with the role of Arab women in political decision-making. However, testimonies, opinions, research papers and survey analyses reflect different levels of concern and achievement. Implicitly or explicitly a number of pertinent issues have been raised concerning Arab women and politics- or better Arab women in politics.

The first issue is conceptual. The intellectual construction of Arab feminism is, at best, a partially, not fully, achieved project. Can feminism in our part of the world (and indeed in the 'third world' at large) safely assume that the concepts generated by the experience of Western feminism are global concepts that can simply be applied locally? My immediate answer would tend to be negative. Not only a critical distance is required vis-à-vis these products, but also the need to develop autonomous feminist goals and strategies and ground them in the Arab present. What is at stake here is not so much geographic or cultural but mainly historical, i.e. one of temporality. In the absence of such a critical distance vis-à-vis these concepts and the intellectual production of an Arab feminism, consumerism would prevail. In other words, the symbolic appropriation of what the West has achieved, or, at best, its assimilation by a marginal elite divorced from the rest of society. What is lost in the process is the starting point, the process of accumulation and the required periodization to reach the required goals.

The central concept of 'gender', for example, calls for differentiating between the biological function of women and their socio-economic, political and cultural roles. To begin with, this thesis seems to be a mere replica, in the field of feminine studies, of the neo-liberal 'state/civil society' dichotomy now prevalent in the social sciences. In both cases, a simplistic dualism emerges where should be established complex correlations. More importantly, all social systems incorporate different forms of exchange of the 'agents' of that biological function and of control over domestic work associated with it. Women's socio-economic, political and cultural roles are thus determined in function of those prevalent forms of exchange and control. Hence, neutralizing women's biological function, and achieving its relative autonomy vis-à-vis the aforementioned roles, are in themselves social, historical and political achievements and not a mere theoretical assumption.

The second issue is of a strategic order. The quota system, for example, was initially adopted in countries where women have made great advances in participation in public life (economic, social and cultural) but were

still politically underrepresented. Does it mean the same in countries where such advances have yet to be made? On the other hand, to what extent would such a voluntarist political achievement encourage wider (economic, social and cultural) forms of participation? Whatever the answers to these questions, it is highly likely that the implementation of the quota in the Arab World would turn out to be symbolic if not attached to, and backed by, real positions and forces in society as a whole.

Another issue raised concerns the relationship between the feminist movement and the overall movement for change in the Arab World. Many contributions considered the social foundations of prevailing Arab politics (tribalism, sectarianism, etc.) as severe impediments to the participation of women in political life. They implied a necessary relationship between women's participation in political life and the overall socio-political transformations in their countries. This raises the 'tactical' question concerning the means of achievement.

Women movements have acquired a different connotation compared to the sixties and seventies. Now, the field is mainly in the hands of NGO's that tend to compartment, rather than relate, fields of thought and action (human rights, environment, women, development, etc.). A critical assessment of the experience of Arab NGO's is long overdue. Have they encouraged concerted feminist action or have they driven feminist activists to competition for donors, funds, clients, etc.? Are NGO's capable of linking local strategies and actions to national ones?

Whatever the answers to these questions in the current debates- and answers are required- one thing is sure. Feminism is eminently political. It is about changing relations of power between men and women in society. And in so doing, it is about changing the terms of politics at large. Undoubtedly, much of the characteristics of authoritarianism prevalent in our societies are the product of the domination of patriarchy. Feminizing politics thus becomes the equivalent of freeing politics of what makes it authoritarian.

A feminist perspective on politics would render it more humane and indeed more democratic. Not necessarily because of any inherent characteristics attributed to womanhood, but because those who have long suffered from oppression and inequality, and struggled for equality and justice are deemed capable of imagining new forms of social life. Thus enfranchizing half of society cannot be reduced to a mere quantitative change. It would hopefully open up qualitatively new horizons for the conception and practice of politics as liberation.

And They Call This Peace!

Monica Tarazi

Live testimony from occupied Jerusalem: "I wrote this last night when I got home from Jerusalem. It is neither clever nor analytical. But it's what I saw. And what I saw was heartbreaking." Monica Tarazi

Today, I went to Jerusalem. It was devastating. I was with a group of Palestinians from Haifa and its surrounding area. We were there for a conference which was canceled because of the 'events' as the conference organizers put it with ironic understatement. So with little else to do given the general strike that shut Ramallah down completely, and wanting to do something practical to help, we decided to venture into Jerusalem and do just about the only thing you can do here without risking your life when there are demonstrations against the occupation outside every refugee camp and at every checkpoint. We went to the Makassed hospital in East Jerusalem to donate blood.

The drive from Ramallah to the Makassed hospital in Jerusalem should take around half an hour. Just over an hour after leaving Ramallah, and having driven through settlement after settlement (because the only roads the Israelis left open were the settlement roads), we finally got close to the hospital only to be stopped by a row of Israeli soldiers standing in a line blocking the road and facing off with a few dozen Palestinian youths who were gathered around 50 yards away. The soldiers were, as usual, heavily armed. They had about a dozen jeeps and several vans. The Palestinians, again as usual, had only stones. There were burning tires in the road. Every now and then a Palestinian would throw a stone in the direction of the soldiers (who were too far away to actually be hit), and then retreated.

I bumped into L., a German girl I know who lives and works at the Lutheran hospital down the street from the Makassed.

"This has been going on all night," she told me wearily. "Yesterday it took me three hours to get from over there to here because the whole road was blocked." She pointed in the direction of the Makassed, about 150 yards away. She continued, "they (the soldiers) came into the hospital last night and were shooting inside .. several of the boys died in here." she added, by way of explanation. Boys. They're killing boys.

After a few minutes spent gaping in horror, we got back into our bus and cars and turned around. We drove about 20 minutes through the side streets until we finally reached the Makassed. As we drove to the front of the hospital we could hear shooting. The Israeli occupation forces were apparently getting bored just standing there and decided to take things up a notch.

More shots, and an ambulance zoomed past sirens wailing. With her usual impeccable timing, my mother called. I thought about lying about where I was, but realized that she would be able to see through my fib - if not from my voice, then from the gunshots and ambulance sirens. I said I'd call back later.

We were greeted at the hospital by an official looking man who led us up the stairs to the rooms where the injured were being treated. The first man we met had been hit, by a rubber-coated bullet I think, in the head. He looked drowsy and his head was covered in bandages. He was about 25 years old. Someone from our group said a few words of support, and we moved on. In the next room was a man lying with a bandage across his face. He was lucky: only his eye had been blown off. If he had been a few inches to the right, the bullet would probably have entered his brain. In the next room was a young man who had been shot in the hand. The

room after that housed a man who had been shot in the stomach. "He's in a very bad shape," whispered a doctor. Stating the obvious, he added, "it's not good to be shot in the stomach."

Downstairs, the injuries were worse: A 13 year old girl shot in the stomach. A man shot in the head. Another had been shot in the heart - they didn't think he'd last the night. I stopped listening after that. Another room, another patient in agony, another family suffering in silence. And then another. And another. All the while, we could hear the sirens screaming as the ambulances entered the hospital. And we could still hear the shooting.

We went outside to the hospital's Emergency Entrance. There were probably two dozen people there, some in uniform, some not. One man had a megaphone which he was using to give orders to everyone in sight. Everyone seemed to have a cell phone which struck me as being strange until I realized that they were using them to communicate with the ambulances and the various taxis acting as ambulances. "There's one coming! Clear the way! Clear the Street!" ordered the man with the megaphone. "Only doctors can approach the car!" An ambulance roared in. The hospital staff pulled out a young man with bandages around his arm. Someone yelled to alert the man with the megaphone to the arrival of another vehicle. Again Mr. Megaphone repeated his demand for everyone to clear the way and let the ambulance through. And again they did.

This time the 'ambulance' was a white service taxi van, one of many being used to ferry the injured to the hospital. Out came a girl about 14 years old. I guessed she was suffering from tear gas inhalation: she had no visible wounds, was breathless, and was clutching her head. Another ambulance arrived with another young man. Then another. Five ambulances in the 20 minutes we spent there. I couldn't decide whether to be relieved or devastated that everything was so well organized. On the one hand, everyone had his job and knew what to do: it worked like clockwork. On the other, that perfection was tragic when the activity in question is the admission of wounded youths to a hospital.

At that point I had started shaking. Adrenaline, stimulated by horror and rage, was attacking my legs and arms. I felt weak, but strangely energized. My legs shook slightly as I walked. I was selfishly relieved when we were told that the outpouring of donations from the local community meant they had no room for our blood. I figured I needed every

drop of my blood if I was going to stay vertical for the rest of the afternoon.

From the Emergency Entrance we headed to the office of Dr. Khalid, Director of the hospital. Relieved to be able to sit down (I wasn't sure how much longer my legs would hold me), I gratefully accepted the Arabic coffee handed around. I just started to relax, when the shooting started up again, louder this time. So, as sirens wailed outside, and shots rang out from 100 yards away, Dr. Khalid smiled warmly and welcomed us. It's so nice to see 48 Palestinians here in the West Bank, he began, using the term Palestinians use when talking about that part of Palestine lost in 1948. One of the women in our group interrupted him. "We are not the 48 Palestinians. We have always been here. They are the Jews of 48". But then she thanked him and put into words what we were all feeling. "Our hearts", she said, "are with you."

We asked him about the people we had seen and the procedure for dealing with crisis such as this. He told us that yesterday 5 martyrs died at the Makassed. 190 people were injured and needed treatment. 150 were admitted. He told us

that all five were killed by the type of bullets that explode after entering the body, causing maximum damage. "High velocity bullets" he said in English. I wondered if there was a way to say "high velocity bullet" in Arabic or if they always used English to describe them. He told us that the Israelis have no respect for ambulances, that they shoot at them and won't let them help or transport people. Later, someone else told me that yesterday, Palestinians lay injured on the street 50 yards from hospital and the Israelis wouldn't let the ambulances near them.

He then started telling us about the 'Disaster Plan' (again named in

English but explained in Arabic). This plan has been in operation since the first days of the Intifada. Everyone knows his or her role, where they have to be and what they have to do. In times of crisis, all hospital staff have to either be present or on stand-by at a known location so they could be called in if needed. I thought of the 'disaster drills' emergency medical workers simulate in Washington (where I worked with an ambulance service) so we could keep up our skills. They don't need drills here, they have plenty of practice.

When we finished our coffee, we went outside to the bus. While we were milling around waiting for our bus driver to get the bus, and for everyone to say their good-byes, we watched the boys throwing stones and the soldiers lined up

*All the while, we
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staring back at them. There was no shooting. Suddenly, all the Palestinians in front of us - about 200 in all - turned and started running towards us. Scared, I looked at the direction of the soldiers. My friend and I grabbed each others hands as we realized that the Israelis soldiers had formed a line and were running towards us, their guns raised, shooting wildly in our direction. Lots of gunfire. The ambulances and other cars fled towards us. Terrified youths, apparently scared of arrest and injury in equal degrees raced past us. Dodging them and the cars, we ducked back into the hospital compound and someone shut the metal gate. My whole body shook in fury and fear. Half of me wanted to run for cover. The other half, the part of me that was furious at the brutality of the soldiers and exploding with rage at the injustice of the situation, wanted to go out and join the *shabab*, to pick up stones and hurl them at the animals shooting at us. Shooting at us because Palestinian youths have the audacity to demand their freedom, the gall to remind the world that they are human beings too with rights and pride, and the desperation to risk everything in the pursuit of justice.

I didn't join them. I cowered behind the gate until it seemed calmer and the youths started to return to the area. We opened the gate and stepped outside the hospital to see what was going on. We had just resumed our places when the soldiers started attacking again. Again, some 200 teenagers turned around towards me and fled. They looked scared; I was terrified. The sounds of the bullets were getting louder and louder as the soldiers came closer. Again we fled into the hospital compound and waited.

A few minutes later, it was calm again. One member of our group sprinted to her car (which was parked right in the line of fire) and I opened the hospital gate for her. The *buaab* (part gatekeeper, part security man), a cheerful looking man in his fifties, smiled at me gratefully and asked in Arabic if I was with the group from 48 Palestine. It was surreal. We stood in the street exchanging greetings. He offered me a cold drink, I explained what I was doing in Palestine. The shooting continued and the youths retreated again. And we stood making small talk.

Finally we moved behind the gate. Our group was, we realize, stranded; our bus was outside but the gunfire was too heavy to reach it, and anyway, our driver was smarter than we were - he was nowhere to be found. So, we did the next best thing to getting the hell out of there. We had lunch. My hands shook as I lifted my fork and used my knife. They were still shaking several hours later when I called my parents to tell them I was OK.

By the time we finished eating, things had calmed down. The youths were still there. So were the soldiers. But the shooting had paused long enough for us to get to the bus. We got on the bus quickly and drove away towards the center of town. In three minutes, we were at the Garden of Gethsemy. Tourists were giggling as they chatted to each

other and marveled at the buildings and the trees. I fought the urge to get out of the bus and shake them. I wanted to shout at them. "Don't you realize that they are KILLING teenagers less than 1km from here? Do you care about nothing but old stones and buildings? How can you go sightseeing when quite literally around the corner, Palestinians are fighting for their lives and for their freedom? You want sights, I'll show you sights. Go to the hospitals. See the sight of a mother crying over her injured child. See a wife praying so that her husband will survive the night. See the Doctors fighting to treat patients with no money, no equipment and no supplies. Watch teenage boys with automatic weapons shoot at teenage boys with stones. But, for God's sake, stop giggling."

Of course, I didn't say that at all. I watched silently from the bus. And listened as the radio announcer read the news: clashes in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, Gaza, and Jenin. Hundreds injured. over a dozen killed. An ambulance worker shot in the head in Gaza as he tended to a patient who had been shot. A child of 14 shot dead in front of his father as they tried in vain to shelter themselves from the soldiers fire. Another child killed in Gaza. Another in Nablus. A 16 year old from Ramallah. They were firing at demonstrators from helicopters and armored tanks in Gaza. I stopped listening and remembered the clashes I went to in 1998 in Ramallah. I remembered how petrified we all were when the helicopters arrived and started flying low. You can't hide from a helicopter, you see. They can get you wherever you are cowering. And I started remembering the sting of the tear gas used to disperse the crowds, the fact that it stings your eyes, your throat, your lungs and your skin. And then I realized that all day I hadn't seen a single Western journalist. I wondered where they were and cursed them for their absence. And I cursed the soldiers for their brutality. And I cursed the Israeli government for putting them there and and I cursed the whole world for not caring.

Maybe when I have been here longer, I will be able to understand the situation. Maybe one day I will be able to grasp whatever it is in Israel's collective consciousness that enables it to act with such willful disregard for human life. Maybe one day I will decide whether they are convinced by their own pathetic excuses, whether they are motivated by anything besides pure, unadulterated evil. Maybe eventually I will know if Israel honestly thinks that in oppressing and brutalizing a civilian population, a people whose gravest crime is to exist at all, they are serving the interests of peace. Maybe, maybe not.

Right now, as I sit at home writing this down, I'm too tired and physically exhausted, from the dreadful 'low' that inevitably follows an adrenaline 'high'. My head is throbbing and my mind is numb. But I am enjoying the silence. This weekend is the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah. Israel brought in the New Year by killing Palestinians. Start as you mean to continue. And they call this peace.

Recent Publication

- Anderson, Bridget. *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*: Zed Books, 2000.
- Henig, Ruth. *Women and Political Power: The Making of the Contemporary World*, New York, 2000.
- Poya, Maryam. *Women, Work and Islamism*, London: Zed Books, 1999.
- Stearns, Peter N. *Gender in World History*, New York: Routledge, 2000.

Call for Papers

Signs, Journal of Women in Culture and Society seeks submissions for a special issue on "**World Politics, Women, and Building Peace**" slated for publication in Summer 2003. For this special issue, we encourage papers that expand feminist analysis into relatively neglected questions surrounding armed conflict and the creation and maintenance of justice and peace. We welcome historical discussions and contributions that assess the successes and limitations of as well as extend already established feminist scholarship. We would be very pleased to receive papers from international policy makers and those working in non-governmental organizations.

Please observe the guidelines in the "Notice to Contributors" printed at the back of the most recent issue of the journal or available at:

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/Signs/instruct.html>

Please send submissions (five copies) no later than October 31, 2001 to:

Signs, "World Politics, Women, and Building Peace"

1400H Public Policy Building, Box 957122

University of California, Los Angeles

Los Angeles, CA 90095-7122

USA

Signs, the Journal of Women in Culture and Memory, is seeking submissions for its special issue on "**Gender and Cultural Memory**." The publication is expected to be published in Autumn 2002 and submissions entail manuscripts that examine different modes of memory (personal, cultural, traumatic, etc.). Send submissions (5 copies) no later than January 31, 2001 to:

SIGNS "Gender and Cultural Memory"

University of California, Los Angeles

1400H Public Policy Building

Box 957122 Los Angeles, CA 90095 - 7122

For more information visit web site:

<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/Signs/call.html>

Films

Women on the Move

By Nabiha Lutfi

In Menya (upper Egypt), women from the grass roots are organizing for change. This film is dedicated to those courageous and committed women who, despite social constraint and few resources, are striving to improve living conditions in their communities, and to shape a better future for their children.

OFF-SIDE

By Zeina Maasri

The video piece is about the global language that surrounds football, especially among males. In this video, the game is used as a metaphor for sexual and gender power relationships, where the woman is given the passive/receptive role of the net. The scene takes place in an urban neighborhood waste lot used by boys to play the game. They play to the watching gazes of the girls, the camera, and then again to the viewers of the piece. The work is rhythmically structured along this network of gazes in which the viewers are also implicated.

The piece interweaves two narratives: one is situated within an Arabic context whereby the questions of Chastity/virginity of a woman are critical issues that concern the honor of the family. The second narrative takes these relations of power beyond Arabic culture to reflect on questions of "identity" and the social positioning of the "woman" and the "feminine" that are still deeply rooted in western social structures.

Drag Questions

By Naz

This 7 minutes experimental documentary, made in 1999, enters the lives of 4 women of different backgrounds. They answer questions regarding their gender identity and sexuality. Each person has different views. Louise, is a woman. Sokari is a woman. Steph feels guilty about being a "woman". Joelle is a performance artist and a writer who can be defined as a gender bender. What does it mean to be a "woman" in today's society, and for oneself. Each person's own definition and views of being a "woman" or "man". Or being neither man or woman, actually being human. Why is clear, defined gender expression such a necessity for "healthy" everyday interaction. This short video explores these issues and much more in a brief intense swirl of a search for self and maybe seduction even.

“Various definitions of empowerment for women exist. Empowerment is a process of gaining understanding of, and control over, the political forces around one as a means of improving one’s standing in society. This requires awareness of one’s situation, skill acquisition that enables change, and working jointly in effecting change. It involves ‘claiming equality’ instead of waiting for others to provide it. Empowerment can be used for social mobilization, changing women’s state of mind, and gaining access to the bases of social power. ... Empowerment begins when women ‘change their ideas about the causes of their powerlessness, when they recognize the systemic forces that oppress them, and when they act to change the conditions of their lives.’” (Women in the Third World: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Issues, pp. 498 - 499)

“Hence Arab women have continued to join the different political movements as isolated individuals rather than as a collective force. In addition, women active in the political arena have remained a very small political movement and as a small minority have tended to suffer from the alienation and psychological disorders that affect such minorities. They feel the gap that exists between the reality imposed upon them and that to which they aspire, and realize that the political movement in no way represents them or expresses the problems they face every day in the family, in the workplace, and within society as a whole. Arab women are deprived of the right to reflect their situation, and the difficulties which they face. The reason given to explain this neglect is that a number of other important problems should be given priority.” (The Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader, p. 239)

“The few women who form the Arab political movements and become members find themselves surrounded by an atmosphere that leads them to adopt the ideas and way of thinking followed by the men in control of these movements. They tend to repeat the same ideas and slogans, and deny the existence of what we may call the problem of Arab women. Even if the existence of this problem is recognized, it is considered of secondary importance, or relegated to the category of issues that can be dealt with at a later date, since the time has not yet come when they should be faced and solved effectively, or it is treated as a matter that will find a spontaneous solution as soon as imperialist and class domination have been abolished.” (The Nawal Al-Saadawi Reader, pp. 239-240)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the Government of his/her country. the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. the power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the

highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. ... women’s equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women. Women’s equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women’s interests to be taken into account without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. (Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration, p.109)

“One cannot deal with the problem of female representation by a quota system alone. Political parties, the educational system, NGOs, trade unions, churches - all must take responsibility within their own organizations to systematically promote women’s participation, from the bottom up. This will take time. It will not happen overnight, or in one year or five years; it will take one or two generations to realize significant change. ... This is what we are working on in Sweden. We did not start with a quota system. First we laid the groundwork to facilitate women’s entry into politics. We prepared the women to ensure they were competent to enter the field; and we prepared the system, which made it a little less shameful for men to step aside. Then we used quotas as an instrument in segments and institutions where we needed a breakthrough.” (Birgitta Dahl, Speaker of Parliament, Sweden)

“Quotas are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they oblige men to think about including women in decision-making, since men must create spaces for women. On the other hand, since it is men who are opening up these spaces, they will seek out women who they will be able to manage - women who will more easily accept the hegemony of men.” (Anna Balletbo, MP, Spain)

“So it is that women in authority have often assumed male attributes, even male dress. In Egypt 3,500 years ago, the only woman Pharaoh, Hatshepsut, had to put a beard of lapis lazuli and a male kilt for ceremonial occasions. It was the only way she could perform the central ritual of Egyptian kingship, by which the god-monarch every morning celebrated the sun’s rebirth and re-transmitted life to the people of the Nile valley. In literature, Shakespear’s Portia, in the Merchant of Venice, amazes everyone with her legal skill — by which she ‘tempers justice with mercy’ and outwits the villain in his lawsuit for a pound of flesh. But she does so disguised as a man. Similarly, both Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher were termed ‘statesmen’ and contemporary women executive wear ‘power suits’. The reverse, a man imitating a woman, is less frequent, particularly if the aim is to portray public power and influence.” (<http://www.idea.int/women.htm>)

From Egypt

Dear Fellow Scholars, Writers, Friends:
There is an ongoing campaign in Egypt to divorce Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi, writer and medical doctor from her husband of many years, Dr. Sherif Hetata, as Nawal's views have been declared to be "against Islam." The "divorce" case will be heard in a *shari'a* court on June 18. It is being brought by the lawyer Nabih Wahash. Sherif and Nawal have asked that those who wish to support them sign the letter below to be sent on their behalf. After signatures are collected, I will send the letter to the appropriate officials. Please sign this letter in the name of intellectual freedom and justice. To sign on to the letter, reply with your name and location or affiliation or simply email Dr. Sherifa Zuhur szuhur@earthlink.net or Dr. Sondra Hale sonhale@ucla.edu

Letter written to Public Prosecutor, Maher Abdel Wahab, and Minister of Justice, Counselor Farouk Seif El Nasr

Your Excellencies:

We, the undersigned, are writing to protest the attempt to annul the marriage of Nawal El-Saadawi and Sherif Hetata on the grounds that the views expressed by Dr. Nawal El-Saadawi, medical doctor, writer and active defender of the rights of women place her outside the boundaries of Islam.

