

[http:// www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/raida.html](http://www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/raida.html)

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World
Lebanese American University | Issue 120-121 | Winter/Spring 2008

forthcoming issue

ARAB WOMEN IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

Arab Refugee Women

Issue 120-121 Winter/Spring 2008

Arab Refugee Women

Double
Issue



INSTITUTE FOR
WOMEN'S STUDIES
IN THE ARAB WORLD



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dima Dabbous-Sensenig

MANAGING EDITOR

Myriam Sfeir

GUEST EDITOR

Anna Elyse Ressler

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR

Rosemary Sayigh

EDITORIAL BOARD

Samira Aghacy

Lebanese American University (LAU)

Sami Baroudi

Lebanese American University (LAU)

Arda Ekmekji

Haigazian University (HU)

Najla Hamadeh

Bahithat

Nancy Jabbra

Loyola Marymount University

Mona C. Khalaf

Lebanese American University (LAU)

Lynn Maalouf

Journalist

Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous

Lebanese Emigration Research Center

(LERC), Notre Dame University (NDU)

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Fadia Faqir: Writer

Mary Kawar: ILO

Adele Khudr: UNICEF

Ann Lesch: American University in

Cairo (AUC)

FOUNDER OF AL-RAIDA

Julinda Abu Nasr

MAQUETTE AND COVER DESIGN

Greta Khoury

TECHNICAL SUPERVISOR

Zouheir Debs

al-raida

The Institute for Women's Studies

in the Arab World

Lebanese American University

P.O. BOX 13-5053 Chouran, Beirut,

1102 2801 Lebanon

TELEPHONE 961 1 867618, ext.1288**FAX** 961 1 791645**WEBSITE** [http://www.lau.edu.lb/](http://www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/raida.html)[centers-institutes/iwsaw/raida.html](http://www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/raida.html)**E-MAIL** al-raida@lau.edu.lb**The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World
at the Lebanese American University**

The Lebanese American University founded the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) in 1973. The history of the Institute is closely linked to that of the first women's college in the Middle East, the American Junior College for Women, which was established in 1924 by the Presbyterian Mission. The College, which educated Middle Eastern women for half a century, became coed in 1973. In order to honor the college's unique heritage as the first educational institution for women in the region, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was established that same year.

Mission

- Engage in academic research on women in the Arab world.
- Develop and integrate women's studies in the Lebanese American University curriculum.
- Empower women in the Arab world through development programs and education.
- Serve as a catalyst for policy changes regarding the rights of women in the Arab world.
- Facilitate networking and communication among individuals, groups, and institutions concerned with women in the Arab world.
- Extend ties with international organizations and universities working on gender issues.

Al-Raida Quarterly Journal

IWSAW issues a quarterly journal, *Al-Raida*, whose mission is to promote research and the dissemination of updated information regarding the condition of women in the Arab world.

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.

All submitted articles are reviewed by IWSAW. IWSAW reserves the right to accept or reject the articles submitted. Those articles that are accepted will be edited according to journal standards.

For more details about our submission guidelines kindly visit our website at: <http://www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/index.html>

Cover Image:

Lara Anne Horst, 'Waiting'
natural pigments & acrylic paints,
2004



INSTITUTE FOR
WOMEN'S STUDIES
IN THE ARAB WORLD

Al-Raida's previous issues

- ISSUE 1** 1976
Addressed Various and Suggested
Topics for Research that
Investigate Women's Role in
the Media, in Education, in Art,
and Work
- ISSUE 2** 1977
Promoted Women and Events
that Focus on Women's
Development
- ISSUE 3** 1978
Importance of Documentation
in the Arab World
- ISSUE 4** 1978
Post-War Thoughts
- ISSUE 5** 1978
Women Between Reality and
Illusion*
- ISSUE 6** 1978
Research Projects on Women's
Status: A Pressing Need in the
Arab World*
- ISSUE 7** 1979
Will Power
- ISSUE 8** 1979
The Year of the Child, The Year
of Hope
- ISSUE 9** 1979
Women and Work*
- ISSUE 10** 1979
Do you have Senile Symptoms
- ISSUE 11** 1980
Women and Health
- ISSUE 12** 1980
Facts about IWSAW
- ISSUE 13** 1980
The Germ
- ISSUE 14** 1980
Traditional Family Relations in
the Arab World
- ISSUE 15** 1981
1981, Year of the Handicapped
- ISSUE 16** 1981
Why a Woman's Liberation
Movement?
- ISSUE 17** 1981
Fallen Idols
- ISSUE 18** 1981
A Message to Consider
- ISSUE 19** 1982
Future Plans for IWSAW
- ISSUE 20** 1982
Women and Old Age
- ISSUE 21** 1982
Freedom cannot be One-Sided
- ISSUE 22** 1982
World Campaign for Peace
- ISSUE 23** 1983
You Cannot Set The Clock Back
- ISSUE 24** 1983
What Is Development

- ISSUE 25** 1983
Women's Participation in
Development
- ISSUE 26** 1983
Gibran's Anniversary
- ISSUE 27/28** 1984
1984, The Beginning of a New
World Communication Order?
- ISSUE 29** 1984
Women of Egypt and Algeria
- ISSUE 30** 1984
Special Issue, Women and the
War in Lebanon
- ISSUE 31** 1985
Arab Women and the Women's
Decade
- ISSUE 32** 1985
Arab Women and Literature
- ISSUE 33** 1985
Tunisian Women Speak
- ISSUE 34** 1985
Equality, Development, and
Peace. (Baghdad, Nicosia,
Nairobi)
- ISSUE 35** 1986
Women of Saudi Arabia*
- ISSUE 36** 1986
Kuwait Women: 25 Years of
Independence, 1961-1986
- ISSUE 37** 1986
Women of Bahrain
- ISSUE 38** 1986
The Status of Arab Women
- ISSUE 39** 1987
Women and Work
- ISSUE 40** 1987
IWSAW: Fourteen Years of
Sustained Effort
- ISSUE 41** 1987
Arab Women and Economic
Development
- ISSUE 42** 1987
Women's Liberation
- ISSUE 43** 1988
Women's Psychology
- ISSUE 44/45** 1988
Woman Artist
- ISSUE 45** 1988
Women and Liberation
- ISSUE 47** 1989
Women and Television
- ISSUE 48** 1990
Women in Management
- ISSUE 49** 1990
Women in Law
- ISSUE 50** 1990
Women in Charge
- ISSUE 51** 1990
Women: Where, When, and How
- ISSUE 52** 1991
Lebanese Women

- ISSUE 53** 1991
Never Married Women
- ISSUE 54** 1991
Basic Education and Female
Drop out in the Arab World
- ISSUE 55** 1991
Women Contributing to a Better
World
- ISSUE 56** 1992
Women and the Environment
- ISSUE 57** 1992
International Women's Day
- ISSUE 58** 1992
Women At The Earth Summit
- ISSUE 59** 1992
Women...A Step Ahead*
- ISSUE 60** 1993
Why Feminism*
- ISSUE 61** 1993
What About Career Woman*
- ISSUE 62** 1993
Young Woman of Lebanon in the
Post-War Era
- ISSUE 63** 1993
Women = Family in 1994*
- ISSUE 64** 1994
International Women's Day.
1994 (IWSAW's Regional
Environment Conference)
- ISSUE 65/66** 1994
Battered Women in Lebanon*
- ISSUE 67** 1994
Women's Health in Lebanon
- ISSUE 68** 1995
Women & Education in Lebanon
- ISSUE 69** 1995
Arab Women in Management*
- ISSUE 70/71** 1995
Women in Post-War Era
- ISSUE 72** 1996
Women, The Media and
Sustainable Human
Development
- ISSUE 73** 1996
Arab Women in the Fine Arts
- ISSUE 74/75** 1996
Women's Rights Are Human
Rights: Perspectives From the
Arab World
- ISSUE 76** 1997
Women in the Arab Family
- ISSUE 77** 1997
Arab Women and Poverty
- ISSUE 78** 1997
Women and Literature
- ISSUE 79** 1997
Women in Agriculture
- ISSUE 80/81** 1998
Arab Countries and CEDAW
- ISSUE 82** 1998
Women in the Labor Force

- ISSUE 83/84** 1998-1999
Women's Lives in Lebanon
- ISSUE 85** 1999
International Year for Older
Persons
- ISSUE 86/87** 1999
Arab Women and Cinema
- ISSUE 88** 2000
Arab Women and the Media
- ISSUE 89** 2000
On Violations
- ISSUE 90/91** 2000
Women Centers in the Arab World
- ISSUE 92** 2001
Feminizing Politics
- ISSUE 93/94** 2001
Marriage Patterns in the Arab
World
- ISSUE 95/96** 2002
Incarcerated Arab Women
- ISSUE 97/98** 2002
Arab Women in Civil Society
- ISSUE 99** 2002
Sexuality and Arab Women
- ISSUE 100** 2003
Arab Women's Movements
- ISSUE 101/102** 2003
Non-Arab Women in the Arab
World
- ISSUE 103** 2003
Women and War in the Arab
World
- ISSUE 104/105** 2004
What About Masculinity?
- ISSUE 106/107** 2004-2005
Young Arab Women
- ISSUE 108** 2005
Arab Women and Disability
- ISSUE 109/110** 2005
Women and Activism in the Arab
World
- ISSUE 111/112** 2005-2006
The Status of Women in Lebanese
Legislation
- ISSUE 113** 2006
Female Criminality in the Arab
World
- ISSUE 114/115** 2006
The Empowerment of Arab
Women Through Higher
Education
- ISSUE 116/117** 2007
Arab Diaspora Women
- ISSUE 118/119** 2007
Arab Women Writing in English

* Out of print - Xeroxed copies are available

Hard copies of recent and back issues of Al-Raida are available in English at the Institute.
Online copies of issues, 2001 onwards, are available online in English and Arabic (free of charge).

al-raida

THE PIONEER ISSUE 120 - 121 | WINTER / SPRING 2008

03

Editorial

ANNA ELYSE RESSLER

05

File

Arab Refugee Women

06

AYAKI ITO

International Refugee Law and the Arab World

11

HALA W. MAHMOUD

Exploring Identity Changes of Sudanese Refugee Women in Cairo: Liminality and the Frustrating Struggle between Stability and Change

20

ASSMAA NAGUIB

Home Away from the Homeland: Palestinian Women and the Re-construction of Home Two Tales from Shatila

25

LYN OSSOME

Locating Arab Refugee Women: Identity and Allegiance in Global Feminist Conflicts

33

NATOSCHIA SCRUGGS

My Present State is Fleeting

34

SAUDAMINI SIEGRIST

Erez Crossing
Picasso's Weeping Woman

36

ROUBA BEYDOUN

Iraqi Refugee Females in Lebanon: De facto Changes in Gender Roles

45

MARINA DE REGT

Triple Tensions: Somali Refugee Women in Yemen

53

SUMAYYAH SAMAHA

Artworks

- 55 **IBRAHIM A. EL-HUSSARI**
The Visibility of Palestinian Refugees: Women in Revolutionary Narratives
A Gender Discourse
- 59 **CATRIONA VINE, SERPIL TASKAN, AND AMY PEPPER**
The Experience of Internally Displaced Women in Urban Areas
of Western Turkey
- 67 **NEGAR RAZAVI AND KAMMERLE SCHNEIDER**
Health and Displacement: A Comparative Analysis of Displaced
Iraqis' Access to Reproductive Health Services in Iran and Jordan
- 77 **Book Reviews**
- 77 **HANAN AL-SHAYKH**, *Hikayati Sharhun Yatul: Sira Muda'afa (My Life is Too
Long to Tell)* (reviewed by Mohamed Berrada)
- 79 **SUAD JOSEPH** (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* (reviewed
by Nisreen Salti)
- 82 **NADJE SADIG AL-ALI**, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*
(reviewed by Zainab Al Bahrani)
- 84 **KARIN VAN NIEUWKERK**, *A Trade Like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers
in Egypt* (reviewed by Dalila Mahdawi)
- 86 **ROSEANNE SAAD KHALAF** (Ed.), *Hikayat: Short Stories by Lebanese Women*
(reviewed by Tanja Tabbara)

A Celebration of Refugee Women in the Arab World

Anna Elyse Ressler

In our hurried world, we often prove to be poor listeners and shallow observers. This is certainly true of our understanding of the plight, aspirations, and contributions of refugee women living in our midst. Public discourse about refugee women is often limited to pity and sympathy. In reality they remain hidden in the shadows of society. Unless one is invited into the private sanctuaries of their confidence, built to preserve their safety, they appear faceless and the breadth of their reality remains unknown. This, in spite of their fundamental role in society and their importance in the construction of a holistic future.

This edition of *Al-Raida* seeks to encourage better listening, observing, and understanding of the world of refugee women. It aims to bring into focus their strengths, the obstacles they face, and their coping strategies. It is our hope that throughout these pages, the human voice of the refugee woman can be heard and celebrated, in its many forms. To these ends, art, poetry, and narratives have been scattered between more formal academic reflections.

Refugee women are central to understanding the political, social, and economic turmoil in the Arab region, and as such deserve much more attention than commonly given. First and foremost, refugee women deserve attention as a basic response to their humanity. They are in many ways the human face of war, poverty, and discrimination, but also of hope and resilience. They are often identified as exceptionally vulnerable, experiencing the traumas of war, displacement, and gender-based violence. As such, they deserve increased protection and service. But they also act as the family protector and provider, the memory holder, and the builder of family, identity, and society. For this, they deserve better understanding, opportunities, and our admiration.

Articles were submitted to this edition of *Al-Raida* from diverse writers, contexts, and backgrounds. Interestingly, a natural cohesion exists between articles based on their mutual consideration of core issues. Perhaps the most common theme across the articles is the timeless struggle of refugee women to create and retain identity amid the competing need to both hold to the past and to exist in the present. Like all refugees, when refugee women flee their homes they leave behind complex social networks, traditions and rituals, identities, social recognition, and a way of life. As refugees, they may be thrust into new cultures and social systems. In these new environments, they may face discrimination, isolation, and poverty. Navigating these new complexities requires ingenuity and strength. In the context of Sudanese refugee women in Cairo, Mahmoud studies this tension, as manifested in three domains: the body, productivity, and the social sphere. Naguib, drawing on the narratives of two Palestinian women in Lebanon, illustrates women's ability to positively adapt to displacement and to overcome the fore mentioned tension by the recreation of home, memory, and identity. Analyzing Arab refugee women's location in the global feminist movement, Ossome identifies the opportunity in the identity crisis of Arab refugee women for

the reconciliation of feminism in the Arab world with the global feminist movement. Adding to the struggle to recreate an identity for themselves and their families, refugee women are often faced with shifting dynamics in the family and in gender roles. In some refugee situations, women may find employment easier and enjoy freer movement than men, thus changing their role in the public sphere, even becoming the primary 'bread-winner' for the family. Such changes are explored in various articles. Beydoun's article, for example, focuses on Iraqi refugees in Lebanon, and highlights changes in gender roles in displacement, notable in women/girls' increased responsibility and engagement at home and in the public sphere and decreased social capital/social networks. Interestingly, the articles suggest that women do not unilaterally embrace their increased voice in the family; stepping outside the house forces them into contact with unknown dynamics which threaten their identity and safety. As evidence to this, both Mahmoud and De Regt draw attention to women's feelings of frustration and degradation which result from being forced to work in jobs that they consider socially inferior. Similarly, De Regt finds that Somali refugee women in Yemen are thrust into the public sphere, in which they feel vulnerable. In her article, she suggests that this causes tension in the home because it forces men into an uncomfortable position of dependence.

Feeding these dynamics is a brutal reality: in many situations, refugee women experience multiple layers of discrimination. Not only are they faced with stigma and discrimination as refugees, they also struggle against social, cultural, and legal gender-based discrimination. This can result in violations of their basic human rights and frustrate attempts to satisfy basic needs. Ito's article describes the international and regional protection mechanisms which ensure refugee women's rights. Against this background, a number of the articles highlight critical deficiencies in national protection mechanisms, human rights violations, and continuing need. For example, Vine, Taskan, and Pepper's article considers the condition of displaced Kurdish women in Turkey, noting continued human rights violations. Similarly, Razavi and Schneider study Iraqi refugee women's access to basic reproductive health care in Iran and Jordan. They stress the long term consequences, for refugee women and for the region, of the inadequate provision of basic services.

The articles not only highlight the gendered experience of refugee women in the Arab world, they also draw attention to many of the refugee populations believed to be among the most vulnerable in the region: Palestinian refugees – the largest refugee crisis in the modern history of the Middle East; Iraqi refugees – a growing crisis surpassed only by the Palestinian refugee crisis; sub-Saharan African refugees in the Arab world (Somali and Sudanese)—who have not only fled extreme violence in their home countries, but are likely to face discrimination and neglect in their host-countries; and displaced Kurds—a historically marginalized population in the Arab world. These communities live on the edge of our society and consciousness, in the shadow of regional and national politics. They are a living testimony to the consequences of war and the human drive for survival.

Ultimately, this edition of *Al-Raida* is a call to action, both to assist the marginalized communities and to listen and learn from them. Refugee women are among the most vulnerable in our society but, as the articles show, they are also survivors, examples of the strength, courage, and adaptability of humans generally. We have much to learn from their stories and experiences.

Anna Ressler works on refugee issues in the Middle East with international and national NGOs.
Email: annaressler@hotmail.com

Arab Refugee Women

Ayaki Ito

International Refugee Law & the Arab World

Hala W. Mahmoud

Exploring Identity Changes of Sudanese Refugee Women in Cairo

Assmaa Naguib

Home Away from the Homeland

Lyn Ossome

Locating Arab Refugee Women: Identity & Allegiance in Global Feminist Conflicts

Natoschia Scruggs

My Present State is Fleeting

Saudamini Siegrist

Erez Crossing & Picasso's Weeping Woman

Rouba Beydoun

Iraqi Refugee Females in Lebanon:
De facto Changes in Gender Roles

Marina De Regt

Triple Tensions: Somali Refugee Women in Yemen

Sumayyah Samaha

Artworks

Ibrahim A. El-Hussari

The Visibility of Palestinian Refugees

**Catriona Vine, Serpil Taskan,
& Amy Pepper**

The Experience of Internally Displaced Women
in Urban Areas of Western Turkey

Negar Razavi & Kammerle Schneider

Health and Displacement: A Comparative Analysis



International Refugee Law and the Arab World

Ayaki Ito*

Introduction

Amira is a 34-year old Iraqi woman. In 2005 a group of militants burst into her house in the Dora area of Baghdad. They told her husband to leave the house within 24 hours for sectarian reasons. He refused and was shot dead on the spot. One of the militants raped Amira in front of her two children. Afraid and ashamed, she fled Iraq with her children to a country in the region. She is still afraid in the country of asylum because many men are asking why she is alone and some are making unwanted advances. She is also afraid of being arrested because she entered the country illegally. She is afraid to return to Iraq because of her experience and the stigma associated with it.

Fatima is a 20-year old university student from country A. For her summer vacation, she visited another country in the Middle East. She fell in love with a man whom she met at the hotel where she was staying with her family. She ran away with him and they got married. Her father was furious. He felt that she had shamed his family name. He threatened to kill her to protect the family's honour. Fatima is afraid to go back to her home country: she knows that her father will kill her and the authorities will not stop him from doing so.

Both Amira and Fatima are refugees – as defined by international refugee law. Their stories are typical and found across the world. However, in many places in the Arab region Amira and Fatima would not be recognized as refugees. Though many governments and the general public show a general tolerance towards refugees, due to the lack of domestic legal frameworks, the authorities apply immigration laws in force. As a result, refugees are

often arrested for illegal stay and do not have access to the labour market, a situation which makes basic sustenance difficult.

The rapid rate of globalization, coupled with the turbulent events in Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, and other parts of the world, has caused an increasing number of refugees to seek protection in the Arab region. Many countries of the region have been tolerant towards the likes of Amira and Fatima. However, this tolerance is not always anchored in a solid legal basis and its scope has been limited. This article outlines the scope and parameters of refugee protection¹ in the region, as defined by international refugee law and international human rights law. The article will conclude that the Arab countries are obliged to protect non-Palestinian refugees because they have ratified various international human rights instruments. In light of this argument, this article advocates for the full implementation of those instruments which have been ratified by countries in the Arab region.

Who is a Refugee?

On a human level, Amira and Fatima's experiences compel their listener to consider them to be refugees. But what does international refugee law say? The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (CSR and CSRP, respectively) define a refugee as anyone who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country."² In other words, a refugee needs (1) to be outside of

his/her own country; (2) to be unable or unwilling to return there (avail himself/herself of protection of his/her country); (3) to have a well-founded fear of persecution; (4) to have at least one of the following five reasons for persecution – race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.

According to these criteria, Amira is considered to be a refugee because (1) she is outside of her own country; (2) she is unwilling to return because she knows that the police are not in control of her area of residence; (3) she is afraid of being harmed because her husband was killed and she was raped; and (4) she was subjected (and will likely be again) to violence because of her religion. Similarly, Fatima is a refugee because (1) she is outside of her own country; (2) she does not trust the police when it comes to preventing honour killing; (3) she is afraid of getting killed by her father; and (4) she will be subjected to violence for having transgressed the prevailing social norms (membership of a particular social group).³

Refugee law clearly defines who is a refugee. The next question is, what can refugees expect from the governments of countries where they are seeking protection? To fully answer this question, the discussion will have to be expanded beyond refugee law.

International Protection of Refugees

How should the state protect Amira and Fatima as refugees? When their country of origin cannot or will not protect them, refugees should be accorded “international protection.” This “surrogate” protection is supposed to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights of refugees. “Protection” in this context should be understood as “all activities, aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights, humanitarian and refugee law).”⁴

Admittedly, this definition of protection is very broad and, in many respects, does not provide specific details. What does it mean concretely? First and foremost, refugees should not be forcibly

sent back to their own countries in which they risk being persecuted – or a serious threat to their lives and freedoms. This principle of *non-refoulement* is fundamental to refugee law:⁵ if this right is not ensured, other rights will not be able to be fulfilled because refugees would not have the opportunity to enjoy other rights in the country in which they sought safety (“country of asylum”). In addition, if Amira and Fatima arrived illegally in their country of asylum, they should not be prosecuted for their illegal entry. If someone was escaping from an immediately life threatening situation, how could one expect him/her to have obtained a passport and the proper entry documents? Moreover, often, the state itself is an agent of persecution. Thus, it is difficult to obtain passports from the very party that may be persecuting you.

Refugees – both male and female adults – should be provided with identity documents which allow them to stay legally in the country of asylum. In addition, the documents should allow the refugee to move freely in the country of asylum. Refugees should also have access to the labour market, i.e. the right to work. Refugee children should have access to public education. Refugees should not be discriminated against with regard to their access to public healthcare, including women’s reproductive health. They should have free access to courts. Refugees should be able to practice their religion freely. Refugee protection also entails the identification of durable solutions, be they voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to third countries.

These are some of the rights outlined in the Statute of UNHCR⁶ and CSR. However, the Statute was conceived in 1950 and CSR was created in 1951 – only two years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and 15 years before the International Bill of Rights. Today, the basic rights enumerated in CSR have been significantly supplemented by human rights instruments that have since come into force. Indeed, foreseeing the future development of human rights law, Article 5 of CSR leaves room for states to grant additional rights and benefits to refugees.⁷ Fifty-seven years after the birth of CSR, the world now has a large number of regional and international human rights instruments and related

international and national legislation. Refugees are human beings; thus, human rights law should also protect refugees.

In short, the rights of refugees are not only found in CSR but in a wide range of regional and international human rights instruments. The development of international human rights law has had an overarching positive impact on the protection of refugees.

Refugee Protection and the Arab World⁸

Table 1 shows the status of ratification of CSR and seven other key international human rights instruments among the member states of the League of Arab States. The table also shows the number of non-Palestinian refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in each state in 2006. Arab states generally have a poor record of accession to the refugee instruments. Only 9 member states out of 22 have ratified CSR. By contrast, most of the states acceded to the main international human rights instruments. For instance, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was either signed or ratified by all the member states (except for Palestine). This has significant implications for refugee protection. Article 22 of CSC stipulates that:

State Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other persons, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.

This provision is designed to ensure that children seeking asylum or refugee children should be protected according to the national law and international human rights law. In other words, states that are not signatories to CSR but have ratified CRC have an obligation to protect refugee children's rights.

Similarly, the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) also provides rights to refugees. Almost all the member states in the League of Arab States have either ratified or signed the CAT. Article 3 provides that:

No State Party shall expel, return ("refouler") or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture.

CAT contains the same principle of non-refoulement outlined in refugee law. Nobody can be expelled or deported to a country where there is a risk that they might be tortured. Many refugees have suffered or would risk suffering from torture as a form of persecution. Thus, there is a continuum between the *non-refoulement* principle of CAT and that of CSR. In this respect, Lebanon has established interesting jurisprudence. While the country is not a signatory to CSR, it has ratified CAT. Referring to Article 3 of CAT, the Beirut Penal Court ruled in 2003 that refugees recognized under UNHCR mandate should not be forcibly returned to their country of origin.⁹ As a result, the court ruled that a Sudanese refugee arrested for illegal entry should not be deported.

A third example of the interface between refugee law and human rights instruments can be found in the application of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICPPR), which 16 countries of the League of Arab States have ratified. Article 7 of the ICPPR stipulates that:

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.

The Human Rights Committee, created to monitor the implementation of this treaty, reaffirmed the extraterritorial effect on Article 7, referring to the *non-refoulement* principle:

In the view of the Committee, States parties must not expose individuals to the danger of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment upon return to

another country by way of their extradition, expulsion or refoulement.¹⁰

Thus, the ICCPR also prohibits forcible expulsion or return of asylum-seekers and refugees to countries in which they may be tortured or subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, which is often practiced as a form of persecution. Although most of the member states of the League of Arab States are not parties to CSR/CSRP, the ICCPR reinforces their obligation to the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Furthermore, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR) provides an additional framework for the realization of the right to an adequate standard of living, work, education, social services, and family life for asylum-seekers and refugees. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls on signatory states to guarantee the same rights to men and women, particularly with respect to their enjoyment of their fundamental human rights. The example of Fatima in this article touches upon Article 16 of CEDAW, obligating the signatory states to “take all appropriate measures to ensure the same right between men and women to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent.” Notably, some countries in the Arab region ratified CEDAW with reservations against this article, meaning that they did not agree to implement and protect the right as expressed in this article. This section showed that although the states in the Arab region have not ratified the CSR and the CSRP, they already have clear legal obligations to

protect refugees by applying the other provisions of key international human rights law. If these instruments were implemented in accordance with their letter and spirit, asylum-seekers and refugees would immediately have a considerable level of protection, even without the ratification of CSR/CSRP. In other words, not being a signatory to the CSR and its protocol does not absolve the state of its responsibility to protect refugees.

Conclusion

The development of international human rights law over the past fifty years has created a seamless interface between refugee law and human rights law. The ratification of CSR/CSRP has not advanced in the region and there is a continuing need to call on the Arab countries to consider accession to the two important refugee instruments, CRS and the CRSP. At the same time, this article has illustrated that the Arab countries have agreed to protect the fundamental human rights of refugees through their ratification of various international human rights treaties. All the countries in the region have ratified legal instruments that should assist and protect the likes of Amira and Fatima. However, for refugees to be afforded their rights, countries in the region will have to concretely implement and actualize the obligations that they have already agreed to.

Ayaki Ito is Senior Protection Officer, UNHCR Regional Representation in Lebanon.
Email: ITO@unhcr.org

*The views expressed in this article are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or UNHCR.

ENDNOTES

1. This paper deals only with non-Palestinian refugees in view of UNHCR’s mandate and the scope of CSR51 and CSRP67. For detailed discussion on this matter, see “Note on the Applicability of Article 1D of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees to Palestinian refugees”, UNHCR, Geneva, October 2002.
2. CSR, Article 1 A (2). For further elaboration of the definition of Article 1 A (2), see “Interpreting Article 1 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees”, UNHCR, Geneva, April 2001.
3. UNHCR defines a particular social group as “a group of persons who share a common characteristic other than their risk of being persecuted, or who are perceived as a group by society. The characteristics will often be one which is innate, unchangeable, or which is otherwise fundamental to identity, conscience or the exercise of one’s human rights.” For the example of Fatima, she was perceived as someone who transgressed the societal mores and tarnished the family honour by marrying someone whom her family did not approve of. She can be considered as belonging to a “particular social group” according to the international refugee law. See also “Guidelines on International Protection: Gender-Related Persecution within the Context of Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees”, HCR/GIP/02/01, UNHCR, Geneva, 2 May 2002.
4. Third Workshop on Protection, Background paper, ICRC, 7 January 1999. For a more detailed description of protection activities, see para. 12, Note on International Protection, UN General Assembly, A/AC/96/830, 7 September 1994.

5. See para (b), Conclusion 25 of the UNHCR Executive Committee (EXCOM): "Reaffirmed the importance of the basic principles of international protection and in particular the principle of *non-refoulement* which was progressively acquiring the character of a peremptory rule of international law."
6. Annex to the UN General Assembly Resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950, defining the original mandate of UNHCR. See footnote 10 below.
7. Article 5, CSR51, "Nothing in this Convention shall be deemed to impair any rights and benefits granted by a Contracting State to refugees apart from this Convention."
8. For a comprehensive overview of refugee policies of the countries in the Middle East and their relationships with UNHCR, see Zaiotti, R. (2006). Dealing with non-Palestinian refugees in the Middle East: Policies and practice in an uncertain environment. *International Journal of Refugee Law* 18(2), 334-353.
9. Criminal Court of Beirut, Decision no. 1119/2003, 12 June 2003. Whilst this was an encouraging development, the court could have also resorted to the argument that refugee status granted under UNHCR mandate should be respected by the state authorities, as UNHCR's mandate derives originally from the UN General Assembly Resolution 428 (V) of 14 December 1950. The original mandate has been expanded further by successive General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions. In other words, UNHCR is mandated by UN's principle organs in accordance with the relevant provisions of UN Charter, and Lebanon, as a UN member state, has the obligation to respect the function of UNHCR, thus, refugee status granted by UNHCR under its mandate.
10. Para. 9, General Comment 20, UN Human Rights Committee, Forty-fourth session, 1992.