We are deeply concerned that such a measure can only produce an extremely negative image of Egypt and the Arab and Islamic world. This

intended legal action against Dr. El-Saadawi and her husband, Sherif Hetata, will be considered a basic infringement of human rights, and political and religious freedoms.

We ask you to do all that is within your power to make sure that justice and intellectual freedom prevail in Egypt.

Sincerely,
Dr. Sherifa Zuhur
Visiting Scholar
Center for Middle Eastern Studies
University of California, Berkeley

Professor Sondra Hale
Department of Anthropology
University of California, Los Angeles

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

On the 6 March 2001 a weekly newspaper published an interview I had given a few days before I left for a long lecture tour in Germany, France and the United States. In this interview I reiterated the views I have defended in all my writings during the last forty years and pronounced publicly in many parts of the world including the Arab Region. In these views I link questions of sex and gender to politics, economics and culture at the local and international level and struck at the roots of all forms of exploitation and oppression whether class, patriarchal, racial national, or religious. Those who are in power have always tried to silence my voice. These attempts to silence me have increased steadily in the past years which have witnessed the predominance of capitalist neo-liberal forces and their allies including religious fundamentalism.

In the interview, I repeated my opposition to the veiling of women which implies that women are only bodies, to polygamy, to inequality in inheritance rights and insisted that all of these were in contradiction with the true spirit of Islam and the correct interpretation of the Qoranic text. I also mentioned that some of the practices of Islam had been inherited historically from the pre-Islamic era and that this was a natural phenomena in all religions and gave as an example that of the pilgrimage. The newspaper which published my interview, like many other newspapers appearing all over the world, depends heavily on sensationalism for its sales. My views were manipulated, quoted out of context and blown up with provocative headlines. The powers that

be which have always been unhappy with my views seized the occasion of a deteriorating cultural atmosphere coupled with a rebound of fundamentalist tendencies in Egypt. The Mufti of Egypt issued a declaration to the same newspaper accusing me of having strayed out of the bounds of Islam. A few days later, a lawyer raised a case against me for separation between me and my husband on the grounds of apostasy. The case is appearing before a personal law court (*Sharia* Court) on June 18, 2001. But since all cases must be raised by the General Prosecutor himself according to the amendments made to the law of Hizba, the same lawyer sent a request to the General Prosecutor asking him to have me tried on the same grounds. If the General Prosecutor agrees, I can be tried and sentenced to a period of imprisonment for attacking religion or separated from my husband by Hizba on grounds of apostasy. We are waiting to see what will happen.

What you are all doing is wonderful and we are very thankful to you. Expand it more and more until it becomes an irresistible wave. You will be defending human rights and the dignity of many men and women in our region and all over the world.

Send your protests to Farouk Seif Al Nasr, Minister of Justice, Lazoughly square, Cairo, Egypt; to Maher Abdel Wahab, the General Prosecutor, The High Court, July 26 Street, Cairo, Egypt (Fax 202 5757165); to Hosni Mobarak President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, and to the First Lady Suzanne Mobarak with copies of everything to the Egyptian Embassy.

Nawal El-Saadawi

International Women's Day

To celebrate the International Women's Day, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in collaboration with the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music held a concert "Women and Music" on Saturday, March 10, 2001. The performers were women professors and students from the Conservatory.



Photo Exhibit - Violence Against Women

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in collaboration with Amnesty International organized a photo exhibit on "Violence Against Women" on Wednesday March 21, 2001 in Sheikh Zayed Hall, Fine Arts Center. The photo exhibit was part of the international campaign aiming at combating violence against women.



Kamal Labidi, June Ray, Mona Khalaf, Anita Nassar, Abdel Mitaal Gershah



June Ray,



File | File | File

Women and Politics in the Arab World

This special issue of *Raïda* is devoted to the theme Women and Politics in the Arab World. Beyond the opinions, surveys and discussions concerning women's participation in politics, the obstacles they face and the achievements they made, the following pages are a quest for a new approach to politics in general.

In this issue's 'Opinion', Monica Tarazi relates one day in the life, blood, horror and death of the Palestinian Intifada. She damns a world that does not care, in the name of a people whose "only crime is to exist at all".

The first article under our main theme is by Mona Makram Obeid, political sociologist and prominent member of the Wafd party. Mona takes the lead from C. Wright Mill's 'intellectual craftsmanship' to write a personal testimony of her experiences as an Egyptian MP. Amal Kawar reviews the development of Palestinian women's participation in political life and decision-making against the paradoxical background of state building, unleashed by the Oslo accords, and the renewal of the Intifada. Playing a crucial role in national liberation, Palestinian women remain 'invisible to decision makers and the media', concludes Kawar. Rana Hussein, on her part, argues the case that political tribalism constitutes a major obstacle to women's participation in Jordan's parliamentary life.

The issue's roundtable is centered on the controversial issue of the women's political quota in Lebanon. Participants Linda Mattar, Iqbal Doughan, Azza Sharara Baydoun, Najla Hamadeh, Mona Khalaf, Joseph Moawad, Fawwaz Traboulsi and Miriam Sfeir argue its validity and feasibility in a country whose political system is already based on sectarian political quotas.

Bariaa Ahmar Sreih makes the point that political sectarianism is a major obstacle to women's participation in political life in Lebanon. She adds that the lack of solidarity among women also accounts for much in their poor show in the last parliamentary elections. Also on Lebanon, Marguerite Helou analyses the major factors influencing female participation in parliamentary and municipal elections by comparing three field studies undertaken in the post-Taef period. Under the title " 'Quota' in the Field: 'My Lady Take Your Place'", Hind Assaf Soufi undertook an extensive survey on the attitudes of the Lebanese towards the Quota system, presented by Ghena Ismail. Miriam Sfeir interviews MP Nayla Moawad on the making of a woman MP in Lebanon, her ambitions, achievements and her 'succession'. Heba El-Shazli reports on the first conference on Women and Parliamentary Elections organized by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) held in Cairo last March. Finally, in the book review section, Zeina Misk brushes the portrait of Maud Fargeallah (1909-1995), the Lebanese socialite who, in the forties and fifties, "made and unmade ministers and presidents in her salon".

Fawwaz Traboulsi

The Testimony of an Egyptian MP



Mona Makram Obeid

When my dear friend, Mona Khalaf asked me to contribute a short piece on my experience in politics this gave me an opportunity to think about my experiences in general and how they affected my life. I would like to share a few of those thoughts with you.

Adopted by the Leader

As I think back, two factors have greatly affected my political life: my family background and my academic education. I grew up in a home where politics was part of the air you breathe! From a very tender age, I developed a very strong affection towards the “patriarch” of the family: Makram-Ebeid, one of the most remarkable politicians, social thinker, reputed lawyer with unique oratorical skills, and a lover of poetry, of music in addition to possessing an irresistible sense of humor. Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde and P.G. Woodehouse are the authors I remembered figuring prominently on his bedside next to French authors such as Montesquieu, Rousseau as well as books on religion and The CORAN. For him too, I was his favorite member of the family. Having had no children of his own, I was his “adopted” child which he took along in all his trips, to Alexandria, Luxor, Aswan, etc ... As a youthful rebel against parental authority, I was very often seriously reprimanded both by my parents and my school teachers who often suspended me from the different schools I went to! But I always found a steadfast defensor in him! He was a passionate narrator of his own journey through life, a journey closely intertwined with the history of Egypt between 1919-1952. From him I learnt about his (and Egypt’s) struggle for independence, his exile by the British to the Seychelles in 1921 with the “Father” of the nation, the revered leader, Saad Zaghloul, his unflinching efforts as a Secretary-General of the famous Wafd party to establish a parliamentary system, his masterful command of English, French and particularly classical

Arabic, his devotion, commitment and loyalty to Egypt and his steadfast attachment to his ideas on the necessity of an Arab Union and to the social plight of the poor.

All these factors had a major influence on my formative years. I developed a passion for historical books and biographies of great personalities. So from a very early age I “devoured” books which became my favorite companions. When I did not buy them, I would read them in the bookstore and spend hours on end in libraries. Although my years at school did not teach us

much about the history of Egypt, as I grew up in the Nasser years and all that part (Egypt’s Liberal Experiment between 1919 and 1952) had been removed from school texts, my family upbringing and my love for historical books greatly compensated that dearth. I must add here that, while at school, my major childhood trauma was the death of my father. I always remembered how much he supported the notion that I should continue my education abroad (at Oxford) and prepare for a role in addition to being a wife and mother. He wanted me very much to be like a boy, in the sense of achievement in the world of education.

As I think back again, my first reading assignment at AUC comes to mind. It was an essay by C. Wright Mills entitled “On Intellectual Craftsmanship.” It offers a number of ideas that have served me well over the years. The most important idea appears at the beginning of the essay, where Mills writes that “the most admirable thinkers ... do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other ... you must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work: continually to examine and interpret it. In this sense craftsmanship is the center of yourself.” Though I did not intend to pursue a career as a



scholar at the time, the principles Mills presents are applicable to whatever life one chooses to lead. The idea of regarding one's life's work as a craft is, in my view, the key to success. It means diligently and persistently developing one's skills, even when there is no immediate professional reward for doing so. It means integrity and professionalism in every aspect of one's life and one's work. It also means a whole-hearted, unwavering dedication to work that enables one to persist even when confronted by discouragement and temporary set-backs.

I learned these principles at AUC, and I have drawn on them many times in my career. They played a particularly important role in my decision to join Parliament. Many Egyptians are cynical about our Parliament, believing it to be a weak institution that only ratifies decisions taken by the President. I must admit that I shared this view for many years. When I first entered AUC, I had no political ambitions whatsoever. My goal was to become a University professor. Yet when the multi-party system was consolidated in the early 1980s, new opportunities emerged for building a strong and effective democracy in Egypt. At that time, my decision to run for a seat in Parliament was based on three considerations:

First, I felt a strong obligation to participate in the decision-making of my country, rather than simply sit on the sidelines and offer criticism. I was fully aware that our Parliament had many flaws. Yet an institution is not an impersonal monolith. It is made up of individuals, who determine its character and behavior. If enough dedicated individuals enter Parliament, it will become an effective body that can move our country toward greater democracy and justice. As I learned at AUC, dedicated individuals can make a difference in any institution.

My second reason for entering Parliament was a desire to apply my academic training to the many problems that confront Egypt. I was trained as a sociologist at AUC, where I acquired all the skills for objective, dispassionate analysis of society and its problems. During my research, I found myself developing solutions to many of the challenges facing Egypt, particularly in the areas of education and foreign policy. I became dissatisfied with simply writing papers about these problems and then walking away. In short, I wanted to make the transition from being an observer of Egypt's political life to being a participant. My studies at AUC trained me in the technical skills needed to be an effective participant in public life. Furthermore, my experiences there gave me the confi-

dence to believe that I could, in fact, succeed as a parliamentarian.

My third reason for joining parliament was my belief that women must overcome the cultural barriers that prevent them from participating fully in public life. When I studied at AUC, men and women were treated with equal respect. As a result, women were involved in every aspect of the University. The accomplishments of women at AUC made me aware of the enormous contribution that they could make to Egyptian public life. And yet, much of this potential goes untapped because of prevailing cultural attitudes toward women. Egypt will be able to solve its many problems only when it utilizes the talents of all its citizens. This includes encouraging women to fully participate in public and professional life.

Last but not least, AUC has always provided a setting where Egyptians can express their views openly and without fear of derision or persecution. As a result, it had become an

important bastion of tolerance and intellectual freedom. At a time when religious fanaticism has made restrictions on thought and speech fashionable, AUC has continued to provide a secure environment for the exchange of ideas. It has also produced thousands of graduates who understand the importance of free expression and who practice tolerance and civility in their daily lives.

The Women's Movement in Egypt

Now let me try to give a brief historical survey that will serve as a background to our discussion. The periodization of history is always arbitrary, but it maybe helpful to think about the twentieth-century changes affecting the roles and status of women in Egypt as having gone through four fairly distinct phases and as having entered a new period starting in 1979. The chronology in the back of this paper may help orient readers, as it summarizes major events relevant to the public role of women in Egypt.¹

From about 1900 to 1923, men as well as women appeared as prominent participants in the women's movement. Some influential women, including a princess, organized fashionable intellectual salons. Both proponents and opponents of an expanded role for women defended their views, most frequently in Islamic terms and in reference to the need to modernize Egypt. In this regard, little has changed since, and the debate is still coached in these terms, thus supporting the suggestion of a prominent Egyptian sociologist (Saadeddin Ibrahim) that in Egypt nothing is ever really dis-

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carded. Rather, Egyptian history is a process of recycling and accumulation.

The second stage in the women's movement began in 1923 with the establishment of the Egyptian Women's Union. It ended in 1935, when the process of women setting the agenda for the movement was basically completed. Upper-class women organized, marched, gave speeches, established private voluntary charitable organizations, defined issues and stacked claims. Women went abroad for higher education, schools for girls were founded, and, in 1928, women were admitted to the Egyptian National University. Feminist leaders such as Hoda Sha'rawi and Ceza Nabarawi made a point during this period of linking feminism with nationalism, but also emphasized that women had the right to personal development and fulfillment.

In 1935, the mainstream of the women's movement in Egypt began to be more assertive regarding women's rights. For the first time, the Women's Union endorsed the principle of full political equality for both sexes. As they were graduated from university, more women entered the professions. Some worked as active feminists. Others concentrated on professional development, eschewing politics for the time but, consciously or unconsciously, laying a foundation for a future political career. The question of Palestine and the need for Arab unity were new themes taken up by women activists after 1935. But traditional programs also continued, such as the effort to abolish legalized prostitution. This last effort finally succeeded, but not until 1949. In general, women became more active in public life and help set the tone for the period. Following World War II, political work was accelerated, and more strictly political groups of women were formed, especially after the death of Hoda Sha'rawi in 1947.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, social feminists, who specialized in attempts to improve social and economic conditions, vied for leadership with political feminists who advocated direct political participation by women and reform of the Personal Status Laws regulating marriage, divorce, and child custody. The feminist movement adopted, albeit piecemeal, the goals of political feminists. However, most day-to-day work fell within the scope of social feminism, by which women established and ran a variety of private voluntary social service organizations. Politically, the most important of these were in the health field, such as Tahseen El-Seha, the Red Crescent, and the Mabarrat Muhammed Ali hospitals.

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One example of their importance can be seen in the response to problems Egypt faced in the aftermath of World War II, in which these agencies were active in efforts to deal with major epidemics such as cholera and malaria. The women's associations, particularly the Mabarat, were probably more active than the government in handling these crises and they, along with the government, and some foreign help agencies, were responsible for ending the epidemics. In this and other ways, women demonstrated their value to society and supported their nationalist cause. In the process, and in a conscious exercise of linkage politics, they worked to gain support for items on their political agenda. This tactic bore fruit, but not until after the Free Officers came to power.

The 1952 revolution started a new phase in the life of Egypt. But for women, the period which began in 1935 did not end until 1956, when the new Constitution gave women the right to vote. Between 1956 and 1979, pathbreaking women participated in Egyptian public life in new ways. Egyptian women started their own businesses, entered parliament, were appointed to cabinet posts and became increasingly conspicuous and visible. An increasing number of women became active in more fields, particularly the professions. On perhaps a more negative note, the 1960s women's groups were absorbed into the only legal political organization of the time, the Arab Socialist Union, and many of the welfare activities of women were taken over by the state. For a while, the political nature of feminist activity was limited to serving the party and the state. However, even though feminist organizations were somewhat co-opted by the regime, the pace

and scope of female involvement in public life was accelerated by accumulated momentum from the past achievements, notably in education. After 1970, when Anwar Sadat became president of Egypt, this trend was given further encouragement by the regime. The president's wife, Jihan, an ardent feminist, became the focus for both blame and praise as she developed into a public personality and a force in her own right. The period which began in 1956 with women gaining the right to vote, ended in 1979. In that year, with strong presidential support, the Personal Status Laws were reformed and women were given guaranteed seats in all of Egypt's elected assemblies.

After 1979, Egypt's leading women continued to do the kind of things they had been doing throughout the century. Now, however, a new role was added: defending and consolidating established rights and protecting the position of women from erosion or wholesale attack. What was a radi-



cal and to many, outrageous program in 1923 is now partly legal, traditional, and even regarded as conservative in some quarters. But for others, all proposals to enhance the role or improve the status of women remain objectionable. The new *status quo* has been supported by, among other, the Sadat-Mubarak regime and most of the women elected or appointed to high public office. Some feminists, including many in the political opposition, however, want more substantial change in the direction of full equality. Other opposition figures, including some Islamic fundamentalists, advocate enacting legalization which would severely restrict the role of women in public life. Thus, what has been accomplished remains controversial and should not be regarded as permanent.

Women in Parliament

The first women to become members of Egypt's National Assembly in the late 1950's joined an unusual institution. Party politics and parliament had been suspended following the 1952 revolution. When the new constitution was promulgated in 1956 it envisaged a National Assembly, universal adult franchise, and an organization called the National Union to supervise and guide politics. There were to be no political parties, as they were perceived by the leadership of the country to be divisive. The Assembly was to make laws and approve the budget as in Britain, and cabinet ministers were to be subject to questioning by members of the Assembly. The Suez crisis of 1956 and related events delayed the implementation of the new constitution until July, 1957, when the new 360-member National Assembly convened for the first time. The constitution allowed the president to appoint ten members, while the other 350 were elected, two from each of the 175 districts. Two of the successful candidates were women, one from Cairo (Rawya Attia), the other from Alexandria (Amina Shoukry). Defeating men in open elections, they successfully overcame the bias among their constituents against women in politics.

All candidates for the 1957 election had been approved by the Executive Committee of the National Union, an organization created by President Nasser to specialize in policy-making and serve as the functional substitute for political parties. Parliamentary politics restarted in Egypt as a pale vestige of the frequently lively and sometimes raucous Parliament of pre-revolutionary times, which was precisely what the new regime wanted. Since that time, Egypt has had 10 parliamentary elections (excluding the 1960 selection of members for the Assembly of the United Arab Republic),

some of which (1964, 1976) have been quite animated. Women fared differently in each election. For example, eight were successful in 1964 but only two, both incumbents, were elected in 1969.

For the first time in 1979, a relatively large number of women were elected to Majlis al-Shaab, due to the creation in that body of thirty seats specifically reserved for women, including at least one from each governorate. These new seats were additions to the total number of members in the Majlis, so that men could not complain that they had "lost" anything. Thus, the new Majlis al-Shaab had a total of 390 members, 9% of whom women. Only women were permitted to contest elections for the reserved seats, but both men and women were allowed to vote. These elections involved over 200 female candidates for thirty places. In addition, two women were appointed, one in 1979, the other in 1981. Three ran against men and defeated them. In 1983, thirty-five women were members of Egypt's Majlis al-Shaab. In Majlis al-Shura, 140 of the seats were filled by elections held in 1980. The elections were on the party list system and no seats were reserved for women. Two women were on the list of the government party, however, and were elected. The remaining seventy seats, five of which went to women, were filled by presidential appointment, bringing the number of women in both houses of parliament to forty-two, which amounts to 7% of the membership.

In 1976, President Sadat introduced the multiparty system and three political parties were established. In 1979, the Arab Socialist Union was formally abolished as was the center platform or group which had represented the government in parliament, and three political parties were permitted to organize, publicize their activities, and contest elections. The largest of these, holding 90% of the seats in Majlis al-Shaab in 1979, was the government party, the Hizb al-Watani al-Democrati, the National Democratic Party (NDP). President Sadat was its first president and Hosny Mubarak its second. All but one of the women in parliament between 1979 and 1983 were listed as members of the NDP. The other two parties represented in parliament in the early 1980s were two of the three "illegal" opposition parties in Egypt. The Muslim Brothers were not permitted to form a party because religious parties are proscribed. The Wafd al-Gideed (New Wafd), the inheritor of the mantle of pre-revolutionary nationalism and legitimacy, "dissolved" itself in 1978, rather than deal with continual government harassment.

My Experience as an MP

After President Mubarak came to power in 1981, the Wafd

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Party, resumed its activities through a court ruling and participated in the 1984 elections. None of its women candidates won a seat. In these elections, over 140 women were candidates for office. Roughly 75 percent of these women competed on behalf of an opposition party, but only two were successful, both representing the New Wafd. Olfat Kamel, a veteran Cairo politician and incumbent parliamentarian and Rizqah al-Balashi, a veiled social worker from Alexandria whose candidacy was supported strongly by the Muslim Brothers, joined the thirty-three NDP women elected to Majlis al-Shaab. These two women have little in common although they are members of the same party, and they help to illustrate the diverse and sometimes paradoxical position of women in the opposition. One attracted votes from one of Cairo's slums, the other from mainly male Islamic fundamentalists. In 1987, the number of women diminished to 18 and in 1990, when the electoral law was changed once more to the individual constituency, women only garnered five elected seats and four were appointed by the president. In 1995, the same occurred and in 2000, seven women were elected and four appointed (out of a total of 454 seats)

Following the relative liberalization of 1979, it is against this background that I entered public life in 1983. This was not easily accepted by my family, particularly my uncles on my father's side, drawing on the notion that "politics is a man's business" but I resisted and was ostracized for some time. I ran for the women's seat in 1984. At that time, the electoral system was based on the party list system, with 30 seats reserved for women. (This was the first multi-party election since the 1952 Revolution which had abolished all parties.) Political and professional experience in addition to family reputation were major factors which played in my selection as a candidate on the party list. However, what was equally interesting during the campaign, is that apart from using my academic experience as a political asset (ordinary Egyptians have great reverence for education) the use of my family's upper Egyptian background (my family originates from Kena, 60 kms from Luxor) drew a great deal of support as most of the population of my constituency which included Rod el Farag, El Sahel, El Sharabeya, Choubra, and Zawya Hamra, (what is known as North Cairo District), with a population of 3.5 million, were originally from Upper Egypt.