TABLE 1: Member States of the League of Arab States and Ratification of International Human Rights Instruments

	Refugees (2006)*	CSR/CSRP	ICCPR	ICESCR	CAT	CRC	CEDAW	CERD
Algeria	95,121	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Bahrain	18	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
Comoros	1	X	X	O	Δ	O	O	O
Djibouti	9,278	O	O	O	O	O	O	Δ
Egypt	104,390	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Iraq	46,586	X	O	O	X	O	O	O
Jordan	519,477	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
Kuwait	275	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
Lebanon	22,743	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
Libya	4,757	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
Mauritania	861	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Morocco	1,878	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Oman	14	X	X	X	X	O	O	O
Qatar	81	X	X	X	O	O	X	O
Saudi Arabia	241,050	X	X	X	O	O	O	O
Somalia	1,890	O	O	O	O	Δ	O	O
Sudan	200,660	O	O	O	Δ	O	X	O
Syria	707,442	X	O	O	O	O	O	O
Tunisia	161	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
UAE	206	X	X	X	X	O	O	O
Yemen	120,468	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Palestine	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total	2,077,357	9 states	16 states	17 states	16 states	20 states	19 states	20 states

O=ratified/ Δ=signed but not ratified/ X=not signed or ratified

- CSR/CSRP: 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol
 ICCPR: 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
 ICESCR: 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
 CAT: 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
 CRC: 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child
 CEDAW: 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
 CERD: 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

* Source: UNHCR/Amnesty International Annual Report 2007

Exploring Identity Changes of Sudanese Refugee Women in Cairo:

Liminality and the Frustrating Struggle between Stability and Change

Hala W. Mahmoud *

Introduction

Kunz (1973) argued that refugees are a distinct social type, whereas Coker (2004) referred to Victor Turner's (1967) influential work on liminality to highlight the inherent 'transitional' nature of a refugee's identity. It is an identity that is essentially liminal – a state characterized by ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy. Refugees are faced with the loss of patterns that sustained previously established identities and new factors that require effective adaptation and identity transformations. The interplay between these factors results in tremendous identity struggles. Not surprisingly, identity confusion is one of the most common stressors facing refugees (Baker, 1983; Stein, 1986).

This article explores identity changes experienced by Sudanese refugee women in Cairo, who, like all refugees, are a heterogeneous group (Baker, 1983; Harrell-Bond, 2002). The focus here is on shared experiences in this diverse group of women. Tens or even hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees have come to Egypt as a result of the decades of conflict in Sudan. The wars in Sudan have partly resulted from ethnic, religious, and inter-tribal tensions (Lesch, 1998; Johnson, 2003). Egypt is one of the primary destinations for Sudanese fleeing war. Many arrive in Egypt with the intention of applying to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for refugee status, in the hope of third-country resettlement (Coker, 2004). The Sudanese refugees in Cairo are heterogeneous, consisting of people from a variety of social classes, age groups, and ethnic backgrounds. Many have been refugees for years. They live in groups among the local population in Cairo's poor districts or urban slums. The majority of them are illegally employed and their living conditions are dire (Moro, 2004). They have very little protection and are often subjected to arbitrary detention and discrimination (Briant & Kennedy, 2004; Mahmoud, 2007). Like other refugee groups, the Sudanese refugees in Cairo vary with regards to the extent to which their migration was forced (Westermeyer, 1989). However, many arrive with stories of detention and harassment by Sudanese security forces. Most Sudanese refugees enter Egypt with visas that expire after one month and continue to stay illegally until their refugee status is determined by UNHCR (Briant & Kennedy, 2004).

* The Sudanese refugees in Cairo have helped me collect valuable data to get my PhD while they were suffering in their precarious situation. Such selfless giving is appreciated beyond words, and I will remain eternally grateful for their support. I am also thankful to my doctoral supervisor, Gerard Duveen, for his valuable comments on the ideas presented in this paper.

An important issue facing many Sudanese refugees is the indefinite waiting period in Egypt. Living in a transitional state, without knowledge of the final destination, causes emotional distress. This constant state of waiting is made more difficult by the severe break with their previously established identity. In Sudan, people were part of a social order in which their identities were entrenched, practiced, and rendered meaningful. Coming to Egypt changes familiar patterns, practices, and groups, which, in turn, affects self-perception and the construction of identity.

As a point of departure, it is important to note that it is difficult to separate changes in gender-based identity from other identity changes experienced by this group of women. As described in the "Multiple Identities" framework (Gregg, 1998), the presence and constant interplay between multiple identities in an individual's life must be acknowledged. Therefore, besides being "Sudanese", "refugees", and "women", the Sudanese refugee women in Cairo also have religious, ethnic, and other identities that simultaneously and dynamically play significant roles in their lives. The gender identity transformations are experienced in the shadow of other identity changes. They occur in a transitional period and constitute part of the general identity transformation all refugees experience.

It will be argued that the identities of Sudanese refugee women in Cairo are essentially liminal, ambiguously trapped in the struggle between stability and change. As in any other culture, being female in Sudan is defined by sets of values, roles, and practices that constitute pillars on which identities are founded, supported, and rendered meaningful. Displacement shakes these pillars, challenging and constraining the sustainability of previous definitions of identity. While Sudanese refugee women strive to retain the values that previously formed the basis of their identities as women and persons, they are confronted with a new reality that imposes restrictions on and challenges to those identities. This results in the psychological distress of identity conflict and confusion. This article will detail how such identity issues are experienced, expressed, and reinforced in three overlapping domains: the domain of the body, the domain of productivity, and the domain of the social sphere.

Methodology

This article is based on PhD fieldwork conducted between June 2006 and January 2007, piloted by an earlier study for an MPhil degree in 2004-2005. The research explores how Sudanese refugees in Cairo use culture to manage the identity and life changes they experience as a result of forced migration. The fieldwork was qualitative (consisting of focus groups, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic analysis) and included male and female Sudanese refugees in Cairo. During the research process, the refugees' lives in both Sudan and Egypt were extensively discussed.

The data used for the present article is based on ethnography and thirty-one in-depth interviews with Sudanese refugee women. The women's ages ranged between nineteen and fifty-three and the length of their stay in Egypt varied between one and eight years. They were diverse in terms of marital status, religion, ethnicity, tribe and region of origin, education, occupation, and official UNHCR refugee status. Their commonality was that, at the time when the interviews were conducted, they were all 'waiting'

indefinitely in Egypt for a decision to be made about their future.

The fact that this diverse group of women is treated as a single entity does not undermine the ethnic and cultural diversity within the group. The circumstances of these refugee women have resulted in the emergence of a new group identity – that of a ‘Sudanese refugee’. This emergent identity is constantly reinforced in Egypt by social groups (e.g. by some Egyptians and certain aid agencies, etc) who treat them as a homogenous group (Sudanese refugees), rather than acknowledging the range of factors contributing to their identities (e.g. westerners, northerners, southerners, easterners, Muslims, Christians, Beja, Dinka, Arab, African, etc.). This, in turn, has impacted the way in which refugees have come to identify themselves, proving that “identity is as much about the process of being identified as it is about the process of identification” (Duveen, 2001, p. 259). This new identity is further reinforced by the common experiences Sudanese refugees share in Egypt.

The Domain of the Body

The body is one of the domains through which identity changes are caused or expressed. It has been argued that the body can be the locus of identity transformations (Coker, 2004), and, as will be shown, the body not only represents these transformations, but also expresses and reinforces them.

The invasion of the body through sexual violence is a traumatic event that affects the very core of a Sudanese girl or woman’s identity. As in many cultures, in Sudan a woman’s dignity and moral standing is based on her virginity before marriage.¹ Many Sudanese women experience sexual violence before coming to Egypt (Verney, 1995). In particular, rape is sometimes the primary reason why a woman or a girl decides to flee Sudan and becomes a refugee. The story of Hend, a 25 year old, single, Sudanese refugee girl, exemplifies the impact that rape can have on a girl’s sense of femininity, dignity, and humanity. Hend’s story illustrates how the body can become the locus of suffering, a symbol of the loss of femininity.

Hend is an intelligent, opinionated, and personable young lady. She came alone to Egypt a year and a half ago. Hend is a survivor. Her experience is full of admirable courage and resilience. When she began her studies at a university in Sudan, she became politically active. She was arrested and detained four times before she decided to flee. She was subjected to increased abuse and torture each time she was detained (from psychological to physical, culminating in sexual violence and rape). Following each detention, Hend would courageously return to her university and speak about her experience. However, her last detention, during which she was raped, was the final straw. This incident affected the core of her identity, damaging what she valued most as a Sudanese woman. As she explains:

... After what happened to me [i.e. the rape], I couldn’t stay. If I had a fiancé in Sudan, he wouldn’t understand what I went through. I couldn’t go back to my house or university. There was nothing left for me there...

The rape was an invasion of the embodied value of chastity, resulting in what she believed to be a forced disconnect between her and her community. It marked the beginning of her journey outside Sudan, a story of suffering and dehumanization.

¹. See Cloudsley, 1983; Boddy, 1989.

For Hend, her body continued to be the locus of identity transformation, as shown below:

... (I) started working [in Egypt] because I was on my own and needed money. This is a whole other story of suffering. After having been a top university student, I am working now as a housecleaner, which is humiliating... And [I] sleep on the floor... People treat [me] like [I am] not human. [I] and a piece of furniture are one and the same for them. I work six days a week and only come back home for one night. I spend the rest of the week constantly working ...

The above excerpt describes her feelings of dehumanization which result from a significant identity transformation: from student to housecleaner. The lack of mental stimulus and the physical stress made her feel that she is no longer 'human' or able to enjoy the luxury of 'free time', but a machine that needs to be recharged to resume its task. When asked how she spends her free time, she responded:

There is no free time. I only take a day off from work and I come back, sleep, and do the chores. When I'm done, I worry about the transportation back to work... There is no time for anything. I feel like a machine.

In this case, the body has become the locus of psychological distress and dehumanization, and the bearer of significant identity changes. The shift from 'citizen' to 'refugee', the impact of rape on her identity and on her perception of her own femininity, and the dehumanization she experienced at work reflect the severity of her experience and her marked sense of loss. As shown above, these experiences, in Hend's case, are felt and expressed through the body.

Another way in which the body acts as the locus for identity transformation for Sudanese refugee women in Cairo is through physical self-presentation. In parts of Sudan, womanhood and femininity are enforced by the performance of beautification rituals and clothing. In the cities, women typically wear the Sudanese robe (*tobe*), paint *henna* on their hands and feet, use particular scents, and perform the *dukhan* ritual (a sauna-like 'smoke' bath to cleanse and purify their skin). These processes are essential to a woman's sense of femininity and personal beauty. Participants proudly and nostalgically described the importance of these processes for Sudanese women; as Basma explained, "... We can't live without those things. Oh my God!... every woman should have those things."

Sudanese refugee women in Cairo strive to continue to practice these rituals but it is difficult. The unavailability of many items and the high cost of those items that are available make their acquisition difficult. In addition, Sudanese women have less time and energy in Egypt to perform such rituals because, in addition to house chores, many Sudanese refugee women work long hours. Housing conditions also impede women's ability to practice beautification rituals. In Sudan most of the houses are one storey, thus women can easily dig the holes in the ground used to perform the *dukhan* ritual. In Cairo, many of the refugee families live together in single rooms in apartment buildings. It is thus difficult to dig holes in the ground and to find the privacy needed for such a ritual.

The above factors have resulted in the decreased practice of these rituals in Egypt. Women that can perform the *dukhan* ritual face another difficulty:

Hala: Do you do [the *dukhan*] everyday?

Basma: No, it depends on when I'm going out. Because it's not good... the smell is so strong, and not all Sudanese women do it here... because this smell is not common here. If men smell it, it would be a disaster! [i.e. seductive].

Despite the various difficulties mentioned, the interviewees insist on the value of such rituals which are basic to the expression of their femininity as Sudanese women. One of the most common and easily retained aspects of self-presentation is the Sudanese robe and henna, which many Sudanese women continue to wear in Egypt. Doing so, however, has its own connotations; in addition to their skin color, wearing the Sudanese robe and *henna* makes them stand out as Sudanese. Arguably, these beautification practices are used to reconfirm personhood and womanhood for Sudanese refugee women in Egypt. For example, Becker (1997) notes:

Clothes do more than simply cover and fit the body. They are an extension of the body, an extension that proclaims personhood, because people choose clothes that represent who they are. Without such reminders of identity, a major linkage with the known body is dissolved, and a guidepost of continuity is destroyed. (p. 138)

Once again, the body becomes the locus of identity changes and the medium through which identity is expressed and reinforced. The constraints experienced by women attempting to continue practicing beautification rituals, as used in Sudan, reflect the broader feelings of cultural estrangement. Yet, they continue to struggle to retain their femininity, as reinforced by traditional rituals and clothing, while simultaneously adjusting to new constraints.

The Domain of Productivity

For the purpose of this article, productivity is defined as the roles and values which shape a Sudanese girl or woman's identity as a productive citizen. This has a variety of forms in Sudan, including specific duties for students, housewives, and career women. Displacement has a severe impact on the refugee women's identities as productive persons, resulting in injury to their dignity and the redefinition of selfhood. The domain of productivity is the site of "degrading" and distressing identity transformations experienced within the family or through the body (as was seen in the case of Hend). Again, refugee women get trapped in the psychological struggle between stability and change.

Due to the legal restrictions on refugees in Egypt (Moro & Lamua, 1998), it is almost impossible for many to find decent jobs. Many have to struggle in the informal sector or sell merchandise on the street. It is particularly difficult for men to find jobs and the few available jobs are low-paying and physically demanding. Women have better chances to find employment in the informal sector. Many women work as housecleaners or wander the tourist streets of Cairo as *hannanas* (women who paint *henna*). Thus, women become the primary 'breadwinners', which results in a pronounced shift in gender roles and, consequently, shatters gender identities. The majority of women see this shift in gender roles as degrading. For example, Eman proudly recalls that in Sudan she was 'a housewife'. In Cairo, Eman has been

forced to work as a housecleaner to help her husband and family. She described her experience as follows:

In Sudan, it was different because I was not working. But when I first came here... I had to work to support my husband. I looked for a job and... [the] only job that was available and paid better was cleaning houses. So, by God, I worked. By God, you know when I am working, my tears fall on the floor. I wipe the floor and I wipe my tears with it. I mean, this has really affected me, by God. [Gets very tearful]. I really suffered because of this...

This experience clearly represents a shift from Eman's previous identity as a 'dignified housewife'. However, she justifies her current condition by stressing that she is working to help her husband, thus framing the experience within the higher duty of being a supportive wife and mother. This identity shift is not only distressing because of its personal effect but also because it prevents her from carrying out other mothering activities. For example, Eman bitterly explains how her physically demanding job as a housecleaner has affected her health and undermined her role as a mother:

I worked for two years... And I got sick, I wouldn't lie to you... I was bleeding, and I had back pain, and pain in the joints. So I lied down for a while. But I got treated, thank God, and I am better now. The doctor told me either to work less... or quit... Thank God, until now I've continued to work every other day. But by God, I am tired. Everyday I go to work, you know, when I come back home, my daughter tells me, "Mama, come kiss me". But I ask her to come because I am unable to move. My back hurts and I need to lie down immediately... The following day, thank God, I usually feel better. I cook for [the children] and I do anything they need...

This excerpt highlights the inherent liminality of Eman's identity as a refugee mother. She feels that she must help her husband and provide for her family. The only way she can fulfil this responsibility is to do what she thinks is a 'degrading' job. This job is also harming her health and making it impossible for her to meet the standard of the ideal mother and housewife that she set for herself. Like many other refugee women, she is trapped in the struggle between stability and change. This process involves identity challenges and role conflicts that leave her physically and emotionally distressed. Her description of physical illness, resulting from her demanding job, also illustrates how the body can act as the bearer of identity transformations, overlapping the domain of the body and the family.

Another way through which the family acts as the locus of identity transformations is through procreation. In many parts of Sudan, one of a woman's primary roles is to bear children.² Sudanese refugee women continue to embrace the value of procreation. While this reinforces their womanhood, as previously defined, it also puts tremendous stress on them and their entire family. Many parents worry about their children's safety on the street. Many complain about the lack of education for their children and worry about what the future will hold for uneducated persons. Many lament that their children are rapidly internalizing the Egyptian culture and losing their own. Still, parents continue to have children because procreation is a core value, sustaining their personhood in the face of inevitable change. Again, the women are caught in a struggle between stability and change. Having many children is an important value,

2. See Boddy (1989) on a northern Sudanese community and Deng (1972) on the Dinka of southern Sudan.

which secures their womanhood and personhood, but the circumstances in Egypt make fulfilling the related duties and obligations very challenging.

Domain of the Social Sphere

Social life is another domain through which identity transformations, caused by displacement, are lived and reinforced. Social life in Sudan is full of hospitality (Voll & Voll, 1985). Relationships in the extended family and tribal and social networks in Sudan were based on ideals of solidarity and mutual support. Part of a woman's life and identity in Sudan is expressed by her social role in the community. This entails her participation in social gatherings and networks. These social interactions not only provide entertainment but they also have important social functions. An example is the 'coffee ritual', nostalgically described by many women. This ritual typically took place at noon, after the women had finished their chores. One woman would host all of the women in her extended family and neighbourhood for coffee (this was regularly rotated). Each woman would bring an ingredient to make coffee and snacks. During the gathering, folkloric songs are sung and there are various forms of entertainment. However, in addition to its entertainment value, the coffee ritual provided community support for those in trouble or need. Problems were discussed and a *sundooq* (donation box) was passed around, in order to collect money to help those in need. In addition to the coffee ritual, missed by many in Egypt, a woman and man in Sudan are socially responsible for visiting their neighbours and family, hosting guests, and supporting others during events.

The absence of important support networks in Egypt causes refugee women great difficulties. Although support networks have been formed in Cairo, they exist on a much smaller scale and the extent of their funding is limited. Refugee women note that maintaining the coffee ritual in Cairo is difficult because of the lack of financial resources to cater for a gathering, the lack of physical space, and because in Cairo many women work whereas in Sudan they were housewives.

Another important and commonly mentioned obstacle is the difficulty of dealing with Sudanese from other backgrounds in Cairo. This creates identity confusion for women, reflected in their difficulty to relate to other Sudanese and results in the lack of social activities and gatherings. This has left many women confused and socially isolated. When asked what she misses in Sudan, one participant responded with the following:

... Here, there's no intermingling. I sometimes feel sad because of this. Even within the Sudanese community, there's no intermingling... I don't know much about my neighbour, and she doesn't know much about me. In Sudan, it is different... You see, I shut my door like this in isolation, because I'm the only person from Darfur in this place. They are all from the Nuba Mountains, and when I visit them, they speak their *Rotana* [tribal language].

As evidenced by the above example, the social sphere is another domain through which identity transformations are lived and reinforced. The aforementioned participant complained that there was no intermingling within the 'Sudanese community'. Yet, she acknowledged that her neighbours were women from a different background in Sudan. This illustrates the identity confusion which results from changes in ethnic identities taking place in Egypt. Specifically, the new group identity,

'Sudanese refugees', may have given refugee women expectations about their social lives in Egypt, such as a belief that they would be able to develop relationships and have smooth interaction with other Sudanese groups. However, in reality, they are perpetually faced with mixed messages: Are they 'Sudanese refugees' or are they members of their respective regions or tribes? Or both? What should their expectations be? And how can they avoid estrangement and disappointment?

Conclusion

This article attempted to examine how the 'liminal' or 'transitional' identity of a refugee is experienced by Sudanese refugee women in Cairo. These women are experiencing identity changes on many levels: from identifying themselves with particular Sudanese tribes or regions to adapting to the 'Sudanese refugee' identity; from productive citizens to refugees; and from students/house wives/career women to housecleaners. In all of the above examples, refugee women are caught between the need to establish control over their lives and maintain continuity with their past identities, and the need to respond to the changed circumstances they face in Egypt. Should they give up their previously established identities and adopt new ones? Should they use the little control they have in their present situation to maintain continuity with their past? Or should they do both? And what does their future hold?

Identity changes were explored through the overlapping domains of the body, the spheres of productivity, and the social sphere. Each of these domains has been explored as locations in which identity transformations are lived, manifested, and reinforced.

An important factor to briefly consider is the way in which identity struggles are managed by refugee women. How do refugee women cope with this frustrating liminality? The answer to this question deserves a study, in its own right. However, it is worth noting that liminal or transitional periods are typically addressed through processes of meaning-making and the recreation of control (Becker, 1997). Although this process can be idiosyncratic and dependent on personality, psychology, and other life circumstances, it is fair to say that many women are able to give meaning to their experiences by integrating identity conflicts into larger value systems. Many are motivated by the value of providing for their children and securing them a better life. Many take solace in the belief that this is part of God's 'plan', which helps them accept their situation. In all cases, giving greater meaning to their experiences by framing them within a larger value-structure makes it easier for women to cope with their situation.

The dynamics of identity changes discussed in this article emphasize the fact that identities are lived and felt. They have a real presence in everyday life and are experienced at the level of the body, the mind, and the social sphere. They are constantly in motion. Understanding them requires understanding the contexts through which they are manifested and experienced.

Hala W. Mahmoud is a PhD candidate in social psychology at the University of Cambridge, UK and a research fellow with the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Centre (FMRS) at the American University in Cairo.
Email: hwm21@cam.ac.uk, halawael@aucegypt.edu

REFERENCES

- Baker, R.** (1983). Refugees: An overview of an international problem. In R. Baker (Ed.), *The Psychosocial problems of refugees* (pp.1-10). London: The British Refugee Council and European Consultation on Refugees and Exiles.
- Becker, G.** (1997). *Disrupted lives: How people create meaning in a chaotic world*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Boddy, J.** (1989). *Wombs and alien spirits: Women, men, and the zār cult in northern Sudan*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Briant, N., & Kennedy, A.** (2004). An investigation of the perceived needs and priorities held by African refugees in an urban setting in a first country of asylum. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 17(4), 437-459.
- Cloudsley, A.** (1983). *Women of omdurman: Life, love, and the cult of virginity*. London: Ethnographica.
- Coker, E. M.** (2004). "Travelling pains": Embodied metaphors of suffering among southern Sudanese refugees in Cairo. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*, 28(1), 15-39.
- Deng, F. M.** (1972). *The Dinka of the Sudan*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Duveen, G.** (2001). Representations, identities, resistance. In K. Deaux & G. Philogène (Eds.), *Representations of the social: Bridging theoretical traditions* (pp. 257-270). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Gregg, G. S.** (1998). Culture, personality, and the multiplicity of identity: Evidence from North African life narratives. *Ethos*, 26(2), 120-152.
- Harrell-Bond, B.** (2002). Can humanitarian work with refugees be humane? *Human Rights Quarterly*, 24, 51-85.
- Johnson, D. H.** (2003). *The root causes of Sudan's civil wars*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Kunz, E. F.** (1973). The refugee in flight: Kinetic models and forms of displacement. *International Migration Review*, 7(2), 125-146.
- Lesch, A. M.** (1998). *The Sudan: Contested national identities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Mahmoud, H. W.** (2007, January). Shattered dreams of Sudanese refugees in Cairo. *Forced Migration Review*, 27, 75.
- Moro, L. N.** (2004). Interethnic relations in exile: The politics of ethnicity among Sudanese refugees in Uganda and Egypt. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 17(4), 420-436.
- Moro, L. N., & Lamua, L. S.** (1998). *Economic situation*. In *Coping with the Dynamics of Culture and Change: The Case of Displaced Sudanese in Egypt* (pp. 21-27). Cairo: Sudan Cultural Digest Project and Office of African Studies, The American University in Cairo.
- Stein, B. N.** (1986). The experience of being a refugee: Insights from the research literature. In C.L. Williams & J. Westermeyer (Eds.), *Refugee mental health in resettlement countries* (pp. 5-23). Washington, D.C.: Hemisphere Publishing Corporation.
- Turner, V.** (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Verney, P.** (1995). *Sudan: Conflict and minorities*. London: Minority Rights Group.
- Voll, J. O., & Voll, S. P.** (1985). *The Sudan: Unity and diversity in a multicultural state*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Westermeyer, J.** (1989). *Mental health for refugees and other migrants: Social and preventive approaches*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.

Home Away from the Homeland: Palestinian Women and the Re-construction of Home Two Tales from Shatila

Assmaa Naguib

I Am There

*I come from there and remember,
I was born like everyone is born, I have a mother
and a house with many windows,
I have brothers, friends and a prison.
I have a wave that sea-gulls snatched away.
I have a view of my own and an extra blade of grass.
I have a moon past the peak of words.
I have the godsent food of birds and olive tree beyond the kent of time.
I have traversed the land before swords turned bodies into banquets.
I come from there. I return the sky to its mother when for its mother the sky
cries, and I weep for a returning cloud to know me.
I have learned the words of blood-stained courts in order to break the rules.
I have learned and dismantled all the words to construct a single one:
Home*

- Mahmoud Darwish

Darwish's words echo those of millions of Palestinian refugees whose loss of a Home has led them to a lifelong struggle for the reconstruction of the concept. They resonate with thoughts of Palestinians everywhere who find themselves, after 60 years of displacement, locked in an endless search for the requisition of a Home, a process that is gradually becoming more of a symbol than a political end. Scores of academic essays have examined the right of return, the peace process and the conditions inside refugee camps in Lebanon and elsewhere; yet few have successfully dealt with the way in which Palestinian refugees have coped with the difficulties of those very conditions and actively sought to find meaning to the experience of displacement. Despite the fact that the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon remains bleak,

refugees refuse to be seen merely as victims, given up to a life of hopelessness and despair. Instead, the sense of loss, resulting from the absence of a conventional nation state combined with the problems of resettlement, has led them to erect new homes in the diaspora. This article seeks – through the use of oral narratives – to give a voice to Palestinian refugee women and to highlight the human dimension of the process through which a Palestinian refugee woman seeks to construct an alternative image of a very personal Home away from the homeland. This article draws on the narratives of two remarkable women from Shatila whom I interviewed for this article.

The connection between narration and self in a collective crisis must be considered when

documenting the history of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Even more critical is the role of women in the refugee camps. Women's personal narratives "whether written or oral, mono- or polyphonic, structured story or fragmentary testimony, have value in illuminating this contested subjective domain that national and social movements repress" (Sayigh, 1981, p. 3). The existing literature regarding the Palestinian right of return lacks a gendered perspective and does not provide a detailed or comprehensive account of women and their views, thus maintaining the marginalization of women in this sphere. Women are "communal witnesses, a sort of oral archive, or repository of experiential, historical lore, and tellers of suffering" (Peteet, 1997, p. 123). This article adds to the existing discourse and hopes to illuminate the importance of Palestinian refugee women

There were always too many people, very small rooms, too many neighbors and especially after marriage and having the kids, I never had time to be alone with myself.

the Shatila refugee camp, I have been introduced to the ways in which Palestinian women have carved a Home in the refugee camp by exercising control over their surroundings and playing an active role beyond the sphere of hollow slogans and empty promises. They have accepted the reality of their daily lives in a host-country that has never welcomed their presence and have overcome it to found a Home. Both women noted that the problem for the younger generations of Palestinian refugees, like themselves, is that they do not have a firsthand experience of Palestine as their Home and hence have grown up with a feeling of homelessness and uprootedness. This sense of homelessness is intensified in states such as Lebanon where they have felt that their host-country was repulsed by

as recorders of history. During their life, they have experienced the worst of refugee-hood – uprooting, exile, and trauma.

By listening to Farida and Amira, two young Palestinian sisters and mothers in

their presence. This has led them to cling even more strongly to memories of the homeland, which has come to represent freedom, dignity, warmth, and stability. Unlike their predecessors who have seen Palestine, the memories of Palestine for Farida and Amira's generation are based on interaction with the older generation. Inevitably, the search for Home for them became the centre of their Palestinian experience.

As children, they absorbed images of olive trees, the national flag, music, food, and scents of Palestine from their elders. As exiled Palestinians in Lebanon, they had to "turn to memory as compensation for loss and a source of renewed self-knowledge" (Porter, 2001, p. 304). Clutching to memories, they have managed to keep alive an idealized image of Home in order to maintain the will to fight for the right of return. The camps in Lebanon – such as Shatila where Farida and Amira grew up – remain an attempt "to create a symbolic continuity with the past, the refugees have organized space so that the camps' quarters carry the names of the villages they left behind. This serves two purposes: it keeps the memory of the past alive and inscribes this imagery into the daily lives of the residents" (Knudsen, 2005, p. 220). Farida fervently explained that Palestine has always been more than just a homeland; it's an all encompassing way of life. She still maintains the Palestinian dialect, cooks Palestinian food, and possesses the traditional Palestinian ornaments and clothing, even though she had never visited Palestine.

Amira

Amira was among a generation of Palestinian refugees who grew up during the Lebanese civil war and the 'camp wars' and whose teenage years were spent with an extended communal family in Shatila. This living arrangement was a cause of stress for Amira; she had to care for the elderly of the camps, make sure the children stayed safe, carry water from place to place, and provide food, all the while knowing that she was only playing a minor part in a national struggle for return. While she relived moments of childhood happiness during our interview and fondly recalled stories of being

spoiled by her parents, brothers, and sisters, Amira repeatedly referred to how suffocated she had felt: “There were always too many people, very small rooms, too many neighbors and especially after marriage and having the kids, I never had time to be alone with myself.” She spent the early years of her life moving around the camp, in bomb shelters, dodging bombs and bullets and hiding in different areas of Beirut. As a mother, however, Amira realized that she had other choices. She chose not to let her identity, a Palestinian refugee in an inhospitable host-state, decide her fate. Being a Palestinian refugee implied being constrained by unfair laws regarding employment, housing, and

education, and she realized that these laws might never change. She explained that accepting reality was not the same as commending or embracing it. As a result, Amira decided to use the existing circumstances to her favor.

...I have never seen Palestine. Shatila is where I grew up and where my kids got to know life. Does that mean I don't want the right to return?

While still having to live the daily struggles that many of her national compatriots are exposed to, Amira came to believe that a Home could still be constructed for her and her family in Lebanon.

Amira's realization came a few years ago when she started to work as a baby-sitter for a Lebanese woman. For the first time, she had the chance to have some time for herself. It was not the financial aspect of her job which liberated her but rather the act of getting to work. Every day she would walk by the sea to reach her employers' house. In this simple act, she felt she was able to 'rearrange her thoughts', schedule the housework and get rid of her troubles: “All I wanted was a place with a sense of privacy and walking by the sea gave me that.”

But when the war launched by the Israelis against Lebanon started in July 2006, Amira relived it all again: the loss of Home and security. This time

Amira decided to teach her own children a lesson. She refused to follow her parents' example, taking her children to shelters, and moving where the government declared it was safe. She taught them that their security and their stability is a mental state. Her children slept in the same beds they slept in before the war. “It was dangerous but you can not spend your life running away from death.” When the war was over, Amira says she understood that even though Shatila has been the only place where she has ever had a house and while she would never give up the need and desire to return to Palestine, her Home remained a state of mind that she can delve into to find peace and serenity in her state of displacement.

Farida

For Farida, ten years older than her sister, the reconstruction of Home has a different meaning. At an early age, she started to take responsibility for caring for her family by working as a typist and doing handicrafts, in which she excelled. Her desire to share the burden of the family was translated on a national (Palestinian) level. Farida witnessed national losses and sacrifices, one after the other, and believed that the restlessness that overshadowed her life in Shatila could only be surmounted by return. In the seventies, the passion and militancy expressed by Palestinian leaders and youth led her to mistakenly believe that “they stood on the doorstep of freedom”. This feeling encouraged her to lead a life of activism, assisting the *fedayeens* and standing against apathy and indifference. She remembers with sadness, however, that things only went from bad to worse for the Palestinians in Lebanon.

Farida met her husband during the 'camp wars' at the hospital where she volunteered as a nurse. He occupied a bed next to her wounded brother-in-law. She recalls that long before she met him, she had felt that she should play a bigger part in the national struggle for return. She was constantly feeling dissatisfied with the news coming from the homeland, the stagnation of the political situation, the failings of the peace process, and the deceit in the promises delivered to the refugees. Farida says

that she embraced her reality-check: “It does not look like things will change for the better in my lifetime, but I can at least prepare my children for a better future and teach them how to fight for it.” While her belief in activism has not faltered, it has taken a different shape.

Farida became part of a leading NGO in Shatila which provides different services for the residents of the camps. Farida recounts that the most difficult moments she had were not those of war and bloodshed but rather the moments when she had to face the questions of her oldest son. When he asks her about his future, she finds herself having to face the questions of her past. She had believed that with hard work, belief and passion, justice can be achieved. Instead, she is still faced with the uncertainty of her and her family’s future. The only way she could come to peace with his questions was to encourage him to honorably struggle for the return to Palestine because she believes that he can only find a life worth living by trying to regain the homeland.

Farida’s reconstruction of Home is found in her work through which she relieves the pain, resolves problems, leads, inspires, and helps keep hope alive among fellow Palestinians. She reiterates that she continues to remind her children and all the youth of Shatila to resist and fight – in the midst of the current state of despair – for the right of return and all what it stands for, namely justice, freedom, and a better life. Her belief in activism has been rekindled. When she is able to transfer her passion to the youth, she feels she is closer to Home.

According to Farida and Amira, women in Shatila have always developed their own unique methods of depending on each other and facing political troubles. Farida mentioned that when young male *fedayeens* were targeted and captured by Lebanese security officials, it was the women who negotiated their release. Farida noted that she recently encountered a man in Shatila who reminded her that she had saved his life more than 20 years ago when he was threatened by a Lebanese guard. Women have succeeded in adapting to the difficulties of life in the camps. Tired of the

political situation, discontent with being ignored in the peace process, and wanting to be treated like human beings, they started to challenge traditional gender roles. The reconstruction of a Home in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon is only one of the ways in which Palestinian women have embraced their roles in the national resistance.

As part of their role in the national resistance movement, both women were adamant in explaining that an attempt to reconstruct an idea of Home in the camps in Lebanon does not in any way question their belief in the right of return. When asked, for example, how she would react to being offered the chance to return to Palestine, Amira responded:

Yes, as a Palestinian I have been wronged, it would have been much better had I lived on my land the whole time but instead it was robbed even before I was born. But I have never seen Palestine. Shatila is where I grew up and where my kids got to know life. Does that mean I don’t want the right to return? No, I want it. I want justice to be served.

I would go back to see Palestine because I have heard so much about it from my mother and father. But no, I might not return. I want a better life with my children and my family wherever that would be.

Experience in living and working in the camps has illustrated to me that for Palestinian refugees the right to return carries with it visions of justice, dignity, and motivation for life. Farida sought passionately to explain that the life of Palestinian women is an endeavour to maintain the belief in the right of return while simultaneously seeking peace in the camps and building dreams that enable them, their children, and families to survive in the current conditions. Ilana Feldman’s (2000) analysis commends the efforts of these women whose “continued focus ... on their memories of Home has [not] obstructed their ability both to cope with the reality of the present and to acquiesce to resolutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” (p. 40). On the contrary, in their quest to keep Palestine alive they have in fact “helped to keep the tragic realities of Palestinian history from utterly destroying Palestinian community and political life” (Feldman, 2000, p. 40).

Conclusion

For Palestinian refugee women in Shatila, Home in the refugee camp is in the conflict zone. There is no separation between the private and the public in the refugee camps. Home is a location of battle, shootings, demolitions, and trainings. The massacres at homes in Shatila destroyed any notion that the refugees had a Home which was separate from the conflict. For the Palestinian refugees Home is a place of refuge and battle. Both the narratives of Farida and Amira expressed an unwavering desire for the right of return but unlike the dominant representation in literature and the

political slogans that routinely idealize Palestine, they have remained alert to the more important difficulties, obstacles, and disruptions embedded in their daily lives. The day-to-day life of the women in the camps reflects a unique struggle through which Palestinian women have been able to take part in and keep alive the national resistance.

Assmaa Naguib is a Ph.d. candidate in Middle East Literature and a research and teaching assistant at the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Department at the American University in Cairo.
Email: Assmaa.Naguib@googlemail.com

REFERENCES

- Abdulhadi, R.** (2003). Where is home? Fragmented lives, border crossings and the politics of exile. *Radical History Review*, 86, 89-101.
- Darwish, M.** (2004). Poems. Blesok / Shine – Literature and Other Arts, 36. Retrieved July 21, 2008, from <http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/issuedetails.aspx?issueid=8e63c1cb-e6a1-444c-868c-d83c5b0280ee&articleId=286d123d-be3e-467d-94ee-f28d2c88e759>
- Feldman, I.** (2000). Home as a refrain: Remembering and living displacement in Gaza. *History and Memory*, 12(2), 10-47.
- Knudsen, A.** (2005). Islamism in the diaspora: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 18(2), 216-234.
- Peteet, J.** (1997). Icons and militants: Mothering in the danger zone. *Signs*, 23(1), 103-129.
- Peteet, J.** (1994). Male gender and rituals of resistance in the Palestinian Intifada: A cultural politics of violence. *American Ethnologist*, 21(1), 31-49.
- Porter, R. J.** (2001). Autobiography, exile, home: The Egyptian memoirs of Gini AlHadeff, Andre Aciman, and Edward Said. *Biography*, 24(1), 302-313.
- Said, E.** (1984). The mind of winter: Reflections on life in exile. *Harper's Magazine*, 269, 49-55.
- Salhi, Z. S., & Netton, I. R.** (Eds.). (2006). *The Arab diaspora: Voices of an anguished scream*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Sayigh, R.** (1998a). Dis/Solving the "Refugee Problem". *Middle East Report*, 207, 19-23.
- Sayigh, R.** (1998b). Gender, sexuality, and class in national narrations: Palestinian camp women tell their lives. *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 19(2), 166-185.
- Sayigh, R.** (1998c). Palestinian camp women as tellers of history. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 27(2), 31-49.
- Sayigh, R.** (1981). Encounters with Palestinian women under occupation. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 10(4), 3-26.
- Schulz, H. L., & Hammer, J.** (2003). *The Palestinian diaspora: Formation of identities and politics of homeland*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Terkenli, T.S.** (1995). Home as a region. *Geographical Review*, 85(3), 324-334.

Locating Arab Refugee Women: Identity and Allegiance in Global Feminist Conflicts

Lyn Ossome

Introduction

There are academics who argue that the most significant failing of the Arab feminist movement is that it has yet to become a political actor with significant power and influence in the social and political arena.¹ Overtly radical Arab feminists are accused of being pawns of the West, of being too polarizing to represent the interests of Arab women and are ostracized by the Islamic establishment. Their “personal is political” stance is seen as a deliberate subversion of the primary issues concerning Arab women generally, including Arab refugee women. Notably, though Arab refugee women are a highly politicized group, for the most part they remain silent in the Arab feminist discourse: they are neither addressed by Arab feminism nor are they given a voice in Arab feminism.

Arab refugee women are the focus of this article, particularly with regards to the construction of their identity. To understand the role of the identity construction of the “Arab refugee woman” in intra-feminist debates, this article will address the following questions: what categories of women qualify as “Arab refugee women” and what epistemological grounding most objectively situates them to be in a unique position to address the debate described in the previous paragraph?

As noted by Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), feminist approaches to the social sphere are concerned “not just with truth, but also with how knowledge is produced and authorized” (p. 14). Feminists have a “moral responsibility” for their knowledge claims, which “entails a general ethic of accountability to a community of women” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 14). In the case of refugees, Sayigh (1996) classifies the researched as “disadvantaged” (p. 145). However, as Harding argues, “the oppressed have the capacity to see more clearly. They may be socially disadvantaged but they are epistemologically privileged; they are better placed to produce ‘maximally objective knowledge’” (Harding, 1991, p. 27).

Unpacking identities in this way is crucial for analysis. Leila Ahmed (1992) problematizes the Islamist position regarding women; she defines it as essentially reactive, trapping the issue of women in the larger cultural struggles. In other words, the Islamist position diffuses the heterogeneity among Arab women and obscures the distinct groups within the whole, along with their issues. Unless unique groups of Arab women are able to maintain distinct identities and a separation is made between their diverse issues, there is a real possibility of “losing” Arab refugee women in such a cultural vault.

1. Author Saliha Boudeffa observes that women’s gains in the Arab world are the result of a silent revolution. Through education and work, they have managed to achieve social visibility and a place in the media. In fact, the feminist movement comes as a result of these social and economic changes.

In addition, cultural biases, colonialist in nature, are often present, even in some of the most radical political circles. The racist notions that Arabs are indeterminately linked to Islam and that Muslims are backwards and uncivilized often lead to the conclusion that Arab politics can never be progressive because it is “Muslim” and therefore supports patriarchy, violence, savagery, barbarism, etc. A racist logic homogenizes all Arabs and Muslims, constructs them as inferior to Whites/Europeans, and assumes that the Arab identity and Islam are inherently backwards and patriarchal.²

These attitudes, underlying the contemporary struggle between Western feminism and Arab feminism, raise many complex issues about race, resources, class, and power that exceed the scope of this article. In attempting to locate Arab refugee women in the larger debates, the truism that their religious identity may be constructed by Islam, though important in aligning them with a particular form of feminism, does not, on its own, inform their politicization as refugees or as actors in the women’s movement. In the following sections it will be shown that a more influential factor in this process is their identity as refugees. It is argued that using Islam as a starting point homogenizes Arab women and has the net effect of rendering Arab refugee women, as a sub-category, invisible.

2. See interview with INCITE! Women of Colour Against Violence! co-founders Nadine Naber and Andrea Smith at http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/6851_criticalmoment-2007.pdf.

3. Many of the 50,000 refugees who fled to Pakistan in the months following the Taliban takeover of Kabul did so because they were suddenly deprived of female earnings. Female employment has proved to be a necessity for many families in the camps and the prospect of having to survive in Afghanistan without this option, given the harsh economic conditions, has been a clear disincentive to return.

4. Refer to Nahla Abdo’s “Engendering Compensation: Making Women Count!”, a report prepared for the Expert and Advisory Services Fund International Development Research Centre, March 2000.

Identifying an Agenda among Arab Refugee Women

The role of refugee women in post-conflict reconstruction frequently emerges in both academic and policy debates on refugee reintegration and citizenship. As a social group, refugee women have and continue to be marginalized. This is primarily so because the ruling classes that articulate laws and influence development policy persistently essentialize them as a homogenous group, viewing them as a mere offshoot of war, and considering them as social and economic burdens rather than assets. However, recent research has demonstrated that in fact refugees represent a crucial, yet under-utilized, social, political, and economic capital. This is further supported by Hanafi (2007) who, in a pioneering study showing familial modes of entrepreneurship driven by non-economic factors as motivating refugee return, makes the case that “Palestinian returnees should not be seen as a burden to society but rather as an asset, bringing skills and capital and having great potential to contribute to the social and economic life of the receiving country” (p. 75).

Though the role of refugee women in sustaining livelihoods, building and maintaining cohesion, and facilitating reproduction and production of family and community in refugee settlements is widely acknowledged,³ not much is known about the structural possibility of transforming their agency in order to influence the course of livelihoods outside of the refugee setting or to actively participate in the Arab women’s movement. Few studies have been conducted among Arab refugee women to these ends.

Refugee women in many Arab countries have been found to disproportionately suffer discrimination on the basis of their gender and also on the basis of their ontology, as refugees.⁴ The difficulties that Arab refugee women experience in their host countries are well documented. Of all Arab countries, only Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen are parties to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its Protocol. For instance, due to the failure of the Arab states to recognize Palestinians as refugees under the Refugee Convention and their subsequent failure to guarantee Palestinian

refugees' legal protection, these states do not routinely grant Palestinian refugees many of their basic human rights. Thus, Palestinians are sometimes denied the right to work, to travel freely either inside or outside Palestine, to unite with family members, to own private property, or to benefit from a wide spectrum of international human rights guarantees. In addition, research on domestic violence, particularly against women in the Gaza refugee camps, has shown an increase in physical, mental, psychological, and sexual violence against women.⁵ These issues, as crucial as they are, remain peripheral to core Arab feminist concerns.

While Western feminists criticize Arab women for their acceptance of religion, claiming that it undermines their cause, Arab activists maintain that their struggles can be located in some or all of the wider social, political and economic situations in their countries at any given time. Arab women, generally, contend that it is less pressing for them to tackle specific phenomena (such as rape, wife battery, sexuality, etc.), than to attempt to change the wider context in which they live. Arab women argue that women who live under political, economic, or racial oppression believe that their oppression as women is part of their oppression as people. Their argument continues that these oppressions are believed to be major impediments to women's progress. Thus, they argue that many of the specifically Western feminist concerns can be realized only once a certain level of self-determination and development has been reached. Arab women have, nonetheless, maintained a steady demand for change, particularly regarding their civil and political rights. Despite a reluctance to openly radicalize their demands, these women continue to demand greater self-expression and autonomy for women in the Arab world. Arab refugee women, however, remain largely excluded from this discourse.

To the extent that the revival of religious fundamentalism threatens the global feminist establishment, Western feminists underscore the necessity of engaging Arab women as symbols of the sustained struggle between religion and feminism. This has not always been true: conservative Arab feminists have long been targets of Western feminist criticism for their perceived tolerance of systematic oppression and abuse of women under patriarchal Islamist regimes. The position in which they find themselves now is one concomitantly worsened by each new wave of Islamic terrorism. Arab refugee women, however, continue to evade this "fundamentalist" stereotype. Although perception of them has not substantially changed, they are not as 'vilified' as they have been in the past because they have come to symbolize the failure of extremist regimes (a vindication for the champions of "freedom" and "emancipation"); in a sense, their position in global feminist politics has improved with the escalation of the political upheavals that rendered them refugees.

These antagonisms are significant thematic considerations in analyzing the distance between Arab feminists and Arab refugee women.

Politicization in Exile

Women actively create room for movement in conflict situations and utilize the windows of opportunity offered by conflict to improve their position. For instance, various forms of conflicts offer women new opportunities for political participation, exposure to the

5. The Women's Empowerment Project of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program has documented a sharp rise in cases of violence against women, including incest rape. For more information visit <http://www.gcmhp.net/women.htm>

concept of women's rights, the chance to establish women's groups, skills training, and organizational capacity building. Refugee women with links to the Diaspora and/or with strong links to NGOs, particularly NGOs which actively promote human rights and social justice concerns, will be more sophisticated in their political discourse, more aware of global rights regimes, more adept at accessing information via technology (such as the Internet), and more actively involved in seeking political change in their homelands (Jacobsen, Levitt, & Wagner, 2002). Various studies have shown how women actively utilized these numerous windows of opportunity to improve their position. For this reason, in this article reference is made to an "empowerment"⁶ perspective vis-à-vis women's position in exile in contrast to a "victim" discourse.

Similarly, Mahnaz Afkhami (1994) in *Women in Exile* notes that:

Along with the loss of their culture and home comes the loss of the traditional patriarchal structures that limited their lives in their own land. Exile in its disruptiveness resembles a rebirth for the woman. The pain of breaking out of a cultural cocoon brings with it the possibility of an expanded universe and a freer, more independent self. (p. 45)

Empowerment of refugee women is also a class issue which manifests itself differently from one group to the next, depending on location, education, exposure, as well as social/economic or political connections. Among elite political exiles, the result of this politicization is felt in the form of sustained debate and engagement with the ruling classes and consciousness-raising, both at home and in the diaspora. Among less privileged groups of refugee women, this politicization is symbolized by collective responses to oppression and abuse, and organizing around daily issues that particularly affect women and children.⁷

Strategic Engagement by the West

The Arab women's movements are part of international women's organizations that strive to improve women's position in all societies, as well as to struggle for peace and sustainable development, and against war and globalization. There are many common factors between Arab women's movements and international women's organisations, taking into consideration the specificities of each society in its culture and economy. Many international women's organisations are currently active in opposing the war in Iraq and supporting the right of the Iraqi people to control their fate. Many Arab and international women's delegations are sent to Palestine, in a popular campaign to protect the Palestinian people, where they face violence from the occupation forces. Despite these common grounds, questions remain as to who determines the agenda with regard to affected groups in these regions: if Western feminists engage with Arab refugee women's issues (as researchers, development experts, or activists), how accurately do they portray these issues to the rest of the world?

Arturo Escobar (1995) identifies labelling as a fundamental feature of organizations, alluding to the pervasive use of labels within the development discourse in the form of client categories and "target groups", such as "small farmers", "pregnant women", "landless labourers", "slum dwellers" and the like (p. 108). These labels are essential to the functioning of institutions dealing with problems in the Third World ("Third World"

6. Describing an integrative empowerment model, feminist activist and sociology professor, Balghis Badri argues for the necessity of empowerment of the self and civic engagement, as well as incorporating educational, legal, leadership, political, economic, cultural, religious, and institutional factors to empower women.

7. In Eastern Sudan, for example, the experiences of conflict and exile have changed the nature of active women's groups. A study among women's groups in exile and groups that address the needs of women in marginalized and war-affected areas found that women still attending literacy classes are organized and often leaders of women's groups and they are adopting an increasingly transformative agenda.

is itself a label). Labels are by no means neutral; they embody concrete relationships of power and influence the categories according to which we think and act. Geof Wood has insightfully summarized the rationale for labelling:

...the validity of labels becomes not a matter of substantive objectivity but of the ability to use labels effectively in action as designations which define parameters for thought and behaviour, which render environments stable, and which establish spheres of competence and areas of responsibility. In this way labelling through these sorts of designations is part of the process of creating social structure... Labels reveal more about the process of authoritative designation, agenda setting and so on than about the characteristics of the labelled... In that sense, labels do in effect reveal the relationship of power between the giver and the bearer of the label. (as cited in Escobar, 1995, p. 349)

Labels determine access to resources, so that people must adjust to such categorization to be successful in their dealings with the institution(s).⁸ Thus, it can be argued that the material and practical needs of “Arab refugee women”, to a large extent, overpower their strategic needs, rendering their cultural identity as Muslims and Arab women much less valuable over a period of time. Their identity as refugees, on the one hand, obliterates their individual and collective struggles as Arab women. On the other hand, it empowers them materially, while transferring responsibility (and power) for their well being to external agents of development, namely the international community.

International response to refugees is an embodiment of mediation between communities, states and, in some cases, social movements, each with separate and oftentimes conflicting interests. At the level of communities, this interest might be the preservation of cultural sovereignty in the face of social upheavals. At the institutional level, labels are invented and maintained on an ongoing basis as part of an apparently rational process that is essentially political (Escobar, 1995). Women’s movements, for their part, articulate an interest in refugee women as part of a wider struggle for the emancipation of all women, although their interest may at times inadvertently resemble those of the ruling classes.

Western lobbying on behalf of marginalized groups of women is, in some instances, perceived as misplaced and has been criticized as such. Western feminist assertions of women’s rights as human rights must, for example, take into consideration the particular situations of different women. While the political importance of the discourse of human rights and equality remains compelling, any adequate discourse of human rights must remain vigilant about its own partiality and limitations. While Western feminism(s) tend to focus on the rights of individual women, many Arab feminists, recognizing the importance of individual rights, also highlight the problems faced because of social, structural, cultural, and global influences. Malaysian author, Azza Basarudin (2002), argues that “approaching Arab women’s rights, struggles and liberations through Western feminist agendas cannot be effective because these agendas were cultivated in a different environment based on Western history, needs, experiences and values” (pp. 62-65).

8. Used here in reference to social, political, and economic entities that influence access to, and may exercise control over resources necessary for survival and livelihoods.

The jostling of Western media, international non-governmental organisations, aid agencies, and various philanthropic individuals to assist refugees caught in these

“wars of terrorism” has not been lost on Islamic feminists in the Arab world. There is the perception that Arab refugee women have been prioritized for assistance and overly flashed on the world stage, at the expense of equally needy Arab women living in difficult conditions and fighting for basic civil and political spaces without so much as a nod from the West. As this situation develops, the convictions of Islamic feminists in the Arab world become stronger: increasingly they believe that indeed Arab refugee women are the domain of the West, the West’s pawns, and therefore the West’s mess to sort out. The reluctance of the Arab women’s movement to delve into the politics of Arab refugee women can also be construed as their reluctance to be obscured and swallowed up by the secular, populist politics of the capitalist mammoth that is the West. It is, in the final analysis, a subverted rejection of the global feminist movement.

Towards Rapprochement

Is reconciliation of Western feminist and Arab feminist ideology possible or indeed desirable? Perhaps it is the ambivalent attitude of Arab feminists towards their refugee counterparts that allows for the tiny hope that Arab and/or Islamic feminisms and Western feminism will be able to find a common space to address and accommodate Arab refugee women, a break from the polarizing issues that currently pit Arab and Western feminists against one another.

Law provides an effective platform for rapprochement. There is a global consensus among feminists on the need to write civil laws that are outside the boundaries and unreasonable demands of religious texts and to enforce them to protect women. There is also a consensus on the fact that civil law should be concerned with what is fair and just, not a passionate plea to keep men superior to women. Law is a powerful site for dialogue among women themselves and between women and the patriarchal state. The polarizing controversies surrounding perceptions of Arab women’s subjugation under religion cannot be simply resolved, but, in the short term, it is imperative to establish a common cause around legislative amendments that can be achieved for Arab women in their countries and Arab refugee women in Arab host-countries. This can be achieved by collectively challenging resistant legal establishments in Arab countries with regard to women’s political and social participation and civil liberties.

Barring legal compromise, two factors threaten the precarious position of Arab refugee women and, at the same time, provide opportunity for the Arab women’s movement to reconcile itself with the plight of Arab refugee women and re-establish rapport with the global movement of women: it is hypothesized here that the favour that Arab refugee women currently enjoy with the international community cannot last indefinitely. Beyond a wholesome appreciation of their situation, there has neither been a concrete movement to mitigate the root causes of refugee crises in the Arab world by the West nor significant progress towards protecting refugee women in exile. In the absence of concrete asylum guarantees, Arab refugee women are likely, in the long run, to turn back and seek favour at home. Thus, the Arab women’s movement has a unique opportunity to broaden its agenda to rally around them refugee women and embrace issues specific to refugee women as part of its core agenda.

UNHCR facilitates three possible responses to the refugee crisis: resettlement of refugees from the country of asylum to a third country, voluntary repatriation of refugees, and local integration/naturalization of refugees in the country of asylum. The former is riddled with problems and controversy, particularly where women are concerned, and only a tiny percentage benefit from resettlement each year. The majority are slated for repatriation, which presupposes an end to the conflict in their country of origin. The third alternative, integration into the host country, can create special problems for Arab refugee women. Research has found that the tug-of-war between host-communities and refugees strain much more than resources. It can create cultural and social tensions between groups. The Arab women's movement can again capitalize on these debates, providing more space for its interaction with the global feminist movement.

Finally, towards finding common ground, Basarudin (2002) suggests that "for feminism(s) to be accepted in the Middle East, Arab women need new liberation movements that are based on their experiences and values with some acceptable feminist ideas and practices" (p. 62). She continues: "There is a wide gap between Western feminist discourse and the actual lives and practical needs of women from various ethnic groups, cultures and backgrounds" (p. 63). Thus, she suggests that in envisioning solidarity with Arab women, Western feminists should utilize the vast resources and knowledge available in dismantling global oppressions, which not only include gender apartheid but which also have social, economic, and political components, to understand how Arab women have continued to be victims of racism, colonialism, and imperialism.

Conclusion

Arab feminists and Western feminists frequently disagree on issue prioritization and approach. Arab feminists think it necessary to coach women's advancement in the wide struggle of their society. Western feminists have argued that this approach leaves critical issues unattended. Despite the fact that the issues of Arab refugee women have been largely ignored by Arab feminism, this article has argued that the strategic engagement of Arab refugee women by the West, which has led to deeper interest in the lives of women throughout the Arab world, could provide a neutral ground for dialogue and debate. Arab refugee women's concerns can provide significant points of entry and engagement between Arab feminists and their counterparts in the West.

Lyn Ossome is a graduate student of Gender and Development Studies at the Institute of Women, Gender & Development Studies (IWGDS) at Ahfad University for Women.
Email: lyn.ossome@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Afkhami, M.** (1994). *Women in exile*. Virginia: University Press of Virginia.
- Ahmed, L.** (1992). *Women and gender in Islam: Historical roots of a modern debate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Al-Turabi, H.** (n.d.). On the position of women in Islam and in Islamic society. *Islam for Today*. Retrieved January 25, 2008, from <http://www.islamfortoday.com/turabi01.htm>

- Badri, B.** (n.d.). Debating empowerment frameworks. Unpublished paper presented at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo, 2006.
- Basarudin, A.** (2002). Bridges, building solidarity: Reconciling Western and Arab feminisms. [Electronic version]. *Al-Raida*, XIX(97-98), 62-65.
- Boudeffa, S.** (2003). Current challenges facing the Arab women's movements. *Al-Raida*, XX, (100), 60.
- Eltahawy, M.** (2005, December 5). The muslim brotherhood and women. *Asharq al-Awsat*. Retrieved January 25, 2008, from <http://www.aawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=2&id=2941>
- Escobar, A.** (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the third world*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Hanafi, S.** (2007). Social capital, transnational kinship and refugee repatriation process: Some elements for a Palestinian sociology of return. In R. Brynen & R. El-Rifai (Eds.), *Palestinian Refugees: Challenges of Repatriation and Development* (pp. 46-78). London: I. B. Tauris.
- Harding S.** (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Jacobsen, K., Levitt, P., & Wagner, S.** (2002). Perspectives on transnational membership: The political activities of Congolese and Burundian refugees in camps and urban areas. Unpublished manuscript.
- Langer, J.** (2004, May). Crossing borders: The extent to which the voices of exiled and refugee women have adapted to their new Western diasporic space. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 66-74.
- Lazreg, M.** (1988). Feminism and difference: The perils of writing as a woman on women in Algeria. *Feminist Studies*, 14(1), 81-107.
- Marsden, P.** (2002). *The taliban: War and religion in Afghanistan*. London & New York: Zed Books Ltd.
- Mohanty, C. T.** (1991). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. In C.T. Mohanty, A. Russo, & L. Torres (Eds.), *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, (pp. 51-80). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Ooko-Ombaka, O.** (1979). Law and the limits of international and national reform: Institutions of the International Economy and Underdevelopment. Unpublished thesis, Harvard University, Cambridge.
- Ramazanoglu, C., & Holland, J.** (2002). *Feminist methodology: Challenges and choices*. California: Sage publications.
- Sayigh, R.** (1996). Researching gender in a Palestinian camp: Political, theoretical and methodological issues. In D. Kandiyoti (Ed.), *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging perspectives*. London & New York: I. B. Tauris.