As a political sociologist by training, my campaigning experience proved to be an incredibly rewarding one. Being the only female on a list of 11 men, my assignment consisted of doing the door-to-door campaign. That meant paying visits to constituents in their homes which men candidates do not

do because of tradition. This opened my eyes to a society entirely different from the one I knew, where conformity to tradition was dominant. Yet, at the same time, the constituency had almost the highest number of working women but none would be seen attending electoral rallies which we held daily in different places. Their sons, brothers or husbands would tape the speeches delivered in those meetings and take them home! That is what I found out during my household visits, as the women would repeat to me every word I had pronounced in those rallies. Another discovery was the high level of politicization among the youth, (certainly much more than my elite AUC students!). What they shared in common, though, was their skeptical outlook on the validity of the whole process of elections, since, according to them, the results were known in advance! Another interesting aspect of my constituency was the relative high percentage of Coptic Christians (about 20%) most of whom had a thorough religious upbringing and were quite concerned about the growing tensions between Muslims and Christians, which had seen a peak at the time, in 1981. Although I did not gain a seat in 1984, my experience had been so rich and exciting that I lobbied extensively to be selected as a candidate for the 1987 elections.

I thoroughly enjoyed the work of parliament and felt I was doing something useful for my country.

Meanwhile I had been very active in the party, as the rapporteur of the Foreign Relations Committee, a contributor to the party newspaper with a weekly column which was an important outlet for non-conventional opinion partaking in a variety of national regional and international issues. I considered that writing organizing and joining different NGO's such as the Arab Human Rights Organization, were as meaningful as running for office. So once again, I ran in 1987.

The reserved seats for women were dropped but proportional representation using the Party List electoral system was kept. I was placed high enough on the list (no.3) which gave me a reasonable chance of success. But although I was announced winner in the evening newspapers the day the results were announced, the next day my name had disappeared from the morning papers. The reason given was that there was a mistake in the computer count! (Quite reminiscent of the Gore/Bush campaign, one could say!!) In any event, it was quite clear that with the rules stacked in favor of the ruling party and manipulated results, it would have been hardly conceivable to let a woman in the opposition garner a seat in the elections! There was no such a precedent since women had the vote in 1956.

The President has the prerogative to appoint 10 MPs. This device permits him to appoint women and Christians, as very few of both have won office in elections, particularly

File File



since 1990, when the electoral system was once again changed the individual constituency. Luckily, I was appointed to in 1990 and served in parliament until 1995 as an independent. Although parliament is by definition a democratic institution, Egypt is not a full fledged democracy and, for the most part, extra parliamentary authorities expect compliance. It is within this atmosphere and hemmed by these constraints that I was functioning as a parliamentarian. Many of my colleagues were more frustrated than exhilarated by playing the role expected of them. For my part, I thoroughly enjoyed the work of parliament and felt I was doing something useful for the country. I served on the Foreign affairs Committee as a full member and chose the Committee on Education, second, due to my professional background and expertise. This has allowed me to make a substantive contribution to debates, discussions and legislation. Circumventing bias against women in politics meant that much more work and participation was expected than from male colleagues.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the activities which always attracted me has been working with voluntary associations. I helped found several of them such as the Civic Forum, the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights, etc. The reason was my strong belief that for the process of democratization to go forward, a robust civil society was essential in order to foster a culture of democracy. Over the past several decades, the government of Egypt has tried to control these organizations through a restrictive law (Law 32) introduced in 1964. Consequently I considered that one of my contributions in parliament was to raise consciousness among the members on the obstacles to development that government encroachment on these organizations were causing and I persistently called during five years for associational autonomy. Today, there is an amended law, hopefully less restrictive, which will be soon discussed in parliament. In other words, by offering alternative ideas or plans, one could help change conventional notions of behavior regarding a wide range of issues, particularly issues of special interest to women.

I found out that by engaging in organizational work, one can try to change what people in Egypt do, and directly influence behavior. On the other hand, through my academic affiliation I have worked to change how and what people think, to influence ideas, and, through ideas, to alter future behavior. So, in addition to writing, and through my teaching at university, I have tried to influence my students directly and feel greatly rewarded when some of them look up to me as a role model. But what is more important is to encourage students to think on their own. Today, I devote an enormous amount of my time to the non-governmental organization, that, together with many friends and "concerned citizens", I have founded in 1995 and preside: the Association for the Advancement of Education which has received observer status by the ECOSOC of the UN. This came as a result of my thorough involvement as a member

of the Parliamentary Committee on Education, which allowed me to travel all over Egypt to visit schools. This experience convinced me that most of Egypt's problems start with education and that no progress could be made without improving education. I have therefore made a trilateral agreement between my association (AAE), the Ministry of Education and the Egyptian Swiss Fund for Development to upgrade basic services in 100 government primary schools in poor areas.

Future Prospects

Future prospects for women depend on the overall prospects for freedom for interest groups and political parties to organize, and for individuals to exercise freedom of speech, press and assembly. While individual rights are important, the history of the women's movement in Egypt, illustrates the centrality of organization. The Egyptian government has done a great deal to improve the status of women in Egypt and women are using the opportunities afforded to them by the Mubarak regime although the signals relative to democracy and freedom to organize have been ambiguous. So for example, this year's election has seen the first elections since 1952 to be conducted under judicial supervision. However, the NDP (ruling party) although it suffered its most severe set back since its inception in 1978 (it gained 175 seats out of 444) has managed to keep its dominance in parliament (87% of seats) by putting pressure on most of the independents (213) to re-join its ranks. On the positive side, however, the opposition press (as well as the government press) has been able to publish and criticize the NDP policies as well as the personnel associated with the regime. On balance, one can say that the ability of women to continue their role and face the challenge of trying to strengthen civility and tolerance in society as a whole, whether in politics or in non-governmental associations, appear relatively secure, guaranteed by law, presidential support, especially by Mrs. Mubarak², and the women's own enthusiastic efforts to help build a civil society and a democratic system.

In conclusion, I can say, that my experience as a participant in public life has been a busy, multifaceted and rewarding one. I believe public service has made me, if not a better Egyptian, perhaps a more grateful Egyptian - realizing what a privileged country Egypt is and what creative, friendly, tolerant people Egyptians are. We have every reason to be proud of past accomplishments by both men and women, and have confidence in our ability to meet successfully the challenges ahead.

END NOTES

1 Most of the discussion on the historical survey of Egyptian women in politics is adapted from Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life*. AUC Press. 1987

2 Mrs. Mubarak, has used all her clout to press for more rights for women and has lately founded (in 2000) the National Council for Women based on her firm belief that women should learn how to exercise their rights.

Major Events in Egyptian Feminism, 1873-2001

1873 The first government primary school opened for girls.
1892 The magazine *Al-Fatat*, the first women's magazine published in Egypt, was started in Alexandria by Hind Nawfal, a Syrian Christian.
1899 Qasim Amin published *Tahrir al-Mar'a* (Women's Emancipation).
1908 Fatima Rashid launched the first women's magazine to be published by an Egyptian Muslim, *Majallat Tarqiyat al Mara*.
1914 The educational Union of Women founded in Cairo.
1919 Hoda Sha'rawi led demonstrations of veiled women in support of the Egyptian nationalist cause, the first demonstrations of their kind in Egypt.
1921 The first government secondary school opened for girls.
1923 Hoda Sha'rawi attended the meeting of the International Alliance for Women in Rome. She, and the rest of the Egyptian delegation, returned to Egypt unveiled. Many other women began to follow their example.
The Egyptian Women's Union was established in Cairo by Hoda Sha'rawi in March.
1924 The new constitution approved. It included the principle that elementary education was to be free and obligatory for both sexes. The 1924 constitution did not give women the right to vote.
1925 The first Egyptian girls to be sent abroad by the government for advanced degrees left for England. *L'Egyptienne* magazine, edited by Ceza Nabarawi, was published in French by the Egyptian Women's Union.
1925 *Rose al-Yussuf*, which came to be the leading weekly political magazine in Egypt, was founded in Cairo by Fatma al-Yussef, a former actress.
1928 The first female students entered Cairo University.
1935 The Egyptian Women's Union advocated for the first time equal political rights for women.
1937 *Al-Masreyya*, a fortnightly periodical, was published in Arabic by the Egyptian Women's Union.
1938 The Eastern Women's Conference held in Cairo. The chief issue was the question of Palestine.
1939 The Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs established.
1944 The Arab Women's Union founded in Cairo. Hoda Sha'rawi elected president.
1945 The United Nations founded, with Egypt as a founding member. World War II ended. The League of Arab States founded, with Egypt as a founding member.
1947 On December 12, 1947, Hoda Sha'rawi died at the age of 68.
1948 A woman's political party, *Bint al-Nil*, established in Cairo by Mrs. Doria Shafik.
1949 Legalized prostitution abolished, culminating a 35-year campaign by Egyptian feminists.
1951 Members of *Bint al-Nil* briefly occupied parliament demanding representation for women.
1952 The Free Officers' Revolution. The Constitution abolished and political activity circumscribed.
1956 The new constitution promulgated giving women the right to vote for the first time in the history of Egypt.
1957 Parliamentary elections. The first women elected to parliament.
1961 A government decision to make higher education free.
1962 Dr. Hekmat Abu Zeid was the first woman appointed to the cabinet, as minister for social affairs, serving until 1965.
1967 Egypt, Syria, and Jordan defeated by Israel in the June War.

1970 Anwar Sadat replaced Gamal Abdel Nasser as president of Egypt.
1971 Dr. Aisha Rateb became the second woman appointed to the cabinet as minister for social affairs. A new constitution promulgated and perceived by many as more conservative than the old one, as it emphasized women's role in the family.
1973 The October War with Israel.
1976 Parliamentary elections held using the political "platforms" of right, left and center, according to a law issued in November 1975. The center, government, platform won 82% of the seats.
1977 In January, the government announced cuts in subsidies for such basic staples as bread and cooking oil. Riots ensued and the subsidies restored. In a cabinet reshuffle in February, Aisha Rateb replaced as minister for social affairs by Dr. Amal Othman, who became the third woman to serve in that post.
1979 The electoral law amended to provide for 30 reserved seats for women in *Majlis al-Shaab*. The law of local government amended to provide that 10% to 20% of the seats on all local councils be reserved for women. The Personal Status Laws amended, reforming rules pertaining to divorce, alimony, and child custody. Dr. Aisha Rateb became the first Egyptian woman to be appointed ambassador.
1980 *Majlis al-Shura* was formed with 7 women among its 210 original members.
1981 President Sadat ordered over 1500 people arrested for political as well as domestic security reasons. Several women were among them.
1985 In May, the Higher Constitutional Court declared the 1979 amendments to the Personal Status Laws unconstitutional on procedural grounds. In July, *Majlis al-Shaab* passed new amendments to the Personal Status Laws which were almost identical to the 1979 amendments. First Lady went to Nairobi to represent Egypt in the women's conference.
1987 Parliamentary elections. 18 women became MP's, 14 elected and 4 appointed by the President.
1988 The establishment of the Mater i,nity and Childhood Council.
1990 Parliamentary elections.
1994 Population Conference held in Cairo.
1995 Beijing Conference for women development. Parliamentary elections: 9 women became MP's, 5 elected and four appointed by the President.
1996 The construction of 3000 one-class schools to fight women's illiteracy.
1997 The allocation of a part of the Egypt's budget for women's development and the inclusion of this project in the country's five-year plan (1997-1998/2000-2001). The appointment of the first woman as Deputy of the People's Assembly, *Majlis al-Shaab*.
1998 The appointment of the first woman in the Administrative Prosecution Office, *al-Niyaba al-Idariyah*.
1999 The law of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) amended. The appointment of the first woman as secretary of Giza Zone. The appointment of the first woman as head of a village in South Sinai governorate.
2000 The establishment of the National Council for Women (NCW) by presidential decree. The amendment of the Personal Status Law allowing women to have the right of "Khol'a," or divorcing themselves. Parliamentary elections: 11 women became MP's, 7 were elected and 4 appointed by the President. The First Arab Women Conference held in Cairo.
2001 The National Conference for Women.



What are Quotas?

The core idea behind quota systems is to recruit women into political positions and ensure that women are not isolated in political life.

Quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least a "critical minority" of 30 or 40 per cent. Quotas for women entail that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body, whether it is a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee or a government. The quota system places the burden of recruitment not on the individual woman, but on those who control the recruitment process. The core idea behind this system is to recruit women into political positions and ensure that women are not isolated in political life. Previous notions of reserved seats for only one or for very few women, representing a vague and all-embracing category of "woman", are no longer considered sufficient. Today, quota systems aim at ensuring that women constitute at least a "critical minority" of 30 or 40 per cent. Quotas may be applied as a temporary measure, that is to say, until the barriers for women's entry into politics are removed.

Most quotas aim at increasing women's representation, because the problem to be addressed usually is the under-representation of women. This is particularly relevant since women constitute 50 per cent of the population in most countries. A quota regulation may, for example, require that at least 40 per cent of the members of a committee are women.

Quota systems may also be constructed as gender-neutral, which means that they aim at correcting the under-representation of both women and men. In this case, the requirement may be that men as well as women should constitute 40 per cent of the members of a committee, or that neither gender should occupy more than 60 per cent and no less than 40 per cent of the seats.

Quotas to help men into certain positions may be used in sectors with an overwhelming representation of women, for example, in social work. But even in this sector, men occupy the majority of leadership positions; thus quotas are aimed more at getting men into education and into entry-level positions in this field. There are, however, rare examples of gender-neutral quota systems to help men into politics, for example, in the Socialist People's Party in Denmark, a party with many active women. In this discussion we focus mainly on quotas for women.

Quotas are a much debated issue among both men and women around the world. Opinions vary among women regarding the effects, fairness and repercussions of using quotas to increase women's representation. In August 1997, International IDEA gathered women MPs from around the world to discuss this issue within the broader context of women's effectiveness and participation in politics.

Pros and Cons

Various arguments have been set forth for and against the introduction of quotas as a means to increase the political presence of women. Some of the pros and cons include:

Cons

- Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference in it;
- Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected;
- Quotas imply that politicians are elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications, and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside;
- Many women do not want to get elected just because they are women;
- Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within party organizations.

Pros

- Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from acquiring their fair share of the political seats;
- Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women;
- Women have the right to equal representation;
- Women's experiences are needed in political life;
- Election is about representation, not educational qualifications;
- Women are just as qualified as men, but women's qualifications are downgraded and minimized in a male-dominated political system;
- It is in fact the political parties that control the nominations, and it is not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected;
- Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, but only temporarily.

Two Concepts of Equality

In general, quotas for women represent a shift from one concept of equality to another. The classic liberal notion of equality was a notion of "equal opportunity" or "competitive equality". Removing the formal barriers, for example, giving women voting rights, was considered sufficient. The rest was up to the individual women.

Following strong feminist pressure in the last few decades, a second concept of equality is gaining increasing relevance and support: the notion of "equality of result". The argument is that real equal opportunity does not exist just because formal barriers are removed. Direct discrimination, as well as a complex pattern of hidden barriers, prevent women from getting their share of political influence. Quotas and other forms of positive measures are thus a means towards equality of result. The argument is based on the experience that equality as a goal cannot be reached by formal equal treatment as a means. If barriers exist, it is argued, compensatory measures must be introduced as a means to reach equality of result.

Source: <http://www.idea.int/women/parl/ch4b.htm>



Palestinian Women:

Political Activism Since Oslo

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Palestinian women occupy a special place in Arab women's political history because of their dynamic involvement in the long Palestinian struggle. Similar to the case of women in the Algerian Revolution, Palestinian women's participation in the nationalist struggle provided an historical opportunity for their social and economic liberation (Hiltermann 1991; Kawar 1996; Peteet 1991; Sabbagh 1998). On the other hand, the Palestinian women's case is a good example of how the political context mandates parameters of women political participation and their struggle for equality.

This paper will give an overview of developments in Palestinian women's participation in political life since the Oslo agreement and the return of the PLO to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Oslo agreement helped redefine Palestinian women's activism by creating an environment of state formation and civil society development and by availing funding both to the secular non governmental organizations (NGOs) and to women's development projects undertaken by the Palestinian Authority (PA). In fact, the Palestinian women's case is a good example of how the Northern donor community impacts NGO activism in the Arab region, specifically those groups committed to secular change. This is particularly important to the Palestinian women's movement which shares with other Arab women's movements an underlying consensus for an international secular ethos untied to the traditional Islamic norms (see Haddad and Esposito 1998, 50-52).

The advent of Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations was a momentous development for Palestinian politics in that it unleashed energies for state formation, economic development, and democratization in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. With the demise of mobilizational politics following Oslo, women's NGOs rose to the forefront of political activism alongside other progressive institutions. These organiza-

tions are part of a rising Arab NGO movement which is led by a younger generation of urban professionals, who have become disenchanted with stagnant political parties and trade unions (Korany, Brynen and Noble 1998). A number of Palestinian women's centers, led by the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, the Working Women's Society, and the Women's Legal Counseling and Aid Center, exemplify this phenomenon as they stepped into a leadership vacuum left by the weakened faction-sponsored federations of women's committees of the 1980s. As to the returning diaspora-based GUPW, it has always been an essentially nationalist mobilizational organization, therefore, unable to adapt to the demands of project-oriented political and economic development.

Concurrently, on the PA level, women's activism in the area of development is being carried out by women's development offices in several of the ministries, led by the General Directorate of Gender Planning and Development in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. These offices are working on gender awareness of PA personnel and mainstreaming gender in Palestinian development projects.

It is commonly known that the donor community has become a fact of life in the Palestinian arena since Oslo, they now form the financial backbone of West Bank and Gaza's economic and political development projects, including those by women's NGOs and the PA's women's offices (Palestine Human Development Profile 1996-1997, 31-35; Partners in Peace 1996). Generally, Northern involvement in the development of civil society is a phenomenon evident in many countries of the South, and has, therefore, produced important theoretical concerns in the development literature about loss of autonomy by Southern NGOs and the problem of sustaining development (Fowler

تتظاهري ضد الاحتلال أي نعم .. لكن
تتظاهري حتى تطالبي بحقوق
المرأة فهذا من سابق المسجلات !!

*You demonstrate
against the Occupation,
o.k. ... as for demanding
equality and calling for
women's rights, no way.*



1991, 53-84; Gyimah-Boadi E. 1996, 118-132; Hulme and Edwards 1997; Ndegwa 1994, 19-36).

It is important, however, to recognize that the Palestinian women's movement is grounded in the nationalist mobilizational experience and is, indeed, led by feminist and leftist women who were active in the resistance. There is ample evidence that during the Intifada (1987-1993) women's issues were being discussed in open forums of leftist groups, especially early marriage, forced veiling, and violence against women (Kawar 1996, 99-128; Sabbagh 1998). Clearly, however, the Palestinian women's movement has now materialized as NGOs are led by enterprising, relatively politically autonomous women who are committed to gender issues and women's empowerment. In any case, as will be suggested below, the women's movement's strategies are based on the fact of Palestinian women's economic and political marginalization not just availability of donor funding to certain objectives and strategies.

Palestinian Women's Marginalization

Economically, Palestinian women have had very limited financial resources largely due to the traditional norms that give preference to males in employment,¹ because of the growth in public building projects, supported by donor funds especially from Japan and the United States, or in the residential building industry driven by the prospects of peace (Roy 1999) income, inheritance, property and credit. In addition, under the Israeli occupation, the West Bank and Gaza Strip suffered from many years of low or non-existent economic development (average GDP/capita \$1304) and high unemployment. In terms of earned income, women lag far behind men in the rate of employment as they constitute 10%-13% of the labor force (Hammami 1998, 107-110; Roy 1987). Of course, in times of intense political crisis such as the 2000 Intifada, known as al-Quds wal Istiqlal

Intifada (the Intifada of Jerusalem and Independence), economic suffering increases many folds, reducing incomes but also making women's caretaker role extremely important for societal survival.

If the political situation improves, the educational data for the West Bank and Gaza Strip suggest that the prospects are good for the expansion of the female labor force. Evidence can be found in the trend toward equalization of literacy rates among the young and a relatively high percent of females in community colleges and universities enrollment (Social Monitor 1998, 24-32). This is important because preliminary data indicate that education beyond the secondary program is much more likely to be associated with employment for women than for men (Palestinian Census Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey 1996). Also, education is associated with lower fertility and lower early marriage rates (Moghadam 1993, 122-31).

Improved educational opportunities for Palestinian women are likely to increase their public roles both as members of the labor force and as participants in NGOs.

Politically, Palestinian women's marginalization is evident in the top political positions. In the early ministerial appointments of the PA only two were women: Um Jihad, long-term chief of the PLO's social welfare program who is Minister of Social Affairs and Hanan Ashrawi who was given the Ministry of Higher Education portfolio (but has since resigned). Below the top ministerial level, only a handful of women achieved the level of General Director, ranked third to Minister and Deputy Minister and sometimes heading a department. Furthermore, although there is no hard data on membership in the Palestinian negotiating teams, women have been invisible — apart from Ashrawi and a few others who participated briefly at the start of the negotiations (Ashrawi 1995). All in all, according to data reported by the Women's Affairs Committee (1999), women occupy no more than nine percent of high legislative and administrative posts in the PA.

In the legislative and presidential elections, held in January 1996, only five women (5.6%) were elected to the 88-member Palestinian Legislative Council, representing a decline (from 9%) in the representation of women in the faction and quota-based Palestine National Council—the representative body of the PLO. Interestingly, in the presidential elections, the Palestinians made an unprecedented step in the Arab world when Samiha Khalil, a well-known charitable society female leader, ran against Arafat. The main political reason for the low number elected to the Legislative Council is that Fateh and the two leftist factions who ran candidates, Fida and the People's Party, nominated few women. Arafat's strategy upon his return to the Palestinian territories has been to consistently patronize notable clans and to conform

to the pervasive conservative social environment in order to maintain support for the peace process.² The other related reason is the adoption of the single-member-district electoral system, known to be disadvantageous to women (Matland 1998, 74-88).

It is difficult to know if nominating more women would have increased their number in the Palestinian legislature. Public opinion data suggest that women (48% of the voters) might have been more likely to support female candidates than men. One survey, for example, showed that women were much more likely than men to think that they should be in the legislature and that their presence is important in order to gain women's rights (Jad 1996). Conservative social norms, however, would have remained an obstacle to voting for women, as appears to be the case in some of the other Arab nations (Baaklini, Denooux and Springborg 1999, 129, 150, 164, 202, 217).

It is interesting to note that the PLO leadership continues to extend verbal support for bringing women into decision making roles even though it has generally failed to make that a reality (Abu Ali 1975; Kawar 1996; Khalili 1977). A recent PLO Central Council resolution, for example, reiterated commitment to: "work to enhance the role of Palestinian women in all spheres of nationalist work and widen the participation of women in all decision making circles (al-Quds February 4, 2000). In any case, the results of the first Palestinian legislative elections became a call for action by the women's leadership in the GUPW, the women's committees and the women's centers. They accurately saw the relative exclusion of women in these initial steps in state formation and democratization as a failure to capture gains from their history of contributions and sacrifice for national liberation. The consensus following the 1996 legislative elections was that the women's movement must draw on donor funding to enhance women's political education and be very active and visible in advocating women's rights.

Women's Movements Strategies

The Palestinian women's movement is engaged in a multi-sided approach led by the women's centers and focused on raising awareness of women in the areas of democratic rights, women's legal rights, and gender analysis of issues. There is also a great deal of advocacy work, meetings with PA officials, legislative deputies, and faction leaders, and the mass media. These activities serve strategic gender concerns in that they seek, in Molyneux's (1986) words, "the removal of institutionalized

forms of discrimination," "the establishment of political equality," and "the adoption of adequate measures against male violence and control of women" (283-84). This contrasts with practical gender concerns that focus on services such as the operation of a health clinic for women, for example.

A major target group of civic education and gender-training workshops are women in rural areas and small towns, reflecting donor interest in rural development. It is important to note, however, that the organizers' nationalist work also taught them that women in the more remote areas require more attention, having fewer opportunities for political participation than those in the cities or on college campuses. Female youth are especially targeted for leadership training through the ongoing Women's Affairs Committee's Sanabel program for 14-20 year olds. Another important group are school teachers because of their important socializing profession. These workshops, engaging both men and women, have been successful in enrolling hundreds throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In all, numbers provided by annual reports show an extensive outreach effort engaging hundreds of women each year through these educational workshops and also through their legal and social counseling programs and crisis hotlines.

Reaching working-class women, however, has been logistically more difficult because they tend to work in small workshops or at home, oftentimes in remote villages. Working-class women are found primarily in agriculture, both in its formal and informal sectors, in services, and in the garment industry (Social Monitor 1998, 44). Part of the difficulty, said head of The Working Women's Society and an experienced organizer among garment workers, is that women's centers have not incorporated a service element in their programs such as kindergartens that can facilitate reaching the grassroots. During the height of the Palestinian women's committees movement, each factional federation of committees operated dozens of kindergartens throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but most were closed or turned over to local women when the funds dried up in the early 1990s. Service can also be especially important in the competition with the Islamist movement with its extensive health and educational services.

A potentially significant, but untapped, group is the small but growing number of urban, professional women, who are employed primarily in teaching, medical arts and the public





sector (Palestinian Census Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey 1996). Growth in hiring professionals has been greatest in the public sector (Roy 1999, 71) and is largely influenced by patronage considerations, benefiting both women and men. A major hurdle to overcome, however, is the double burden that all working women face. Housework and child care can be very taxing on women's time as the region is burdened by one of the highest fertility rates in the world (Hammami 1998, 107-110; Social Monitor 1998, 10). As in other Arab countries, the female labor force tends to concentrate among unmarried women and those of childbearing age (Moghadam 1993, 43). There is also a shortage of professional childcare and the child care industry is largely private and tends to be expensive (Hammami 1998; Directorate of Gender Planning and Development, MOPIC: <http://planning.pna.net/gender>).

The Palestinian women's movement has been able to reach a wide audience through the use of the new Palestinian mass media, including state and private television and radio and the daily newspapers. The more politically-active women's centers have specialized personnel who regularly issue news releases about their training workshops and lobbying activities. The newly-created Palestinian radio and television have been hungry for programming and therefore quite friendly to the women's centers. The most ground-breaking women's media project to date is the Women's Affairs Committee's *Voice of Women*, a biweekly supplement of the West Bank daily *al-Ayyam* discussing women's issues, such as early marriage and violence against women, and also presenting women in non-traditional economic and political roles.

Evidently, the Women's Affairs Committee is the leading framework for advocating gender equality to the Palestinian Administration and the Palestinian Legislative Council. The committee is a loose network of nineteen partisan and independent feminist groups that essentially encompass the Palestinian women's movement. It includes women's rights activists from seven PLO factions, various women's centers, and professional women working in academia, especially from Birzeit University Women's Studies Unit. By favoring decentralization and networking, these groups have maintained their specialization and autonomy as members of factions and societies. Indeed, the Women's Affairs Committee has amassed a great deal of respect and standing primarily from the fact that its leaders have had a long record of leading factional women's organizations and also that some hold

important roles in the PA. For example, the committee's board includes a Palestinian Legislative Council deputy and the head of the Directorate for Gender Planning and Development in MOPIC—

who is a founding member. But their clout also derives from their ability to network and present a unified voice. This was evident in an early success when they managed to repeal a 1995 Transportation Ministry Directive that required a family member to be present when a female takes the driving test (to avoid the opportunity for sexual harassment, it was claimed).

Having feminists work in NGOs and in the PA raises the question of cooperation among women's centers and governmental women's offices and how that can affect Palestinian women's structure of political opportunity. Informally, there is a great deal of personal communication among women in the NGOs, the legislature, and the PA, dating back to their history in the Resistance. Also, as mentioned above, some in the PA are members of women's centers governing boards. On the institutional level, however, there are no mechanisms of cooperation, such as community advisory boards to PA offices. Currently, it appears that the responsibility for gender issues in the PA is primarily in the hands of MOPIC's Directorate of Gender Planning and Development.

Clearly the PA's women's offices contribute in important ways to the fight for gender equality, but how their work will proceed after independence is difficult to envision at

this stage. Their initial preoccupation after they were founded (1995-1996) has been to design their strategic plans and do some planning coordination through the Inter-ministerial Women's Committee. This attempt at coordination has been led by the Directorate of Gender Planning and Development and supported by funds from UNIFEM and UNDP (Rizeq 1997). During the early years of the transitional period, PA women's offices were preoccupied with jurisdictional struggles in their respective ministries and with raising funds from donor sources, as the Palestinian tax base is currently rather weak. (The Palestinian case may very well be

unusual in that both governmental and nongovernmental women's institutions rely heavily on donors to fund their development projects.) More recently, the General Directorate of Gender Planning and Development has turned its attention to carrying out extensive gender-sensitivity training of PA personnel aimed at both policies and strategies of action. This project is currently limited to three

The Palestinian women's movement is grounded in the nationalist mobilizational experience and is, indeed, led by feminist and leftist women who were active in the Resistance.



ministries, Agriculture, Local Government, and Labor, but it is expected to expand to other ministries later on. These gender planning activities inside the PA represent an expansion of women's political involvement which now includes pioneering feminist activism within the new Palestinian bureaucracy.

Finally, the political work of the women's movement is made possible by the body of international donors that supported the creation of the PA and the rebuilding of Palestinian civil society.

Role of Donors

The strategy of supporting NGOs as important actors for sustainable development is a prevalent model of donor funding to countries of the South because NGOs are considered closer to the people, more transparent and easier to monitor (see Fisher 1998; Hulme and Edwards 1997). By late 1990s, there were fifty-one Palestinian NGOs, including the women's centers, who were beneficiaries of donor democracy and civil society grant projects. Their activities covered a wide array of causes: human rights, women's empowerment, agricultural relief, children's rights, worker rights, former prisoner rehabilitation, small enterprise development, university education and research, media capacity building, and women's empowerment (Panorama Center unpublished data 1998).

Several countries in the Northern donor community emphasize democracy and gender-sensitivity training programs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The major donors, however, are the European Union and the United States, which lists democracy as one of four pillars of its development goals (Abu Yousef 1997; Zagha and Jamal 1997; USAID 1998). The European Union's main project for human rights and democracy in the late 1990s was the MEDA-Democracy Program which provided training for both genders but had no relationship with any of the women's centers. The United States Aid and Development Agency (USAID) locates its Palestinian democracy goal within a more general "governance" thrust. It supported several Palestinian NGOs' projects, including ones by the Women's Affairs Committee and the Working Women Society.

Prior to the peace process, Western funding for women's groups consisted primarily of helping factional women's committees to open kindergartens, and each federation of committees operated dozens in the late 1980s. These projects produced enduring relationships between feminists in the donor community and those in the women's committees,

starting, what Carapico (1997) calls, a "horizontal sisterhood" based on global feminism. Interestingly, a number of donor representatives in the West Bank and Gaza came from a history of solidarity with the Palestinian cause during the Intifada and have a more trusting relationship with some of the leaders of the women's centers. Networking is an important empowerment tool and donor funding has made it possible for Palestinian women's organizations to communicate with their sisters, regionally and internationally through electronic mail, web pages, and through international conferences sponsored by United Nations agencies such as UNIFEM.

*In the 2000
Intifada, ordinary
women quietly
participate in the
struggle through their
care giving, and
traditional roles
as mothers, sisters,
and daughters.*

A theoretical challenge for Palestinian women's centers, from the perspective of traditional interest group theory, is how to achieve sufficient autonomy from their funding sources. Palestinian analysts addressing the NGO-donor relationship suggest that donor support reduces NGO autonomy by creating new priorities and behaviors in the domestic political environment and raising concern about the sustainability of the political liberalization process (Barghouti 1994; Giacaman 1994). The Palestinian NGO community, according to Hammami (1995) and Bishara (1996), are professionalized

groups that "deliver development" which isolates the masses from partisan politics. The imprint of donors is quite evident in the emphasis on civic education and women's development, so that Palestinian discourse on women's empowerment is now filled with Western terminology; "Democracy," "gender," "advocacy," and "workshops." This is an especially sensitive issue for openly political NGOs, sometimes referred to as "political shops" such as the women's centers who can be described as intermediaries for donor democracy and gender equality agendas.

On the other hand, professionalism has meant greater organizational efficiency and movement toward strategic planning and accountability (auditor checks, quarterly and yearly reports), mandated by the donors community. One positive consequence is that open agendas and financing have increased the centers' credibility at a time when corruption has become an important issue in Palestinian politics. The performance of the Palestinian NGO movement generally receives a high rating (actually the highest along with Arafat) among various political actors such as the legislature, the cabinet, and the political parties (Center for Palestine Research and Studies, Results of Poll #42, July 28, 1999). In any case, it is extremely difficult to empirically determine where economic self-interest ends and where



ideas and issue commitment begin, especially since most in the women's NGO leadership have been active in the political struggle since their youth.

The most pressing challenge to the secular Palestinian women's movement is the general resistance of the Islamic movement to gender equality in the area of personal status law and to gender analysis of social problems in general. The Islamic challenge to secular social policies has placed gender at the center of Middle Eastern discourses on Western-style development policies. Indeed, gender has been used, as Hatem (1995: 187-208) reminds us, by both the Islamists and the government as an indicator of power. From its side, the Palestinian women's community has made sure that gender remains part of public discourse by discussing in the media such topics as women's political representation and violence against women. But personal status law remains the most charged issue to tackle in the current stage of state formation.

This is particularly evident in the confrontation between feminists and Islamists in 1997-1998 over the Palestinian Model Parliament on Women and Legislation, sponsored by the Women's Legal Counseling and Aid Center. The purpose of the Model Parliament, whose membership was both female and male, was to bring about a comprehensive debate on women's rights in such areas as education, employment and personal status and to come up with a set of basic principles to submit to the legislature. The Model Parliament was attacked in a number of Friday sermons during 1998 by clerics who branded the project as a conspiracy by the West. In particular, they rejected any consideration of a secular family law or any serious modifications of the laws that were on the books (Jordanian in the West Bank and Egyptian in Gaza Strip.)

The controversy, which was aired in televised debates between secular leftist and religious leaders, was finally defused in a strategic retreat of the women's leadership and their allies in the PLO factions. The compromise, called the Nablus Declaration, was signed by a large number of Islamic clerics and secular leaders and it held the right to discuss changes in personal status law but also proclaimed the principle that "Shariah is the only source of personal status law" (Al-Ayyam April 21, 1998)— a net defeat for the secularists. Clearly, secularization of personal status law proved to be an extremely politically sensitive and divisive issue and, according to many in the Palestinian women's leadership, an unattainable goal at the present. Indeed, in public opinion surveys in the 1990s Palestinians have

revealed a pervasive social conservatism and authoritarianism, especially in the villages, on a wide range of issues, including support for veiling, for religion-based personal status law, and discomfort with women as political leaders. (Hanf and Sabella 1996; Heiberg and Ovensen 1993).

Furthermore, there is a consensus among the women's leadership that Arafat is supportive of women's rights but that he has to appease the Islamic movement in order to maintain national unity, as he negotiates with the Israelis. Arafat typifies the modernizing Arab governments' ambivalence concerning gender equality due to calculations concerning the balance of power vis-a-vis the Islamic movement. This ambivalence is particularly reflected in the draft Palestinian Basic Law which would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex at the same time that it would uphold Shariah as a source of law.

*It is difficult
to know if nominating
more women would
have increased
their number
in the Palestinian
legislature.*

Conclusion

This paper supports Jacqueline and Wolchik's (1998) argument that women enter the process of democratic transition from a marginalized condition and then organize and make strategies that bring gender into the political arena (12-13). In the mid-nineties, the Palestinian women's movement has made great strides in framing women's issues in gender terms and in reaching a wide audience of women, girls, and educators of both sexes through civic education and leadership workshops. Organizationally, the women's centers are recognized as the leaders of the women's movement by the mass media, public authorities, and the critical Islamic movement. It is also important to note that the women's movement's visibility and credibility derive to a great extent from its ability to network across the spectrum of secular nationalist women's groups. Finally, the women's movement strategies of action have been characteristically those of entrepreneurs who, in Dahl's words, have the political "skill and drive" and make use of the "unusual opportunities" availed by Northern donor countries "for pyramiding a small amount of initial resources into a sizable political holding" (Walker 1991, 43).

There are a number of implications of these findings on the question of Palestinian women's political future. First, transnational funds and expertise have strengthened women's NGOs' independence from government (historically represented by the PLO) while increasing their accountability to Northern donors. Women in dependant-capitalist countries, such as Palestine, face the challenge of making demands in an economic and political environment in which accountability tends to be upward toward external



A women's delegation is required ... check with the boys whose turn is it to head the delegation.

actors and a state that can no longer promise extensive social welfare to its citizens. At the same time, the future Palestinian state, though expected to be low in resources, cannot be neglected in the analysis because it will be an important participant both as supporter of political norms and also as the institution responsible for mediating the ongoing secular-Islamist competition.

Second, a long term challenge is for the women's movement to become more inclusive of grassroots interests. Project-based strategies have maintained some connection between urban women, political activists and women in small town and village communities, and some of the projects are preparing young women for political organizing by developing their political skills. The project-based approach, however, has not been conducive to aggregating women's interests or building a representational organization of women, which requires party sponsorship or membership commitment. Access by women's centers to a few thousand women, though impressive, tends to be temporary due to the short tenure of these projects, and the numbers reached fall short of the tens of thousands affiliated with the factional women's organizations of the 1980s.

Fundamentally, the Palestinian women's movement would have to overcome the problem of women's economic powerlessness and the diversity of their interests, whether class, economic condition, rural-urban divide, and religiosity (see also, Abdulhadi 1998). The power of social conservatism and political religion will be particularly challenging since the contemporary Palestinian women's movement currently fits within a global governance paradigm that emphasizes secularism, project-oriented NGOs and feminist networking: Palestinian, regional and international. During the mid-

nineties, Palestinian Islamic women's activism tended to be *ad hoc* but now they are becoming more organized and might eventually pose a serious challenge to the secular women's movement. Such a challenge should not necessarily mean the inability to find a common ground for a unified political stand. Indeed, Islamist women have been known to be critical of rigidity among their male counterparts on such issues as the imposition of the veil and women's seclusion (Prusher 2000).

Finally, as the end of 2000 brought renewed Israeli violence toward the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, women's attentions have again become focused on the practical concerns of caring for families, especially those of the martyrs and the wounded. Unfortunately, the project-oriented, donor-funded organizational framework of the Palestinian women's movement has been ill equipped to gear up and deal with such a crisis, apart from Internet activism which disseminates information and urgent messages calling for support. In the 2000 Intifada, ordinary women quietly participate in the struggle through their care giving, traditional roles as mothers, sisters, and daughters. As in other times of crisis, Palestinian women's political participation acquires the character of being at once critical to national liberation but also invisible to decision makers and the media.

- END NOTES**
1. Due to these traditional gender roles, women in the blue-collar workforce have not benefitted
 2. For references on gender and the Palestinian presidential and legislative elections of 1996, see Documentation of the 1996 Palestinian Elections in Terms of Women; Jad 1996.



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Jordan: Women and Politics

Rana Hussein

Journalist and Human Rights Activist

With an expected call for parliamentary elections this fall, former women candidates look with mixed expectations at their chances of winning seats in the 80-member Lower House. "I am planning to run for the upcoming elections no matter what the outcome of the draft elections law was," stated Toujan Faisal, who in 1993 was the first and only woman to make it to the House. Faisal, who repeatedly charged that vote rigging in the 1997 elections caused her defeat to her opponent Nayef Mola for the Circassian seat in Amman's Third District, vowed to run this fall "even if I know that fraudulent activities will occur like last time." "I believe the vote rigging... in 1997 was a success, and it will be my success again if I run this time and they forge the elections so that I lose again," Faisal charged. She said fraud would only serve to strengthen her political standing. Critical of the parties and individuals who boycotted the 1997 elections as well as those who intend to sit out the coming elections if the Elections Law is not amended to their liking, Faisal said: "Everything that these parties and individuals are doing is a waste. The true work is for these strong parties to participate in elections and if they lose, they will prove that there was fraud in the elections."

But for former candidate and journalist Fardous Masri, "without amendments to the Election Law's one-person, one-vote system and other election regulations, there is no point in women contending seats in Parliament." "In my humble opinion, I do not believe that any woman will reach the Lower House under the current Elections Law because the law as it stands strengthens tribalism," she said. Election analysts have repeatedly criticized the one-person, one-vote system stating that it strengthens tribalism, does not insure demographic balance and limits voters to make one choice instead of voting for several candidates. Masri, one of 17 women who ran unsuccessfully in 1997, added that poten-

tial women candidates also find themselves hampered by the lack of financial resources. "Why should I waste my limited financial resources in running for elections that I know I will lose because of several factors?" Masri asked.

The last three elections [in 1989, 1993 and 1997] proved to be a major setback for women, with only one of the 32 women who ran during those years managing to clinch a seat. Analysts have attributed women's failure to the one-person, one-vote system, lack of financial resources, tribalism and imbedded cultural beliefs that sees no place for women in the political arena and still portrays women as housewives whose only job is to raise children and run their households. "One deputy from my own Fifth District assured me that there is no need for me to run because he has information from the government that no woman will win this time," Masri said.

For former Senator Na'ela Rashdan who went through the disappointing election experience back in 1989, discrimination was also embedded in the political parties. "The party was so surprised that I decided to run for elections and they thought I was joking, but when they sensed my seriousness, they decided to support another male member and told me to run on my own," Rashdan recalled. The party's attitude was not the only factor against her decision to enter political life a decade ago. She says women themselves were also a factor. "When I would ask women who would they vote for, they would tell me their husbands or their tribes did not decide yet who to vote for," she said. Rashdan, who will most likely refrain from running in the upcoming elections, stressed that the only solution for women to win in the upcoming elections was a "temporary quota." "Women need a temporary quota in order to convince people that they are capable of doing the job. Then, in the future,

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women will not need a quota and will be elected based on their performances under the dome," she explained.

Many candidates complained during the 1997 elections campaign, that their opponents collected many of the voting cards and distributed them to voters after offering them several incentives to vote for them. The incentives ranged from promising voters jobs, to university admission for their relatives, and sometimes, voters were obliged to vote after being invited to a "mansaf" by the candidates.

Others charged that several voting cards were distributed to the same person at different polling stations, that voting cards were issued to army personnel (military personnel are prohibited from voting in Jordan), votes were cast in the names of deceased individuals and bogus voting cards were issued. Communist Party member Emily Nafaa, who ran in 1997 in the Third District for the Christian seat, said she was undecided about running again. "My decision to run is a party decision, and it is too early now to decide, especially amid several reports that the elections might be postponed or that the mandate of the Lower House might be extended," Nafaa said. She added that she favors running because women's presence in Parliament is of "extreme importance." "We have been lobbying for better representation for women in the Lower House because there are many legislative issues that women need to tackle," Nafaa said. Nafaa was referring to efforts by women groups and activists calling for a better representation for women in the Parliament, mainly allocating a 20 per cent representation for both genders, which many described as a quota under a new name.

This demand caused a controversial debate in the media and meetings among supporters and opponents of the quota system in Jordan. Head of the Lower House Legal Committee Ghaleb Zu'bi, who agreed in principal that women should be present in the Lower House, objected to the 20 per cent demand, or quota, which he described as being "unconstitutional." "Women should not demand a quota because quotas are unconstitutional," Deputy Zu'bi told a television program recently. Currently there are quotas allocated for Bedouins (6 seats), Christians (9 seats) and Circassians (3 seats) in the Lower House. The lawmaker justified the presence of quotas in Parliament "because of historical and political reasons." He did not elaborate.

A second states man who met with women groups to listen to their demands emphasized the need to lobby the executive authority and the parties to ensure better representation in future elections. "Only then can we change the society's cultural mentality and support our society to give women a chance to participate positively in all sectors of life and not only the Parliament," said deputy and former Speaker of the Lower House of Parliament Saad Hayel Srour. Other deputies, however, have rejected the idea of women's repre-

sentation in the Lower House to start with. "Women cannot force themselves on a society that does not want them. They are still in the beginning of their march and should first prove themselves before they consider political representation," Deputy Mahmoud Kharabsheh of the Balqa District told women activists.

However, the most outrageous and derogatory comments were those of a deputy from the Amman Fourth District during a meeting with the press and Legal Committee to discuss the Election Law. "This is a man's job...women deputies will cause distraction to male deputies and stir trouble when male deputies instinctively looked at their breasts ... women could jeopardize their honor by going out late at night to take part in an "attwa or sulha" - social activities or Bedouin customs whereby a person plays as an intermediary or a middle man to bring two opposing sides together. If my daughter stayed out till late night I would shoot her myself."

Nafaa begs to differ stressing that "women's presence in Parliament is one form of democracy and openness to the outside world." "If I do not run for the elections, I am going to devote myself to question all the deputies who made promises and the ones who will make promises for women in their upcoming elections which they forget once they reach the House," Nafaa added.

Rashdan agreed stating: "We should start questioning all these deputies who are rejecting women's presence in Parliament, about the unfulfilled promises which they made during their election campaigns." Other demands, similar to those of the opposition parties, included canceling the one-person, one-vote system, increasing the numbers of seats in the Lower House to 120 and securing a demographic and geographic balance among the 21 electoral constituencies.