Poem

Natoschia Scruggs

My Present State is Fleeting

This existence in exile, I wish on no other
It's an emptiness the heart dares instruct the mouth to expose

This burning pain represents ongoing struggles
It lingers, arresting my creativity and my words

This awkward anonymity drapes my sorrow
In Damascus, I'm a stranger; in Amman, an outsider

This desire to take my past and tomorrows
I bear blueprints, maps of violations, constant reminders

This spirit of survival nurtured in Iraq
I am a child of the Tigres and the mighty Euphrates

This refusal to surrender, strong, won't relapse
My present state is fleeting...impermanent...transitory

This exile
This pain
This anonymity
This desire
This spirit
This refusal

Emptiness
Struggles
Outsider
Tomorrows
Nurtured
Strong

This existence in exile, I wish on no other
My present state is fleeting...impermanent...transitory.

Natoschia Scruggs is a doctoral student in the African
Diaspora Studies program at the University of California,
Berkeley.
Email: nscruggs@aol.com

Poems

Saudamini Siegrist

Erez Crossing

Pigeons nest in iron rafters above the crossing, building a resting place with stubble collected from bulldozed fields of olive, roadside weed and tufts of grass, from feathers shed when they make love and their wings beat against corrugated air. Below them is the corridor of Erez, at gunpoint, a theatre of concrete block, metal and steel wire coiled and twisted onto spikes and stakes, marking the passage. Soldiers play the part of high school drama students, nervous and bored, dressed for combat in outfits of lead, trapped in the narrow confines of their prison yard. They pace under the full throttle of the sun, while feathers – they don't notice – fall to the ground, the color of clouds, grey pearl, silver, summer rose and moody violet, turning metallic light iridescent, the color of sand, of wind and wing beats of pigeons lovemaking.

The soldiers move between blasts of loudspeakers, surrounded by electric currents of scorched desire that shock the heart back from the dead again and again. Hours drag on – a few small children holding their mother's hand, a lone shepherd, a minibus of UN staff register nationality and name, logging time – while overhead pigeons caress, common pigeons, scavengers that nest on window ledges of New York and Paris, the same haunted language, their cooing and echo, the same small eggs warmed to hatch where searchlights glare and burn and blind the moon's reflection in the empty craters of Erez.

(Written 10 April 2005, while waiting with a UNICEF team, for clearance to cross into Gaza.)

Picasso's Weeping Woman

The sound of a key, my door opens
and there, wearing that same red hat
on her black rooted hair,
is the weeping woman.
Imagine my surprise.
I rise, introduce myself and offer a chair.
She stands. She sobs. She scrapes
her face. Her fingernails
leave blue streaks that freeze
into triangular tears.
Two tilted dippers spill her eyes.
She is unable to speak.
I ask, "What brings you here?"
She cries.
I stare.
Her expression is fractured and unclear,
scattered in the pieces of a fist.
She cannot be comforted.
I wonder what she wants,
if she expects me to repair the tragedy.
I begin to despise her.
Finally I have to tell her weeping bores me,
I will not cry for her.
I take her by the arm to show her out
and close the door.

Saudamini Siegrist
UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre
Email: ssiegrist@unicef.org

Iraqi Refugee Females in Lebanon: De Facto Changes in Gender Roles

Rouba Beydoun*

The year 2003 was a turning point in the Arab region. The Coalition Forces invaded Iraq causing the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the subsequent violence. This has led to a massive influx of refugees throughout the Arab region. Around 4.2 million Iraqis left their homes due to the violence in their country. Some two million have fled to neighboring countries, including Lebanon (UNHCR, 2007). Lebanon is also host to an estimated 400,000 Palestinian refugees who fled Palestine largely as a result of the formation of the Israeli state in 1948 (Shafie, 2007). Aside from Palestinians, Iraqis currently account for the vast majority of refugees in Lebanon (DRC, 2005). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that around 50,000 Iraqi refugees are residing in Lebanon (IRIN, 2007). The Lebanese State is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, thus the vast majority of Iraqis have had to enter the country illegally (IRIN, 2007).

A study based on a sample of 2,892 Iraqi individuals in Lebanon in 2007 indicated that 36.4 percent of the sample was female (DRC, 2007). Many factors in Lebanon and in Iraq affect the refugee woman's role in society. What is expected of her and those around her often changes under emergency circumstances. This article explores the extent of these changes. It will hopefully benefit researchers as well as development agencies by providing insight into the daily expectations, hopes, and responsibilities of an Iraqi refugee woman or girl in Lebanon. The article also aims to

bring the typical concerns of a refugee woman to the attention of her host community.

Methodology

This article does not attempt to draw general conclusions regarding the Iraqi refugee population in Lebanon. Rather, it attempts to present a description of the daily life of a few Iraqi females. It uses quantitative information from other studies to inform the reader about the current situation of Iraqis in Lebanon. In-depth interviews with six Iraqi refugee women from diverse social backgrounds were conducted for the purpose of this article. The interviewees agreed to have the information they provided used in this article. However, only two agreed to have their names mentioned. For this reason many of the quotes in the following article will be anonymous. Between 2006 and 2008, the author of this article interviewed some 800 Iraqi refugees in Lebanon as a UNHCR employee. Some of the assumptions in this article are based on general trends observed throughout this period. It is important to note that religion/sect was not a significant variable in the six in-depth interviews conducted. For this reason, it is not addressed in this article.

Research Findings

The main finding of the research was that the interviewees' responsibilities vis-à-vis their family members considerably increased. The refugee woman is expected to continue to play the roles she played in

Iraq – whether these roles are considered traditional or not – and bear new responsibilities as well. As the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children report explains:

Women suffer most from situations of displacement as they continue to undertake most domestic labor and have to cope with many additional problems, such as inadequate shelter and inadequate food and the struggles to care for and maintain their families. Increasing social and economic marginalization, family instability and the act and impact of migration alter male and female gender roles—creating internal cognitive dissonance while presenting opportunities for positive change. [...] Gender roles become more blurred as the struggle for survival takes precedence over more rigidly defined, traditional roles. Men often lose their means of livelihood, creating depression, dependency and withdrawal. Even the humanitarian assistance provided, often in the form of direct handouts, creates dependency, lethargy and a loss of control over one’s life and future. (Masculinities: Male roles, 2005)

It was found in the course of the interviews that refugee women do not expect to replace their old responsibilities with the new ones but rather, out of a sense of duty, temporarily accept the burden of both. In contrast, the men often have difficulty accepting women’s new responsibilities because of their pride and their own sense of duty towards their female family members. However, Iraqi refugee men may accept the changing dynamics on an exceptional basis. These male and female perspectives stem from the sense of duty entrenched in Iraqi culture.

Some of the reasons for the increased responsibilities of refugee women include security concerns, the family status of the refugee woman, difficult living conditions, reduced access to basic services, and trauma. These responsibilities are manifested in the persistence of household chores and increased employment. Such responsibilities affect the perception of the male figure, family dynamics, the family’s social life and their worldview.

Factors Contributing to Shifting Gender Norms

Security Concerns

The vast majority of newly arrived Iraqis in Lebanon stay in Lebanon illegally because the Lebanese State does not recognize refugee status. Iraqis continue to travel to Lebanon for the following reasons: some do not feel safe in the countries bordering Iraq where their persecutors might reach them, some have family ties to Lebanon, others consider the salaries in Lebanon to be better than in neighboring countries, and some feel that there is more freedom in Lebanon (DRC, 2005). According to the Danish Refugee Council, 71 percent of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon are smuggled across the Syrian border (IRIN, 2007). Fleeing persecution and violence in their country of origin, families, including children, new-born infants and elderly, do cross the borders in a clandestine manner. They prefer risking arrest and detention to staying home. A few enter legally and overstay their visa expiry date and only very fortunate persons/families manage to obtain residency permits.

The experience of crossing international borders in a clandestine manner puts the female at high risk, even if accompanied by a male family member, traditionally the protective figure. For example, an adolescent girl gave the following account of her experience when she fled Iraq in 2005: because her father worked with the Americans in Iraq, her fifteen year old brother was killed and her father was threatened. The family legally fled to Syria and then entered Lebanon illegally. Her ten and seven-year-old brothers and three-year-old sister cried during their journey: “We had to walk a lot ... it was very tiring. We were very scared ... and it was so cold”. Such experiences may threaten Iraqi gender roles: the father, traditionally a protective figure, was unable to prevent his daughter from being afraid and experiencing insecurity.

According to a Public Information Officer in UNHCR Beirut, thus far there has been a significantly higher detention rate of males for illegal entry to and/or stay in Lebanon. A young female head of household stated: “I have frequently been stopped by the Internal Security Forces

because I do not have a residency permit. I tell them to 'do whatever they want,' they don't arrest me. They say 'you are a woman and you have 3 children'". This significantly changes family dynamics as female family members have greater freedom of movement than males. Though men continue to see themselves as the providers for the family, they are forced to accept some compromises. The father of the 16-year-old refugee female mentioned above stated:

Around a week after we arrived, she [then 14 years old] started working. I stayed home for around 2 months at the beginning because the Internal Security Forces had raided Iraqi homes in the neighborhood. Therefore, I couldn't go out. I only had \$200 USD left and I used part of the money for rent. So I spent my last \$50 USD on a small oven as there was nothing in the apartment.

Though he was able to find work two months later, thus preserving his role as family provider, his daughter continued to work – sharing the responsibility of providing for the family. Many Iraqi men work as janitors in their buildings because this job requires minimal movement for them while their female family members work outside the home.

According to UNHCR, in November 2007 five hundred Iraqis were held in prison for illegal entry and/or stay in Lebanon (IRIN, 2007). A minority of Iraqis are caught upon illegal entry to Lebanon. Most Iraqi men are detained at checkpoints while leading their difficult daily lives. Many female dependents are therefore left behind and must fend for themselves. However, there are also families, including children, that have been caught on the Syrian-Lebanese border trying to enter illegally and have been detained. Nagham, a thirty-year-old single woman, was hoping to surprise her younger brother in Lebanon after much suffering in Iraq. In Iraq, her elder brother had been kidnapped in 2006 and has not been found since. She was threatened. She fled along with her cousins to Syria and attempted to enter Lebanon illegally to join her younger brother: "We spent 50 days in prison. We were held with people who were charged with

prostitution and drugs. It was very difficult." UNHCR was able to have her and her extended family released. She was issued a circulation permit from the General Security Directorate which is valid for 3 months, renewable under the condition that UNHCR finds a third country in which she can be resettled.

In addition, some Iraqi men in Lebanon fear that the conflict in Iraq will continue to impact them in Lebanon. They fear that they will be pursued and harmed in connection with whatever caused them to flee Iraq. When asked if she had Iraqi friends in Lebanon, a married Iraqi woman said:

I have acquaintances but not friends. My husband [...] doesn't want people to know that he's here. Despite his precautions, they found him [in May 2007]. He was buying cigarettes in a supermarket, around 8:30 pm. Three men approached him in Dora area [Beirut] and beat him up. They did not speak. They tried to take him but he screamed. He was in bed for four to five days. We could not inform the police. Caritas visited him and paid for his operations. He continues to have problems with his back.

Living Conditions

The living conditions of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon are poor. Most households live in rented apartments with one to two rooms, for which they pay between \$200 to \$250 USD per month. Incidentally, the price of rent is roughly equivalent to the average monthly salary an Iraqi earns in Lebanon (DRC, 2007). In 2005, there was an average of 2.37 family members in an Iraqi household in Lebanon, while in 2004 in Iraq there was an average of 6.4 persons per household (Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation & UNDP, 2005). This difference is due to the fact that the family average in Lebanon is affected by the large number of single Iraqi men in Lebanon. In fact, in 2005, 61 percent of Iraqi males in Lebanon above the age of 18 were single compared to only 21 percent of women above the age of 15. Thus, despite the low average family size in Lebanon, in reality it is not uncommon to find families consisting of five or more persons. For example, an extensive household

assessment conducted in 2007 showed that Iraqi families composed of five to eight individuals amounted to 19.2 percent of Iraqi households in Lebanon (DRC, 2007). Unfortunately, many have to live in the apartments described above. Describing her apartment, an Iraqi female said: “It is composed of two rooms [...]. The living room has a TV and a couch where my parents and my sister sleep and the [other] room has 3 mattresses and a closet where we sleep, me and my two brothers.”

Many families fleeing Iraq sell their possessions before fleeing. They have to pay a considerable amount of money to smugglers – an average sum of \$200 USD per person. They arrive to Lebanon with a modest sum of money, which is usually quickly depleted because of the high cost of living in Lebanon. A married Iraqi woman with two children explained that she is not always able to buy fresh groceries in Lebanon:

Honestly, when I go and buy groceries, I don't buy the fresh vegetables, I buy day-old vegetables as they are sold at cheaper prices. There are things I do not buy. Now meat is sold for 10,000-12,000 LL. I cannot buy it. I buy tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant and potatoes. Now apples are for 1,500-2,000 LL. I cannot buy them either. If they sell apples from the previous day, I might buy them.

A female head-of-household, who was a flight attendant in Iraq and whose money has quickly depleted in Lebanon, said: “We eat anything now, a piece of bread or potatoes.” Another example is that of a family of five which had to live in a one-room apartment where sewage odors were persistent and humidity and water leakage made the family constantly sick. The family had to stay in that apartment for more than eight months before they managed to find better accommodation.

Access to Services (Education and Health)

According to the study conducted in 2005, 55 percent of Iraqi households in Lebanon did not send any of their children to school (DRC, 2007). The main reason provided was the high cost of education (DRC, 2007). It is generally accepted in Iraqi society that girls and boys should attend school.

In fact, according to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in 2004, 58 percent of boys and 47 percent of girls between the ages of 6 and 24 went to school (DRC, 2007). A study conducted in Lebanon in 2007 showed that 53.7 percent of girls between the ages of 15 and 17 went to school while only 35.5 percent of boys did. The study found that this gender discrepancy was due to the fact that boys of that age were more frequently expected to work than girls of the same age (DRC, 2007). These statistics indicate that the Iraqi community has continued to prioritize education in the refugee context though it has been forced to adapt to new conditions. The fact that girls and boys are not able to pursue their studies is very distressing for parents and for the children. Notably, one of the adolescents interviewed and her father could not refrain from crying when asked about her and her brother's inability to attend school.

Concerning access to healthcare, the 2007 survey in Lebanon revealed that 66-68 percent of medical bills are paid by the Iraqi refugees themselves (DRC, 2007). With the high cost of health services in Lebanon and their difficult financial situation, many reported that they could not continue to buy their prescription drugs or be examined by a physician because of their inability to cover the cost. The fact that the male family member cannot provide for such basic necessities may also weaken his position within the family and lower his own self-esteem.

Past Harm and Trauma Experienced by Female and Male Refugees

[M]embers of a terrorized social group who find that what has happened to them is incomprehensible, and that their traditional recipes for handling crises are useless, are particularly likely to feel helpless and uncertain what to do. When war so routinely targets the social fabric, community structures may not be able to fill their customary role as a source of support and adaptation. (Summerfield, 2000, pp. 232-235)

The mere existence of pervasive violent conflict in one's country may have severe psychological consequences on the population. According to

Reschen (2006) many Iraqis are expected to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder due to the violence in their country (p. 971). In addition, many Iraqis have personally experienced persecution before deciding to flee, especially in the aftermath of the Samarra attacks in February 2006 (in 2004, around 12 percent of Iraqis in Lebanon had experienced traumatic events) (DRC, 2005). Many women and girls have experienced rape, assassination attempts, threats to their lives, or have witnessed their family members being kidnapped, killed, or tortured. The middle-aged woman mentioned above, whose husband was killed, described her twenty-year-daughter with the following: "Since her father died [in March 2006], she became like this. She locks herself up in the room and says she wants her father."

Changes in Women's Role in the Family

The sixteen-year-old adolescent mentioned above, who started working in Lebanon in 2005 when she was 14, described her role back in Iraq as such: "I would return home from school and study. When I finished my studies, I would help my mother with cleaning and other house chores. Then I would help my younger siblings study." Since she came to Lebanon, her concerns have shifted. Describing her changed state of mind, she said: "If I stayed home and didn't go to work, my father would not be able to provide for the family alone. I am always thinking about my responsibilities in the house [...]. I never thought of anything other than my studies [in Iraq]." Zahra, a widowed mother with two daughters, said: "my only responsibility used to be to teach my children and hope that they would graduate from university. Now I have to worry about expenses... Thinking of the future was a shared responsibility with [my husband] but now it is more of a burden. We are not in our country." A recurrent theme among the interviews conducted is that these females, adults and minor, think of and worry about responsibilities which they had not considered before fleeing Iraq.

The 16 year old adolescent mentioned earlier still helps with the household chores even though she has a job and her mother and two of her younger

brothers do not work outside the home. The sense of guilt and duty towards her family makes her feel like she is not doing enough. Cleaning the house is still an exclusive responsibility of females, even when they are burdened with long working hours outside the home. The woman is also expected to cook, as was the case back in Iraq. There may be some instances during which the male figure helps, however they are exceptional. If there is more than one female in the house, the one who does not work outside the home does most of the cleaning and cooking. With regards to buying household consumer items, it seems that in Iraq the male had a shared or exclusive responsibility to purchase such items. Now, in cases in which the family entered Lebanon illegally, the responsibility becomes exclusively that of females because frequently men do not feel safe outside the home.

Iraqi Refugee Women and Employment

According to a UNDP report on living conditions in Iraq in 2004, 13 percent of females above the age of 15 were in the labor force, in contrast to 69 percent of males. Nineteen per cent of women between the ages of 25 and 54 were employed. Eighty-eight per cent of men in the same age bracket were employed (Masculinities: Male roles, 2005). In 2005, 55 percent of the Iraqi population in Lebanon was working, the overwhelming majority did not have residency permits: "91 percent of the males and 38 percent of the females [above the age of 16] were reported to be economically active. 47 percent of the females are fulltime housewives" (DRC, 2005). The need to earn money is therefore translated for both genders into higher rates of employment, particularly for women.

The issue of working in the country of asylum is problematic for refugee women on three levels. One level is whether the refugee woman ever worked in Iraq. For example, a 31-year-old Iraqi refugee, who had not completed her primary education and who was a housewife in Iraq, stated: "a woman never works in Iraq especially... [if] she lives in the village of Tallesqof (village in Mosul province)". As she and her husband need to provide for their two school-age boys, she now works as a cleaning lady.

When asked whether her husband accepted the fact that she was now working, she explained that it upset him but that “he is forced to accept it.” She and her family fled to Lebanon in 2006 after having been threatened. They had less than \$1,000 USD upon arrival. Her husband earns \$200 USD per month. Their rent alone is \$210 USD. The father of the 16 year old girl who is working explained that humanitarian organizations tried to intervene to stop his daughter from working. He said:

I told the humanitarian organization that I really cannot afford for my daughter to stop working. We are paying rent and we are barely able to survive. [...] Every day I see my daughter going to work, my heart is torn to pieces. Now my 12 year old son is also working. I have my pride. My sister in Australia asks me if I need anything but I don't tell her that I need any money.

The refugee woman who is not used to working and her family are forced to accept her new role in the labor force but they are not pleased with it. This situation can hurt their self-pride: having a working woman in the family is understood by some to be a sign that the man is unable to fulfill his duties as family provider.

Another level is the nature of the job itself. Even if the refugee woman worked in Iraq, the work conditions in Lebanon are often unacceptable to her or her family. The nature of the job itself becomes the main issue. Notably, work opportunities in Lebanon are primarily limited to a number of blue-collar jobs. The issue of pride thus recurs. A 31 year old refugee said:

[My husband] absolutely does not want me to work. He says ‘I am the man and I should provide for the family’. In addition, the fact that I work in homes as a maid makes it worse. I am my parents’ only daughter and never did such things in my life.

Because she was worried about her parents’ perception, she stressed the importance of keeping her identity confidential. She explained that she continues to conceal her difficult living conditions from her parents. She believes that

they would be upset if they found out and would blame her husband.

The third level is that of exploitation. Once again, there is very little that the protective figure in the family can do to prevent this. As the overwhelming majority of Iraqis do not have residency permits, they do not have protection against exploitation in the work place. Many report that, among other things, they are not paid on time and complain of long working hours, in addition to being paid very little.

In addition, the increasing number of working children is a worrying trend in the refugee population. One of the adolescents interviewed for this study worked in a jewelry box factory for 5 months when she first arrived in Lebanon until she contracted a skin infection from the chemicals she was forced to work with. She worked from 7:30 am until 5:30 pm or 8:00 pm from Monday to Friday, and from 7:30 am until 12:30 pm on Saturday. She earned \$200 USD (300,000 L.L.) a month and was treated disrespectfully by her employer and colleagues. Three days after quitting her job, she found another job doing embroidery. In her new job she works as late as 9 pm some nights. She is only allowed to have a half an hour lunch break. Nagham, who was a hairdresser for more than 10 years in Iraq, was offered pay as low as \$66 USD (99,900 L.L.) a month at a hairdresser shop in Lebanon. Still another example is that of a female head-of-household who was offered a job as a housekeeper, provided that she allowed her potential employer to marry her 10 year old daughter.

Changes in Gender Roles in the Home

Iraqi men’s ability to play a traditional role in the family is reduced in the refugee context by a number of factors, including the high risk of detention, the limited income that the refugee men can earn, physical and psychological injury in Iraq and the risks incurred while crossing borders etc. “Our society does not respect a man who sits at home while his wife works and feeds the family,” said Kholoud Nasser Muhssin, a researcher on family and children’s affairs at the University of Baghdad. “This



This is a drawing by an unidentified beneficiary of Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center in which she pleads: "Dear Jesus help release my father and brother from prison and thank you for protecting them from every harm possible. Amen."

phenomenon will definitely weaken the role of the father and reduce respect among children for their fathers in some families. It will adversely affect an already devastated society," added (IRIN, 2007). The father of the above-mentioned adolescent girl explained that when he and his family were crossing the Syrian-Lebanese border with the smugglers, he was worried about the safety of his then 14 year old daughter: "I was very worried about her. I was scared, because we were the only family being smuggled across the border. It was at night, the smugglers could have harmed her. They wanted to carry her [as she was tired] but I didn't let them, I carried her myself." The daughter also explained that even though her parents were with her at the time, she did not feel safe. In addition, her father is unable to protect her in her work place

as he is not present. Her father said:

When we applied to Australia, we used to sit and talk about what we will do. I will not let the children work. I will only let them focus on their studies, nothing else. [...] I don't pressure my children to work. This is not what I hoped for at all. I want them to study. Every father wants that for his children.

Nuclear families in Iraq usually share a house with their extended family. Even in cases of insecurity when they have to stay home, family members can socialize with siblings, in-laws, cousins, etc. In Lebanon social life for Iraqi refugees of both genders is limited for a variety of reasons. Unemployment, security, high cost of living, past trauma and family status affect Iraqis' social life

in Lebanon. The wife of an Iraqi man who was subjected to assassination attempts in Iraq and in Lebanon, explained: “We specifically wanted to live in a neighborhood where there are no Iraqis as my husband is very scared [...]. My husband’s security situation doesn’t really permit us to socialize as he doesn’t want people to know that he’s here.” In this case, the security concern plays a determining role in the family’s social life. The husband’s fears affect the wife by reducing her social activities.

Other families who only have security concerns vis-à-vis Lebanese authorities also have a reduced social life for both genders, specifically for the men. One of the interviewees explained that she takes her children to places of worship without her husband, for fear that he might be detained because of his illegal status. Both the husband and the wife are distressed by the situation but feel they have to accept it. The woman seems to have more space for socializing, but often chooses not to do so without her husband. With respect to financial constraints, the father of the adolescent girl described what family leisure was for him:

Sometimes my children see other kids having birthday parties and so on. I do everything I can to buy them a cake and a soda when one of them has a birthday. And I allow them to invite one or two close friends. Sometimes I take them to the Sunday market when we need to buy something. Sometimes we just go for walks in the area.

Social Impact of Shifting Gender Norms

Due to exceptional circumstances, the refugee community seems to have become tolerant of situations that would not have been acceptable under normal circumstances. Nagham, who was imprisoned for 50 days for illegal entry explained that an imprisoned female in Iraq is viewed very badly. However, this is not the case outside Iraq: Nagham’s brother was very supportive during and after her detention. Moreover, she was not stigmatized by her community. The same applies to women who are living alone, which in Iraq is typically frowned upon. As the extended family network is available there, the female head-

of-household is expected to reside with them. However, given that she is living outside Iraq, the fact that she chooses to live alone is not held against her.

In addition to changing social norms, the short-term aspirations of Iraqi refugee women are often impacted by displacement. For example, Nagham explained that when she was in Iraq, she dreamt of getting married and of having a family. Now, she dreams of reuniting with her disappeared brother and her other brother residing abroad. The importance of family is persistent in Nagham’s aspirations. Her current priority is to reconstruct her previous life rather than to begin a new family.

A young Iraqi woman head-of-household explained that she hopes for security, to be in her own house with her children, to stop fleeing and to stop fearing the future. She said, “Life has no taste anymore. I have no feeling for the future. My life is my children now. Life has no taste now. I get them food and ensure they are alive. One cannot think of the future, work, or building a life, nothing. We live day by day.”

The adolescent 16 year old girl explained that when she was in Iraq, she dreamt of graduating from school and helping her siblings in their studies. Now, she constantly thinks of how to provide for her family and hopes that she will be resettled to a third country where she can go back to school. Her ambition to finish her education is a constant, but it is on hold until the more urgent objective of earning money or traveling to another host-country is fulfilled.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these interviews suggest that Iraqi refugee women in Lebanon are struggling to balance traditional gender stereotypes and labor divisions with the new demands of poverty, illegality, safety concerns, poor living conditions, and unemployment. Women are being forced into roles that were previously alien to them. Simultaneously, safety restrictions and the high risk of detention often result in men’s limited

movement, which makes them unable to perform duties which are traditionally theirs (providing for the family, fulfilling social obligations, etc.) As a result, the gender dynamics in the family have shifted. Because of the extraordinary circumstances, it appears that both genders and the Iraqi community at large are willing to accept these changes, but only on a provisional basis. If the conflict in Iraq continues to make return impossible, the temporary changes in gender roles could become more permanent. Careful attention and further research should be undertaken to understand

the short-term and long-term implications of shifting gender dynamics to ensure that support is appropriately tailored.

Rouba Beydoun is a Human Rights activist working at United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR-Beirut, as a Refugee Status Determination assistant. Email address: roubabeydoun@yahoo.com.

* The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNHCR or the United Nations.

REFERENCES

- Danish Refugee Council (DRC).** (2005, July). *Iraqi population in Lebanon survey report*. Retrieved October 11, 2007, from http://www.drc.dk/fileadmin/uploads/pdf/English_site/Lebanon/Survey_report_on_Iraqi_population.pdf
- Danish Refugee Council (DRC).** (2007, November). *Iraqi population survey in Lebanon report*. Retrieved February 10, 2008, from http://www.drc.dk/fileadmin/uploads/pdf/English_site/Lebanon/Iraqi_Population_Survey_-_English.pdf
- Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN).** (2007, November 6). Lebanon: Iraqi refugees face prison and deportation. *United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)*. Retrieved November 10, 2007, from <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=75172>
- Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation & United Nations Development Programme.** (2005). *Iraq living conditions survey 2004*. Retrieved October 11, 2007, from <http://www.iq.undp.org/ILCS/PDF/Tabulation%20Report%20-%20Englilsh.pdf>
- Reschen, M. E.** (2006). Health in the Middle East: Psychological implications of Iraqi invasion. *British Medical Journal*, 333(7575), 971.
- Shafie, S.** (2007, July). Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. *Forced migration*. Retrieved November 1, 2007, from <http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo018/>
- Summerfield, D.** (2000). Conflict and health: War and mental health: A brief overview. *British Medical Journal*, 321(7255), 232 - 235.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).** (2007, August 28). *Iraq: Rate of displacement rising*. Retrieved November 1, 2007, from <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=briefing&id=46d3f68f4>
- Masculinities: Male roles and male involvement in the promotion of gender equality.** (2005, September). *Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children*. Retrieved October 11, 2007, from http://www.womenscommission.org/pdf/masc_res.pdf

Triple Tensions: Somali Refugee Women in Yemen

Marina de Regt

Introduction

Since the outbreak of the Somali civil war in 1991 a burgeoning flow of Somali refugees has spread all over the world. Ethiopia and Kenya have received the highest numbers of Somali refugees; however, Yemen has also received hundreds of thousands. Yemen is the only country on the Arabian Peninsula that has signed the Refugee Convention of 1951 and Somali refugees are accepted on a prima facie basis. Yet, the living and working conditions of Somali refugees in Yemen are far from ideal. Their social status in Yemeni society is low; they are often discriminated against and are blamed for the increasing unemployment rates, levels of crime, prostitution, presence of AIDS, and the loosening of moral values.

The number of Somali women that come to Yemen on their own, without male relatives but sometimes accompanied by children, is remarkably high. In some cases, they experience the war directly, through rape or witnessing their relatives' violent death. In other cases, they suffer from poverty and the lack of income-generating opportunities. Some marry on the way or soon after their arrival in Yemen in the hope that marriage will guarantee male protection, support, income, and an easier life. The alternative, living alone as a single woman in Yemen, is difficult. However, these marriages do not always last and thus, many women end up living alone with their children. Though Somali women are socially dependent on men in Yemen, they are economically independent. It is easier for women to find paid work in Yemen than for men. The large majority of Somali women are employed as domestic workers, cleaning the houses of Yemeni families, and they have often become the main providers for their families. Somali men find it difficult to accept their dependence on women. The changed gender relations result in tension, conflict, and the break-up of marriages.

1. See for example, Affie, 2004; Boyle and Ali, n.d.; Chell-Robinson, 2000; Farah, 2000; and Al-Sharmani, 2006.

2. The research was part of the research program titled Migrant Domestic Workers: Transnational Relations, Families and Identities at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) and the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research (ASSR).