The demands were backed by a petition signed by over 15,000 individuals late last year, supporting women's representation in future parliaments, presented to the current Lower House for consideration. "The women's sector is determined to lobby for women's representation in the Lower House, and we are planning to focus on several highly qualified women who are socially and politically experienced," said Salwa Nasser, NGO Coordinator at the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW).

Whether or not a women's quota is realized ahead of national elections, expected next fall, the fact remains that the women's experience has been a discouraging one, and a considerable disincentive for their future participation. Although it is too early to calculate how many women will run, prospects for their involvement appear bleak. "We have been contacting many women pioneers to know if they are planning to present themselves as candidates, so far, no one has been able to give us an answer," Nasser said.



Round Table

Women's Role in Politics: The Quota System

Myriam Sfeir

Women's Role in Politics: The Quota System was the subject of a round table discussion held at the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World last March. The participants were Azza Sharara Baydoun, Iqbal Doughan, Najla Hamadeh, Mona Khalaf, Linda Mattar, Joseph Moawad, and Fawwaz Traboulsi.

- Are you for or against the quota system? Why in both cases?

Najla Hamadeh: Women's weak political participation in Lebanon is a symptom of the current political system based on family, regional and sectarian representation which is preventing women from entering the political arena. Moreover, in light of the current political situation, women are focusing on Western imports and are preoccupied with Western thought and modernity. I strongly believe that when you concentrate on one thing you tend to forget all the other things. Women are taken by the West and Western thought so they tend to think that wearing Western clothes, studying in foreign universities and earning a good salary implies modernity. They fail to participate in the political game and they forget the initial struggle and the cause that they are fighting for. The goal should not be personal benefit but collective.

Implementing the quota system will only take place when Lebanon becomes a modern democratic country in the true sense of the word i.e. when citizens come to represent their country and not their religion or family. Moreover, given that women have to an extent adopted the West as the norm, they fail to tackle pressing concerns in their society.

I am for the quota system because it imposes a role model in society. It would be ideal if these women did not come from political families (with due respect to everyone).

Mona Khalaf: I am against the quota system. It did not solve the problem of family-based political representation.

Hamadeh: It is true that the Quota did not solve anything, but my point is that if there is a quota system I am against women being selected according to their family's political history. I am for representation according to categories namely farmers, workers, professional unions, etc. If the purpose of the quota in Lebanon is to consecrate and legitimize the current political system, then I am against it. There is no point in calling for it. The quota should start changing things.

Linda Mattar: The issue of the quota is complicated. We, women, have always participated in politics because the personal in our lives is political. Even though we are not policy makers, yet, we are active participants in the political life of our country through our work with NGO's, associations, political parties, workers and professional unions, etc. We are not decision makers nor are we present in decision making positions to impose change. The idea of a quota system came about after much investigation. It was not invented by us, it is found in several countries all over the world. Despite the fact that women are productive in all spheres, namely academic, agricultural, economic, human, etc. and have pivotal roles in various sectors, they still lack decision-making powers. Moreover, in most cases they are not allowed to voice their opinion in political matters. In view of this situation, the Beijing conference highlighted the quota system as a solution to the problem. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), calls, though not explicitly, upon signatory countries that have ratified CEDAW to quicken the pace of women's participation in political decision. What does that mean? Nothing other than adopting a quota system. If you ask me how should we



Fawwaz Traboulsi

apply the quota, I will answer that I don't know, because implementing a quota requires much study and research. In Lebanon we are presently calling for a quota of 10%

I strongly believe that if we have the means to change the Lebanese electoral system, the need for a quota will disappear. In Lebanon no sect, family, or party encourages women to run for elections. Those who oppose the quota system hold that it is a shame for women to beg for a position through quotas. If so, then it is unacceptable for Christians and Muslims to beg for quotas in political representation. I think the shameful element is in the fact that we have very few women in leadership positions. Why are we afraid of a quota system if we, as women's organizations, are able to educate women on the importance of electing women representatives who have gender-sensitive political agendas?

Fawwaz Traboulsi: I think there are two points we need to consider from a purely feminist point of view. No matter what the political system is, we should adopt the quota system. The purpose of quotas is initially to ensure equal gender representation in politics and not to change the system of sectarian political representation. Had the discussion been geared towards changing the current political representation in the country, then the quota system doesn't feature in this discussion. If we want to change the current situation and adopt the quota than we should try to come up with a new electoral system.

Iqbal Doughan: What we want is democratic representation. In European countries rarely do they object about the quota because their system is different. Women want a new system.

Azza Sharara Beydoun: I am against the quota system, in view of the fact that the prevalent electoral system will reduce its desired effects to a quantitative addition of women to the parliament. Those who are bound to be elect-



Iqbal Doughan, Najla Hamadeh,
Azza Beydoun

ed are list members who pledge allegiance to its head. The prominent head lists in Lebanon are not famous for their sympathy towards women's issues and concerns. Hence, any woman who would be elected under these circumstances will have a narrow margin of political as well as legislative freedom in dealing with these issues and concerns.

If a woman deputy is to represent women, (as well as men, of course) she should be conscious of women's issues that have been put forth and elaborated in the past 50 years or so by the women's movement in Lebanon. She should, furthermore, join effort with this movement in its attempts to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. A woman deputy who is not dedicated to this formidable task is not much use to women.

Furthermore if she is not present as a "more of the same" contribution to the parliamentary life, she should be willing to approach the political, social, economic and educational issues of our society through what may be designated as a "woman's perspective". Or she should have the skill to "look at the world through the eyes of women" - as goes the motto of the Beijing conference. This is not as idealistic as it may sound; the details of its practice is documented in the Feminist literature all over the world.

A quota system for women will probably follow the same criteria as the current quota system for men. Female deputies will be distributed among sects, families and other masculine/patriarchal and "natural" affiliation. I do not think that these affiliations constitute the proper areas that allow for a political experience for women, not to mention a distinct contribution to Parliamentary and legislative life.

Traboulsi: I still do not understand why you oppose the quota system.

Beydoun: Because it is misleading. It is based on the false assumption that a female deputy is necessarily sensitive to



women's issues and concerns. Needless to say a male deputy who adopts these issues and concerns is more valuable to us than a female deputy who is devoted primarily to her masculine based affiliations.

Mattar: Why not, once we apply the quota system, we will have both men and women in parliament.

Beydoun: What for? Women are already participating - as you say - in the political life of our country in different forms and places (members and leaders in NGO's, unions, associations, etc.). It is true they are not decision makers on national issues yet, but I am not sure the quota system, implemented within the obvious constraints, will allow them to make women friendly decision, much less gender sensitive ones. I am aware of the argument claiming that the abundance of women in the parliament allows for role models for female population to identify with. We already have those, don't you think? So the question remains what for?

Traboulsi: In order to allow half the society to participate in political life.

Hamadeh: To be honest with you, I no longer feel offended when I hear people saying "Let's leave feminist concerns and women's political representation aside when discussing politics" because, nowadays, I am convinced that our problems do not stem from the fact that men are active in politics and women are not. Our situation in Lebanon is much worse than that. Most nations have shifted from a feminist approach to a gender approach. We have failed to do so and still dwell in the past. I no longer sympathize with women alone, I sympathize with all individuals that are not represented, be they men or women. Before calling for equal representation we should work at the grassroots level to learn more about what we need.

Ideally those who should reach decision making positions should be individuals whose interests cater to the majority of the citizens. Unfortunately, this is not the case as most decision makers are individuals whose interests differ from that of the majority of the population. That is why we cannot over simplify the quota issue by saying we are with or against. The problem is much more complex.

The reason why we want women to participate in political life is because the end result will lead to more democracy and will take into account the benefit of the entire population. Even though we should work hard on the end product,

however, given the current political makeup of the country the issue of gender will never make a difference.

Doughan: I am against the quota system because we are still not ready for it nor will it make a difference anyway. I strongly believe that the absence of women from the political arena in Lebanon stems from social constraints in their traditional upbringing. Women in Lebanon are faced with formidable challenges when trying to attain political power. The family as well as society make sure to drum into the head of women the fact that they are unfit for politics. We are bombarded with phrases like "women cannot understand politics" and "women and politics don't mix". Before debating the issue of implementing a quota system, we have to examine where do women stand in the decision making and in the politics of the country. As women are we required to blindly approve the status quo or to introduce

positive changes. My question is "In light of the current political system, can we make a difference? and is it feasible to enter the political arena?" Is the quota the solution to all our troubles and will competent women reach top ranking positions? If they do, will anything really change?



Joseph Moawad,
Linda Mattar

Our struggle should be a national and feminist one. We women are half the population and therefore we should also attend to the issue of stereotyping prevalent

in our society. Enlightenment and consciousness raising will lead to informed choices. Women are conditioned to believe that they are unfit for political office and this is wrong. Education and action are key elements that will lead to women's empowerment. Moreover, forming a pressure group is essential and training women on leadership skills is a priority.

Joseph Moawad: This issue has been discussed endlessly and I don't know what to add to the current discussion. My question now is do we want any woman, just because she is a woman, to reach top-ranking positions or do we want her to spice up political life with her innovative ideas and program? We must note that not all women are honest nor are they all interested in ameliorating women's conditions. In fact some of the most corrupt politicians were women (e.g. Benazir Bhuto and Tanso Chiller)

Traboulsi: Lets stop putting the blame on our sectarian political system. Most Western countries have adopted the quota system not because their system is sectarian and family-based but because of disequilibrium in the balance of

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power between men and women. Besides, we should bear in mind that not all women make good politicians (the same applies to their male counterparts), there are corrupt women and honest women politicians. Moreover, we can not expect all women politicians to defend women's rights. Some are uninterested in feminist concerns.

Mattar: Society is evolving democratically. That is why we need a quota system in Lebanon. The quota is a transitional solution, it can never be permanent. NGO's, political parties as well as democratic committees are expected to facilitate the ascent of competent women to top-ranking positions. Workshops should be organized by these organizations to teach both men and women the importance of electing women. Moreover, discriminatory laws should be amended. The women elected should be competent because if unfit women reach positions of power and they fail to do what is expected of them, people will no longer elect women.

Khalaf: I am against the quota system because I believe that it consecrates the Lebanese political system that is sectarian and based on family affiliation. Most women who will reach somewhere will not get there out of personal effort but because of their connections. They offer the head of the list blind devotion and in doing so they become a puppet in his hand. I believe that we should not play the game according to men's rules because the system they abide by is a failing one.

We need efficient and competent women to represent us in



parliament. We should have a political agenda and fight for it till the end. If we do not achieve the desired outcome soon, we are bound to get there someday. Hence, it is a matter of time. Jumping on the wagon should not be our priority. Our basic

problem in Lebanon is that we lack genuine national affiliation. We have no allegiance to our country. Our loyalty goes to family, sect, money, etc. Now is our chance to make a difference given that we are not yet immersed in the dirty political game of men.

Moawad: Establishing quotas for women or rejecting them is not enough. We should reflect on the means of implementing the quota system.

Khalaf: The plan of action I am calling for goes beyond the quota system, women and citizenship. It has to do with the country as a whole. We should encourage men and women to work side by side. Our aim should not be to replace men by women. We should look for competent individuals be they men or women and encourage them to work together.

Moawad: The reason why the quota system is gaining a lot of attention nowadays is because of the huge gap between our part of the world and the rest of the world. Can we impose modernity and are we ready to learn from other country's experiences in order to impose positive changes. We should concentrate on lobbying. If we all leave this room convinced that quotas are a must, then we should lobby and draft a plan of action to impose the quota system. Despite the fact that I am against a quota system, I will help out.

Forthcoming Marriage and the Arab Woman



Lebanese Women and Politics: A Comparison between Two Field Studies

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The first decade of the history of independent Lebanon witnessed the arbitrary exclusion of women from the definition of the “Lebanese” who were granted and guaranteed equal rights and duties in the Lebanese Constitution.¹ Women were denied their political rights either explicitly in electoral laws² or implicitly by holding elections on the basis of electoral lists that did not have female voters on them yet.³

As such, female participation in Lebanese politics became a subject of scholarly concern and research. However, due to the fact that discrimination against Lebanese women was not restricted to political rights, most of the published research before 1992 focused on discrimination in the Law and on how to remove it. Very few researchers raised the question about the real reasons behind the total absence of female representation in the country’s political institutions before and throughout the war.

This situation changed after the return of peace to Lebanon and the various calls for the restoration and strengthening of democratic practices. The number of researchers interested in the subject of female participations in politics increased and research witnessed an important qualitative and quantitative change especially with the availability of funds from international, regional and local institutions that worked and continue to work on increasing women’s awareness of the importance of her participation in the running of the affairs of the state. Despite this, female participation in Lebanese politics, with the exception of exercising the right to vote, is still much less than is expected and desired.

This research aims at highlighting the major factors influencing female participation in parliamentary and municipal elections by comparing the results of three field studies conducted in the second half of the nineties. The first is a study based on survey research of female voters using a stratified random sample of 300 women, taking sectarian and regional divisions into consideration in drawing the sample and on direct interviews with a sample of candidates to parliament both conducted during the parliamentary elections of 1996.⁴ The second was a study of female candidates to and members of parliament based on direct interviews with them conducted in 1997,⁵ and the third is a study of female candidates in the municipal elections of 1998 based on direct interviews with a stratified sample of the total candidates (93 candidates).⁶

The first part of this study provides a brief overview of female participation in public positions between 1953, and the present. Comparison between candidates in local and national elections on a number of variables is provided in part two. Part three presents the factors influencing this participation at the local and national levels.

I. Female Participation in Public Positions: A Brief History

A. Women In Public Positions 1953-1975

Lebanese women did not enjoy any political rights before 1952. This restricted their participation in politics to indirect means and channels i.e participation in the electoral campaigns of male candidates, in protest activities,⁷ and act-



ing as informal aides and advisors for sons and husbands. Optimism prevailed late in 1952 with the removal of all legal obstacles in the face of formal female participation in political life. This optimism did not last long. It started to fade away with the unsuccessful attempts at ensuring that all the rights provided for in the law are exercised in practice.

Apart from the right to vote, which Lebanese women exercised wholeheartedly, as indicated by the size of the female electorate in both national and local elections, other rights were not equally enjoyed in practice, mainly the right to assume public office. Between 1953 and 1972, nine women ran for parliamentary seats, some of them more than once (with a total of 14). With the exception of Mirna Al Bustany, who was elected by a unanimous vote in 1963 to complete the term of her father who died in a tragic accident, no woman ever reached parliament before the early nineties.

At the level of the executive authority, total absence of women was and is still observed in the formation of successive governments as in the appointments for the top positions in the regional administration. In public administration generally the number of female employees decreases as one goes up the administrative hierarchy (11.7% in grade four positions, less than 7% in grades two and three and less than 1.5% at the grade one level).

The picture is not brighter in the judicial authority. Women have been excluded from top and sensitive judicial positions such as the Constitutional Council and Supreme Judicial Council. As is the case in public administration, the number of women decreases as one goes up the judicial hierarchy.

The situation in the local administration was not much different. Women were excluded from positions filled through appointment not elections (the positions of Muhafez and Kaemmakam). The total number of female members in elected municipal councils all over Lebanon never exceeded 1%, out of which only two women were elected to head a municipal council (out of 390 positions). Only one woman was elected mayor (out of 1800 mayors in Lebanon) and the number of female members in all the mayorship councils never exceeded 0.05% of the total number of members.

This minimal participation by women in formal Lebanese political institutions has been used by some advocates of female participation as an evidence of the existence of discrimination against women. Such accusations and claims raise the question on whether discrimination on the basis of sex is really existent and intended or whether this level of female participation is a result of other factors? Answers to these and related questions will be provided below.

The war in Lebanon (1975-1990) did not change the situation as far as participation in formal institutions is concerned. No national or local elections were held and female

absence from positions filled by appointment continued to be the norm. The war and the changing social, demographic, economic and political conditions dictated more female participation and involvement in the political life qualitatively and quantitatively. Women joined militias and political parties, carried weapons and fought, participated heavily in protest politics, joined various organizations and associations active as pressure groups, etc. However, even in this, women were denied access to higher and leadership positions. This is highly noticeable in political parties as well as in interest groups (except in some of the professional groups, the membership of which was a prerequisite for practicing the profession such as the Pharmacist Order).

B. Women In Public Positions 1991-2001

The picture started to change after the war came to an end and the return to democratic practices. In 1991 appointments were made to fill the seats of the deceased members of parliament. Nayla Moawad, wife of the assassinated first Lebanese president after the Taef agreement was appointed. This, and the previous experience of Mirna Al Bustany, led some to comment that a woman has no chance of becoming member of parliament "unless she is in black", mourning a dead father or husband. However the elections held in 1992, 1996, and 2000 respectively disclaimed this by the arrival of three women to parliament. (see table 1).

This positive development in female representation in parliament was not accompanied by any changes in female par-

Date	Muhafazah	Number of candidates	Number of withdrawals	Number of Winners
1953	Biq	1	1	-
1957	Beirut	1	1	-
	Beirut	1	1	-
1960	South	1	-	-
1963	Mount Lebanon	1	-	1
1964	Beirut	1	-	-
	Chouf	1	1	-
1965	Mount Lebanon	1	-	-
1968	Beirut	1	1	-
	Mount Lebanon	1	1	-
1972	Mount Lebanon	4	2	-
1991	North	1	-	1 (appointed)
1992	North	1	-	1
	South	2	-	1
	Mount Lebanon	2	-	1
1996	North	3	1	1
	South	2	-	1
	Biq	2	-	-
	Mount Lebanon	3	-	1
	Beirut	1	-	-



ticipation in the executive and judicial authorities despite the demands voiced by various local and international groups and organisations. Females were even denied the right to apply for the Judges Training College during the nineties. This raised protest from various woman organizations. The judicial institution defended its position by saying that over 90% of female judges want to work in the capital and its suburbs due to family obligations which will create problems when it comes to the appointment of judges to different regions in the country.⁸ The change however started to appear upon the government's declaration in 1998 of its decision to hold the municipal elections for the first time in 35 years. In this women saw an outlet to their frustration.

A review of daily newspapers published in Lebanon during the three weeks that preceded the municipal elections coupled with investigations in the field revealed that about 500 women have made public their intention to run for the municipal councils. Only 353 remained officially in the battle of which 140 won.⁹ Many saw in these numbers a source of optimism and described it as the "woman thrust on municipal councils". However, optimism based on these figures is not rationalized. A simple calculation of ratios and percentages reveals that it is not different from the pre-war period. Three women were elected to head municipal councils and the number of female members in 708 municipal councils did not go over the pre-war 1% figure of the total number of members. What calls for optimism and may be an indicator of important developments in female participation are three phenomena. The first is the regional and sectarian distribution of female candidates. There were candidates from all sects in all areas of Lebanon and mostly in rural conservative areas than in the urban areas. Second is the percentage of those who won from the total female candidates (50% average for Lebanon and 100% in some districts in Beqa, the North and the South). Third is the fact that the number of winners in rural conservative areas was much higher than in the large urban municipalities.

These phenomena are highly indicative of change and do discredit many of the claims that the conservative traditional character of the Lebanese society is the major obstacle facing female participation in the running of the affairs of state and society. The significance of these and other indicators becomes clearer when comparison is made between the candidates for parliament and those who ran for municipal councils and the factors at work in determining the chances of each in reaching the position they ran for.

II. Comparison between Female Candidates in Parliamentary and Local Elections on Certain Variables

The following comparison aims at highlighting the major characteristics of the group of females with the ambition of becoming members of the national and local elites.

The Sectarian Distribution of Candidates

In general, the number of Christian candidates was more than that of Muslim candidates. In the parliamentary elections of 1992 there was three christian candidates and two Muslims, in 1996 there was six Christians and four Muslims.

The candidates belonged to the three larger sects in Lebanon (the Shiites, Sunnis and Maronites) with the exception of only one Catholic and one Armenian Orthodox. Explanation for this fact can be found in political confessionalism which distributes parliamentary seats equally between Christians and Muslims and proportionately between the various sects of each religion. With the sectarian minorities allocated a small number of seats, the chances of females becoming the sole representatives of their sects in parliament in a highly patriarchal society decrease. This discourages women belonging to these sects to engage in the electoral battle.

Since the law does not provide for a sectarian distribution of seats in the municipal councils, we find female candidates from all sects in the local elections with the total number of Christian candidates approaching three times the number of Muslim candidates (257 Christians vs 96 Muslims). Moreover, the larger number of female candidates was found in purely Christian and mixed areas and very few ran in purely Islamic areas, mainly those dominated by fundamentalist Islamic movements. While 53% of the Christian candidates won, the figure was 45% for the Muslim candidates with the exception of three districts (the Minieh-Dounieh, Hasbaya and Rashaya districts) which witnessed the winning of all the Muslim candidates.

The fact that two out of the three female members of the 1992 and 1996 parliaments respectively were Christians may be used by some to support a widely held belief that the Christian community, influenced by western values, is more open on the issue of the freedom and rights of women and is less patriarchal in its culture than the Muslim community. Such a conclusion provides nothing more than a distorted view of the situation. To say that Muslim society is less open in relation to women's rights and freedom doesn't necessarily mean that the Christian community is more open. Interviews with the sample of candidates in local and national elections showed that acceptance of the idea of a female running for the elections by the family and the municipal society was determined by a variety of other factors.

The Candidates Educational Level

Although the electoral law does not require more than being literate (i.e able to read and write) a major feature of the female groups of candidates is their educational level especially when compared with the male groups. About 80% of the female candidates were holders of university degrees (in medicine, engineering, pharmacy, law, sociology, political science, mass media, literature, etc.). The majority of the



remaining 20% have finished their secondary education. Those "able to read and write" were very few in number. About 15% of university graduates hold a Masters or PhD degree in their field of specialization. Education, work experience, and competence were factors stressed by the candidates as major determinants of their chances to win the battle. Besides building a personality and enhancing financial independence, these three factors improve and broaden a woman's network of public relations.

The results of the local elections supported the female candidates expectations on the role of these factors: about 95% of those elected were educated and got a sizable number of votes (ranked 2nd to 4th in the number of votes they obtained). However, the very small number of women elected in the large municipalities including Beirut despite the relatively large number of highly educated and competent female candidates indicate that the role of education and competence as determinants of electoral behavior decreases with the increase in the intensity of political struggles paving the way for a greater role for other, mostly traditional, factors.

This is supported by the interviews conducted with female candidates in the 1992 and 1996 parliamentary elections. Although the three women in the three elected parliaments since 1992 have been holders of diplomas or university degrees, the candidates have indicated that education and competence are not major determinants of their chances in the battle when compared with the role of other factors despite their importance for a good performance once a woman wins the election.