Gender relations always change as a result of migration and in refugee situations. In particular, the changes in gender relations among Somalis in the diaspora have been noted in several studies.¹ The case of Somalis in Yemen is particularly interesting in this respect because of a paradoxical gender relationship: Somali women are simultaneously economically independent and socially dependent on men, due to their need for male protection. In this paper, I will describe and analyze this paradoxical situation and the multiple tensions Somali women face in Yemen; in society at large, at home, and at work. The paper is based on extensive anthropological fieldwork in two cities in Yemen between 2003 and 2007 and on in-depth interviews with Somali domestic workers.²

Social Tensions

The following are examples of headlines that have appeared in Yemeni newspapers over the last few years: “Smuggling across the Gulf of Aden from Somalia to Yemen on the Increase”, “At least 112 drown off Yemeni Coast”, and “Somali Immigrants Face Death in the Red Sea”. Since the outbreak of the civil war in Somalia, the flow of Somali refugees to Yemen has increased dramatically. Currently, there are more than 90,000 Somali refugees registered in Yemen. The actual number of Somalis that have come to Yemen since 1991 is unknown because many of them are not registered or have moved to other countries. Most Somali refugees come to Yemen on smuggling boats, risking their life during the journey. The boats are made of wood, do not have sanitary facilities, and are overcrowded. “When the boat is too heavy and starts to sink, the smugglers start to throw people off the boat in order to stabilize it. People are shouting and screaming because they are still alive but know that they are going to die,” recalled a Somali woman who came to Yemen by boat. In addition, the smugglers are not allowed to enter the Yemeni waters, let alone go ashore. Thus, the passengers are sometimes forced to jump off the boat a few miles off the coast and swim to shore, at the risk of drowning in the process.

Those who survive and arrive safely in Yemen are apprehended by the Yemeni police. Somalis are immediately accepted as refugees and referred to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)-refugee camp in Al-Kharaz, near Aden. Non-Somalis have to prove that they are indeed refugees. In the interim they may be arrested and imprisoned. Despite the ready acceptance of Somali refugees, they sometimes experience harsh treatment. For example, their belongings may be confiscated. There are stories of women experiencing harassment. Habiba, a young Somali woman who came to Yemen because she lost her husband, is one such example. She was separated from her three children and raped by three Yemeni policemen because she could not pay the sum of money they requested from her. She was held by the policemen until the following day. A strong stigma is attached to rape in Somalia and so, prior to the interview, Habiba had not told anyone what had happened.

UNHCR has established a refugee camp near Aden where refugees can receive food, shelter, and health care. The camp is located in the desert, is subject to extremely high temperatures, and has only basic facilities. Accordingly, most Somali refugees prefer to travel to big cities in search of employment. UNHCR encourages refugees to integrate into the local community. The camp is reserved for “vulnerable cases”, unable to survive without international assistance (Hughes, 2002, p. 12). Currently, there are approximately 10,000 people living in the camp. The rest leave the camp and travel to the cities. In the southern part of Yemen, it has become common to see refugees walking long distances with little luggage or clothing. Sawda, a young Somali woman of 17 years, left her family because of poverty and travelled to Yemen on her own. She recounted her experience of leaving the refugee camp: “We spent seven days on our way to Sana’a. We didn’t have money for a taxi so we had to walk. We walked at night, we slept in villages, and the next day we continued walking.”

In the cities, most Somali refugees share apartments and rooms in an attempt to decrease the cost of rent, which results in overcrowding. The rooms are small and usually sparsely furnished with one or two mattresses, a bed, and sometimes a

wardrobe. Even though Somalis are accepted on a *prima facie* basis, their living conditions in Yemen are difficult. They do not have citizenship rights and need work permits to work in the formal sector. The Yemeni government is responsible for the registration, dispensment, and renewal of identity cards for Somalis. However, these services are only available once every two years due to the lack of governmental resources. Consequently, many Somalis do not have identity cards. This hampers their access to health care, education, and employment. NGOs who receive financial support from UNHCR to offer assistance to refugees, such as the Refugee Health and Community Center and Marie Stopes International Yemen, are only allowed to help refugees who hold identity cards. Those who do not have identity cards are not entitled to subsidised services.

In addition, Somalis are often discriminated against and exploited as tenants and workers. The outbreak of the civil war in Somalia coincided with the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991 and the subsequent return of hundreds of thousands of Yemeni migrants from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.³ The government of the newly established Republic of Yemen lost one of its main sources of income, namely the remittances of Yemeni labour migrants. The government was unable to cope with the sudden arrival of returnees and refugees, particularly in regards to basic service provision such as housing, employment, health care, and education. The structural adjustment policies imposed on Yemen by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank further weakened Yemen's economic situation. Currently, general unemployment and poverty are rampant. In the early 1990s returning Yemeni migrants were blamed for economic problems. Currently, refugees from the Horn of Africa are the scapegoats for Yemen's ills. Increasing rates of unemployment, criminality, prostitution, and AIDS are linked to the presence of refugees who, subsequently, suffer from racism and discrimination (see Hughes, 2003, p. 37).

The Yemeni government does little to support Somali refugees. The refugee law, in which the rights and duties of both refugees and the Yemeni government are laid out, has not been approved by the Parliament and is therefore not implemented. Somali refugees are treated like other foreigners and have few rights. Rather than improving the situation of Somali refugees in Yemen, the Yemeni government tries to reduce the refugee flow by assisting in negotiations in Somalia. In addition, whereas Yemen used to have an "open-door policy," in which entrance and illegal residence were relatively easy, the government has recently implemented strict border control regulations, as part of Yemen's contribution to the "war on terror" (Hughes, 2002, p. 10). Regulations at the border with Saudi Arabia, in the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Aden, are focused on the prevention of arms smuggling and the entry of "terrorists." However, they have also proven very efficient in preventing refugees from entering Yemeni territories. Against this backdrop of discrimination, the Somali refugee women who are able to enter Yemen are often faced with poor economic conditions and maltreatment in the work place.

3. The Yemeni government was against a military attack on Iraq after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, with the result that approximately 800,000 Yemeni migrants were expelled from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

Tensions at Work

The large majority of Somali women in Yemen are employed as domestic workers. Despite the economic crisis in Yemen, upper and middle class families in the main cities increasingly hire domestic workers. Changing family relations as a result of migration,

urbanization, the increase of girls' education, and women's employment have impacted notions of domestic work which has, in turn, resulted in the increased demand for paid domestic labour. Yemeni women are reluctant to work as domestic labourers because this job has a low social status and because working as domestic labourers forces them into contact with men who are not their relatives. The majority of domestic workers come from Somalia and Ethiopia. In some cases, Asian women are also employed.

There is a clear hierarchy among domestic workers. Asian women, from the Philippines, India, and Indonesia, are employed by upper class families for cleaning, cooking, child care, and elderly care. Ethiopian women are mainly employed by the upper middle and middle classes. They usually are hired to clean, cook, and to do care-taking jobs. Usually, Asian and Ethiopian women live with their employers. Middle class families predominately hire Somali women to do their domestic work. Somali women are almost never hired to cook. They are usually hired for cleaning jobs. They rarely live with their employers' families because they have their own family responsibilities.

For Somali women in Yemen domestic work is one of the few possibilities for paid work. It is also the reason for their economic independence. However, many Somali women have difficulty accepting their employment because it is seen as low-status work, it forces them into a hierarchical relationship with Yemeni women, and it puts them in daily contact with men who are not part of their family. Somali women have sometimes stated that, before the civil war in Somalia, they, themselves, had domestic workers at home and thus find it humiliating to do this type of work. In addition, Somali women are both culturally and religiously similar to their Yemeni employers: they are Muslim, they learn Arabic quickly, and share many cultural and religious values with the Yemenis. However, employment as domestic workers forces them to accept a subordinate position vis-a-vis Yemeni families. As domestic workers they are dependent on their employers who give them orders, can refuse to pay their salaries, and who may even accuse them of theft and send them to jail. Their dependence and vulnerability is even greater because they are refugees in a society that does not give them full citizenship rights. In addition, domestic work takes place in the private sphere and is therefore not covered by labour laws in Yemen. Domestic workers lack protection in cases of conflict between the employer and the employee. For example, one interviewee told me that she first worked for a large Yemeni family where the workload was very heavy, her salary was low, and she was not treated well. When she complained about her salary, the family threatened to employ an Ethiopian woman instead: "Praise the Lord, how the Yemenis treat us! They were always shouting: *Ya Somaliya! Ya khadima!*⁴ Come here, do this and do that. It was really bad. But I accepted it and did what they wanted."

Because Somali domestic workers have little power to negotiate the terms of their employment, they use different tactics and strategies to undermine the hierarchical relationship with their Yemeni employers. Coming late to work, not coming to work for a couple of days, or refusing to do certain tasks are ways in which they try to challenge this inequality. As a result, Yemeni employers call them "unreliable," saying that "they come and go when they want" and "they work for a short period and then they quit again". This so-called "unreliability" is also a result of the fact that Somali women have their own family responsibilities in Yemen. As mentioned before, many

4. *Khadima* literally means 'female servant' but it is also an explicit reference to the *akhdaam*, the lowest social status group in Yemen who are black and cannot trace their ancestry.

of them have children and are therefore not available for full-time work, particularly those who are single mothers. They cannot live with their employer's family. There is a chance that they will have to stay home to take care of a sick child or to help a relative. In addition, their "unreliability" is related to the fact that they are seen as "sexually promiscuous". Yemeni women are often concerned that their husbands will have extramarital sexual relations with the Somali women who work in their houses.

Domestic work is in the private sphere of the house and thus brings labourers into close contact with the members of the family, notably with men. Female employers often prefer to employ domestic workers who are not attractive in order to diminish the possibility that their husbands might become sexually interested in them. In general, Somali women are not seen as physically attractive by Yemenis because their physical appearance does not conform to Yemeni notions of beauty. In addition, the fact that they are Muslim and cover their bodies is seen as a sign of modesty, less likely to arouse men's sexual desire. Some Yemeni women, therefore, prefer to employ Somali women rather than Ethiopian women, who are regarded as beautiful. However, Somali women have the reputation of being "sexually promiscuous" and Yemenis often say that "Somalis will do anything for money."

Somali women stress that they are Muslim and therefore strictly respect notions of gender segregation and avoid contact with men who are not part of their family. However, they claim that Ethiopian women have sexual relationships with the male members of the families they work for. This, they believe, results from the fact that they are Christian,⁵ wear tight clothes, make-up, and do not cover their hair. In attempt to protect themselves in the work place where they are regularly confronted with the gaze and advances of men, Somali women emphasize their own modesty and strict code of sexual behaviour, blaming Ethiopian women for sexually promiscuous behaviour. For example, Fawzia, one of the Somali women interviewed, said: "Yemenis think that domestic workers aren't human. They treat us like servants and think that we never get tired. They make us work for long hours without food or anything. And the men are bad. They try to touch us and they look at us."

Somali domestic workers are vulnerable because they live and work in a society where the protection of women depends, to a large extent, on the presence of male guardians and because they work in the private sphere where abuse and exploitation can take place without legal repercussion. In order to get the protection of a male figure, women prefer to be married. However, their marriages often do not last.

Tensions at Home

The Somali civil war has had major consequences on gender relations in the public and private spheres, both inside and outside Somalia. One of the main impacts of the war is that women are increasingly replacing men as the breadwinners of the family.⁶ Somali women in the diaspora are actively involved in public activities, both paid and community-based activities. Mulki Al-Sharmani, who did research among Somali women in Cairo, concludes that Somali women play a vital role in securing livelihoods and maximizing economic, social, and legal resources for their families. Although their decision-making power inside the family has increased as a result of their economic and

5. The majority of Ethiopian women working in Yemen are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians.

6. See for example Chell-Robinson, 2000; Gardner and El-Bushra, 2004; Affie, 2004; Al-Sharmani, 2006.

social activities, women are often frustrated by men's reluctance to take responsibility for their families and to actively engage in the community (Al-Sharmani, 2006).

Among Somali refugees in Yemen, similar changes have occurred. As mentioned before, finding paid work is easier for Somali women than it is for Somali men. Unemployment rates are high in Yemen. The only employment that is available for Somali men is unskilled jobs, such as cleaning cars, street sweeping, and unskilled construction work. Many men find these jobs humiliating. Women are more willing to accept low-status jobs than men.⁷ Though Somali women do not like to work as domestic labourers, they accept it because they do not have an alternative to provide for their families.

In Somalia, as well as in Yemen, women's social status depends, to a large extent, on their marital status. Kapteijns's (1993) analysis of Somali society includes the following: "Considered a temporary member of her father's household, a woman gains only outsider status in the household of her husband" (p. 3). In Yemen, being married is also of crucial importance to women because it guarantees male protection and belonging to a family. Single women and divorced women have a low social status and they run the risk of being harassed when they live on their own or have no male guardian. For refugee women in Yemen, male protection is even more important because they often do not have male relatives who can protect them.

Many single, divorced, and widowed Somali women marry soon after their arrival in Yemen. Khadija married and divorced twice in Yemen. When asked whether she would marry again after two bad experiences, she answered: "I would not marry again if I had the opportunity to go to the US or Europe but if I stay in Yemen I may marry again. Life is too hard for a woman living on her own in Yemen."

Somali men have other reasons for getting married. Women with paid jobs have become interesting marriage partners for unemployed Somali men. Even when they have a wife and children in Somalia, Somali men may marry a second time abroad. Marriages are easily arranged among Somali refugees and are not always based on a written contract. However, the fact that women are earning money and that men are economically dependent on them results in tensions at home. Though men need women's income, accepting it makes many men feel frustrated, angry, and alienated. Increasing their use of *qat* and cigarettes is a way in which they deal with their frustrations. Chewing *qat*,⁸ a very common habit in Somalia which is also practiced on a large scale in Yemen, is a favourite pastime of Somali men. Many Somali women complain that their husbands do nothing else and constantly want the money they earn to buy *qat*. In Somalia it is shameful for men to ask their wives for money but in the diaspora it has become normal. Somali men also take out their frustrations on their wives and children, which results in an extremely high rate of marital conflict and divorce: "Because of the breakdown of the traditional support systems available in Somalia, abusive relationships between parents and children, as well as among married couples, are increasing in the Somali community" (Affie, 2004, p. 112).

7. See Kibreab, 1995; and Gardner & El Bushra, 2004.

8. *Qat* is a mildly stimulant drug, the leaves of which are chewed.

Halima's husband was killed in Somalia. She migrated to Yemen to provide for her four children, whom she left at home with her mother. She married six months after arriving in Yemen but the marriage ended within a short period. "In the beginning my husband

was very nice to me but he changed suddenly and started to ask for the money I earn. He did not want me to send money to my children. We quarrelled a lot and after three months he divorced me," she told me. Another interviewee, Adar, also requested a divorce because her husband wanted her salary. However, she only succeeded in getting a divorce after people from her tribe interfered. Because Halima and Adar were both economically independent, they could opt for a divorce without fear of losing their financial resources. Although life in Yemen is difficult for single Somali women, Halima and Adar preferred to cope with the difficulties of not having male protection to having a husband who takes their money and does not provide for his family.

Conclusion

In this article I have analyzed the multiple tensions Somali domestic workers in Yemen are confronted with. The case of Yemen is interesting because it is a conservative society in which women, to a large extent, are dependent on male relatives who provide for them and give them social protection. In general, married women with children have the highest social status in Yemen because they do not have to do paid work. In Somalia the cultural importance of the male breadwinner grew during the colonial and post-colonial period. However, the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 has led to changes in gender relations and to an increase of women's economic participation. Both in Somalia itself and in the Somali diaspora, women have replaced men as breadwinners in the family. In addition, the number of female-headed households has grown considerably for a wide variety of reasons.

Somali refugees in Yemen are confronted with discrimination and have limited opportunities to improve their living conditions. Somali men have difficulties finding paid work because unemployment rates are high. For Somali women, it is easier to find paid work because there is a demand for domestic labour among Yemeni families in the big cities. Yet, Somali women working as domestic labourers are perpetually seeking ways to decrease their vulnerability in Yemeni society. They are vulnerable as refugees, as women, and as domestic workers. Marriage is a way to diminish their vulnerability because it guarantees male protection in a society where living alone as a woman is difficult. In addition, they hope that their husbands will provide for them. Somali men are interested in marrying Somali women because of their income. This, however, does not mean that marriage is the best solution for both parties. Actually, marriages are a source of tension and conflict because of the different ways in which men and women depend on each other.

Marina de Regt is an anthropologist currently working at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam.
Email: mre@iisg.nl

REFERENCES

- Affe, L.** (2004). Domestic conflict in the diaspora: Somali women asylum seekers and refugees in Canada. In J. Gardner & J. El Bushra (Eds.), *Somalia: The untold story – The war through the eyes of Somali women* (pp.107-115). London: Pluto Press.
- Al-Sharmani, M.** (2006). Living transnationally: Somali diasporic women in Cairo. *International Migration*, 44 (1), 55-77.

- Boyle, E. H., & Ahmad A.** (n.d). *Culture, structure, and the refugee experience in Somali immigrant family transformation*. Unpublished paper, University of Minnesota.
- Chell-Robinson, V.** (2000). Female migrants in Italy: Coping in a country of new immigration. In F. Anthias & G. Lazardis (Eds.), *Gender and migration in Southern Europe: Women on the move* (pp.103-123). Oxford/New York: Berg.
- Gardner, J., & El Bushra, J.** (2004). *Somalia: The untold story – The war through the eyes of Somali women*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hill, G.** (2006, July 5). Somali refugees languish in Yemen. *BBC News*. Retrieved July 23, 2008, from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5151518.stm
- Hughes, N. H.B.** (2003). Yemen and refugees: Progressive attitudes – policy void. *Forced Migration Review*, 16, 36-37.
- Hughes, N. H.B.** (2002). *Report on the situation of refugees in Yemen: Findings of a one-month exploratory study*. Cairo: Forced Migration and Refugee Centre, American University of Cairo.
- Jaffer, F., Guy, S. & Niewczasinski, J.** (2004). Reproductive health care for somali refugees in Yemen. *Forced Migration Review*, 19, 32-33.
- Kapteijns, L.** (1993). *Women and the crisis of communal identity: The cultural construction of gender in Somali history*. Boston: African Studies Center, Boston University.
- Kibreab, G.** (1995). Eritrean women refugees in Khartoum, Sudan, 1970-1990. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 8(1), 1-25.
- Musse, F.** (2004). War crimes against women and girls. In J. Gardner & J. El Bushra (Eds.), *Somalia: The untold story – The war through the eyes of Somali women* (pp. 69-96). London: Pluto Press.
- Republic of Yemen, Ministry of Human Rights.** (2004). *National Human Rights Report 2004*. place of publication: publisher.
- Warsame, A. M.** (2004). Crisis or opportunity? Somali women traders and the war. In J. Gardner & J. El Bushra (Eds.), *Somalia: The untold story – The war through the eyes of Somali women* (pp.116-138.). London: Pluto Press.

A New Section in al-raida

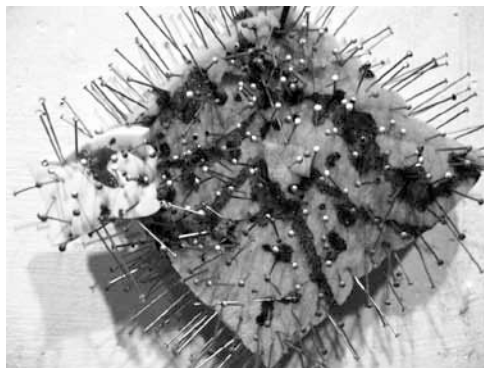
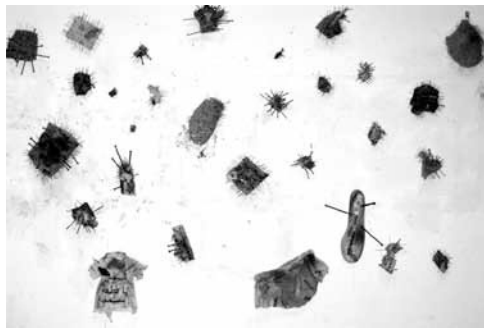
A new section has been introduced titled
'Letters to the Editor'

Please send your comments to al-raida@lau.edu.lb

Artworks

Sumayyah Samaha

The art work below is prepared by Sumayyah Samaha a Lebanese artist living and working in New York City. Her art works addresses political and personal issues. In the last few years she has been making art that addresses conflict situations in Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq.



◆ **CLUSTER BOMBS FALLING**, mixed media installation about the bombs dropped by Israel on Lebanon, summer 2006.

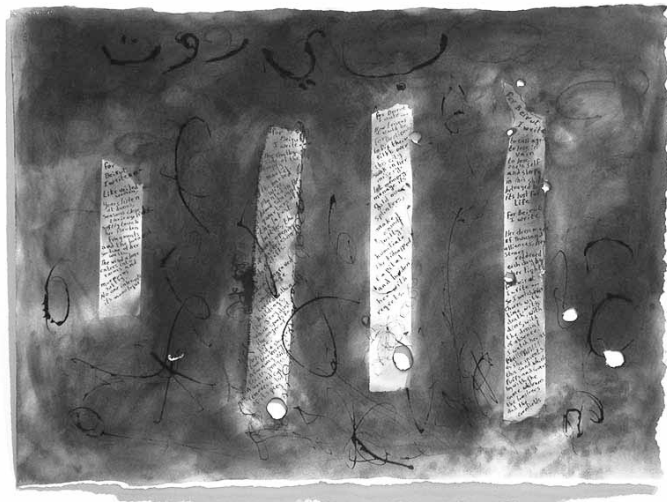


◆ **5TH CRUSADE**, mixed media about the American invasion of Iraq (clay/pins/nails).



◆ *PINE TREES DONT MAKE PINE NUTS ANYMORE*, water color and ink on paper, 2006.

◆ *FOR BEIRUT I WRITE*, water color and ink on paper featuring a poem by Claire Gebayle about Beirut during the war, 2006.



◆ *ISRAEL/PALESTINE FENCE*, mono prints, mixed media, symbolic war in protest to its building, 2006.

The Visibility of Palestinian Refugees: Women in Revolutionary Narratives A Gender Discourse

Ibrahim A. El-Hussari

In the following critique El-Hussari discusses three of Ghassan Kanafani's books: *Rijal fil-Shams (Men in the Sun)*, *Ma tabaqqā la-Kum (All That's Left to You)*, and *Umm Sa'ad*. Kanafani. As a Palestinian refugee himself, Kanafani has fathered a genre of literature known as 'Resistance Literature'. His literary works have continued to have a reverberating influence on the political and social discourse of Palestinian refugees throughout the Arab world. Though he does not focus specifically on gender issues, his analysis of Palestinian nationalism highlights the complex social and political context in which refugee women exist. El-Hussari's critique of Kanafani's novels focuses on the transformation of the female characters in their shift from passivity to political and social awareness and engagement. In so doing, El-Hussari suggests that Kanafani's female characters represent the Palestinian refugee population in their political and social struggle to regain a voice and an ownership of destiny. Though the Palestinian refugee situation is unique, Kanafani's focus on the Palestinian refugees struggle with engagement and activism resonates with other refugee communities in the Arab world. El-Hussari draws attention to the issue of refugee women who not only face discrimination as refugees but who also struggle with the gendered tension between voicelessness and engagement within the home and in the broader Arab society.

Introduction

In contemporary Palestinian fiction, gender differences, specifically focused on sexual politics and home economics, are submerged by national issues which loom over the life of Palestinian refugees, irrespective of gender. The majority of Ghassan Kanafani's literary works perpetuate this trend; excluding the female protagonist in *Umm Sa'ad*, women are rarely central to the plotline, or shaping the narrative's claim. Despite the marginality of these female characters, Kanafani does not sacrifice the tensions determining and defining the role of these characters. He also does not fall prey to classical feminist definitions of sexual politics. For example, Kate Millet (1971) notes the significance of power and domination in contemporary literary descriptions of sexual politics. These concepts do not seem to be the decisive factors shaping

women's destinies in Kanafani's revolutionary writing. Whether they are silent, absorbed in an internal monologue, or speak their minds candidly, Kanafani's female characters seem to be moved by intuition and natural gifts in their definition of existence. Choosing not to ignore the gender issue in favor of the national cause, Kanafani unravels several generations of women as he explores their narratives in a changing world, without dismissing the cultural thread that binds them together. Thus, the female characters' efforts to move towards self-awareness are framed by their response to the historical conditions traumatizing or elevating the lives of Palestinian refugees. In his three respective novels, namely *Rijal fil-Shams (Men in the Sun)*, *Ma tabaqqā la-Kum (All That's Left to You)*, and *Umm Sa'ad*, Kanafani portrays his female characters as dynamic, developing in the context of a specific time and space; there is a considerable shift in his

characters as they react to the compelling situations in which they find themselves. During this process of change, the female characters shift from a state of total passivity and nominal self-recognition to one of partial participation in their surrounding context, and eventually to a state of full awareness in which they begin to play an active role, not only in shaping their fate, but also the fate of their people.

Men in the Sun

In the first novel *Rijal fil-Shams (Men in the Sun)*, the voice of the woman is barely heard, as wife, mother or daughter: as a wife and mother, she is but a part of the memory of her husband who is facing his bleak fate, venturing into the unknown desert to secure a decent living for his family; as a daughter, she is the subject of an arranged marriage explored through the memories of her betrothed cousin who is smuggled across the desert borders to seek a job; and as divorced wife and mother, she is a part of a family story, related by her teen-age son to his traveling companions on the eve of their desert journey. Within the historical context conditioning the lives of the Palestinian refugees and in the absence of a national project to challenge their behavior, it seems that the woman is unable to directly engage in her context and to improve her status. Hence, it is the man who takes heed of that historical condition. As the three men, representing three Palestinian generations by virtue of their age-groups, accept to be smuggled inside a water-tank across the Iraqi-Kuwaiti desert borders, they accept the consequences of the illegal border crossing. Ironically, the three men noiselessly suffocate to death inside the symbolic moving coffin, leaving behind bereaved women silently struggling in a bigger tank, the refugee camp. The story highlights the national drama, in which both genders are engulfed. *Men in the Sun* is a tragedy without tragic heroes or heroines. The historical context is depicted as joining the genders in victimization, highlighted by both their silent suffering and voicelessness.

All That's Left to You

In *Ma Tabaqqa la-Kum (All That's Left to You)*, the woman assumes more significant visibility, both

physically and morally. She imposes herself on the texture of the narrative when her sexual disgrace triggers the subsequent events that structure the plotline. Her presence, as female, is constantly felt as part of a universal human condition that frames the mundane lives of refugee women, irrespective of time and space. Maryam, though not the principal character, is one of the clearest expressions of the Palestinian plight after 1948, during which most of the Palestinian people lost their land and became refugees. After sixteen years in exile, she is portrayed as a spinster approaching middle-age. She allows a married man and a collaborator with the Israelis (during the Israeli occupation of Gaza Strip in 1956) to tarnish and impregnate her. However, the disgrace Maryam has brought to the family honor, protected by her younger brother Hamid in the absence of her parents (the father was killed in action before the mass exodus and the mother was assumed to have been displaced somewhere in Jordan), is treated with sympathy. In this book, Maryam is more developed than the female characters in Kanafani's earlier book; she is not voiceless and inactive as they are. Her successive internal monologues coupled with her conversations with Hamid and Zakaria, her de facto husband, exhibit her potential to understand herself, both as a woman and as the mother she would become. This struggle with self-realization culminates in her heroic action of killing Zakaria with a kitchen knife in self-defense and, more significantly, in defense of motherhood. She refuses to abort her unborn child, as demanded by Zakaria, protecting motherhood at all costs. Symbolically, her act coincides with Hamid's readiness to slit the throat of his captive, an Israeli border-guard soldier, in the heart of the Naqab Desert which Hamid is crossing to reunite with his mother. These two acts of violence and protectionism symbolically usher in a new historical context which allows the dispossessed Palestinians, male and female alike, to re-enter history: their heroic acts invariably foreshadow the birth of the Palestine Liberation Movement a few years later.

The importance of a Palestinian national project and an active Palestinian identity, mobilizing both men and women, is central to both *Men in the Sun* and *All That's Left to You*. In *Men in the Sun*,

which ends with the death of the three Palestinian male refugees who are being smuggled inside the water-tank, the situation of the Palestinian refugees and their lack of a united voice is aptly expressed by the water-tank driver when he finds them dead: “Why didn’t you bang the sides of the tank? Why? Why? Why?” (Kanafani, 1956/1978, p. 56). In *All That’s Left to You*, however, the national project is in a state of ferment, requiring the participation and involvement of both genders for its actualization. This time, it is Maryam who takes action while Hamid, though determined to act, is frozen by indecision. Viewed aesthetically and symbolically, the silent death of Palestine in *Men in the Sun* is given a voice in *All That’s Left to You*, reverberating as Maryam towers over the dead body of her child’s father, the collaborator:

... hammering with cruel persistence into my head. Remorseless.
Pounding over him, and the bulk of his death heaped there. Pounding.
Pounding. Pounding.
(Kanafani, 1963/1990, p. 50)

Umm Sa’ad

In the third book, *Umm Sa’ad*, written in the wake of the successive defeat of three Arab armies in 1967, Kanafani takes advantage of the historical event to focus on specific issues that reflect the impact of the new dynamics in the Arab World, particularly on the life of Palestinian refugees. Although his book is based on a Palestinian narrative, depicted through the interaction between Umm Sa’ad and a reporter, Kanafani’s story is not a clear documentary. In fact, the factual and the fictional seamlessly blend, allowing the central figure, a traditional Palestinian mother, to gradually grow into her awareness of the Palestinian refugee context around her. Her contextual awareness is particularly textured by her son’s (Sa’ad) involvement with the *fidayin* (the guerilla fighters). Uncompromising, Umm Sa’ad is a memorable figure, in Palestinian fiction specifically and in contemporary Arabic fiction which portrays Palestinian people. Umm Sa’ad’s interviewer and interlocutor, possibly a reflection of Kanafani himself, says:

Umm Sa’ad is a real woman, quite familiar to me, and I still see her,
talk to her, and learn from her.
(Kanafani, n.d., p. 241)

Portrayed as class-conscious, originally a Palestinian peasant, Umm Sa’ad betrays an intuitive yet comprehensive knowledge about the miserable life of the refugee men and women “who have paid the bill of the Arab defeat in full” (Kanafani, n.d., p. 242). Irrespective of claims that Kanafani put his ideology in her mouth, her comments on the Six-Day War of 1967 are ordinary and often spoken by the common observer. Consider the following excerpt:

What war is that you’re talking about, my son? I heard about it on the radio. The radio announced the breakout of the war, and the radio announced it was over.
(Kanafani, n.d., p. 246)

This female character’s use of language reflects the simplicity of her life, defined by her identity as wife, mother, neighbor, and worker; she cannot be categorized otherwise. If her discourse and use of language is gendered when describing the period of national awakening, it is implied more than stated. Umm Sa’ad is a woman who employs all her five senses as she observes, participates in and comments on the context that surrounds her. Her wisdom, often highly commended by the interviewer, is no doubt the outcome of a long and bitter life experience. She seems devoid of ideological precepts, even during her visit to her son in a guerilla training base. However, she says to one of the passengers sitting next to her on the bus, “one tent is different from another” (pp. 246-265); that is, the tent offered as temporary shelter to the Palestinian refugees in the wake of the 1948 catastrophe is necessarily different from the tent in the training camp from which the Palestinians, militant now, re-enter history.