The fact that most of the educated and competent women were elected in small municipalities and in rural rather than urban areas is a significant indicator of the change in attitude towards women and their role in society in the long thought of as "conservative and traditional" areas of Lebanon. These signs of change are very promising if the small electoral district is readopted in national elections.

C. Distribution of Female Candidates on the Variables of Age, Personal and Social Status

Age of female candidates in local elections ranged between 25 and 64 years. The majority however, and especially of those who won, were under 40 years of age. Married candidates were generally beyond the stage which requires their stay at home to care for children and which may have affected negatively their ability to commit themselves to responsibilities outside their homes.

In the parliamentary elections of 1992, 1996 and 2000 respectively the age of candidates ranged between 38 and 72 years. With the exception of Bahiya Al Hariri and Ghenwa Jaloul who were in their forties when first elected, the age of those elected to parliament ranged between 55

and 65 years. The candidates in the 1996 elections had among them 5 married, 4 widowed, one divorced and two single women. The figures didn't change much in the elections of 2000.

The majority of candidates in local elections came from the middle class. Those from the upper and lower classes did not exceed 3% of the total. No more than 10% of the female candidates are members of politically active families (locally or nationally). In this we find a major difference between candidates in local and parliamentary elections.

Being a member of a politically active family is a major incentive to run for a parliamentary seat and may be a determinant factor of the results. Moreover, "inheritance of seats" by a female member of the family in the absence of a male heir was more apparent in parliamentary elections than at the municipal level. This may be either because many families refused to be represented on the municipal council by a woman or because the norm of inheriting municipal seats is giving way to emphasis on competence. Both explanations find support in our sample of candidates.

D. The Candidates' Party Affiliation and Membership in Women Associations.

What attracts attention most in the analysis of the interviews conducted with candidates in national and local elections is their negative attitude towards political parties active on the Lebanese scene. Over 90% of the candidates were non partisans and didn't believe that Lebanese political parties were ready and willing to help their female members assume decision making positions either inside the party or outside it. This attitude was shared by candidates who were members in political parties because some parties, even the most progressive, have refused to be represented by a woman, while others, mainly the fundamentalists, have fought tough and, in some instances, ugly battles against female candidates.¹⁰

Noteworthy is the fact that this negative attitude towards parties is shared by the war generation (both male and female) as indicated by field research conducted in the early nineties.¹¹ However this attitude is stronger among women than among men. In this we may find an explanation of why the majority of female candidates', even those who were allies of party candidates on electoral lists, stressed their independence. Moreover, those who stressed the positive role that political parties can play in enhancing more female participation in public life were talking about "parties" in general and not about Lebanese political parties.

A very small percentage of the studied sample of candidates in local elections are members of Feminist organizations. Despite the time and effort invested by some of those organizations to help candidates organize their campaign, most candidates complained of the little resources, mainly human, that such organizations can mobilize to help female



candidates effectively. Such complaints were voiced more by candidates running for parliament or in large municipalities due to their need for volunteers to act as observers on their part on election day.

Many of the candidates in the national and local elections were active in social, environmental, educational, health and religious organizations. Training in such civil society activities and organizations were behind the decision to run in municipal elections. However services in this field did not necessarily pay on election day for candidates on the local level as they did for those running for the parliamentary seats although they were very important in preparing them for municipal work once elected.

E. The Candidate's Decision to Run for Elections

For about 70% of the sample of candidates interviewed, the decision to run for local elections was a purely personal decision based on a belief in the need for female participation in the public sphere. The other 30% were asked and encouraged by family and friends. The majority of candidates considered their decision to participate in the elections as an attempt at changing the social stereotypes about women and their traditionally expected role. This position reflects an implicit belief in the existence of discrimination against women and in putting all attempts at participation by women in a context of gender conflict and struggle.

The decision to run on a list or independently was not a personal choice for the large majority of female candidates who preferred running on a list. Various factors intervened to limit their choices thus determining their chances in the electoral battle.

The major difference between those running for parliament and for municipal councils is that while the first group stressed the need for female participation in politics and considered participation at the local level a first and necessary step towards achieving this end, candidates in local elections considered municipal work an extension of their private sphere that has nothing to do with politics. Very few of the latter group had future ambitions to be politically active at the national level. This fact reflected a negative view of politics in general and of the nature of the political process in Lebanon in particular. In this one may find part of the explanation for the large difference in the number of candidates in national and local elections respectively.

What is shared by all female candidates is their belief in women's ability to introduce positive change first, at the level of relations within the institutions she will be joining (parliament or municipal council) and, second, at the level of work and performance. This is based on a belief in female seriousness, organizational ability and lack of readiness for compromise. Female participation will, in the opinion of female candidates, reflect positively on the performance of parliament and the municipal councils respectively.

III. Factors Influencing Female Participation at the Local and National Levels

Comparison between the experiences of candidates in parliamentary elections and those in local elections revealed that the obstacles that faced both types of candidates are very similar, while the factors that increase women's chances of being elected to parliament are different from those at work on the municipal level. Moreover, while it was possible to reach generalization on the factors at play in determining a female's chances of being elected to parliament it wasn't as easy at the local level due to regional particularities, conditions and experiences, thus making comparison more difficult except at a certain level of abstraction.

A. Factors Enhancing the Election of Women to Parliament and Municipal Councils

The major factors that play a role in increasing a woman's chances of becoming a member of parliament are:

- The traditional concept of inheritance of political seats among prominent Lebanese political families and the absence of a male heir (as evidenced in the cases of Mirna Al Bustany and Nayla Moawad).
- When the males in a politically active and influential family provide support for female candidacy as part of role distribution among members of the family (Bahia al Hariri).
- The female being a member of a politically active family who have a broad network of political and public relations.
- Support from people in power.
- Availability of financial and human resources needed to run a campaign especially in large electoral districts.
- Being of the same region and sect as that of her husband (the case of Linda Matar and Zeina Al-Ali Chahine).
- The personality of the candidate and her ability to provide services to her constituency (Moawad, Hariri).

Noteworthy is the fact that two women have reached parliament as a result of special circumstances: Maha Al Khoury Assaad won by 41 votes due to the decision by many Christian groups not to participate in the elections of 1992 and Nohad Saïd who won the battle as a result of the divisions that rocked the National Bloc party in 1996.

In sum, we find that female entry into parliament was not through free competitive elections with equal opportunities for all as it was through the prevalent traditional social structures. The door to such structures is not opened to the woman except by the man or in his absence.

The factors that served female candidates in local elections are:

- Competence and educational achievements.
- The candidate's personality and her network of public relations in her region.
- The young generation's demand for change and bringing new and young blood to the municipal councils (the majority of female candidates were relatively young).
- Attempts made by those forming the electoral lists to

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include at least one female on their list to gain the support of female voters.

- Absence of intense political, family or sectarian conflicts inside the municipal area, although these have served female candidates in few cases in which she was suggested as a compromise.
- A candidate's emphasis on her running as a representative of the municipal area and not as a representative of a family.
- The fact that municipal seats are not distributed on a confessional basis which decreased the impact of the patriarchal character of the Lebanese society.
- A candidate's political neutrality.
- Lack of male candidates due to immigration or their being employed in the public sector (mainly security forces).

Although the role of the traditional social structure is apparent in influencing the chances of female candidates in local elections, we find that it wasn't as significant as in the case of national elections.

B. Obstacles Facing Female Candidates

Interviews conducted with female candidates indicated that it was difficult to generalize. The nature of such obstacles differed between urban and rural areas, between one sect and another, between the married and the single candidate, etc. Moreover, some obstacles were not exclusive to women. They were faced by men and women alike. Such obstacles reflected the dominant political culture, the social structures and the nature of the electoral process in Lebanon. In what follows are some of the major obstacles facing female candidates. Those common to parliamentary and local elections are highlighted.

The first obstacle facing female candidates in local elections was that of the name. The electoral law requires a female candidate to use her maiden name. This posed a problem for married candidates at every stage of the elections. As one candidate put it "We lost half the battle before it even started".

A woman who is known by her married name had to reintroduce herself to her supporters. On election day she had to have enough people at every post to remind voters of who she is and which name to write. When the count started many papers were discarded for having different names. When candidates tried to bring this to the attention of authorities their pleas were neglected. Many candidates considered this an evidence of a conscious attempt at removing them from the electoral battle.

In principle, this problem was shared by female candidates running for parliament. However, no issue was made out of it since both the maiden and married name were accepted and counted. This provided another evidence used by candidates running at the local level to support their argument on the existence of a conspiracy against them.

Being of a region and/or sect different from that of her husband was another problem faced by the married female candidate. In areas witnessing tough political, family or sectarian electoral battles (mainly in parliamentary elections and in large municipalities), some women were opposed and fought on the basis of being "strangers" to the area in which they were running for elections and some of them were accused of being "agents" for the political leaders of their original sect. This highlights the negative impact of the personal status laws and the Lebanese culture on female participation in the running of the affairs of the state.

The other side of such a problem is the one faced by the single female candidate. If she wins in the municipal election and happens to marry someone from outside her municipal area, she has to resign her position. Such problems are never faced by the man.

Two other related obstacles facing female candidates are the cost of the electoral campaign and the ability to run on a list. While the cost of the electoral campaign was a major obstacle in parliamentary elections and in large municipalities it was not a major problem in small and medium sized municipal areas in the local elections. In this we find a partial explanation of the relatively greater success of female candidates in small and medium sized municipalities in comparison with their counterparts in large municipalities and in national elections. In the absence of legal controls on the financing of electoral campaigns, this obstacle will persist and its effect will continue to be felt by both sexes though more by women due to their relative lack of financial independence.

The cost of the campaign in large electoral districts made it difficult for the woman to venture on her own. Some sought running on a list which meant having to pass by the traditional structures. Very few women were able to pass such structures in a highly patriarchal society. In areas which witnessed tough electoral battles women on the lists became the victim of political compromises on election day (the case of the municipal elections in Sidon).

Moreover the interviews with some female candidates in large municipalities (mainly Beirut) who were trying to get "on any list" revealed lack of female awareness of the political side of municipal elections. This have created problems for few of them with their families, led to their exploitation on the hands of some "disguised" political groups, and eventually decreased their chances of winning.

Running on a list was not as difficult in some small and medium sized municipalities in rural areas as it was in large municipalities. The woman's chances of being included on a list and of winning proved to be higher in areas, a) dominated by one political leader (such as Bteghreen and Bneché), b) where the population was homogeneous and well off, (Rabieh), c) areas which witnessed male immigra-



tion during the war (some areas in the Chouf), d) where the young males are members of the security forces who are banned from running for elections (many areas in Akkar), e) where agreement was hard to reach among competing groups which led to the woman being suggested as a compromise (Zahlé and some areas of the western Beqa'a).

The position of some religious leaders towards female candidacy was an obstacle faced by some candidates. A comparison between parliamentary and local elections reveals a difference in the positions of various sects towards female participation in politics. Negative attitudes towards female candidacy in national and local elections or an attempt to exert pressure on female candidates by religious figures was never reported or even felt among christian candidates.

Similar generalizations were hard to reach on the position of Islamic sects. Differences are found between sects as well as among the extremists and moderates within the same sect. In general, moderate Islam does not oppose female participation in politics and public affairs despite its clear preference for the male. As revealed by the experience of Muslim female candidates, moderate Islamic movements did not publicly oppose their candidacy but tried to exclude them in practice. This appeared in a) the very small number of female candidates on the lists formed by moderate Islamic groups and b) the fact that the female candidate was the subject of political compromise on election day in areas dominated by those groups.

Extremist Islamic groups (Sunni and Shii) publicly opposed and fought female candidates by all possible means which ranged between an advice by a Sheikh to withdraw and spreading rumors that affect a female candidate's reputation and honor. This was clear in the position of extremist Islamic groups towards Mona Haddad's candidacy in the parliamentary elections and the candidacy of many Sunni females in the local elections in the North and Shiite candidates in the South.

Noteworthy here is the contradiction in the position of such groups from female candidates of the same sectarian affiliation and females from other sects. The extremist Sunni groups in the North supported Nayla Moawad and Bushra Dabaj in the national and local elections respectively. Hizbollah in the South supported the Sunni Bahia al Hariri. This contradiction in their positions reveals that such groups may accept female participation if dictated by political needs as long as the candidate is not from their own sect due to the implications of this on man's traditional position and status.

No pattern was depicted in relation to the Durze community in local elections. The granting of support to a female candidate by religious figures or withholding it from her was dictated more by the specific conditions in each area (party, family, or other forms of struggles) than by a pure religiously-dictated position on the issue of female partici-

pation. Finally, the Alawite group, mainly due to the very few seats allocated to it, rejected the idea of being represented by a woman (Tripoli).

Each of the above factors played a role in determining females chances in the national and local elections but none was by itself sufficient in explaining the results of the elections. Other important factors were: a) the Lebanese patriarchal culture which defines a woman's role in society with leadership reserved for the man and b) the role of the family in Lebanese political and public life and which still prefers to be represented by a man, especially where inter-family or intra-family divisions exist and where male representatives are available.

Despite the fact that the majority of female candidates in local elections did not run as family representatives, they were nonetheless treated as such. This indicates the inability of the majority of the voters to accept the concept of "an independent candidate" in a culture fragmented along sectarian, family and regional lines.

Two other factors were highlighted by female candidates as having a negative impact on their chances in the elections. The first is the time element, especially in the local elections. Because of the government's declaration of holding the elections, then postponing them, the majority of candidates had no more than three weeks for their campaign. The second is the female attitude towards a female candidate. As some female candidates put it "women proved to be a woman's candidate's worst enemy". Although this factor was apparent in the case of few female candidates it did not prove to be true in the case of candidates in rural areas and small municipalities who won by the votes of women and men.

Conclusion

The above comparison between female participation in national and local elections reveal differences in the formation of the female political elite at each level. The factors at work in the formation of the female elite in parliament is not that different from that at work in the formation of the Lebanese political elite since 1943. As such the arrival of three women to parliamentary seats can be considered a consecration of tradition rather than an indicator of modernization.

On the other hand, the majority of the female elite that appeared as a result of the local elections of 1998 cannot be considered a traditional one. The sources of its power were mainly education, competence and achievement, rather than support from traditional social structures. This applies to the majority of the male group as well. This can be an indicator of important changes in Lebanese society and in its attitude towards modernization and development. The fact that this untraditional female (and male) elite is concentrated mainly outside the big cities provides a source of optimism: change



Muhafazah	District	Number of candidates	Number of winners	Number of Losers	% of winners from total # of candidates
Beirut	Beirut	17	1	16	6%
	Kesrwan	27	5	22	18%
Mount Lebanon	Jbeil	21	2	19	9%
	Chouf	21	10	11	47%
	Aley	24	12	12	50%
	Metn	25	14	11	56%
	Baabda	24	5	19	21%
TOTAL		142	48	94	34%
North Lebanon	Tripoli	9	1	8	11%
	Bchari	9	3	6	33%
	Menieh-Donieh	3	3	-	100%
	Batroun	17	10	7	59%
	Koura	31	14	17	45%
	Zghorta	25	14	11	56%
	Akkar	36	18	18	50%
	TOTAL		130	67	67
Beqaa	Baalbeck	5	3	2	60%
	Western Beqaa	7	4	3	57%
	Zahleh	8	4	4	50%
	Hermel	3	-	3	0%
	Rashaya	2	2	-	100%
TOTAL		25	13	12	52%
South Lebanon	Sidon	14	5	9	35%
	Tyr	7	-	7	0%
	Jezzine	2	-	2	0%
TOTAL		23	5	18	12%
Nabatiyeh	Nabatiyeh	13	7	6	45%
	Hasbaya	1	1	-	100%
	Bint Jbeil	2	1	1	50%
	Marjeyoun	-	-	-	-
TOTAL		16	9	7	68%

is coming from below and is not being imposed from above. Since these elections were held in small electoral districts, they were more representative of Lebanese society and its demands than the national elections.

Another major finding revealed by this comparison is that the increase in female participation at the local level does not reveal a change in society's attitude towards this participation (the ratios are the same) as much as it reveals a change in the woman's view of her role, abilities, and status in society. In fact, the obstacles are more or less the same as before but the woman's readiness to overcome them is stronger today than before.

The various field studies summarized above have shown that the chances of women increase with the decrease in the size of the electoral districts. This is a fact that those con-

cerned with increasing female participation at the national level should take into consideration when discussing electoral laws.

Moreover, these chances increase with the decrease of campaign costs. As such, more pressure must be exerted on policy makers to provide legal controls on the financing of electoral campaigns. Also some provisions of the personal status laws have to be amended if equal opportunity among all Lebanese regardless of their sex is to be achieved.

Finally, our research has revealed the need for field studies that aim at evaluating female experiences at the national and local levels, comparing them and learning from them to improve female participation qualitatively and quantitatively. Organizations concerned with this may work on holding conferences that will allow members of this female elite to share experiences and exchange opinions. It is important to remember that the goal of enhancing female participation in running the affairs of the state requires a continuous process of education and training and not only a few weeks' activity before election day.

End Notes

1. Article 21 of the Lebanese Constitution of 1926. For a detailed account of this exclusion of women, see Laure Moghaizel "The Woman in Lebanese Legislation. Beirut: Nawfal Institute 1985 pp.13-19.
2. Electoral Law issued on 10/8/1950 arts 6 and 21 and the Law of 27/11/1947 regulating municipal elections.
3. Law issued on 31/11/1952 art 136.
4. See Helou Marguerite "Women and Politics in Lebanon" in the Parliamentary Elections of 1996 and the Crisis of Democracy (Beirut: Lcps), 1998.
5. Helou Marguerite "Female Candidates and Members of the parliaments of 1992 and 1996", Bahithat, vol 4, 1997-1998.
6. Helou Marguerite "Women in Municipal Elections" in Municipal Elections in Lebanon 1998 & (Beirut: LCPS), 1999.
7. Examples of such participation are to be found in the activities of feminist groups and organizations between 1934 and 1952. For a detailed account of this period, see Emile Fares Ibrahim, The Lebanese Feminist Movement.
8. The culturally set role for the Lebanese woman is considered one of the major obstacles facing her assumption of public and political positions. For more on this, see the National program for the Support of Female Participation in Political life, Beirut: René Mouawad Inst. European Union, 1999.
9. These figures were obtained from the Kaemmakamus' offices.
10. For a detailed account of this, see Helou, Women in Municipal Elections.
11. Lebanese Intellectual Association, Which Citizen? Which State?, Beirut 1992.



Women in the Lebanese 2000 Parliamentary Elections:

What Political Participation are “they” Talking About?

Bariaa Ahmar Sreih

Journalist

*In the Beginning, there was the Word.
Later, there was the Truth.
Finally, there was the Vision...of equality for women.*

No positive outcome for Lebanese women was expected of the parliamentary elections 2000 - the third elections after the end of the war and the signing of the Taif agreement. At least not to those who knew a few things about the rules of the political game in the Second Republic. However, the number of female participants was phenomenal and unprecedented in the history of parliamentary elections in Lebanon.

The stakes on women were high, but the play was unfair, unequal, and the players inexperienced, moreover disorganized. Above all, they were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea... the devil of confessional divisions and the raging sea of dollars.

Yet, even before the start signal was lowered to begin the electoral race, women were caught up in a societal campaign to support or reject “the quotas for women in the parliament,” a law that would give women a reserved proportion of parliamentary seats. Once again divisions confused them. Yet, despite uncertainty, they strode forward and engaged in battle. Were they Mavericks or visionaries?

*All the Lebanese
candidates, but
especially women,
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to intimidations,
pressure or bribery.*

The women who struggled for election numbered sixteen. There were four represented independently in Beirut: Ghada Yafi, Linda Mattar, Jamale Hermoz and Roula Hourri. Just one candidate, Ghinwa Jalloul, was fortunate enough to be included in the electoral list headed by Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, ex-prime minister at the time of the elections. Outside the Beirut area, in Mount Lebanon there were two candidates: Giselle Hachem Zard who stood independently and Gilberte Zouein, represented in the electoral list. In the northern district there were candidates MP Nayla Mouawad, Ghada Ibrahim, Layla Khazen and Zeina el Ali Merhabi. In the south, there were two candidates: Boushra Khalil (represented for the third time), MP Bahia el Hariri (once again elected deputy, after her former election in 1996 as the first Sunni woman candidate). In the Bekaa, there were three candidates: Norma Firzli (represented for the second time independently), Aklima Hamieh, and Nisreen Abdelsater.

The same number of female deputies were returned out of a total of 128 parliamentary seats, and these were yet three again - the newcomer being Ghinwa Jalloul. The increase in the number and proportion of female candidates, 16 out of 589, is a positive move forward compared with 1996, when there were 11 out of 645. All three owe their seats to men. Bahia Hariri, who is very active in parliament on education and women rights, was

File File



elected in the first place for being the prime minister's sister, and for the social work she has been doing since the eighties in the Hariri Foundation. Later, she succeeded in proving herself as an MP.

As for Nayla Mouawad, widow of the late president Rene Mouawad, although now considered as a political leader in her own right, she was also first elected as a compensation for the tragic death of her husband. In addition, Ghinwa Jalloul, a university professor, was a newcomer to the political club and perhaps made it by being on Hariri's electoral list, which rocked the votes of the capital in a real political earthquake, for various reasons.

More women were not elected due to many interrelated factors:

- A confessional political regime which offers limited choices to electors
- Inexperience in campaigning
- Infertile ground for breaking down old traditions
- Lack of solidarity between women's associations
- Poor economic resources
- Undemocratic systems

According to the Lebanese electoral law, parliamentary seats are distributed proportionately between confessions, thereby maintaining a national political balance. It has always been recognized that a parliamentary candidate also depends upon the blessing of his community's spiritual leader. The reluctance of spiritual leaders to recognize a woman's political status has been traditionally accepted for generations, while male dominance in spiritual leadership has been unquestioned.

Inexperience in campaigning pointed to the unmapped path of parliamentary elections for women. Faced with political and economic pressure, society depended upon the strength of a leader. Women were not sufficiently mature to take a strong lead and face up to their adversaries. Their speeches were too gentle.... they did not take the firm position needed on many essential issues, and they were hesitant about the implications of their new role. Electoral campaigns often remained little more than social occasions.

The infertile ground stems from local traditions and taboos. Lebanese communities traditionally view women as home-makers. The modern image of a career woman breaks away from these traditions, with all their implications. The working woman today, in many areas of Lebanese society, issues reverberating effects which inevitably "upset the boat" of local tradition, and nurture disturbances and animosity.