However, Kanafani portrays Umm Sa’ad as a carrier of both wisdom and prophecy:

This is a piece of a vine tree I’ve just cut off by the road nearby. I’ll plant it for you by the door step, and in a few years to come you’ll be able to eat grapes.

When I held it in my hand, it looked dry, brown and lifeless. You may know little about vine, for it is a bountiful tree that doesn't need much water. Much water wastes it. It takes its need of water from the moisture in the soil and atmosphere, then it yields, expecting nothing in return. (Kanafani, n.d., p. 249)

Between the opening of the story and its closing, Umm Sa'ad grows firmer as an altruistic woman with multiple roles. Memories of past heroes and collaborators are recalled to make a link with the demands of the present. Hope, nurtured only by a dream, seems to be replacing the miseries of life in the refugee camp, accumulated over twenty years of mass humiliation. In her character, the personal and the familial become part of the Palestinian national project, searching for liberation. She is happy to tell the reporter about the change her husband has undergone. More importantly, she speaks about the vine "stick" which she buried at the beginning of the book which, by the end, has blossomed. She hurries to tell the reporter about the "'stick' which has sprouted... has sprouted" (Kanafani, n.d., p. 336), and the reporter, led by her through the story, comes to look at the tiny tip of the 'stick', alive and green, cutting through the soil in which it has been planted, this time "with pride that makes a bang" (Kanafani, n.d., p. 336).

Conclusion

All of the female actors portrayed in Kanafani's work are Palestinian refugees who were forced, along with thousands others, to leave their homeland in 1948 for other neighboring Arab countries in which they simply 'survived' and

'dreamed', refusing to invest in the present until the question of Palestine is resolved. Homeless and stateless, UN ration-card survivors, and refugee camp "dwellers", the women featured in Kanafani's stories are depicted as the potential carriers of a burden bigger than they could have imagined: personal, familial, and national. In the first two novels, *Men in the Sun* and *All That's Left to You*, the gender discourse hiding in the shadow of the national cause marks a shift from the female's voicelessness in the first novel to her embodiment of the heroic, in whom the familial and the national coincide. In the third novel, *Umm Sa'ad*, the woman becomes a symbol of heroism and inspiration, joining the underground revolution through her first-born son. Kanafani portrays her as a simple but strong woman in whose class-conscious character the personal, the familial, and the national are inextricably bound. She epitomizes, both in word and deed, the most significant transition in the lives of the Palestinian refugees. Similarly, her narrative, defined by home and motherhood, gains meaning against the backdrop of the national cause. The two discourses are thus symbolically linked, naturally informing each other. The voiceless woman in the first novel is equivalent to the failure of the three men to bang the sides of the water tank. The pounding of death over the dead body of the collaborator and the oppressor of motherhood is furthered by Hamid's readiness to act against the occupation. The vivid growth and budding of the vine is a reflection of the rise of the Palestinian Revolution.

Ibrahim El-Hussari is Assistant Professor at the Humanities Department, School of Arts and Sciences, Lebanese American University
Email: ihousari@lau.edu.lb

REFERENCES

- Kanafani, G.** (1990). *All that's left to you: Novella and other stories* (M. Jayyusi & J. Reed, Trans.). Austin, Texas: Center for Middle Eastern Studies at The University of Texas. (Original work published 1963).
- Kanafani, G.** (1978). *Men in the sun and other Palestinian stories* (H. Kilpatrick, Trans.). Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press. (Original work published 1956).
- Kanafani, G.** (n.d.) Umm Sa'ad: Qisas Falastiniyya. In *Ghassan Kanafani: al-Athar El-Kamila* (The Complete Work: The Novels), vol. I. Beirut: Mu'assasat el-Abhath el-Arabiya.
- Millet, K.** (1971). *Sexual politics*. New York: Avon Books.

The Experience of Internally Displaced Women in Urban Areas of Western Turkey

Catriona Vine, Serpil Taskan, and Amy Pepper

Introduction

According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Guiding Principles), internally displaced persons (IDPs) refers to any person or group of persons who involuntarily had to leave their home or habitual settlements, without crossing an internationally recognized state border, especially in order to protect themselves from the consequences of armed conflict (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1998). There are an estimated 25 million IDPs worldwide and approximately 1 million in Turkey alone (Deng, 2003). In the 1980s and 1990s, an armed struggle between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish Armed Forces resulted in significant levels of internal displacement in Turkey. Throughout this period, state security forces forcibly evacuated approximately 3500 rural communities in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. Between 3 and 4 million villagers were displaced from their homes in officially sanctioned village evacuations, which were routinely accompanied by violent state security operations against Kurdish villages that were considered unsupportive of the government agenda. A state of emergency existed in many of the Kurdish provinces between 1987 and 2002, significantly contributing to the breakdown of the rule of law throughout this period.

Displacement and its consequences continue to have a detrimental impact on displaced women in Turkey, who are predominantly Kurdish. Although many of the problems suffered by IDPs

in Turkey are common to both men and women, there are specific manifestations of displacement that disproportionately affect women. However, the experiences of women are often neglected in discussions related to internal displacement, despite the fact that approximately 80 percent of displaced persons throughout the world are women and children (Schmiechen, 2003). In view of that trend, we will examine the experience of female IDPs in the western cities of Turkey, considering some of the social, economic, and psychological impacts of their displacement. This article will also discuss mechanisms in domestic and international law that are relevant to the violations suffered by displaced women in Turkey. Within this framework, we will consider the experience of internally displaced women in western Turkey in terms of their domestic citizenship rights and their international human rights.

The Experiences of Internally Displaced Women

The Turkish government has historically failed to investigate the nature and extent of displacement within its borders, making it difficult to properly assess the impact of displacement on particular categories of IDPs, such as women or city slum-dwellers. However, there has been a shift during the past five years which has resulted in greater attention being paid to IDPs in the domestic and international spheres and, as a result, more available information. For example,

in the international arena, the European Court of Human Rights found in the cases of *Akdivar and others vs Turkey and Mentesh and others vs Turkey* that Turkish security forces were guilty of village destruction and of forcing villagers to flee (Norwegian Refugee Council/Global IDP Project, 2004). Official recognition of internal displacement in Turkey has encouraged further investigation, particularly by civil society organizations. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to make inferences from the experiences of IDPs and women in Turkey as a whole, due to the lack of hard data.

In the process of evacuation, IDPs were subjected to many forms of maltreatment, including rape, torture, beatings, mental and emotional abuse, and the destruction of property. In some cases, food embargoes were imposed, forcing villagers out of their homes (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, 2001). Security forces often destroyed the infrastructure and means of living in these communities. Even where inhabitants were not forced to flee immediately, they were often compelled to resettle elsewhere as a result of the destruction of their physical and social communities and the government's failure to provide any form of assistance or resources to rebuild.

The relative safety of the Western cities, where many women fled, was not sufficient to overcome the difficulties facing them. Rather, migration to these cities represents another stage of displacement with ongoing consequences. Although the initial impact of internal displacement continues, the urban context of displacement is further complicated by changes in family and community structures, domestic and state violence, and biases against women. These factors are compounded for internally displaced women because of their ethnicity and their educational and economic standing. IDPs suffer disproportionately high levels of psychological problems as a result of violence and the threat thereof, combined with severe social dislocation associated with displacement (Muller & Linzey, 2007). They are at an economic disadvantage and lack the social support networks necessary to survive in times of crisis. These problems create

a complex situation in which many cumulative difficulties have an impact at an individual, family, and community level. Internally displaced women emerge as a particularly disadvantaged group, suffering from racial discrimination and material losses as well as from the general disempowerment of women in Turkish society.

Changes in Family and Community Structures

The traditional economy of Kurdish villages is based on agriculture and animal husbandry. Within this economic structure, communal living arrangements based on kinship ties and traditional cultural practices are crucial to everyday patterns of life. However, these lifestyle arrangements are often absent from the urban context. One of the critical issues shaping the experience of displaced women in Turkey is the alteration of traditional family and community structures in order to survive in an urban environment.

In their displaced setting, many families attempted to recreate their village structures, building cheap houses on the city fringes. However, it is estimated that there are millions of Kurdish girls without fathers and widows and wives of the 'disappeared'. In addition, there is a significant number of older women who are both widowed and have lost the sons and grandsons who would have supported them in their old age. These losses not only impact women in the form of bereavement, grief and trauma, they also change the dynamics of the household. For example, many women have become single heads of households. This puts women at a particular disadvantage as they continue to be disempowered in accordance with traditional social structures while becoming solely responsible for the survival of their families. While there is no raw data on the psychological impacts of this burden, the day to day reality of life for female heads of households in Turkey are obvious: violence, inequality in employment and a lack of regard for the position of displaced women have left many women destitute and suffering from severe psychological problems and suicidal tendencies.

Violence

State-sponsored violence, domestic violence, and the complex issue of 'honor' crimes all represent significant threats to the lives and well-being of displaced women in the urban areas of western Turkey. It is generally believed that domestic violence increases in situations of conflict. In addition, displaced women who have been forced to flee their homes are considered to be at greater risk of becoming victims of violence perpetrated by state security forces and civilians (Amnesty International, 2004). Although it is generally agreed that state violence has decreased in recent years, fear of violence by state officials, particularly the police, continues to shape the lives of many people in the Kurdish regions and beyond (Mazlum-Der, personal communication, January 23, 2007). While reliable information regarding the situation of displaced women in western Turkey is not readily available, it may be assumed that this fear continues in the post-displacement context. As a result, displaced women are likely to have little confidence in the police, which leaves them without protection against continuing violence in the home.

Women as Representatives of 'Honor'

In many aspects, women in Turkey are treated as 'second-class' citizens. Their lives are shaped by religious and customary practices, without regard for their rights as recognized by law (Kardam, n.d.). For example, perpetrators of domestic violence are rarely investigated or charged by the police and women are not protected against violent relatives (Turkey's accession to the EU, 2006). Furthermore, women often decide not to report domestic violence to the police. Their reasons for this include the fear of further abuse; the belief that to do so would taint the family's honor; and concerns about the possible impact that reporting violence to the police may have on their families and the Kurdish population more generally (European parliament project, 2007). The difficulty in escaping domestic violence is compounded for women who do not speak Turkish. For example, one female victim of domestic violence in Istanbul managed to seek protection from the police. However, she only spoke Kurdish. She was told to "go home and come

back when you have learnt Turkish" (Gökkusagi Women Association, personal communication, January 16, 2007).

According to a recent survey, sexual violence, the threat of sexual violence, and direct threats to women's lives are the main causes of psychological problems, such as depression, insomnia, intensive anxiety, and hopelessness (International Free Women's Foundation, 2007). Internally displaced women in the urban context are likely to develop behaviors based on a lack of confidence, hopelessness, anger, suspicion, and introversion. One survey found that 90 percent of internally displaced women's psychological problems, such as stress and headaches, have increased after moving to Istanbul (Aker, 2002). For many displaced women life has become a vicious cycle of victimization, disempowerment, hopelessness, and further victimization. In accordance with the *Platform for Action* and the *Beijing Declaration*, "women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The enjoyment of this right is vital to their life and well-being and their ability to participate in all areas of public and private life" (1995, para 89). The Turkish government is obliged to ensure the right to life in accordance with international law. Thus, the implementation of protection measures and the provision of basic services for displaced women should be a priority.

Social Exclusion

The main social difficulty that displaced Kurdish women experience in urban centers is exclusion. This is strongly related to the changes in the social structure on which gender roles depended, as outlined above. Women's responsibility for the children and household management, and their contribution to social, economic, and political processes within their villages has not translated to the Western cities to which they fled. These changes in their social roles, coupled with their lack of formal education and their inability to communicate in Turkish, often prevent displaced women from adapting to city life. Instead, they perceive their existence as a "prison-like life" in

the city (Yukseker, 2007, p. 258). The linguistic disadvantage, in most cases, also causes particular difficulties for displaced women in accessing social services, such as health and social aid programs (Demirler, n.d.). For the older generation of Kurdish women who are not employed, cannot speak Turkish, and cannot return to their homelands, the urban context represents absolute isolation. However, for many of the younger generation the urban environment is the only home they have ever known and the prospect of returning to underdeveloped villages is not welcome. This causes significant tension between those who wish to return and those who do not.

Economic hardship is not new to Kurdish women. The Kurdish region has historically been one of the most deprived areas in the country. Despite the relative wealth of western cities, displacement to urban centers in western Turkey has not resulted in an improved economic situation for displaced women. In addition to the rupture in traditional life, IDPs in urban areas face significant difficulties in obtaining housing and employment. In addition, they experience discrimination and social exclusion (Yukseker, 2006). When persons experience gender and ethnic discrimination as well as discrimination in educational opportunities, as is the case for displaced women in Turkey, the impact of economic disadvantage is compounded. Furthermore, women who have access to employment are paid less than their male counterparts, which makes it particularly difficult for single females and their households to survive.

In traditional Kurdish communities daily activities revolve around agriculture, animal husbandry, upkeep of the household, and preparations for weddings and other celebrations. Since the household is the main site of productive activities, Kurdish women play a crucial role in providing for their family's livelihood (Kurdish Family and Households, n.d.). Women in Kurdish families are responsible for key aspects of the family's survival, including making dairy products, stocking food for the winter, managing supplies, and caring for the children. The economic, social, and cultural contributions that Kurdish women provided were

vital to the continuation of social order in the villages. Raising children in accordance with social and cultural traditions and teaching them their domestic roles were also important for supporting their future economic welfare.

This economic structure deteriorated significantly as a result of the armed struggle between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces. However, the displacement of the Kurdish population into urban centers has had a particularly detrimental effect: traditional economic relations have almost completely disappeared. Kurdish women, in particular, experience difficulty in translating their traditional contribution to agriculture and animal husbandry into the urban context. Furthermore, unemployment among displaced Kurdish men has diminished the overall welfare of displaced families. Thus, they experienced not only a horizontal and geographical displacement but also a vertical displacement, in the form of lower living standards (Yukseker, 2006). They have become "the worst among the poor" in the urban context (Sen, n.d.). Changes in the existence of displaced women, specifically in relation to their economic activity, have put them in an economically and socially inactive position. This, in turn, exacerbates the psychological impact of their displacement.

Domestic Obligations and Rights

Under normal circumstances, the national laws of a country protect those within its territory. The principle of territorial sovereignty provides for the protection of internally displaced persons, as stipulated by the domestic laws of their home country. This represents a significant challenge for displaced women, as the state may not be willing or able to create protection measures or to implement existing laws. Further, their governments are often ultimately responsible for their displacement. Internally displaced women often find it difficult to rely on domestic laws to obtain adequate protection from, and an adequate remedy for, the consequences of their displacement, making it essential that they have access to international legal mechanisms.

The policy of internal displacement of the Kurds in Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s was devised and implemented without acknowledgement by the state and beyond the rule of law (Ayata & Yüksek, 2005). Although the 1983 State of Emergency legislation (commonly referred to as OHAL) authorized the Regional State of Emergency Governor to evacuate villages and resettle the population, this power was never utilized (Ayata & Yüksek, 2005). As a result, official records of displacement are scant and their reliability is doubtful. The extent of internal displacement has been a continual source of contention and the lack of reliable statistics has historically facilitated the Turkish government's denial of the existence of IDPs. As a result, displaced women have not only been stripped of their constitutional rights, they have also been denied adequate support during their displacement and an adequate remedy for their displacement and its consequences.

International Human Rights and Obligations

Despite many practical similarities between the situation of refugee women or female asylum seekers and internally displaced women, the legal protection available to internally displaced women is significantly less than that available to refugees and asylum seekers. The range of international mechanisms that IDPs can take advantage of is limited to those international and regional treaties signed and ratified by their country. However, as there are no binding international mechanisms dealing with internal displacement, historically displaced women have had no choice but to rely on more general instruments dealing with human rights and discrimination. There has been some improvement in the past decade because these instruments have been supplemented by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced, which are consistent with international human rights and humanitarian law. This section will discuss examples of how international law is relevant to the situation of displaced women in Turkey, focusing on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination

against Women (CEDAW), and the Geneva Conventions. Although important, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) will not be considered in any detail in this work.

In 1994 the UN Commission on Human Rights gave Francis Deng the mandate to develop the UN Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced, addressing the specific needs of IDPs by identifying rights and guarantees relevant to their protection before, during, and after displacement (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1998, Para. Introduction). The UN Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced are now widely accepted and represent the benchmark for both states and non-state actors in dealing with internal displacement. The Guiding Principles address each stage of the phenomenon of displacement, as well as the responsibilities of states and others towards IDPs.

Section I of the Guiding Principles for Internally Displaced outlines the fundamental principles underlying their development and application. The most basic of these principles is that the government (Turkey, in this case) has the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to IDPs within its jurisdiction (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1998, Para. Principle 3(1)). Therefore, the Turkish government's historical denial of the plight of IDPs within its borders and its lack of political will to deal with that plight cannot continue.

Furthermore, the Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced are to be applied without discrimination of any kind, including discrimination on the basis of sex or ethnicity. This is particularly relevant to women in Turkey, as the Guiding Principles require the achievement of substantial equality between men and women. Therefore, systemic gender-based discrimination must be properly addressed in order for the government to comply with these Guiding Principles. Principle 3(2) addresses several of the specific circumstances and situations facing IDP women. It provides that, as expectant mothers, mothers with young children, and female heads of households, the special needs of displaced women must be taken into account.

Considering the marginalization of women in Turkish society, especially displaced women, there are obvious improvements that could be made in the Government's approach.

The Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced also address the responsibilities of all parties to protect communities from displacement, requiring preventive measures and appropriate planning, should internal displacement be the only feasible option. Although new instances of internal displacement are now relatively rare in Turkey, it is evident that the minimization of displacement, in keeping with Section II of the Guiding Principles, has not been the predominant concern of the Turkish authorities.

Further, the government has failed to ensure that IDPs are provided with proper accommodation, satisfactory conditions of nutrition, health, and hygiene and that family members are together (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1998, Para. Principle 7(2)). If these principles were adhered to in the development of the Turkish Government's policies, many of the factors contributing to women's social, psychological, and economic difficulties would be accorded a significant amount of attention. This is clearly not the case to date.

The Turkish government has also failed to meet the standard established by Principle 18(1), which states that all IDPs have the right to an adequate standard of living. This requires, at a minimum, that the competent authorities provide IDPs with and ensure safe access to essential food, potable water, basic shelter and housing, clothing, essential medical services, and sanitation. In addition, they stipulate that women must be able to fully participate in the planning and distribution of these basic supplies.

For displaced women in Turkey, section III of the Guiding Principles is particularly relevant because it deals with situations where displacement has already occurred. This section outlines a broad range of fundamental human rights and measures directed towards their protection in the circumstances facing internally displaced persons. For example, Principle 11(1) states that "every human being has the right to

dignity and physical, mental and moral integrity." Further, IDPs are to be protected against rape, mutilation, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and other outrages upon personal dignity, such as acts of gender-specific violence and any form of indecent assault (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1998, Para. Principle 11(2)). In addition, Principle 19(2) requires that "appropriate counseling for victims of sexual and other abuses" is provided. Therefore, the Turkish government is not only required to protect displaced women from violations of their human rights, they are also required to take the lead in addressing the consequences of such violations.

As international law is constantly developing, the international treaties that are reflected in the Guiding Principles continue to be useful in their own right. It is therefore relevant to briefly examine relevant provisions contained in CEDAW and the Geneva Conventions. One of the major difficulties displaced women face is entrenched gender discrimination in the laws and policies of their country of origin. Article 2 of CEDAW (which Turkey has ratified) affirms that States Parties agree to pursue "by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating discrimination against women." Although this provision does not amount to a prescriptive obligation, it requires Turkey to direct its attention towards the elimination of gender discrimination in its policies, laws, and conduct. That is made clear by Article 2(d) whereby Turkey, as a signatory, agrees to "refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation."

The situation of internally displaced women in general and instances of gender-based discrimination in the operation of the Compensation Commissions and in relation to proof of property ownership demonstrate the failure of the Turkish government to meet its international obligations in this regard. Treating women differently than men, specifically displaced women, also constitutes a failure on the part of the Turkish government to ensure that women and men are treated equally before the law, as required by Article 15(1) of CEDAW. Equality

in relation to the administration of property is specifically required by Article 15(2) of CEDAW, reinforcing the gravity of the Turkish government's failures in that respect. The Turkish government has not only failed to develop policies directed towards the elimination of discrimination and the achievement of substantial equality, it continues to directly discriminate against displaced women in the administration of its existing laws and policies.

Turkey has also ratified the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, which allows the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women to receive and consider communications (complaints) from individuals and groups. Article 4 of the Optional Protocol outlines the admissibility criteria for communications to the Committee. One difficulty that internally displaced women face in utilizing this mechanism is the requirement that all available domestic remedies be exhausted before the communication is considered. However, it can be argued that the reference to "available" domestic remedies in Article 4 allows for the consideration of communications where individuals or groups are not accorded equality before the law, as the pursuit of domestic remedies may be considered futile in that situation. This argument could be made in relation to displaced women who have been refused compensation by domestic compensation commissions on the basis of their gender or told to return with a male relative. Although the Guiding Principles reflect the content of CEDAW, the possibility of making a communication to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women remains an additional avenue for achieving justice for internally displaced women in Turkey. That is particularly the case for women in the urban areas of western Turkey who are more likely to have access to expertise and assistance in making such a communication.

There is also a growing body of international humanitarian law that regulates armed conflict within a state's borders, such as Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. Turkey is party to the Geneva Conventions and is thus bound by common Article 3. Although the Turkish government disputes the application of Article 3 to the situation

in south-east Turkey, it has been argued that the hostilities between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) amounts to an armed conflict, as defined by the Geneva Conventions. Common Article 3 forbids violence to life and person, and outrages to personal dignity if perpetrated against civilians and those taking no part in the hostilities. Therefore, internally displaced women who experience physical or sexual violence at the hands of government forces can assert their legal rights under Common Article 3. Further, following the jurisprudence of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and particularly its decision in *Prosecutor vs Jean-Paul Akayesu*, a non-military perpetrator can be convicted of sexual assault under Common Article 3, even when physical contact does not occur (Schmiechen, 2003). However, it remains unclear whether the Akayesu decision would prohibit violence against a displaced woman by another displaced person (Schmiechen, 2003).

Conclusion

Internally displaced women in urban areas of western Turkey have experienced violations of their rights under the Turkish Constitution in circumstances that also, arguably, amount to breaches of Turkey's international obligations. Internal displacement and its consequences have had a specifically detrimental impact on internally displaced women in urban areas of Western Turkey, where psychological, social, and economic factors combine to secure their marginalization and disadvantage. The Turkish Government is responsible, both under the Turkish Constitution and international law, to address this situation and must do so as a matter of urgency.

Catriona Vine is Kurdish Human Rights Project's (KHRP) Legal Director, having previously been the Legal Officer and a member of the KHRP Legal Team.
Email: cvine@khrp.org

Serpil Taskan has recently completed an international fellowship at KHRP.
Email: serpiltaskan@hotmail.com

Amy Pepper is a Caseworker at Elizabeth Finn Care. She was previously a research intern at KHRP.
Email: amy.pepper@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Aker, T.** (2002). Zorunlu İç Göç: Ruhsal ve Toplumsal Sonuçları [Electronic version]. *Anadolu Psikiyatri Dergisi*, 3, 97-103.
- Aker, A. T., Çelik, A. B., Kurban, D., Ünalın, T., & Yükkseker, H. D.** (2005). *The problem of internal displacement in Turkey: Assessment and policy proposals*. Retrieved November 8, 2007, from http://research.sabanciuniv.edu/876/2/TESEV_IDP_Report.pdf
- Ayata, B. & Yükkseker, A.** (2005). A belated awakening: national and international responses to the internal displacement of Kurds in Turkey. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, 32, 5-42.
- Amnesty International.** (2004, June 2). *Turkey: Women confronting family violence*. London: Amnesty International.
- Demirler, D.** (n.d.). *Gender dimension of the internal displacement problem in Turkey*. Unpublished paper presented at EPPS and IAFFE AEA/ASSA Conference, Chicago, 5-7 January 2007.
- Deng, F. M.** (2003, May 17). In the vacuum of sovereignty: The international challenge of internal displacement. *Forced Migration Review*, 56.
- European parliament project: The increase in Kurdish women committing suicide: Final report.** (2007). London: Kurdish Human Rights Project.
- Human Rights Foundation of Turkey.** (2001, August). *Monthly report of human rights in Turkey*. Ankara: Human Rights Foundation of Turkey.
- International Free Women's Foundation (IFWF).** (2007). *Psychological consequences of trauma experiences on the development of migrated Kurdish women in the European Union*. Rotterdam: IFWF.
- Kardam, N.** (n.d.). Women's human rights training program, 1995-2003: *Evaluation report*. Istanbul: Women for Women's Human Rights – New Ways.
- Kurdish Family and Households.** (n.d.). Retrieved November 2, 2007, from <http://family.jrank.org/pages/1025/Kurdish-Families-Kurdish-Family-Households.html>
- Muller, M., & Linzey, S.** (2007). *The internally displaced Kurds of Turkey: Ongoing issues of responsibility, redress and resettlement*. London: Kurdish Human Rights Project.
- Norwegian Refugee Council/ Global IDP Project.** (2002, October 4). *Profile of internal displacement: Turkey*. Retrieved October 22, 2004, from http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/ds164_02347tur.pdf
- Schmiechen, M.** (2003). Parallel lives, uneven justice: An analysis of rights, protection and redress for refugee and internally displaced women in camps. *Saint Louis University Public Law Review*, 473, 490.
- Şen, M.** (n.d.). *Etnik Gruplar ve Yoksulluk*. Unpublished paper presented at 'Poverty Symposium', Ankara, Association of Social Democracy, No: 7,12 February 2005.
- Turkey's accession to the EU: Democracy, human rights and the Kurds.** (2006). London: Kurdish Human Rights Project.
- UN Commission on Human Rights.** (1998, February 11). *Report of the representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39. Addendum: Guiding principles on internal displacement (ECN.4/1998/53/Add.2)*. Retrieved July 31, 2008, from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3d4f95e11.html>
- United Nations.** (1996). Platform for action and the Beijing Declaration: Fourth World Conference on Women: Beijing, China, 4-15 September 1995. New York: United Nations.
- Yükkseker, D.** (2007). Internal displacement and social exclusion: Problems encountered by internally displaced persons in the provinces of Istanbul and Diyarbakir. In D. Kurban, D. Yükkseker, A. Betül Çelik, & A. Tamer Aker, *Coming to terms with forced migration: Post-displacement restitution of citizenship rights in Turkey* (pp.258-276). Istanbul: Tesev Publication.
- Yükkseker, D.** (2006). Severed from their homelands and livelihoods: The internal displacement of Kurds as a process of social exclusion. In F. Adaman & Ç. Keyder, *Poverty and social exclusion in slum areas of large cities in Turkey: Report prepared for the European Commission* (pp.41-55). Retrieved November 8, 2007, from http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/study_turkey_en.pdf

Health and Displacement: A Comparative Analysis of Displaced Iraqis' Access to Reproductive Health Services in Iran & Jordan

Negar Razavi and Kammerle Schneider

Currently, 60,000 Iraqis are forced to flee their homes every month (IRIN, 2007). And yet, very few public officials, media sources, or activists have seriously discussed issues confronting the nearly four million Iraqis that have either been displaced internally or forced to leave the country altogether. As the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, stated, "Iraq is the world's best-known conflict but the least well-known humanitarian crisis."¹ Furthermore, the little attention that is given in the media or in policy circles almost exclusively focuses on the plight of Iraqi refugees in Jordan and Syria, where they total nearly 1.5 million. Almost nothing is known of their status in neighboring Iran, which prior to the invasion hosted the largest Iraqi refugee population in the world.

Nearly 80 percent of the displaced Iraqis in Iran are women and girls. Like their counterparts in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, they are traumatized both physically and mentally. Not only are many of them victims of the sectarian violence that forced them to flee their homes, but they are also victims of domestic abuse by husbands and other male relatives, rape, physical and emotional harassment from religious militias, and abuse by border and security personnel. Furthermore, many of the women entering Iran are pregnant, nursing, or have small children, yet have not seen a doctor or any medical professional in months or even years. The combination of these factors and the relative desperation of the displaced Iraqis create a dangerous situation for women and girls.