This did not help candidates who presented themselves in such a context. But then they did not have an alternative, such as political parties or even political currents. Some of them counted on family ties and friends but were let down at the last moment. Others were forced to recognize that although Lebanese society has made progress in terms of women's rights, it needs more time to mature democratically. So they could only lay the ground in preparation for recognition in the next round.

Apart from being divided over the quotas law project, women did not show much solidarity for each other, or for their cause. They were unable to agree on one candidate to whom they could offer all their support in their own region. And under the slogan of electing "the best" in an illusionary democracy, their (non-feminist) votes were just wasted, gone with the wind, while they were fooling themselves thinking that they were voting for "the best," regardless of sex. Women movements multiplied press conferences and speeches, but failed in forming some kind of a solid bloc that would force one candidate onto the electoral lists in each region, regardless or even according to the religion of those women.

Women were not sufficiently mature to take a strong lead and to face their adversaries.

Being elected to parliament has become a good investment for individuals in Lebanon, and men are willing to spend fortunes in the race to the parliamentary seat if they have to. And they have to, since a seat on what called "the bus" or "the bulldozer" has to be bought. Except for a few, most women did not have this kind of money, and even those who had it, misused it. Hopes for success were drowned in the raging waves of

inopportune timing and the costs effected by inexperience.

Lebanese women and men were equal for once, for being victims of the undemocratic systems in the elections of 2000. All the Lebanese candidates, but especially women, were subject to intimidations, pressure or bribery. These were the real choices of Lebanese citizens in the first election of the third millennium, and that is how they elected their MPs ...with few exceptions.

The Word was verbal encouragement to women, inviting them to join the political club. The Vision was to establish equality of rights in parliamentary elections. The fact is that there is no fertile, democratic ground to give a chance to women, nor a political decision to do so. In this same traditional society and a confused political regime, women still have a long way to go. But in actual reality, they do not stand a chance.

A Twelve Year Old Municipal President

Myriam Sfeir

Ghena Majzoub, a twelve year old student at the National Institute for Girls and Boys - Saida, was elected president of the first Lebanese Municipal Council for Children in December, 1999. According to Ms. Nigar Hankeer, coordinator of the Municipal Council for Children - Hariri Foundation, the creation of this council took place at the initiative of Mrs. Bahia Hariri, who came to know about the idea while on a visit to Tunisia. The idea appealed to Mrs. Hariri and she introduced it to the principals of various schools, as well as representatives from the Higher Council for Childhood in Lebanon, the Arab Council for Childhood and Development, the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO and the Ministry of Education who welcomed such an initiative in Lebanon. However, Hankeer maintains that Mrs. Hariri insisted on not copying the Tunisian model but molding it to fit Lebanese standards: "the Council had to fit our needs, customs, as well as traditions. Unlike Tunisia, where candidates are nominated, we have opted in favor of electing the members, the aim of the Municipal Council being to educate the children on engaging in democratic life."

As a result, on the occasion of the International Day for Children in 1999, Mrs. Hariri called upon interested individuals to come forth to found a municipal council for chil-

dren. The first municipal council was founded in Saida and given that the experience was successful, the Hariri Foundation repeated it all over Lebanon. According to Hankeer: "We currently have four councils in Saida, Tyr, Nabatieh and Tripoli. By the end of May, the Beirut and Ikleem Al-Kharoub councils will hold their elections. We are also collaborating with interested parties in Jbeil and Baabda to found such Councils there."

Hankeer asserts that it is wrong to believe in the prevalent misconception that 12 year olds are young and have no vision. "From my experience in working with the children at the Council, I can say that they have proved to be active citizens in society, able to engage in democratic life through their regular meetings and interaction among each other." The children meet once a week. The coordinator, Ms. Hankeer and the President of the Council prepare the agenda for each meet-

ing. Last year, the children had a hectic schedule, they organized a lot of activities such as forestration, cleaning campaigns and took part in all national celebrations. Moreover, they participated in the Liberation Competition, an annual competition organized to commemorate the liberation of Saida from Israeli occupation. For this year, a music concert and other activities are planned jointly with other councils.





Ghena Majzoub

According to Ghena Majzoub, President of the Municipal Council for Children - Saida, the idea all started when Mrs. Bahia Hariri visited her school to tell the students about the foundation of a municipal council for children. Majzoub explained that the candidates who stood for election had to be six elementary students. Ghena explained that 33 different schools, both public and private, participated in the elections and the council managed to bring together children from all classes, religions, and nationalities. The preliminary elections took place in the 33 schools and 33 representatives were elected (one from each school). According to Ghena: "The 33 candidates served as the council's representatives. We met to get to know each other and then formed an administrative council. What is funny is that we had two alliances, the boys' alliance and the girls' alliance. All the boys presented their candidacy for presidency, whereas we, girls, united and nominated 3 candidates and this is how I was able to win the presidency last year."

Majzoub recounts how she was elected president: "Given that the six elementary class at my school has 7 sections, each section had 3 student candidates that were running for elections. I was elected representative for my section and then I had to run against the other 6 representatives. We were 2 girls and 5 boys competing for the position." However, Ghena admits that there was no real competition

because most of her colleagues withdrew in her favor. After winning the elections at her school there was the race for the presidency. "The race was among the 33 representatives from the different schools. They were 18 boys and 15 girls. What happened is that all the boy representatives wanted to run for presidency whereas the girls didn't. So the boys lost their votes against each other and I gained a lot of support from the girls, especially one of the girls who tried to convince her colleagues that they should elect me. Finally, we were left with two candidates competing for presidency, me and another boy, the final countdown was very close and the boy lost by one vote. I was elected in October, 1999 and served for one year. This year, there is a new president and he is a boy. My parents were very happy and my mother couldn't believe it. She was so proud of me. I enjoyed the experience because it was very rich and interesting. The year passed very quickly and I was not very eager to leave. However, I realized the importance of giving a chance to other people."

Ghena dreams of becoming a doctor. According to her, "people are bound to get sick and I want to be there to lend a helping hand. My parents often encourage me to pursue my dreams." Ghena maintains that she enjoyed her work at the Council because it taught her how to participate in political and public life. She believes that this experience will affect her future positively.



“Quota” in the Field: “My Lady Take Your Place.”

Hind Soufi Assaf

Researcher and Human Rights Activist

Under this title, Hind Soufi Assaf conducted a study aimed at identifying the impact of the quota system on different categories of Lebanese society and the possibility of implementing the right to a “share” in the political domain. It also sheds light on the problems likely to result from the introduction of such a procedure.

Research Methodology

The survey was based on the following:

1. A questionnaire,
2. A series of meetings with youths, students and women belonging to different social categories,
3. Preparatory meetings and workshops,
4. A film documenting the elite, political and popular points of view,
5. Surveys that focused on women’s participation in municipal elections.

While meetings focused on raising and advocating the issue of women’s participation in decision-making, surveys aimed at defining women’s political situation in a scientific way. The following questions were asked:

1. The general attitude towards the “Quota”: Is the Lebanese society ready to accept the “Quota”?
2. Does Lebanese society accept the idea of artificially induced change, or does it prefer natural and slow development?
3. In terms of percentages, what does Lebanese society expect in this stage from politics in general and from women in politics in particular?
4. What are the “Quota” percentages suggested by the citizens, and is the Quota appropriate for a society that already has a multiplicity of (sectarian) quotas?

Seven hundred and twenty six surveys were distributed to the youth (25%), home-makers (25%) women and men workers (25%).

The committee for Planning and Research in the Lebanese Women’s Council sorted out and decoded the survey results.

Results Interpretation

A. Women’s Participation in Political Decision Making
Seventy-five percent of the men and 94 % of the women favour women’s participation in political decision-making. Only 17% of the Lebanese reject women’s participation in politics justifying their attitude by the following:

- ‘Current circumstances’ do not require women’s presence in politics.
- Man’s decision is denied so how about woman’s decision?
- This issue is not a priority at this stage.
- Politics is a corrupt world which is not compatible with woman’s nature.

Some answers were attributed by the author to tradition and misunderstanding of religious issues:

- Women have incomplete minds and faiths.
- If her testimony is not accepted in court, how can she be entitled to rule?
- The traditional and natural role of a woman require her to focus on one of our foremost sacred social values, the family.

Who are the Opposers?

Most of the opposers (80%) are young men. Some justified their fears by saying that: “Woman’s freedom will be at the expense of family values.”

Overall, society has become clear about the importance of women’s participation in politics.

Why do people support women’s participation in politics?

1. Women’s efficiency and academic achievement. Most of the answers included such terms; although “academic achievement” is not considered a priority to the voters who essentially elect candidates they personally know or those who would help them when needed. This has been confirmed by a survey that was simultaneously carried out by the Lebanese Women’s Council around the same year. The survey showed that 74% of people base their choices on their personal interest rather than their convictions.



2. Terms related to human rights were also mentioned.
3. Woman is half the society.
4. Some answers, especially those given by women, reflected a special awareness of gender roles. However this category remains a minority.
5. Three percent of the women respondents talked about regaining "power".

B. The Quota as a Concept

60.25% of the women in the sample (sometimes "spontaneously", and almost "aggressively"), support the quota (Table no. 4), compared to only 44% of the men. Rejection was justified by the following reasons:

1. The Quota is a compulsory procedure.
2. It is contradictory to democracy.
3. The Lebanese political system is already based on sectarian quotas.
4. The Quota is a women's privilege, while women reject all forms of discrimination against either of the sexes: "This is the easy way out, women have to work harder," according to one respondent.
5. The Quota will be difficult to apply in Lebanese society in a fair and equitable manner among all regions and sects.
6. I object to the Quota because it is a "cheap way that contradicts women's femininity", one man said. Quota is "offensive for women"; it makes them look weak. Accepting it would be "opportunistic".

The Quota was accepted for the following reasons:

1. It is a transitory and supportive procedure.
2. It gives women the chance to demonstrate their efficiency.
3. It allows women to enjoy their rights as human beings.
4. Quota is a procedure that runs parallel to the process of change. It is a chance to get to appreciate woman's political performance.

C. Fighting for the Right to Share

The difference between women and men's answers is clear. While more than 70% of the women expressed their desire to fight for implementing the Quota, men were reserved; only 33.74% of them answered positively.

Which means will civil society employ in order to effectively support women?

The author says that this question should have been asked in a direct manner. She explains that 90% of those who said they would fight might not go beyond signing a petition in support of the quota, while refraining from participating in demonstrations, for instance. The author points out to the discrepancy that has always existed between thought and practice in relation to women's issues. She gives the municipal elections as an example, noting how women have not won enough seats and were practically excluded from the big cities. The author states that had women decided to use their right to vote, they would have been able to have a woman elected. However, most women from

the lower classes, even if they believe in women's role, do not exercise their right to vote and thus cannot be considered full "citizens". According to the author, this can be attributed to illiteracy, economic subordination, the social system and an inadequate political education.

D. Suggested Percentages for the Quota

According to the author, this point triggers sensitivities since the Quota is imposed on one sex for the benefit of another. She explains that the quota has proved to be effective on the international level because it has been associated with other procedures. She adds that it is unreasonable for instance to specify a quota of 30% for women in political decision making when women are almost absent from the economic and commercial decision making spheres. The sustainable and parallel development requires imposing the quota from the bottom of the ladder upwards into all the developmental fields. Otherwise imposing the Quota would amount to 'burning stages'.

Therefore, the authors suggests introducing a quota in conjunction with a number of procedures among which:

- An comprehensive governmental and supportive policy that forges a dialogue with advocates of women's rights.
- Legal procedures that aim at achieving equality in society.
- An educational policy that starts in the elementary classes.
- Spreading the concept of the Quota and preparing the grounds a wide assimilation of the idea.
- Creating a women's lobby that advances these procedures and works towards imposing them when they are ignored.
- Getting familiarized with the international experiences, especially those of the developed countries. The author mentions that it would be a good idea to formulate feminist visions that suit us and are congruent with the field findings. The author adds that women's education is an inevitable tool for stimulating radical change in society. She quoted a researcher who attributes woman's lagging behind to her reticence in taking clear cut positions, accuses the women's movement of "wearing out", and calling upon it to get organized within a lobby that rises up to the challenges of the third millenium. The author considers this declaration, supportive of women's plight despite its harshness.

The author concludes that it is time for formulating a comprehensive vision in which men, youths and women participate. "This necessitates unifying the efforts. Woman's battle is first her battle with herself and then with the other," that author adds, "That's why, my lady, you are invited to take a place for yourself. Or more appropriately to take your place."

Presented by Ghena Ismail

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Nayla Moawad: On Politics in Lebanon

Myriam Sfeir



Women in Lebanon have always been involved in the national struggle. Southern women resisted the occupation physically and emotionally. Moreover, during the Lebanese war, women were the unknown soldiers who kept the family together. Although, women were active participants in public life they were never given a chance to participate in politics on an equal basis with men. Men should encourage women to be involved in politics. We should move from rallying for women to integrating them in order to succeed in the world of politics.

Myriam Sfeir: what is your position on the Quota system?

Nayla Moawad: This question is not easy to answer, taking Lebanon into consideration. Given that I am a strong advocate of democracy, at first, I was against the quota system. However, as time passed, I became convinced that no woman would reach anywhere (politically) without the quota system. The solution is to introduce a quota with a low percentage allotted to women. I am against the 50/50 percent imposed in France as it implies moving from one extreme situation to another.

MS: Why are women absent from the political scene in Lebanon?

NM: We, in Lebanon, lack proper political education. Awareness campaigns are very important for people to accept women's participation in politics and decision-making. People have accepted women's presence in politics and public life, this was not very common 10 years ago. However, our patriarchal society, whose political system is based on family and sect still poses a hindrance for women. I strongly believe that political parties, with gender sensitive agendas, are major vehicles enabling women to reach decision-making positions in government. There is no doubt that women's presence in politics boosts democracy.

We, in Lebanon, have solid foundations for democracy but we lack proper democratic practice. Women's participation in politics will only take place once we have real democracy.

During the municipal elections I gave more than 103 lectures all over Lebanon in order to encourage women and girls to participate in political life. To my dismay, most women refused to fight till the end for fear of losing the elections and I found this ridiculous. It is not the end of the world if one loses, in any political race there is a winner and a loser and the most important thing is for one to try his/her utmost best.

Politics needs a lot of effort and hard work. I strongly believe that in order for women to win any political race they have to campaign early on. Women should not differentiate between political life and public life because they are not different. There is a common belief that in order to participate in politics one has to be in parliament. This is false because there are many politicians who are doing nothing and a lot of individuals who are not politicians and who are doing a lot. Actively engaging in public life through political parties, municipalities, trade and professional unions, non governmental organizations (NGOs), and universities is political work and will enable one to get to parliament.

Even though a significant number of women are present in politics, however, they still remain largely outside the realms of power and decision-making. No woman has held any ministerial position in Lebanon and only three women were elected to parliament. Women should prove themselves despite all the obstacles that hinder their participation in politics. They should forcefully push for what is rightfully theirs, even though they live in a patriarchal society. I often criticize the system although I am a product of it, however, I am trying to impose change.

MS: How can you explain the fact that you got the highest number of votes in the North during the past two elections?

NM: There are many reasons for that. Let's face it, I reached where I am today because of Rene, my late husband, and in a way I owe it all to him. When Rene was assassinated, people realized that he died for the sake of the country because he was very honest and attentive to national issues. Rene had a promising program that called for co-existence, national solidarity, unity, non-violent dialogue, etc. His program appealed to the citizens and given that I was to pick up from where he had started people voted for me. In addition, I am a woman and that was new as well. There hadn't been a woman in the parliament since Myrna Boustani was appointed thirty years ago. I was appointed in 1991 and the challenge for me was to prove to all my male colleagues, that I was up to the responsibility. I didn't feel uncomfortable being the only woman MP because most of my colleagues were friends of my late husband. Moreover, women in the North helped me tremendously. They massively voted for me. It is a misconception that women fail to support women, at least in my case. Last but not least, I tried to introduce new ideas that were unheard of as a president of the children's committee in parliament. I also tried to introduce a human element to political work through my work at the Rene Mouawad Foundation.

MS: Are you preparing your son to succeed you?

NM: To be honest with you, my son is very interested in politics. He is currently involved in various political projects. He was brought up to believe that he is responsible for this country. My late husband, on the day of his election, explained to Michel, our son, the critical period Lebanon

Our meetings ought to be democratic in character and spirit. Men talk and women be silent.



was passing through and told him explicitly "if anything were to happen to me, you have your mother, your sister and the country to take care of." Michel loves politics and I am not going to discourage him from participating in political life just because he is my son. If he is competent, which I think he is, than why not. However, I am planning to remain in parliament as long as I can serve and make a difference.

MS: What will you do once you retire from public life?

NM: I have a lot of plans that I am hoping to execute through the Rene Moawad Foundation (RMF). I am very much interested in women's rights and democracy and I strongly believe that forming pressure groups is very essential in order to lobby for change.

MS: Tell us about your work in promoting women's issues?

NM: I am an ardent advocate of human rights. This year I was chosen to head the parliamentary council to protect women and children's rights. (This committee that includes women and children indirectly implies that women's rights boil down to mother's rights which is wrong.) Previously, I worked with Laure Moghaizel and August Bakhus to amend several discriminatory laws concerning women and we succeeded. One can't broach on the subject of human rights and women's rights without thinking of Laure Moghaizel. She spent her whole life fighting discrimination against women. I also was a strong supporter of the municipal elections campaign. My other work is not directly related to women's issues but the end result is bound to benefit women. For instance, pushing for compulsory elementary education does benefit women because in poor and rural areas women are excluded from access to education because of limited resources and traditional beliefs.

MS: Is there anything you'd like to add?

NM: Yes, there is one very important point we have to understand, our politicians should be accountable if they fail to execute what they promised to fulfill. Accountability is very important and we have to learn to criticize failure in a constructive manner.

Conference Report

The Performance of Women in the Egyptian Parliamentary Elections of 2000

Heba El-Shazli

Deputy Director for MENA, National Democratic Institute (NDI)

Over the period of two days, March 28 and 29, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) in cooperation with the British Council and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, held in Cairo, Egypt the first conference on Women and Parliamentary Elections: The Present Situation and Perspectives for the Future.

The Conference attended by 430 women political activists and leaders from 10 different governorates was divided into six sessions. Research papers were presented by 30 different political and social scientists and members of parliament.

The conference established that there were three major "shocks" to the political system as a result of the parliamentary elections that were held in October and November 2000.

First: Upper Egypt turned out not to be as conservative as is the commonly understood among politicians, intellectuals and others because two women have been elected to serve that region in Parliament: Nariman El Daramally and Awatef Kahk.

Second: The Judiciary played a positive role even though in some cases, the judges were not aware of the situation outside the polling room. Yet the elections were the "cleanest" in many years. However, there is still much room for improvement.

Third: The official National Democratic Party (NDP) did not do as well as they have been accustomed to do in the past. The NDP is in shock, some of the participants at the conference said. There are now about 86 members of Parliament (even among those who have switched to the NDP) who reached Parliament without the traditional allegiances and who do not owe any favors or allegiance to the

NDP hierarchy. It is still early (only 3 months after the elections) to judge the overall performance of the new parliament but that is definitely something to watch. This is an important development.

Furthermore, the NDP and the other political parties are taking stock in how well the "unorganized" Muslim brotherhood did this time. The Muslim Brotherhood is in reality a well-organized group to be reckoned with and is very active in many communities in Egypt. It is still early (only 3 months after the elections) to judge the overall performance of the new parliament but that is definitely something to watch.

Nehad Abu El Komsan, director of the ECWR, presented a report analyzing the performance of women in parliamentary elections. The report covers 24 electoral districts out of a total of 222 and is divided into five sections: 1) the legislative framework of elections in Egypt; 2) the field observation reports; 3) case studies of some of the women candidates and the reasons behind their winning a seat in the parliament; 4) a study of 35 women candidates for the parliament; 5) recommendations and appendices.

Further, the ECWR has a program of training of political cadres that began in 1999 with 25 women. Seven of those women ran for seats and two of them won: Ms. Nariman El Daramally and Ms. Azza El Kashef, both graduates of the ECWR School for Cadres. The ECWR is currently working with 75 women and would like to work with more potential women leaders if they can receive more funds. The ECWR is receiving many requests for training by members of parliament and activists from all the political parties in Egypt.

Final Conference Recommendations
1. To: Mr. President of the Republic

Use the tools/mechanisms of the Constitution and the law to enable women to be appointed in the judiciary, to the presidency of universities and to other such positions of leadership and responsibility that can affect change.

2. To: The National Council for Women (NCW) and other institutions interested in promoting the political participation of women.

Acknowledging the active and effective role that the National Council for Women has played in support of the political participation of women in political life in general and in the parliamentary elections in particular. And also taking into consideration the many serious efforts by NGOs and research institutes that are concerned with women political participation;

The conference recommends the following:

a. The creation of a fund to cover the expenses of women candidates in election campaigns either based on the recommendation by the political party to which she belongs or her trade union, professional syndicate, chamber of commerce or non-governmental organizations.

b. The creation of a data base to track different kinds of discrimination against women, including tracking her progress in participating in representative councils and the suggestion of practical ways to fight such discrimination.

c. To lobby the Ministry of Administrative Development in order to consider women's political participation as one of the aspects of job evaluation; even if the participation was in the form of labor union committees, local government councils, popular committees in the governorates, or local village councils. And to make sure that her political participation is not in contradiction with her executive duties, especially if the conditions of her political work demanded taking time off during work hours.

d. To request that the administration take into consideration the improvement of women's economic situation, especially their working conditions, wages, benefits and allowances in the public sector, government agencies, ministries, other government bodies and in local government.

e. The drafting of a long-term plan to provide assistance and training workshops and to prepare cadres to participate in the upcoming elections in 2005.

f. The setting up of didactic programs to raise the political consciousness and education of women in a clear and easy manner and explain their political rights.

g. The holding of training sessions for women leaders in the different political parties and in all the governorates in order to raise their awareness of national women's issues and improve their organizational skills in recruiting women to political parties.

h. The need to always introduce new faces, avoid the centralized group of leaders and allow new groups of women to re-juvenate the council's work and the women's political movement. In this respect, we request that all women

candidates in the last parliamentary elections become members of the NCW and be encouraged to run in future elections.

i. To look into new ways whereby the Council's role can be enlarged to become a pressure group in favor of women's issues, on both the national and local levels. The necessity of assisting candidates to join councils of professional syndicates and to encourage many of them to run for a position within those organizations. There has to be a greater interest in the professional associations which constitute with the political parties an important constituent of civil society and through which women's skills and abilities can be made known, i.e. knowledge and practice.

j. Funding should be made available for current female members of parliament and women political leaders to improve their skills. This will help public opinion review their negative opinion of women's ability to handle responsible representative positions and thus help them to be nominated to such positions.

k. A careful review of the situation of peasant women who helped relieve the land reform from its worst conditions yet have no place in its political leadership. Development of the critical female discourse which does not just support her femininity but also critically analyses details and assists in the clarification of the women's movement with a discourse that takes it forward.

3. To: The Social Development Fund (SDF)

The Conference reiterated the important and pioneering role of the Social Development Fund and recommended that the Administrative Board of the Fund adopt the following:

a. Allocate funding resources to fight unemployment among women, and prioritize their requests for loans and credits, finance their small projects, support family production projects, associations providing assistance to working women, as well as supporting training sessions for women on small businesses management, servicing the environment, economic, financial and managerial awareness in order to guide women as to investments milieu and its regulations, methods of democratic administration of economic activities, interaction with the surrounding environment and social activities.

b. Use the SDF funds and its projects to eliminate economic and social disparities between rural and urban women, and between women in the maritime and tribal areas. This requires the usage of modern techniques to improve the situation of women in rural areas and within the tribal culture as a priority.

4. To: The Egyptian Parliament

The Conference considered with a certain relief the environment surrounding the latest elections and the participation of the Egyptian woman as they showed a considerable increase in the political participation of women in the elections: the number of independent candidates reached 75

women, with a percentage of 1.76%, in comparison to 49 women and 1.23% during the 1995 elections. The present experience was also the launching point of a true change whereby women candidatures covered 25 Muhafaza instead of 23 in 1995, as they ran for election in two new Muhafazas: Suhaj and Al Wadi El Jadid. Consequently, we call upon the Parliament to realize the following:

a. To request from the Government the completion of elections in the districts where they were halted. The Conference is confident that Egyptian women will be present in Parliament, represented by Ms. Jihane Helfaoui, the eighth elected woman to Parliament.

b. The Conference appeals to the Members of Parliament to present a law proposal for the adoption of a system incorporating parties' rolls with individual election. This system may be of help in increasing the representation of women and would reflect their true role in political participation.

c. The Conference appeals to the Members of Parliament to present a law proposal compelling political parties, professional syndicates, representative councils in general to allocate a number of their seats to women, as per their initiative in assigning a number of seats to youth.

d. Determine a number of important Parliament hearings to be presided by the Council's Secretary, Dr. Amal Outhman, in order to prepare public opinion and present proofs on the scientific and political competence of Egyptian women, qualifying them to hold and manage critical positions in the country.

e. Create a new parliamentary commission called the Commission to Improve the Situation of Women which would collaborate with the National Council for Women as well as specialized organizations and institutions for the creation of a lobby within the Parliament to approve legislations and support opinions that help the political aspirations of women.

f. Review the Unified Labor Code so as to guarantee women's rights as per equal work opportunities, terms and conditions, with a special emphasis on the situation of women-farmers and other marginalized groups unprotected by the project.

5. To the Ministry of Information

The Conference invites the Ministry of Information to:

a. Increase and improve programs targeting the community in a way to raise awareness on women issues, and consider these issues critical components in the developing of the community as a whole.

b. Examine the different values disseminated in women programs presented on the media's national channels. Are these values commercial or productive? What is their link to the priority values for women, and how do they influence the way community regards them?

c. Design special programs focusing on women's mental capacities and recall the historic role of Egyptian women in community service.

6. To The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education

a. Amend the content of academic curricula and link it to the students and their daily concerns, inciting them to critically discuss different issues. Hence, students would become participants in the educational process instead of passive recipients.

b. Change the teaching methodology from transcription to dialogue and discussion, offering the students the chance to participate and interact freely and democratically, without submitting them to restrictions and dictatorship.

c. Restore extra-curricular activities, student bodies, autonomy systems as well as free election opportunities, nominations and representation to students unions.

7. To: The Ministry of Youth

The Conference highly regards the attempt of the Ministry of Youth to designate seats for women in the Administrative Boards within the Youth Center. Therefore, we call upon the Ministry of Youth to adopt a joint project with different NGOs active among women in order to build the political capacities of young girls/women from ages 15 to 18 years, rendering it possible for the future generation to participate in a political life for which they received training.

8. To: Local and International Funding Institutions

a. Encourage collaboration between the Egyptian Government and its NGOs in order to upgrade the situation of Egyptian women, cleanse Egyptian laws and legislations from all texts that may infer gender inequality or confer gender-based advantages and rights in leadership positions, regardless of competencies.

b. Allocate more funds and provide more attention to fact-finding and field researches that assist in uncovering the real problems of women, and the causes denying them access to leadership or decision-making influential positions.

c. Provide more support to the capacity building of local women leaderships, especially those programs that work on improving their capacities to negotiate and constitute lobbying groups.

d. Support youth-oriented programs in pre-university and university stages that develop their ideas on gender equality and fight their gender-based discriminating behaviors.

e. Give more attention to studies dealing with developing legal structures leading towards the institution of complete gender equity.

f. Provide attention and appropriate financial and technical support to develop women programs, whether led by the Government or NGOs.

g. The Conference believes that the political participation of women is the cause concerning the Egyptian community as a whole. Egypt will not progress without the participation of both men and women in building its future.

Maud Fargeallah

(1909 – 1995)

Zeina Misk

IWSAW Staffer

“To be clairvoyant in politics, one must listen to what people say, search for the motive behind their attitudes, reconstruct narratives, discretely draw out confessions, and finally sum up the situation. Very often I foresaw the future and used this gift for practical ends (...) One must have a good memory for faces, be a psychologist, love contact with people and finally have politics in the blood, be dynamic, be interested in his/her society and country. And like me one must make it one’s goal in life. Despite all this, I was taxed as an agent on the payroll of ...But what has happened to this payroll if there was any?” (Maude Fargeallah).

Maud Fargeallah, the woman who “made and unmade ministers and presidents in her salon” ironically never held any official political post. However, her influence on the local and regional political scenes was not to be underestimated. Renown for her sharp analytical skills and clairvoyance, Maud was a woman who defied all the norms of her society for the cause she loved best: Lebanon’s integrity and sovereignty .

Family Background

Maud Fargeallah, born Moutran (bishop in Arabic) is a descendant of the Ghassanide tribe and comes from a family of prelates. Her great grand father Francis Moutran was a bishop and had written a number of theology books that were shelved in the Vatican library. She grew up in a family environment very much geared towards politics and public life. Sultan Abdul Hamid bestowed upon her paternal uncle Joseph the title of “effendi”. Her six remaining uncles were granted the title of “bey” with the exception of Nakhle who was nominated “pacha”.

One of her uncles, Rachid, lived in France and was involved in a spying case with the Germans. He was forced to reside in Munich after that incident. Maud Fargeallah no doubts takes after her aunt Victoria Moutran who played a major political role at the international level. Victoria lived between Istanbul and Paris. She used to receive in her salon politicians, dignitaries, intellectuals and businessmen. She held meetings in her house for the “Young Turks Movement” and was instrumental in the signing of the famous loan between Turkey and France. According to Maud, had the British listened to her aunt’s advice, the 1914

war would have taken a totally different direction. Victoria had advised the British Prime Minister to keep his fleet in the Bosphorus waters to prevent the Turks from allying themselves with the Germans against the Allies.

Childhood years

Maud was born in Baalbeck on the 28th of July 1909 two years after her parents got married. Elias Moutran, her father, fell in love with Evelyn Malhamé who was only 15 when they met. Her parents were close friends of Nicolas and Maud Tabet, the parents of Zalfa, future wife of Camille Chamoun. Her father was very keen on calling her Maud after Maud Tabet. She was a very spoiled child. On her birthdays, her father organized festivities inviting all the villagers to eat, drink and dance as magnificent fireworks illuminated the sky of Baalbeck.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the Moutran family was still residing in Baalbeck. Her uncle Nakhlé, then her father, were arrested and detained by the Ottomans in Damascus. Both brothers were accused of sympathizing with the Allies and particularly the French. Her father remained in detention for four months while her uncle was executed. Two years later her parents were exiled to Changorie in Turkey. Upon the withdrawal of the Ottomans from Lebanon and the arrival of the British to Zahleh, the Moutran family returned home. During W.W.I, her father had drinking problems and suffered from liver cirrhosis. In 1920 he passed away leaving behind him a shattered 11 year-old Maud. Maud was then a boarder at the sisters of Besançon's school in which she stayed until 1922.

First Outings

Maud attended her first dancing tea party in 1926 when she was invited by Mr. and Mrs. Emile Tabet. At first she was very shy and refused to wear make-up but soon social life appealed to her and she gradually started to enjoy those flamboyant social gatherings. Despite her frequent outings, her mother was very strict with her. Maud was allowed to stay up late only in the company of her chaperon, Emir Fouad Arslan, Emir Majid Arslan's uncle. The Chihas, Sursocks, Trads, Tabets, and the Bustros were amongst her circle of friends. Marguerite Chiha used to accompany her to the dancing parties organized by the Literary Club in Zahleh. Among her many admirers were Ibrahim Sursock,

Robert Sabbagh, Edouard Tabet and Joy Tabet in addition to Camille Chamoun, who was a very awkward dancer and stepped on her feet. Her favorite suitor though was Henri Pharaon whom she was about to marry in 1925.

Marriage and Children

Maud finally fell for Georges Fargeallah who was 16 years older than her and teased her a great deal. They got engaged in the summer of 1927 against her mother's wishes. On April 28, 1928, Maud Moutran marched to the altar wearing an 80 meters white tulle wedding dress! The wedding ceremony was very simple, restricted to close relatives and friends. Georges Fargeallah was still in mourning for the recent death of his father who passed away 40 days before the wedding. Her son Chico was born on January 28, 1929. Médy, her daughter followed two years later on July 28, 1931.

Being a mother did not prevent Maud from pursuing her social life, "the dolce vita" as she called it (Fargeallah, 1989:58). She gained the reputation of a carefree woman living only for and through "mondanités". Maud confessed that such a heavily charged social life was the shield behind which hid a lonely woman who lacked affection and companionship (Fargeallah, 1989:69). Maud never failed to mention how at moments she envied the comfortable life of her husband Georges. While most of her evenings were spent at the Aero-Club one of the trendiest nightclubs frequented by jetsetters at the time, Georges preferred the tranquility of homey dinners. He was not into politics and enjoyed playing cards with a close circle of friends. Maud however attended and organized huge receptions for more than 200 invitees on a regular basis.



An Exuberant Public Life

Her circle of friends was not only the rich and aristocratic families of Beirut society but also included some of the most prominent political figures of the time. French High Commissioner for Syria and Lebanon Comte de Martel was one of Maud's closest friends and used to call her "Maudichon", a nickname she was to keep for the rest of her life. He even confessed that "had he been 15 years younger he would have courted her" (Fargeallah, 1989:81).

As Maud stated she used to live vicariously through other people's lives, she was "intoxicated" by their stories. De

Martel was madly in love with the Countess Raïska de Kerchekove, wife of the Belgian Consul in Lebanon and did not decline any of her wishes. Raïska had convinced the Count to appoint Emile Eddé instead of Bechara al Koury as president of the Republic in 1936. But the president who owed his election to the Countess made the unforgivable mistake of not inviting her to his first public lunch. It was Maud who succeeded where everybody's efforts failed for over 2 years in reconciling president Eddé and Countess Raïska.

As early as 1937 when the country was preparing for parliamentary elections, the "demon of politics" started getting on to her (Fargeallah, 1989: 78). She was constantly invited to the table of the Count de Martel where she met a number of political figures. Her close connection to the count went as far as asking him favors for the growing number of solicitors of services who knocked at her door. For instance, she pleaded to the high commissioner to prevent mandatory authorities from exiling Hajj Amine el Hussein to Palestine in compliance to British pressure. However, her solid friendship with the Count de Martel did not imply support for his political options. She had a strong inclination for French culture, history, language and gastronomy. Nevertheless, she did not sympathize at all with the politics of the Vichy regime. She was much more inclined towards the British, which was publicly revealed when she "adopted" the British forces upon their arrival to Beirut. She had officers from the 9th army everyday at her table. Soon she came to know every one of the officer corps. She always circulated with high-ranking British officials, namely General Spears in whose office most of the major political decisions were taken. She was also a very dear friend of Spear's first secretary, Gerry Young and his wife, a friendship she maintained long after they left Lebanon. Between 1942 and 1948, she organized numerous dancing tea parties to the profit of the British Red Cross. Fund raising gatherings were scheduled every Thursday for 40 convalescent British soldiers.

Again, as she did with the French, Maud Fargeallah had always the courage to criticize the political decisions of her closest British friends. As early as 1943, she saw in Camille Chamoun the perfect and most suitable presidential candidate despite his young age, and openly blamed the British decision-makers who favored Bechara al Khoury. Despite her objectivity and bluntness, Maud was branded as anglophile or pro-British. She did not mind such a label, she "let people talk" in spite of the frequent services she requested from Spears for numerous solicitors (Fargeallah, 1989: 105). Her salon was always open to all sorts of guests, jour-

nalists, friends, and needy people who were received in her bedroom as early as 7 in the morning. She loved assisting people: "Thanks to my social life or in spite of it, I cannot tell, I enormously helped people. I never refused a favor to anyone and I almost always succeeded".

She was general Spears' "white pearl" as he liked to call her and often consulted her on several vital decisions (Fargeallah, 1989: 114). In one of her trips to London in 1952, Maud discovered that all her correspondence with her British friends were kept in Commodore Buth's office in 10 Downing Street. Some passages were even underlined in red. Her letters constituted a "living representation" of the state of affairs in Lebanon (Fargeallah, 1989: 222).

Maud Fargeallah traveled frequently to Palestine to attend to the matters of Zbouba, the village she owned there. The British officials at the borders always treated her royally and facilitated her passage despite restrictions imposed on travelers at the time. It was in Palestine, at the King David hotel, where she met for the first time Asmahane (Amale al-Attrache) the famous Syrian Druze diva. Her stays in Palestine were a continuation of the festive life she carried out in Beirut. Even there, Mrs. Fargeallah was solicited for favors. Using her connections with British security, she interceded for Asmahane to alleviate sanctions the British had imposed on her.

Maud and Nazira Jumblatt

Among Maud's achievements is her successful effort in joining Sit Nazira Jumblatt with General Holmes, commander of the 9th army. Not only was the visit an accomplishment, bearing in mind that Sit Nazira was a reputed Francophile, but having her accept to be photographed was another feat in its own right. The latter consented on one condition: being alone with Maud in the picture.

Independence Woman

Her input to the independence was not to be dismissed. She was eagerly and impatiently asking for the cessation of the French Mandate in Lebanon. During the political turmoil of November 1943, General Spears summoned her to spend some time in Jerusalem because her house was unsafe and surrounded by French security agents.

In May 1945, two years after Independence and shortly after the armistice was declared, Maud received from General Paget, commander in chief of the British armies in the Middle East, a letter thanking her for her efforts in collaborating with the Allies. Saeb Salam who was present at the reception remarked that "even a state does not own a simi-

*US ambassador in
Beirut, Donald
Heath, told her "My
dear, you are a great
man!"*

lar letter" (Fargeallah, 1989:153). Paradoxically, Mrs. Fargeallah could understand the content of the letter written in English only when her friend Ambassador Boswell translated it. Her conversations with British officers were always carried out in French!

Growing dismay against Bechara el Khoury

Maudichon, "like Voltaire", could not stand injustice and corruption (Fargeallah, 1989: 123). She could not tolerate el Khoury's abuse of power. Soon the opposition movement catalyzed by Maud started reacting to the deteriorating economic situation. Political meetings in her salon were intensified to Camille Chamoun's benefit. The President of the Republic saw in her the "instigator of spirits" (Ibid. 1989: 155). Her growing hostility to Bechara el Khoury's regime culminated when she fomented a coup d'etat with the help of Emir Nouhad Arslan, brother of Emir Megid during the spring of 1946.

For the first time in her life, she witnessed a violent outburst from her husband! He had never meddled into her political affairs, but this time it was way beyond limits. Not only was she endangering her life but that of her children and husband as well. The failed coup d'etat did not stop her from pursuing her struggle against the regime. She "could not but work with the opposition" (Fargeallah, 1989: 139). Salma Sayegh, president of the Nahda el Nissa'iyya (Women's Renaissance), joined her ranks as well. On Maud's advice, she turned down the medal she had just received from the government.

Abdul Hamid Karamah then Prime Minister and a very close friend of Maud's commented on Mrs. Fargeallah's attempt to organize a demonstration against the regime by saying: "Maud, you are really strong, you are a 'labwa' (lioness)" (Fargeallah, 1989: 166).

In the opposition ranks

To her dismay, Sheikh Bechara el Khoury's mandate was renewed for six additional years. Assessing Maud's influence on the local political scene, the president tried in vain to win Maud to his side and persistently sought to please her. "Are your British friends satisfied with my performance?" he would ask her whenever they met. He miserably failed in all his efforts to win her to his side and fatalistically stated: "she turns the crank and the opposition follows!" (Fargeallah, 1989:206).

Mrs. Fargeallah was reputed for her bluntness. Outraged by the president's refusal to meet a delegation from the Nahda

al Nissa'iyya who demanded women's suffrage, she called him and insulted him. She was also solicited to settle all sorts of disputes between the government and the "oil people" as she called them. Saeb Salam sought her aid for a serious problem Middle East Airlines was facing with the British I.P.C.

Received by Royalties and Presidents

Maud's admirers were numerous. Commodore Peachy, the admiral of the British fleet in Haifa fell for the eyes of Maudichon. He brought the whole fleet from Palestine to Beirut just to see her! Not only was Maud received by high ranking officials and political figures, she was also invited by King Abdallah of Jordan for lunch and by Queen Elizabeth for an afternoon tea party in Buckingham Palace. Her visit to Jordan was reported by the local radio stations as a major event. She was the first Arab woman to be received at the table of an Arab Monarch, seated at the right hand side of the King and had the privilege of sharing a cup of coffee with him after lunch.

While on a visit to Paris in 1955, Maud attended a parliamentary debate on Algeria at the Quai d'Orsay. She met President Antoine Pinay and freely and openly criticized French foreign policy in the Middle East and particularly in Lebanon and the way they treated Chamoun by branding him as anglophile.

Political Victory: Camille Chamoun Elected President

In the fall of 1952, the long awaited presidency of Camille Chamoun saw the light when Bechara el Khoury was over-

thrown. Maud's dream finally came true. Zalfa did not share her opinion and was terrorized by the new role she had to assume as first lady. Zalfa Chamoun sent Maud to Beiteddine on the night her husband became president: "Camille has asked for you. Go and see him 'khawita' (crazy one). Give him his pillow, he will not be able to sleep without it" (Fargeallah, 1989:232). Maud Fargeallah was to accompany the presidential couple to a number of their official visits to foreign countries. President Chamoun asked her to establish invitation lists for the banquet in honor of King Seoud. Thanks to her, more than one attempt fomented by Fouad Chehab and his followers to overthrow Chamoun's rule failed. Her relationship with Camille Chamoun cooled down for a period of 5 years. However, her political views and path had never stopped being 'Chamounist' in any way.

In 1953, Maud added to her record as a politician that of a businesswoman. She was in charge of providing supplies for Aramco's personnel. To that effect, she rented a run-

The outburst of the civil war left Maud completely chattered ... she saw everything she had fought for fall into pieces.



down stable in Chiyah and renovated it to accommodate more than a hundred workers. Georges, her husband was supervising her work.

A Feminist Activist in Her Own Way

Maud was never interested in joining activist feminist movements. She attended unwillingly some meetings of the Nahda Nissa'iyya upon the insistence of her aunt Evelyne Bustros. She also assisted her aunt in designing and sewing folkloric costumes for the Artisanat. Maud wore folkloric dresses which belonged to Mrs. Bustros in the fashion show celebrating the launching of dolls wearing the national costumes of neighboring countries. Her friendship to the Sunnites whom she considered the most loyal friends she ever had as well as her close relationship to Adel Osseiran were behind granting the 'Christian weak sex' the right to equal inheritance (Fargeallah, 1989: 275).

New Alliances, New Friendships

In 1957, after several disappointments with the British and the way they carried out their foreign policy in the Middle East and in Lebanon in particular, Maud decided to cut off her relations with them. She stopped receiving them and accepting their invitations. She did not want to do with anything or anyone that was not to the advantage of her country. It was the time for a new alliance with the United States. She established a solid friendship with the US ambassador in Beirut, Donald Heath who told her once "My dear, you are a great man!" (Fargeallah, 1989: 289).

Coup d'Etat Instigator

Mrs. Fargeallah had to pay for being a sworn anti-Nasserite and anti-Chehabist: agents of the Egyptian embassy planted a bomb in her garden in 1955. Egyptian newspapers called her "Mode" (fashion) Fargeallah, the woman who "made and unmade ministers and presidents". During the 1958 armed crisis, the helicopter of Holloway, the 6th American fleet Admiral picked up Mrs. Fargeallah, who was spending the summer in Bois de Boulogne to Beirut to have lunch with him. During that same period, Maud with the assistance of US ambassador Mc Clintock, helped Sami el Solh and his men flee the country.

Her strenuous relationship to the Chehabist rule exacerbated and reached its peak after she confronted General Chehab and bluntly criticized his regime. However the price she had to pay for opposing the regime was yet to come. Chehab pressured the British and the Americans to stop collaborating with her. Her work for Tapline and Aramco suffered a great deal. Chehab did not spare any means to force her out of the political scene. However, Maud could not stay idle. As usual, the opposition, mainly constituted at the time of Antoun Saadeh's SSNP members, met in her salon and plans for overthrowing Chehab were clandestinely being drawn. The SSNP coup d'etat of 1961-1962 failed and Maud was forbidden to leave Lebanese territory. She was even interrogated for that effect.

Retreat from Public Life

By 1963, Maud had stopped her direct political activities. She was forced to sell her residence to settle her accumulated debts. This year witnessed the "end of castle life" as Maud described it (Fargeallah, 1989: 340). That same year, she left for France and spent two years and a half in Paris. Even there, she was under police surveillance.

The year 1969 marked the deaths of both her husband and daughter. Two years later, Zalfa Chamoun passed away. The accumulations of these sad events affected Maud tremendously.

The outburst of the civil war in 1975 left Maud completely chattered and devastated. She saw everything she had fought for throughout her life fall into pieces. In 1989, Maud dedicated her autobiography to "the youth of her country who are passing through rough times and to preserve the past in the memory of the future". Maud Fargeallah died at the age of 86 in 1995 leaving behind her a legacy of women's involvement in politics which is yet to be rivaled.

*Maud was never
interested in
joining activist
feminist movements*