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of information regarding the reproductive health² of Iraqi women and girls now living in Iran. Very few assessments or studies have been done on the displaced Iraqi population in Iran and therefore little is known about their ability to access reproductive health services, navigate legal and bureaucratic systems, and integrate into the religious and social fabric of their host communities. In contrast, there has been much greater international attention, aid, and research on the plight of displaced Iraqis living in Jordan, the second largest country of asylum. Differences between Iran and Jordan abound; yet, on many levels, these two countries interact with the displaced Iraqi populations in similar ways regarding the provision of health services. Because more data has been collected on displaced Iraqis living in Jordan, it serves as a useful comparative model to examine the gaps and challenges

1. Statement by António Guterres United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Conference on Addressing the Humanitarian Needs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons inside Iraq and in Neighbouring Countries, April 17, 2007. page 1 http://www.unhcr.bg/iraq_operation/20070417_en.pdf

2. For more information on how reproductive health is defined by the International Conference of Population and Development visit <http://www.un.org/popin/icpd2.htm>

Iran is now facing as it attempts to provide reproductive health services and meet the health needs of its growing Iraqi population.

This article will provide a background on the importance of providing reproductive health services during displacement and examine the specific case of displaced Iraqi women and girls in Iran and Jordan. We will examine the Iraqi health system before and after the war to understand the expectations and level of care Iraqi women and girls were accustomed to receiving prior to their displacement. From there we will explore the level of access and availability of reproductive health services for displaced women and girls living in Iran and Jordan. For more information regarding the provision of reproductive health services for displaced populations in Iran, we will look particularly at the experience of displaced Afghans living in Iran. Ultimately, our analysis will show that the host countries must take a more active role in providing reproductive health to displaced Iraqi women and girls for their own immediate security and economic interests, and for the long-term stability of the entire region.

Reproductive Health for Displaced Women and Girls

During forced displacement, both women and men endure physical hardship and fatigue. Inadequate food and access to clean drinking water can compromise their nutritional status. In crowded camps or urban centers they face increased exposure to disease and infection, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs). They must find ways to cope with the psychological trauma of losing members of their family, their homes, their possessions, and their livelihoods. Displaced women and girls, however, face additional stresses. They are frequently victims of sexual and gender-based violence during and after their flight, and may be pressured to offer sexual favors in exchange for basic necessities. Many are burdened with the emotional and financial responsibility of becoming the sole caretaker of their own and other people's children. While significant progress has been made in recent years in advancing and raising awareness about the need for reproductive health services in conflict-affected settings, on the ground funding and implementation of reproductive health programs remain a challenge. Most displaced women and girls suffer from a lack of quality reproductive health services, which can lead to high mortality rates among women and children, an increase in the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, an increase in unsafe abortions, and increased morbidity related to high fertility rates and poor birthing environments.

Comprehensive reproductive health services entail much more than the rudimentary maternal and child health services often provided in settings housing displaced persons. A comprehensive approach would include family planning, emergency obstetric care, post-abortion care, prevention of gender-based violence, provision of care to survivors, and prevention and management of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV.

In both Jordan and Iran, displaced Iraqi women and girls are not receiving the needed reproductive health care because they may lack the necessary legal documents and the financial means to pay for services. Moreover, they may face religious restrictions, or encounter gender and language barriers.

Healthcare in Iraq

It is essential to first explore the availability of reproductive health services in Iraq to understand the level of care Iraqi women and girls were accustomed to receiving prior to their displacement and what expectations of reproductive health services they bring with them to their host country.

Prior to 1991 Iraq had one of the most sophisticated and advanced healthcare systems in the entire region. According to a UNICEF/WHO report in 2003, 97 percent of the urban and 71 percent of the rural population had access to free primary health care (Diaz & Garfield, 2003). Child and maternal mortality were very low during this period. Female and male doctors could treat all patients regardless of gender. Women had access to quality care throughout their pregnancy. This, however, changed after the first Persian Gulf War. The imposition of sanctions after the war led the entire health system in Iraq to crumble. Infant and child mortality began to increase and maternal mortality rates more than doubled when the sanctions were put in place (Diaz & Garfield, 2003). Also during this time, the number of women receiving prenatal care in Iraq dropped by 20 percent. By 2000, only 10 percent of the population had access to contraceptives (Population Division, n.d.). By 2001, Iraq's human development ranking had dropped from 76 in 1991 to 127 (Iraq UNDP, n.d.).

Today, the health situation in Iraq is dire. While Article 30 of the Iraqi Constitution continues to guarantee free healthcare to all its citizens, people are not receiving the medical care they need. What little infrastructure was left under Saddam is now almost completely destroyed. By 2005, nearly 32,000 doctors had left Iraq (Tavernise, 2005). In the field of reproductive health, the story is similarly abysmal: male gynecologists are increasingly under attack from religious extremist groups for treating female patients, many women fear leaving their homes to deliver their babies in hospitals, and hospitals are understaffed and inundated with many patients in critical condition. As a result, pregnant women in Iraq have a high risk of dying during childbirth. Unfortunately, the Iraqi government can do little to improve the situation of reproductive health for its citizens as long as violence and insecurity continue to afflict the country. Many Iraqis have chosen to escape from the violence and destitution of Iraq to neighboring countries in search of security, economic stability, and health services.

Displaced Iraqis in Iran

Some of these Iraqis have turned to their eastern neighbor for refuge. Although Iran is predominantly Persian, Shia Iraqis in particular have had long historical ties with the Iranian people and, more recently, with the Islamic regime. Iran also is an attractive destination for many Iraqis because of the government's experience in dealing with large numbers of displaced persons.

Long before the war in Iraq forced the latest exodus of people into Iran, the Islamic Republic was host to over 2 million Afghan refugees escaping the violence, drought, and instability that has plagued Afghanistan since the Soviet invasion. Various Iranian government agencies, particularly the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) and non-governmental organizations, have worked closely with the Afghan population, providing health services, education, and humanitarian aid. For many years,

Afghan children were able to go to schools in Iran for free, with subsidies from UNCHR. Because most of the Afghans entering Iran speak Dari, a dialect of Farsi, they were able to integrate more easily into their host communities. The government also allowed Afghans to access some basic healthcare services. Iran's public health system is well-established and has often been seen as a model for the region. Therefore, regardless of their legal status, all Afghans could have their children vaccinated for free in Iran. They could also go to outpatient clinics to receive treatments. Those that could afford it and who were given formal refugee status could buy health insurance like Iranian nationals. Until very recently, the Iranian government had never threatened to expel this group, despite the tremendous strains they have put on the Iranian economy and society.

In addition to hosting a massive Afghan refugee population, Iran was also the single largest recipient country for Iraqi refugees prior to the U.S. invasion in 2003, taking in more than half of all the Iraqi refugees in the world. The 300,000 or so Iraqi refugees in Iran either lived in refugee camps similar to those occupied by Afghan refugees or in cities in Khuzestan, the oil-rich (predominantly Arab) province in western Iran. Some of the more elite Iraqis moved to Tehran. Those who were particularly religiously devout moved to Qom or Mashhad to be close to the Shi'a religious institutions. Many of the religious and political leaders in Iraq today were exiled in Iran throughout the 1990s.

Today, the situation for Iraqis in Iran is mixed at best. New Iraqi refugees are fortunate in some ways because there is an already established network of Iraqis living in Iran who have been there for more than a decade. Also, given Iran's history of taking in large numbers of refugees, it has the institutional capacity to handle the needs of large numbers of displaced peoples crossing the border. Unlike the majority of Afghan refugees, the majority of Iraqis entering Iran are educated and literate. Although they have been affected by violence, they have skill-sets and some money when they enter Iran. Also, unlike Afghans in Iran, most of the Iraqis share religious values with the population and many of them are both religiously and ideologically in line with the religious and political ideals upheld by the Islamic Republic.

However, Iraqis also face many challenges when they enter Iran. Most obviously, they do not speak the same language. Unlike the Dari-speaking Afghans, the Iraqis speak Arabic, making their navigation and integration into their host community challenging. Furthermore, their legal status in the country is ambiguous. Iran does not want to give refugee status to all of the Iraqis in fear that this will spark a massive influx of Iraqis into their country. The Iranian government has only issued official White Cards to a select few who have crossed the border. Currently, around 54,000 Iraqis have been given White Cards.³ Officially, the Iranian government refuses to give most of the new Iraqi arrivals refugee status (Iraqi Refugees in Iran, p. 2007). Those who do hold White Cards are allowed to work legally in Iran, to send their children to schools, and to obtain health insurance booklets.

3. Estimates differ from source to source. Official Iranian sources say 51,000, while UNHCR claims that up to 54,000 Iraqi refugees remain in Iran.

In addition to this group, there is also a very large number of Iraqis entering Iran on tourist visas. Some have estimated that there have been as many as 750,000 Iraqis who have entered Iran with tourist visas since the invasion (Barnard, 2007). Most of these Iraqis return home after the allotted three months. Many will return to Iraq only to reapply for a new visa to Iran. Others use the visa explicitly to access desperately

needed healthcare services. The Iraqi Refugee Aid Council (IRAC), a charity organization that helps Iraqis in Iran, says that there is no way of knowing how many of the Iraqis entering Iran are staying beyond the length of their visas (personal communication with representative from the Iraqi Refugee Aid Council, October 18, 2007). A third group includes those Iraqis that are illegally crossing the border and trying to integrate themselves in the cities in western Iran which have sizeable native Arab populations. Again, there is almost no information available on this group.

These last two groups of Iraqis are not entitled to insurance cards and instead depend heavily on government clinics to meet their health needs. According to IRAC, a large number of the Iraqis run out of money while they are seeking medical care for their family members and opt for difficult procedures which they mistakenly expect to be free as they were in Iraq (personal communication with representative from the Iraqi Refugee Aid Council, October 18, 2007). Organizations such as IRAC provide doctors to these Iraqis free of charge; however, their resources are limited. Because few of these Iraqis are officially registered as refugees, UNHCR can do little to help (personal communication with representative from the Iraqi Refugee Aid Council, October 18, 2007).

Displaced Iraqis in Jordan

Similar to the situation in Iran, Jordan has been flooded by a large number of Iraqis fleeing violence.⁴ The majority of the latest Iraqi arrivals are educated and middle class. Some are poor laborers and farmers from war-torn areas of the country. Similar to the case of Iran, the Iraqis that arrive in Jordan choose this country because of religious affinity and are thus able to more easily integrate into the cultural and religious social fabric of predominantly Sunni Jordan.⁵

Historically, Jordan has been remarkably open to receiving displaced populations from around the region, starting with the Palestinians and up until the current case of the displaced Iraqis. At the onset of the Iraq war in 2003, Jordan's borders remained open and accepting of Iraqis fleeing violence and persecution in their own country. As the war continues, however, Jordanians have increasingly come to resent Iraqis for overburdening their health and education systems and driving up prices for housing, food, and oil (Nanes, 2007). In order to maintain security, Jordan's government, which does not have an established mechanism to determine refugee status, shortened the length of tourist visas for Iraqis, deported visa overstayers, and prevented increasing numbers of Iraqis from entering. Iraqis aged 18-45 are barred from entering and fewer Iraqi Shi'as are allowed to cross the border (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

The office of UNHCR in Jordan only exceptionally recognizes Iraqis as refugees. Instead, it provides registered Iraqis with asylum seeker cards (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Only 35 percent of the Iraqis in Jordan are registered with UNHCR, due in part to the agency's lack of capacity to process the large number of people seeking its assistance. Iraqis living in Jordan are not allowed to work, access public health services (except in cases of emergency) and, until August 2007, Iraqi children were not allowed to enroll in the Jordanian school system.⁶

4. According to a recent study by FAFO (2007), conducted in collaboration with the Government of Jordan, there are an estimated 500,000 Iraqis currently residing in Jordan.

5. According to an assessment by FAFO (2007), the majority of Iraqis living in Jordan are Sunni Muslims (68 percent), only 17 percent are Shiites and 12 percent Christians.

6. Jordanian authorities consider Iraqi asylum seekers to be "guests," a legal designation implying only temporary visitor status.

Only 1 in 8 Iraqis in Jordan has valid health insurance (FAFO, 2007). Iraqis have access to emergency care, regardless of their legal status. However, to receive further care in public hospitals, they must be residents (Amnesty International, 2007).

Reproductive Health Care for Displaced Female Iraqis

In both Iran and Jordan, the legal documentation, religious background, and socioeconomic status of displaced Iraqi women and girls have a dramatic impact on the quality and accessibility of reproductive health in their host countries. Comprehensive reproductive health care addresses maternal health, gender-based violence, sexually transmitted diseases, and family planning. In this section, we will discuss how both host countries are meeting the needs of displaced female Iraqis.

Maternal Health Care

Maternal healthcare involves a woman's ability to have a safe pregnancy, healthy delivery, and access to post delivery care. Approximately 25 percent of women of reproductive age in any displaced population are pregnant. As with all women, 15 percent of them will suffer from unforeseen complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Every day, an average of 1,440 women die from these complications around the world, with 90 percent of these cases occurring in developing countries (UNFPA, 2001).

Maternal healthcare in Iran is relatively comprehensive compared to that of many of its neighbors. According to UNICEF, Iran's maternal mortality ratio is 37 per 100,000 live births. Approximately 90 percent of deliveries are by a skilled birth attendant. Government clinics are required to service all women in labor regardless of citizenship or financial status. Furthermore, 77 percent of women in Iran visit a doctor before their delivery. The maternal health statistics in Jordan are comparable. Maternal deaths are estimated to be 41 per 100,000 live births. Ninety-nine percent of pregnant women receive some antenatal care, even if it is only one check-up prior to delivery. However, only 31 percent of women who give birth in a health facility in Jordan return for post-natal care (UNICEF, 2007).

According to strict interpretations of Sharia law, women and men must be fully segregated, particularly when receiving medical services. In Iran, the Islamic government has mandated that female patients be attended to by female doctors. Therefore, pregnant Iraqi mothers are able to adhere to their religious beliefs and see female doctors, many of whom have been trained by the Iranian regime. By contrast, in the more secular society of Jordan, such state-sanctioned segregation for physicians is not mandated. As a result, many devout Iraqi women in Jordan may not seek maternal health care for fear of reprisals by their community if they were to receive care from a male gynecologist.

Within both countries, the legal documentation of the mother is strongly correlated to the level of antenatal, delivery, and post-natal care she receives. In Iran, the nearly 54,000 Iraqis who have formal refugee status can access doctors in the private sector if they have the money to buy insurance. In Jordan, 25 percent of Iraqi women between the ages of 15 and 50 have given birth during the last 5 years. Nearly all of them sought medical aid during the pregnancy and gave birth with the help and supervision of qualified birth attendants. About 3 in 4 of all births took place in private

hospitals (FAFO, 2007). Many Iraqis also appear not to be aware of the availability of free primary health care (PHC) services for children and pregnant women in Jordan. Pregnant Iraqi women tend to use the private sector for maternity care, whether prenatal or natal (UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, & WHO, 2007). Despite the fact that both Iran and Jordan offer access to government clinics for pregnant women and children, regardless of legal status, many of the Iraqi women that reside in these two countries illegally are still afraid to enter these clinics in fear of deportation or detention. This can lead to high rates of maternal mortality and even higher rates of disability in the case of obstetric emergencies.

Gender-Based Violence

In Iraq, violence against women is rampant. Beyond the general sectarian violence, women are particularly targeted for rape. Also, religious militias often use violence to intimidate women that they deem to be immodest. For example, according to a report by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, during a 10 day period in November 2006, more than 150 unclaimed bodies of women were brought to the Baghdad morgue, many of whom had been beheaded, mutilated, or showed signs of extreme torture (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2007).

Even after women and girls escape Iraq and settle in host countries, they face new challenges and burdens that often lead to increased levels of gender-based violence. Unemployment, cramped living quarters, and changing socio-cultural norms can contribute to an upsurge in domestic abuse. In Jordan, for example, where only about 30 percent of Iraqis are participating in the work force, incidences of domestic abuse against women are very high. Societal taboos in both Iran and Jordan prevent women from reporting abuse. In some cases, doctors and nurses are expected to report cases of domestic abuse to the police. Fearful of being deported or alienated from their small communities, Iraqi women remain silent. Both Iran and Jordan lack counseling for victims of domestic abuse, regardless of whether they are citizens of the country or not. As a result, even if these Iraqi women wanted to escape abusive households and report the abuse to the police, they would have no refuge and no psycho-social support.

7. In Shi'ism, temporary marriage is allowed. In a temporary marriage a man marries a woman for a predetermined period of time, as set in a contract. Because the man pays some money to the woman as a gift, it is often seen by some as nothing more than prostitution. Proponents of *mut'a* disagree and argue that it allows for religiously-sanctioned relationships between men and women that actually protects the woman's rights after the termination of the marriage.

There is also a high proportion of female-headed households among Iraqis in Iran and Jordan. Many women end up as the sole caretakers of their families, as in many cases their fathers and brothers were killed in Iraq. About 1 in 5 households in Jordan are headed by females (FAFO, 2007). Female-headed households are often found to be among the poorer households and the households where the education of the head of the family is lower. Sadly, many women and young girls are pressured into sex and prostitution to support their families. Although in Iran "temporary marriage"⁷ or *mut'a* is legal, it has rarely been practiced in recent years given its negative social connotations. With the influx of illegal Iraqi women and girls, unable to support their families through legal employment, there is a marked rise in the number of temporary marriages. In Jordan, where formal *mut'a* is outlawed, "weekend marriages", which are essentially the same practice, have become increasingly prevalent. They have been dubbed "survival sex" (UN, 2007).

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Due to poverty, lack of protection against violence, difficulty accessing health care, and changes in norms of behavior, displaced populations are particularly vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS (Spiegel, Miller & Schilperoord, 2005). Rates of HIV infection in both Iran and Jordan are comparatively low; however, knowledge of STIs and how they are spread is also low. According to UNICEF, 70 percent of Iraqis have never heard of HIV/AIDS (IRIN, 2005). Because of the religious and cultural sensitivities surrounding the transmission of STIs, these issues are rarely openly addressed in the host countries. However, the conditions for its transmission are especially favorable within the displaced Iraqi population because of several variables namely poverty, sexual exploitation, lack of awareness, and limited access to health services.

Family Planning

Family planning has tremendous benefits not only for individual families, but for the society as a whole. Women and men who have control over the size of their families and the timing of pregnancies have improved health outcomes, fewer unwanted pregnancies, and lower rates of abortion. Women specifically are able to achieve higher levels of education and economic status when they are able to control their fertility. As a result, their children are much more likely to be healthy and educated.

Iran is touted as a model of effective family planning in the developing world. Following the devastation of the Iran-Iraq war, mothers were first encouraged to have more children. However, as the population increased, the strains on the country's resources forced the religious regime to re-examine its negative views towards family planning. With the help of various international agencies, Iran set up a public awareness campaign to educate young men and women about the benefits of using contraceptives and controlling the number of children. Today, all young couples must take classes on contraceptive use before getting a marriage license (Muir, 2002). Women are also able to access oral contraceptives from their pharmacies without questions regarding their marital status, age, or reasons for seeking the pills. While the data does not exist yet on the impact of these programs on Iraqi refugees, research has shown the influence of the Iranian social movement and the edicts of Iranian clerics accepting family planning on the views of Afghan refugees (Sadeghipour Roudsar, Sherafat-Kazemzadeh, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2006). A study of Afghan refugee men and women in Iran found that both sexes showed some willingness not only to discuss reproductive issues, but also gradual acceptance of family planning and contraceptive use after years of living in Iran.

In Jordan, although family planning programs are not as widely publicized as in Iran, the government has made an effort in the last decade to encourage family planning. Contraceptives are now widely available without a doctor's prescription, but access is a challenge for poor or unmarried women and girls, as it has been reported that pharmacists are often unwilling to sell contraceptives to unmarried women or adolescents. In a recent study, Iraqi women in Jordan reported that they were delaying having children due to the difficult circumstances they were enduring in their host country (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2007). It is not clear if the Iraqis are receiving any access to family planning in Jordan or in Iran.

Conclusion

The provision of comprehensive reproductive health services for displaced female Iraqis extends beyond humanitarian concerns. There are severe consequences for the long term stability of the region, economic prosperity of families, and social integration and security of communities if quality reproductive health services are not available and accessible for Iraqi women and girls in their host countries. Women that are brutalized by violence or forced into prostitution cannot protect their own children, cannot help their families escape the cycles of poverty, and ultimately cannot help their families reintegrate back into Iraq upon return. Mothers who die in childbirth leave behind a generation of orphans. Without adequate access to family planning, these displaced populations will only continue to grow at rapid rates and cause even greater strains on the resources of the host countries. It is therefore in the interest of host countries to provide culturally and religiously appropriate antenatal and postnatal care for pregnant women and their infants and education on family planning and the spread of STIs, such as HIV. Although the root causes of gender-based violence cannot be easily eradicated, more attention and resources need to be dedicated to providing counseling and care for victims. In the case of Iran, serious efforts need to be made to collect basic data about the displaced Iraqi population so that effective programs and social services can be implemented and funded to adequately meet their needs. For both Iran and Jordan, reproductive health services for the Iraqis need to move beyond simply providing emergency provisions in stand alone programs and, instead, set up more sustainable, integrated programs within the larger health systems of these host countries. However, the burden is not simply on these host countries. The international community must assist all host countries in meeting the health needs of the displaced population, and the former's commitment must endure beyond the immediate displacement to their eventual return and reintegration into Iraq.

Kammerle Schneider is Assistant Director of the Global Health Program at the Council on Foreign Relations.
Email: KSchneider@cfrr.org

Negar Razavi is Research Associate for U.S. Foreign Policy and Women and Foreign Policy Program.
Email: NRazavi@cfrr.org

REFERENCES

- Amnesty International.** (2007). *Iraq: Millions in flight: The Iraqi refugee crisis*. Retrieved September 4, 2007, from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE14/041/2007>
- Barnard, A.** (2007, May 13). Iran is hot destination for Iraqis seeking calm. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved January 25, 2008, from http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2007/05/13/iran_is_a_hot_destination_for_iraqis_seeking_calm/
- Diaz, J. & Garfield, R.** (2003, July). Iraq health and nutrition watching brief. *WHO and UNICEF*. Retrieved July 30, 2003, from <http://www.who.int/disasters/rep0/11224.pdf>
- FAFO Institute for Applied International Studies.** (2007). *Iraqis in Jordan 2007: Their number and characteristics*. Retrieved November 15, 2007, from http://www.fafon.org/ais/mideast/jordan/Iraqis_in_Jordan.htm
- IRIN Humanitarian News.** (2007, November 11). *Iraq: Aid agencies struggle to support over to million displaced Iraqis*. Retrieved February 4, 2007, from <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=75246>

- IRIN Humanitarian News.** (2005, April 7). *Iraq: Focus on shortage of medicine for HIV/AIDS patients.* Retrieved February 4, 2007, from <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=25004>
- Economy and Employment.** (n.d.). *UNDP Iraq.* Retrieved January 25, 2008, from <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=75246>
- Iraqi refugees in Iran.** (2007, May 17). *Boston Globe.* Retrieved January 25, 2008, from http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2007/05/13/iraqi_refugees_in_iran/
- Human Rights Watch.** (2007, August 16). *Jordan: Government pledges to grant Iraqis education, health rights.* Retrieved February 4, 2007, from <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/08/16/jordan16687.htm>
- Human Rights Watch.** (2003, February 13). *Iraqi refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced persons: Current conditions and concerns in the event of war.* Retrieved February 4, 2007, from <http://www.hrw.org/background/mena/iraq021203>
- Muir, J.** (2002, April 24). *Condoms help check Iran birth rate.* *BBC News Web site.* Retrieved February 4, 2007, from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1949068.stm
- Nanes, S.** (Fall 2007). *Jordan's unwelcome 'guests.'* *Middle East Report, 244,* 22-25.
- Population Division, Department for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.** (n.d.) *The population policy data bank.* Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/abortion/doc/iraq.doc>
- Sadeghipour Roudsar, H.R., Sherafat-Kazemzadeh, R., Rezaei, M., & Derakhshan, M.** (2006). *Reproductive health knowledge, attitudes and practices of Iranian and Afghan men in Tehran province.* *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal, 12(6),* 862-872.
- Spiegel, P., Miller, A., & Schilperoord, M.** (2005, October). *Strategies to support the HIV-related needs of refugees and host populations* [UNAIDS best practice collection]. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).
- Tavernise, S.** (2005, May 30). *Facing chaos, Iraqi doctors are quitting.* *New York Times.* Retrieved January 25, 2008, from <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/30/international/middleeast/30doctor.html?pagewanted=print>
- United Nations.** (2007, November 13). *Press conference by office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* [Press release]. Retrieved November 15, 2007, from http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2007/071113_UNHCR.doc.htm
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).** (2001). *Reproductive health for communities in crisis: UNFPA emergency response.* Retrieved September 4, 2007, from <http://www.poline.org/docs/1547/170617.html>
- United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).** (2007). *The UNICEF evaluation policy: Oral report background note.* Retrieved September 15, 2007, from http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/Evaluation_policy_oral_report_background_note.pdf
- UNFPA, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, World Food Program (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO).** (2007). *Iraq health sector appeal 2007: Meeting the health needs of Iraqis displaced in neighboring countries: Joint appeal by UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP and WHO.* Retrieved September 18, 2007, from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/files/Final_Joint_Iraq_Health_Appeal_18Sep07.pdf
- Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.** (2007, September). *Iraqi refugee women and youth in Jordan: Reproductive health findings.* Retrieved January 25, 2007, from <http://www.womenscommission.org/resources/index.cfm?limit=restype&limitID=2>

Book Reviews

Hikayati Sharhun Yatul: Sira Muda'afa (My Life is Too Long to Tell), by Hanan Al-Shaykh, Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 2005. 380 pages.

REVIEWED BY MOHAMED BERRADA

Though there are many signs in Hanan Al-Shaykh's novel *Hikayati sharhun yatul* that it is the (auto)biography of Kamila, the author's mother, the form the book takes is noteworthy. The author of the (auto)biography is not the person who wrote the book, she was the one who narrated all her life's details to her daughter in lively colloquial language, and gave her the letters she received from her beloved Mohamed. Al-Shaykh makes sure the story keeps flowing spontaneously, just as her mother recounted it in her talented and sensitive style, despite the fact that her parents had deprived her of any schooling. This is what prompted Hanan to tell her mother: "If they had educated you, you would have been the writer, not I" (p.353).

Within the layers of the text, there are signs as to how the writing process was carried out. For instance, the author would write down her mother's stories in small notebooks, in addition to using certain passages from the love letters that Kamila kept. Yet Al-Shaykh has done more than record the story and reformulate it in classical Arabic. Her creative contribution comes in many ways, from giving amusing titles to the chapters ("Even the pigeon goes to school", "The snakes' nest", "By God, you will tailor a dress for a flea"), to drawing a loving image of a courageous, fun-loving mother who resisted society's injustices thanks to her faith in love.

Thus it is a double autobiography, since the person relating her life is not the one who is writing it, while the person writing it is not merely transcribing but also incorporating elements from treasured memories of her mother, thus inserting her own voice into the layers of her mother's stories. The form that the text takes comes to symbolize the relationship between mother and daughter, problematic at first, but turning into the daughter's overwhelming love and admiration for her mother. While Kamila is certainly the cornerstone of the narrative, yet its orbit is extended to recall other characters and several periods of time, so that the mother's (auto)biography mirrors the society of a southern Lebanese village as well as cosmopolitan life in Beirut. Yet Kamila's life was for nearly 70 years closer to a world of fantasy than reality. She confronted hardships and obstacles, yet filled her life with adventures, pleasure, and love. At the end she faced sickness and death with courage.

Kamila came from a poor family and had a difficult childhood in Nabatiyah, growing up with her divorced mother and her brother Kamel. One day, her mother decided to move to Beirut. That is when a whole new world was revealed to Kamila, a world that enchanted her, awakening her love of singing and drawing her to the Egyptian cinema. Kamila made the films and their characters an alternative world to the gloomy religious atmosphere of her home.

At a dressmaker neighbor's, Kamila met Mohamed, who shared her love of cinema. Her love story with Mohamed becomes the lynchpin of her life, a daring experience in a conservative environment that denied any consideration to women's feelings. She was not yet fourteen when her sister died, and her family forced her into marrying her sister's husband, a man uninterested in anything but prayer and trade. She bore him two daughters: Fatima and Hanan (the writer). But the enchantment she had experienced before her marriage made her resume her love

encounters with Mohamed, who pressed her to ask for a divorce. His burning letters, borrowed from writers and poets, set her existence ablaze and pushed her to defy her marriage, her frowning brother and the neighbors.

Her challenge was crowned with success, when her husband, whose business went bankrupt, agreed to divorce her. She married her beloved Mohamed, and they had five children together. She endured a tough life before Mohamed was appointed head of security in the Beqaa. Kamila remained enthralled with love and movies, singing their songs, and teasing her family and neighbors. Even after Mohamed died, her love for life did not falter; she reconciled herself with her father and her two daughters, and traveled to America to visit her son. Nothing could weaken her curiosity or imprison her in grief. Even when cancer stole into her body, she confronted it calmly, happy that Hanan took care of her until the day she died. Yet her voice still speaks from the grave about her sadness at leaving her loved ones. I believe here that Al-Shaykh's decision to continue the story beyond Kamila's death was intended to signal to the reader that 'autofiction' is an integral part of this text.

Writing an (auto)biography based on oral accounts and letters means that Al-Shaykh often resorts to imagination, placing the central character in imaginary situations, which sometimes take precedence over reality. Infatuated with the characters of Egyptian movies, Kamila used them to cast different horizons over her limited and difficult life. She says for instance, "I ask him if this bunch of violets is for me. He says it is. So I start whirling just like the heroine in a movie, wishing the garden were larger, or full of trees, so I could sing and hide my face behind a tree, and then come out and show it" (p. 60).

Hikayati Sharhun Yatul stands out from the conventional autobiography or biography in blending oral with written narrative, and intermeshing the mother's life with that of her writer-daughter, to the point where Kamila finds in Hanan a mirror that sheds light on aspects of her life that had remained obscure to her: "Each time Hanan spoke, she would reveal more about myself to me, and I realized that the present is the past without my knowing it; as if I were taking on her personality and turning into her" (p. 354). This form of writing subjects oral stories to alteration and to fiction, moving them beyond the realm of facts, and gaining arresting meanings and interpretations.

There is no doubt that this complex (auto)biography-novel possesses a striking aesthetic value, through emphasizing the oral qualities of story telling and using the language of everyday life to capture the idiosyncracies of the characters, as well as the ironies of popular taste. Yet it also bears the stamp of a testimony, through recounting the journey of a woman who lived in an environment that objectifies women and imposes upon them its patriarchal tutorship.

What is striking about Kamila's personality is that she represents the 'cultured illiterate', a type that numbers thousands in our societies, people deprived of education but whose natural intelligence allows them to grasp their society's priorities, and to develop their own vision of the world. This helps them in confronting obstacles and carving out a place for themselves in a harsh, merciless society. Kamila's life story shows the development of her awareness, from the day she started maneuvering her way through poverty as a girl in Nabatiyah, all the way to Beirut, where she discovered bright lights, the cinema, the blessing of love, and the harshness of traditions. About her first encounter with Beirut, Kamila says, "I could see the lights that go on and off even during the day, the liquorice vendor as he clinks his copper tumblers,

blonde women without head covers. I didn't know where to rest my eyes. I wanted to touch everything..." (p. 41).

This expression, "I wanted to touch everything", gives us a sense of the basic trait of Kamila's personality, her enthusiasm for the world and for life in all its manifestations. Throughout a life filled with difficulties, she never abandoned her love of love itself, and her love of life's offerings of joy, songs, movies, and friendships. Love was a rescue belt that saved Kamila from misery, family oppression, and the rigidity of traditions. It was not acceptable at the time for a married woman to defy her family by maintaining an open relationship with her lover. For a woman to respond to desire in an austere environment, is this not the beginning of a symbolic, subversive action towards freedom from hypocrisy?

Another aspect of *Hikayati sharhun yatul* worth mentioning is the many languages used: the language of narration, of description, the colloquial language of the dialogue, and the borrowed language of Mohamed's love letters. Such diversification of language has become a stylistic trait of many Arabic novels, contributing to bringing out the specificities of each regional dialect, whilst achieving the 'prosing' of fiction, and removing it from the realm of a fixed rhetoric. In *Hikayati sharhun yatul*, Hanan Al-Shaykh offers a model of juxtaposing different forms of language, in a manner that merits the attention of linguists and discourse analysts. Certain paragraphs of the love letters, for example, give an idea of the romantic, sentimental language that used to affect the lives of many in the 1930s and 1940s throughout the Arab countries. When Mohamed writes: "I love the path you walk on, and the bed that holds you. I love the pillow and the cover and the house and the ceiling and the walls. I wish I were the invisible air that comes in at dawn through your windows to play around with..." (p. 156) does this not remind us of a discourse that was, and maybe still is, a refuge for many from deprivation?

Mohamed Berrada is a literary critic and novelist who teaches Arab literature at the Faculté des Lettres of the Mohammed V University in Rabat. The review was translated from French by Lynn Maalouf and edited by Hasna Mikdashi.
Email: berrada61@hotmail.com

Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures, volume IV, Economics, Mobility and Space, edited by Suad Joseph, Brill. Leiden-Boston 2007.

REVIEWED BY NISREEN SALTI

The first volume of the six-volume *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* (EWIC) set up the EWIC project as an "interdisciplinary, transhistorical, and transnational" work, spanning "all facets of the life of women" in the "civilizations and societies in which Islam has played a historic role" (I: xxi), from the rise of Islam to the present day and extending from West Africa to Central and South Asia, according to the general editor, Suad Joseph (I: xxxiii). In line with this plan, EWIC's editorial board has organized the fourth volume around the themes of 'Economics, Education, Mobility and Space'. Volume I focused on 'Methodologies, Paradigms and Sources' [2003]; volume II on 'Family, Law and Politics' [2005]; and volume III on 'Family, Body, Sexuality and Health' [2005]. Volume V on 'Practices, Interpretation and Representation' and volume VI (Supplement and Index) are expected to appear in 2007. The fourth volume is primarily concerned with examining the material conditions affecting the daily realities of women in predominantly Muslim societies, as well as Muslim women in non-Muslim societies.

Under the broad headings of 'Cities', 'Development', 'Economics', 'Education', 'Environment', 'Migration,' and 'Space', EWIC's volume IV covers topics as sweeping as colonial cities, global cities, Islamic cities, homelessness, urban identities and movements, discourses and practices for development, farming and development, housing policies, non-governmental organizations, sustainable development, credit organizations, marketing, craft industries, foreign aid, informal and formal labor markets, Islamic banking, labor and health, land reform, trade, domestic labor, pastoral economies, professional occupations, sex workers, education from pre- to post-colonial periods, environment, migration, and space. It also includes entries under the headings 'Information Technology', 'Poverty', 'Slavery' and 'Tourism'. The volume "looks for evidence of agency, whether it is found in women's activism in non-governmental or community-based organizations, credit associations, or the possibilities created by education" (p. xxiii). Entries are organized by geographical region and are sometimes preceded or replaced by a conceptual overview. The volume contains 263 entries, including 15 overviews, each followed by a bibliography, the whole written by over two hundred contributors.

A first conceptual challenge that emerges from the *Encyclopedia's* overall aim is whether Islam constitutes an overarching theme across all the phenomena covered. The editors no doubt face this challenge in all the volumes, but it is particularly sharp in volume IV with its themes revolving around the material conditions of everyday life. This reader finds that evidence of Islamic culture as a common thread in economics, education, mobility, and space is tenuous indeed. As Joseph notes in the preface, this question invites more extensive comparative research.

The organization by geographical region of the entries on most of the topics covered is both useful and commonsensical. However, the choice of regions is unsystematic since, as Joseph admits, it was a matter of the availability of contributors rather than theoretical conceptualization. This means that one of the principal functions that this volume is intended to fulfill is somewhat compromised, since the usefulness of any work of reference is based in the predictability of its contents, a quality produced by uniformity of organization and comparability across entries.

The thematic overviews that precede some of the geographically specific entries provide the history of scholarly thought on the topic in question, setting it in the context of Islam and Islamic cultures, and fleshing out its effect and relevance to women. Hence Minako Sakai's overview entry on "The Environment" traces the origins of environmentalism in the west to the science of forestry, and links the rising concern about ecology in the west to the notion of sustainable development. The author then discusses Islam's understanding of the environment, and moves to a discussion of women's land rights in the Muslim world, attributing some of the environmental problems faced by Muslim countries to the severance of the relationship between women and the land. Adam Sabra's overview on 'Poverty' opens with a succinct discussion of poverty from the standpoint of Islam, linking much of the Muslim world's sociological treatment of poverty, its attitude towards the poor, and its institutions for poverty alleviation to the religious doctrine underlying these practices and attitudes, before discussing poverty as it is faced by women in the Muslim world.

These introductory sections are well written, informative, and closer to the ethos of a work that defines itself as more "transhistorical" than most of the other entries in the volume; the vast majority of the regional entries are focused on present day understanding and practice of the topics in question and offer little by way of history. The overview sections also address some of the difficulties that arise from the arbitrariness of the geographic divisions by providing general

entries that are not bound to a particular part of the Muslim world. However, as is the case with the choice of geographic divisions, it is also unclear to the reader on what basis the editors chose to include overviews for some topics and not for others.

According to the defining mission set out in Volume I, the *Encyclopedia* is intended to encompass all eras of Islamic culture. However, outside of the overview sections described above, the content of this volume is confined primarily to contemporary or very recent historical periods. Hence, the “transhistorical” dimension is largely lost. For example, little is said about the four main topics of Volume IV in relation to early and middle Islamic cultures. A notable exception is found in some of the entries on inherently dynamic processes such as urbanization and colonialism. The entries under ‘Colonial Cities’ all flesh out the contrast between the pre-colonial urban landscapes and colonial cities. Petra Kuppinger’s contribution under this heading on the ‘Arab World’ provides an excellent treatment of the changes to urban life introduced by colonialism, and her carefully chosen headings relate the topic to the intersection of public space, the economy, and women’s daily lives. Similarly William J. Glover’s entry on ‘South Asia’ gives the reader a useful picture of the transformations involved with the advent of colonialism, though it is too brief when contextualizing the topic in Islamic cultures and women’s lives.

Economics, one of the four main themes of Volume IV, is covered in 24 different headings encompassing various aspects of the economy ranging from the labor market (child labor, agricultural and industrial labor, labor and health, paid domestic labor, sex workers, etc. ...), the financial market (access to credit and Islamic banking), and consumption (commodification and consumption), to the different productive sectors of the economy. One topic central to development studies that is omitted here though it deserves attention is saving behavior, intra-household, and intergenerational distributional decisions more generally. The more pressing gap in the entries on ‘Economics’ comes from the fact that no effort is made to incorporate any scholarly work on economics, and the entries use the language of public policy, which only borrows some concepts and findings from economic scholarship. Although academic work in economics has been slow to respond to the critiques made by women’s and gender studies, as well as to adequately address challenges and questions emerging from the Muslim world, there are important findings in the empirical economics literature regarding women in the Arab and Muslim worlds that are extremely relevant to some of the ‘Economics’ sections. The same can be said of many paradigms, concepts, and findings from labor and development economics that are applicable to any discussion of women and Islamic cultures.

Many of the entries describe the evolution of debates on the topic in question, and explicitly identify gaps in relevant literatures; two examples are the entries on ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’ and the ‘Arab World’ under the heading of ‘Environment: Change and Natural Resource Extraction’. This gives the volume under review the feel of a rich and extensive reader on women and Islamic cultures rather than an encyclopedia in the classical understanding of the term. Most of the limitations described above are less relevant if the book is intended as a reader, since a reader would have less need to be transhistorical, and less concern for the uniformity of format and coverage across entries which is essential for a work of reference.

For researchers interested in the four main themes covered in Volume IV, the *Encyclopedia* provides the fruit of an immense effort to collect entries from a wide variety of scholars sensitive to the need for the richness and importance of an interdisciplinary approach. Overall, the vast survey it affords of factors affecting the material realities of the everyday lives of women in

Muslim communities is a timely and critical guide for scholars, activists, policy makers, analysts, and general readers.

Nisreen Salti is an Assistant Professor in Economics at the American University of Beirut and has worked on the political economy of development, the curse of natural resources, inequality and health.
Email: ns17@aub.edu.lb

Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present, by Nadjé Sadig Al-Ali, London and New York: Zed Books, 2007. 292 pages.

REVIEWED BY ZAINAB AL BAHRANI

the US-UK war against Iraq and the continuing occupation of the country has resulted in a catastrophic upheaval of Iraqi society, and the obliteration of anything resembling a normal human existence for its people. One of the most significant social changes brought about by the occupation and the interim Iraqi government is in women's legal status and their conditions of daily life. While before 2003 women's lives were oppressed under the dictatorship of Saddam Hussain, compounded by the dire constraints of the embargo, this oppression was similar to that of most other citizens of the country; it was not particularly divided along the lines of gender. Today, women have become pawns in the power plays of the different political factions in Iraq on the one hand, and in the political rhetoric of the United States on the other. The latter is a rhetoric of the liberation of Iraqi women used primarily for American consumption; the reasons most often given in the United States and the United Kingdom for the Iraq war are those of a "humanitarian intervention" to rid the people of Iraq of a brutal dictator and to free women from the burden of the *burkha* (never mind that this garment is in fact alien to the traditional dress of Iraq). As they presented it, part of Saddam's tyranny was the tyranny of the veil. Women, in other words, have now replaced the Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) as one of the causes for their 'just war'.

Another consequence of the war and occupation of Iraq has been a constant re-writing of historical accounts, declarations of identities in relation to the land and to history, narratives of diasporas and returns, and of individuals and groups of people. Telling the stories of Iraqi women is a way to uncover another layer of Iraq's multiple and shifting narratives, as Nadjé Al-Ali, author of *Iraqi Women*, explains in her introduction. She defines her work as an alternative history, focused on women's lives and experiences (p. 267). The author, who is a cultural anthropologist at the University of Exeter in England, sets out to provide this alternative oral history of Iraq through the voices of the women whom she presents in the book.

The book is organized as a historical narrative that begins with the early twentieth century, when Iraq was under the British mandate, before the 1958 revolution that overthrew the monarchy. The stories of a number of older women who recall that time are recounted in the first chapter, entitled "Living in the Diaspora", an indication that many of those interviewed for the earlier period left Iraq soon after the events of 1958. The following pages, as described by the title of each chapter, focus on the experiences of women living with the revolution, with the Ba'th, with the violence of internal government campaigns and internments, with international sanctions, and finally, with the violence of the US occupation of Iraq. This sub-division of chapters under the headings of 'living with' and a particular political era or situation could well be taken by the reader to mean that women are always on the margins of society, and never agents of societal, even less political, change. However, Al-Ali demonstrates her point that this is not the case through interviews with

women who were involved in women's rights organizations and NGOs, or who are humanitarian workers, or writers and bloggers who continue to speak out bravely under current conditions.

The voices of the women that Al-Ali presents in the book are intended as examples of how different women's experiences from the 1940s until today can be taken as accounts of the past. It is refreshing that the author does not define difference among the women narrators in sectarian, ethnic, or religious terms. In fact, the voices of the women seem to reveal that 'difference' before the US war and occupation was perceived by these women and their social circles primarily in terms of social class. The stories told are personal and varied, and provide an interesting narrative mosaic that holds the reader's attention, and provides insights into average people's lives.

However, a number of questions arise from the fact that the processes of the interviews are not laid out. We do not read the actual discussion between the author and the informants, because the author removes herself entirely from the interviews. Instead, Al-Ali has chosen to excerpt passages from the stories that women gave her, whether in Amman, Detroit, San Diego, or London. Al-Ali chose these locations because it was not possible for her to go to Iraq, and because these cities have large communities of Iraqis of various religious, social, and ethnic backgrounds. But she does not clarify how the interviewed women were chosen, nor how she presented the project or the interview to them. Not being told how the interviews were conducted is at times frustrating for the reader. It would have been useful to know, for example, if the author spoke to the informants in Iraqi Arabic, or in English. We can assume that Al-Ali was able to speak to them directly in the local dialect, since we are told that her father is Iraqi, but this issue is never clarified. Likewise, it is not clear if the author was able to consult primary Arabic sources, or was limited to secondary literature on Middle Eastern women, as her bibliography suggests. Given the author's interests and aims the latter approach is valid, but greater clarification would have been helpful.

On the other hand, Al-Ali's own story and family history is woven into the broader narrative of Iraqi women's lives in a way that allows the reader to see the personal aspect of all the narratives, thus moving away from the traditional historical account. The relationship between memory, history, and truth is thoughtfully problematized. But because these stories are idiosyncratic, dependent on the personal view-point of a particular narrator, they can also leave one wishing for more information. As an Iraqi woman familiar with the history of Iraq and with the lives of women there, I would have liked to read more about the start of women's movements in the 1920s, the important role of women in the establishment of the communist party, and their place in establishing hospitals and humanitarian NGOs such as the Red Crescent, both before the revolution of 1958 and right after it.

At the same time Al-Ali provides some fascinating details of the change in women's legal status brought about by the current government under the new Transitional Law and newly written Iraqi constitution. These constitute, in effect, a horrendous erosion of women's legal rights. Al-Ali points out that most women, whether living in Iraq or in exile, are simply unaware of the new laws and their ramifications.

For example, Article 41 of the new Iraqi constitution stipulates that the existing family laws be replaced by religious laws, based on the religion or ethnicity of the individual in question. In other words, the new law has deliberately sub-divided people on a religious and ethnic basis. As Al-Ali points out, the new law makes mixed marriages virtually impossible and threatens already existing ones, and will no doubt fuel more sectarian violence while at the same time constituting

a serious erosion of women's legal rights as human beings (p. 246). This last chapter, "Living with the Occupation", is the most powerful of the book. It provides moving narratives and a strong analysis of how women's lives are affected by the current violence and upheavals of war, occupation, and forced migration. The author's strongest points are that while women are agents in the processes of history, Iraqi women have also become a sign of identity and otherness, and are again becoming the targets of unspeakable violence from all sides.

Nadje Al-Ali's book is an important new work on the lives of women in Iraq and their current plight. While a number of recent books written as memoirs by (or about) particular Iraqi women exist in the English language, these have been primarily in the genre of Orientalist fiction, presenting exotic stereotypes of violence, despotism, and sexuality for the Western reader. Al-Ali's book is a welcome change from such writing, and a notable contribution to the scholarly literature in women's studies. It is a serious and thoughtful book, well written and absorbing to read. It is also a timely book that speaks out bravely about the new attacks on Iraqi women's lives and their legal rights today.

Zainab al Bahrani is the Edith Porada Professor in Ancient Near Eastern Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University in New York.

Email: zb2101@columbia.edu

A Trade like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt, by Karin van Nieuwkerk, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. 240 pages, \$21.95

REVIEWED BY DALILA MAHDAWI

anyone who has read Naguib Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy* will remember the low esteem in which female entertainers in Egypt were held. To many, this went hand in hand with prostitution, alcohol and drugs. Mahfouz's novel may have been set many years ago, but it seems such attitudes were still prevalent in the late 1980s and prompted Karin van Nieuwkerk to undertake her study of female singers and dancers in Egypt. On the whole, she is successful. Her ethnography fuses together issues important in the fields of feminism, ethnomusicology, dance and anthropology, whilst remaining appealing for non-academic audiences.

Van Nieuwkerk spent around 15 months in Egypt conducting her fieldwork: interviewing Egyptians from every stratum of society, staying with entertainers, watching performances, and attending weddings throughout the country. During her stay, she formed solid relationships with men and women involved in the entertainment industry and, in particular, those on Muhammad Ali Street in Cairo. Her friendly relations with her subjects and immersion into their lives gave van Nieuwkerk unparalleled access to the world of Egyptian female entertainers and her study has a unique perspective, mixing theoretical concepts with personal experience.

According to van Nieuwkerk, no wedding or festivity in Egypt is considered complete without singers or dancers. In fact, such celebrations provide an opportunity for families to display their affluence, as reflected in the number of performers hired. It is therefore a puzzling paradox that those entertainers, in particular female entertainers, are met with disrespect and ignominy by Egyptian society at large. One question guides the course of the study: "Is the tainted reputation of female entertainers due to the fact that entertainment is a dishonorable profession or that it is dishonorable for women?" (pp. 2-3). By way of reply, van Nieuwkerk examines the history of the

trade in Egypt, the status of performers in society, personal accounts and opinions, and intellectual debates, in the hope that her study of female Egyptian entertainers will “create more understanding of their livelihood...and...generate more sympathy for” them (p. 1).

Examining Islamic views on Egyptian entertainment, van Nieuwkerk mentions in her introduction that whilst some Islamic scholars and *hadiths* frown upon music and dancing altogether, “the acceptability of the place and occasion of the performance is...an important factor in judging the legitimacy of...entertainers” (p. 11). However, female dancers and singers are unequivocally opposed, since their voices and bodies are considered more seductive than those of men’s. This belief recurs throughout the study, backed up by historical and cultural evidence. The introduction, like the study as a whole, is clearly structured, with the author outlining her methodology and learning process. Her ability to recognize flaws in her early stages of research, with the help of her Egyptian assistant, exemplify the long process she went through in doing justice to her research and subjects.

In chapters two and three, van Nieuwkerk clarifies the relations between entertainers and religious and national authorities, outlining their legal status and various socio-economic and political developments which had an impact on the organization and professionalisation of female entertainers over the past two centuries. These chapters are fascinating, well researched, and highly informative. In her chapter on the 19th century, Van Nieuwkerk describes the fiscal regulation of entertainers and clarifies the original difference between two types of entertainers, the *awalim*, educated and respected women who performed for women in the harem, and the *ghawâzî*, plebian dancers who performed unveiled in streets and at saints’ day celebrations. A particularly informative section describes Muhammad Ali’s 1834 ban on female entertainers and prostitutes in Cairo, which marginalized public women in society and forced many into prostitution, blurring the distinction between *awalim* and *ghawâzî* entertainers. The 1834 ban was probably instrumental in formulating contemporary attitudes towards female entertainers.

Perhaps the most interesting and enjoyable part of the book are the entertainers’ personal accounts, which appear in chapter four. Those stories provide valuable insights into the women’s experiences and opinions, and bestow human faces on figures who would otherwise have remained anonymous entertainers. The accounts also serve to explain why women entered the industry. While some women were attracted as young girls to the trade, most were driven into this profession by economic necessity. A large number come from poorer segments of society and have little or no education, and decided on entertainment because it paid better than factory, domestic, or other menial work. From their accounts, one also notes that most women in the entertainment industry share the larger Egyptian ideal that women should be housewives; it is simply their economic situation which forces them to work. The majority of women stay in the profession only to guarantee a better future for their children, by saving enough money to send them to school or university. The inclusion of photographs of female entertainers, although sadly left anonymous, gives Van Nieuwkerk’s case work a personal and refreshing touch so often missing in academic studies.

For all her emphasis on providing a platform for entertainers to voice their opinions, Van Nieuwkerk remains a critical observer, pointing out any inconsistencies or blatant lies told to her. She furthermore reveals the divisions within the entertainment industry, dismantling ideas of it as a monolithic profession, and instead shows it to be just as internally diversified and hierarchical as Egyptian society at large.

A chapter on marginality investigates whether entertainers, by virtue of their profession, constitute a marginal community in Egyptian society. In assessing this, van Nieuwkerk scrutinizes the spatial, linguistic, social, economic, and cultural realities of entertainers. She also considers their secret language, or *sîm*. It seems many communities in Egypt make use of such a secret language, ranging from goldsmiths or pickpockets to homosexuals. Nieuwkerk provides some interesting examples of the vocabulary of entertainers and their use of the *sîm*, and though she stresses that this is not important to her study as a whole, the topic is so fascinating it well deserves a study of its own.

Chapters six to eight explore the concepts of honor, shame, and gender, and seek to find out whether the poor reputation of females in the entertainment industry is because their profession is considered dishonorable, or due to prevailing 'gender ideology'. Presenting theoretical discussions on shame and honor (defined as "the presence of personal virtues", Van Nieuwkerk maintains that shame, or 'eb' ('ayb), is the main concern of Cairenes, especially amongst the poor (p. 117). She goes on to demonstrate that most people's objection to female entertainers lies in the concept of shame, which, after everything mentioned previously, comes as little surprise. It is their profession, rather than their character, which society considers a disgrace. Putting all the different pieces of the puzzle together, van Nieuwkerk concludes that although certain sectors of society consider female Egyptian entertainers with disapproval, they are mostly seen as working in a 'trade like any other' like everyone else, in order to put food on the table.

A Trade like Any Other is a highly commendable study that is accessible to all readers. Van Nieuwkerk's approach to writing and explaining theory and history is gratifyingly simple and yet does not underestimate the intelligence of her readers. Her book will therefore appeal to anyone from the high school student to the anthropologist or dance enthusiast. Yet it needs to be said that since her research was conducted in 1988/1990, her conclusions may now be out of date. Egypt today is experiencing both high levels of unemployment and poverty, and a surge in radical Islam. These factors may well have changed popular opinions about women and entertainment. Nonetheless, *A Trade Like Any Other* remains a comprehensive and well written study, and relevant to feminist and anthropological research. It is to be hoped that someone picks up where Karin van Nieuwkerk left off.

Dalila Mahdawi is a graduate in Arabic Studies of the University of Manchester.
Email: dmahdawi@hotmail.co.uk

Hikayat: Short Stories by Lebanese Women, edited by Roseanne Saad Khalaf, London/Berkeley: Telegram books, 2006. 222 pages, £9,99.

REVIEWED BY TANJA TABBARA

In *Hikayat, Short Stories by Lebanese Women*, Roseanne Khalaf has compiled and edited the short stories of 26 Lebanese women writers. Some of the texts are excerpts from novels, others were written as short stories. Half of the collection was written in English, the other half was translated from either Arabic or French.

The book includes established authors like Layla Baalbaki, Emily Nasrallah, and Rima Alamuddin, whose work is well known for challenging the role and constraints of women in Lebanon's pre-war society. Critique of social pressures informs Baalbaki's "A Spaceship of Tenderness to the

Moon”, which tells the story of a woman who against all societal odds marries the man she loves, only to find herself, through him, exposed to the social expectations she was trying to escape.

During the Civil War writers like Etel Adnan, Hanan al-Shaykh, and Hoda Barakat became famous for their personal accounts of the war, demonstrating the human tragedies behind the fighting.

However, their texts selected for the collection do not relate to the war experience.

In her story “Chat”, Hoda Barakat describes the younger generation’s obsession with internet communication, which allows them to act anonymously, and cross barriers they wouldn’t dare to cross if facing someone directly. In “The Hot Seat”, Hanan al-Shaykh explores a passenger’s imagination as he takes a seat in a bus that is still warm from the female passenger who has just left it. Stories by other writers like Merriam Haffar’s “Pieces of a Past Life”, Nazik Saba Yared’s “Improvisations on a Missing String”, and Renée Hayek’s “The Phone Call” do explore the tragic impact that the war had on the lives of the Lebanese people in general and on women in particular.

Hikayat is especially interesting because it assembles stories not only by acclaimed authors but also by younger writers, some of whom were Khalaf’s students, and wrote their pieces for creative writing workshops. Their stories reflect the desires and disappointments of a new generation of Lebanese female writers whose writing has been largely shaped by their trans-cultural experiences.

Their texts are provocative, breaking taboos. The narratives of their stories disrupt linearity. They play with repetition and create rhythms and poetics of their own. Their characters are often highly strung and close to, or driven towards madness and/or suicide. While desiring to belong, they are border-goers, in-betweeners, who have suffered great losses that lead them to view themselves and the world around them with irony, sometimes sarcasm. Their pain, sensitivities, and anger are mirrored in their perceptions of the country, the city of Beirut in particular.

For example Hala Alyan in “Painted Reflections” develops the story of a young woman who has been raised in the United States and who embarks on a journey to Lebanon. Her character is intense, extreme, wildly searching for herself. In her paintings she has found a way to express herself. Her journey is a journey of exploration and expression as much as it is an attempt to link up with what she calls her “tentative Arabic heritage”. Having lost a close friend in 9/11, she travels to Lebanon to be distracted from her own feelings of pain and grief. In her paintings, the violence of Beirut and people’s feelings of pain and loss interweave with her own feelings of grief and loss. She feels like a spectator, an outsider, but at the same time is attached to the place, joining the demonstrations after Hariri’s assassination: “I go to these demonstrations as an onlooker only ... I cannot demand entitlement to this pain ... Yet I understand it. I’ve seen it before. I have come here to be distracted and this country is as distracting as I could hope for” (pp. 199-200).

“The One-eyed Man” by Lina Mounzer is the portrait of a man who fails to integrate his past in Lebanon with his new life in Toronto. The death of his father, who was unhappy about his only son leaving Lebanon, and with whom he hadn’t been in contact since, forces him to go back to Lebanon after many years. In the days before leaving, he is on an emotional rollercoaster, feeling insecure and afraid at the prospect of revisiting his family and Beirut after his long absence. Beirut, he feels, “is a landscape of scars and bruises” (p. 211). It mirrors the feelings of a generation that is angry about being “robbed of our childhoods by the acrid taste of fear and sweat” (p. 211), and who resent the general non-willingness of Lebanese society to deal with the memory of the war.

In “Omega: Definitions”, Zeina Ghandour challenges our understanding of national identity and our urge to define and to judge. Her main character provocatively addresses the reader in a direct manner with short rhythmic sentences that question themes of identity and belonging. Her character is refreshingly non-stereotypical in respect to standard depictions of Muslim women living in Western countries. She mocks Western prejudices and ignorance about Islam and the Arab people. And yet she regards her Lebanese identity with equal irony: “Martyr’s Square has been renamed Democracy Square. Forgive me if I can’t join in with the buoyancy. But I feel unrepresented” (p. 140).

The theme of trans-cultural mobility and identity has become more central for the new generation of Lebanese writers who, due to the Civil War and its uncertain aftermath, have spent part or even the whole of their life outside Lebanon. However, the theme is not completely new to Lebanese writing. Etel Adnan, who has herself lived in several countries, develops in “Power of Death” the dense portrait of a man who is virtually falling apart when he realizes that he made, years ago, the biggest mistake of his life by leaving his girl friend in Sweden to return to his home town, Damascus. Her death takes him back to Sweden in search of his past life.

May Ghossoub in her story “Red Lips” and Nadine Touma in “Red Car”, both explore the theme of forbidden sexuality. In her very poetic and beautifully written story, Touma develops a sensual encounter between two strangers. She succeeds in creating a very special and dense atmosphere. At the same time the story is very provocative because the two lovers enter a forbidden holy space, the minaret of a mosque, in which the father of one of the characters is the muezzin. The story is also challenging in its intimation of lesbianism, and at the very end of the story we understand that the two lovers are women. “Red Car” is also somewhat disturbing because there is a hint of death and suicide running through it.

The intensity of the stories, the diversity of styles and themes, as well as the mix of established and new writers, make the book a very interesting read. I hope that Roseanne Khalaf will share with us more stories of talented new writers who, as she says, are “the source of creative inspiration for talented new voices in a country in dire need of innovative alternatives” (p. 23).

Tanja Tabbara is a German Lebanese activist who works on children’s and women’s rights and cultural diversity and expression.

Email: tanjatabbara@hotmail.com