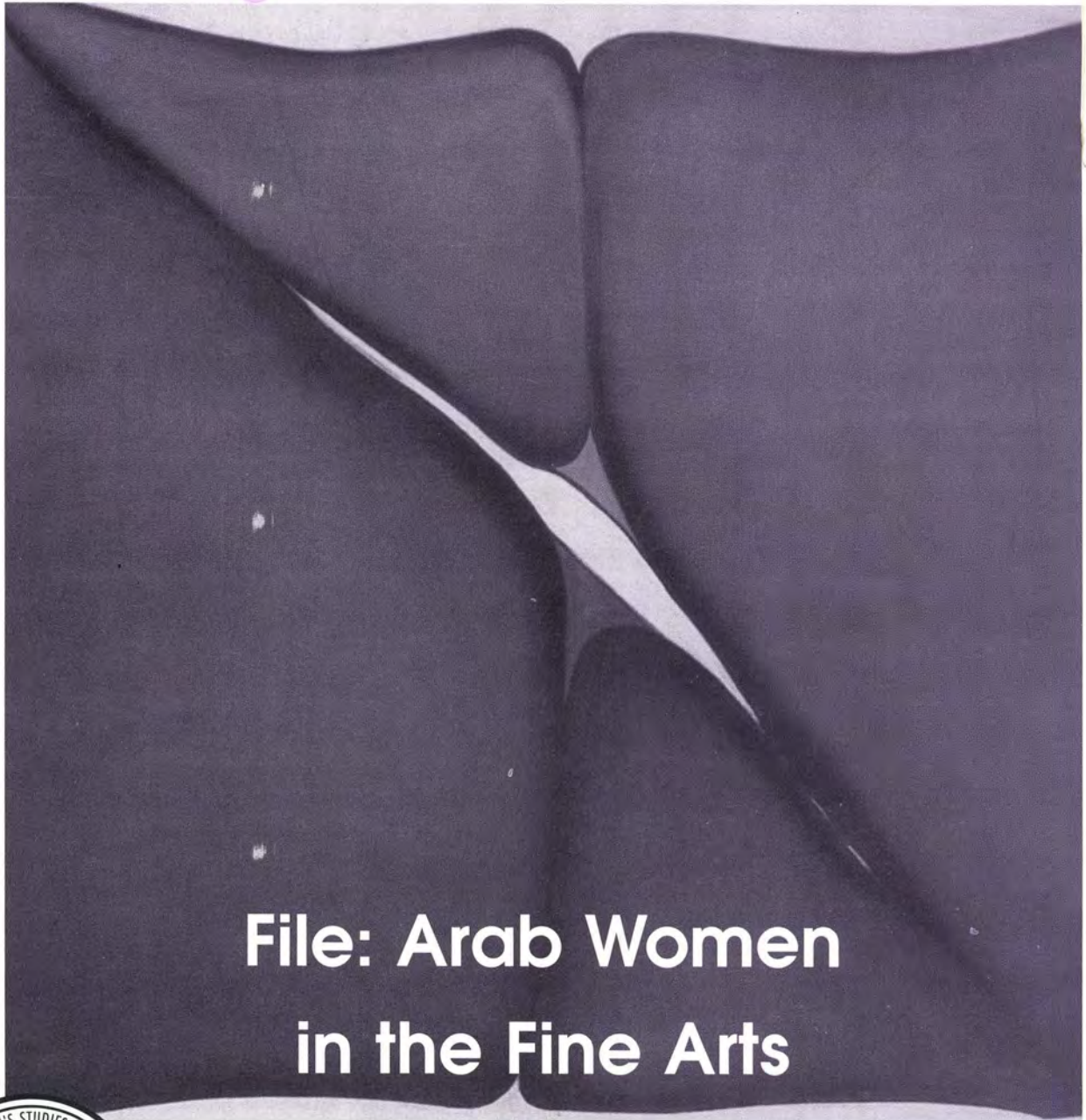


AL-Raida

m a g a z i n e

الرائدة - Volume XIII, No. 73, Spring 1996 *The Pioneer*

WITH THE COMPLIMENTS
OF INSAW



File: Arab Women in the Fine Arts

Also

- One day in the south
- Profile of a medical pioneer



ABOUT IWSAW

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was established in 1973 at the Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College). The founder and Director of the IWSAW is Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr. Initial funding for the Institute was provided by the Ford Foundation.

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

PROJECTS: IWSAW activities include local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures and films; and educational projects which improve the lives of women and children from all sectors of Lebanese society. The Institute houses the

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

ABOUT AL-RAIDA

Al-Raida is published quarterly by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) of the Lebanese American University (LAU), formerly Beirut University College, P.O. Box 13-5053/59, Beirut, Lebanon; Telephone: (01) 867-618, ext. 288; Fax: (01) 867-098. The American address of LAU is 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1846, New York, NY 10115, U.S.A.; Telephone: (212) 870-2592; Fax: (212) 870-2762.

PURPOSE AND CONTENT: *Al-Raida's* mission is to enhance networking between Arab women and women all over the world; to promote objective research of the conditions of women in the Arab world, especially conditions related to social change and development; and to report on the activities of the IWSAW and the Lebanese American University.

Each issue of *Al-Raida* features a File which focuses on a particular theme, in addition to articles, conference reports, interviews, book reviews and art news.

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

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

THE ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FEE FOR *AL-RAIDA* IS US \$ 25. SUBSCRIPTIONS BEGIN IN JANUARY AND END IN DECEMBER.

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Cover Art: "Blue Steel", oil on canvas, 1973, by Hugette Caland, Lebanese painter.

Al-Raida

The quarterly journal of the Institute for Women's
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SUBJECTIVITY VERSUS SUBJECTION: *The Role of Women's Art in Contemporary Arab Society*

Although I have viewed beautiful and impressive works of art in a number of art galleries in Lebanon, Tunisia and Palestine over the last ten years, my most memorable encounters with art works in the Arab world occurred in unlikely settings: a lawyer's office and a doctor's clinic. In both cases, the art works I saw and admired were the creations of political prisoners and torture victims who had made ingenious use of mundane and simple materials--rocks, match sticks, the inside of toothpaste tubes, wrapping paper--to give voice to their indomitable spirits and their unquenchable thirst for freedom, dignity, beauty and humanity. The artists in both cases were neither well-known nor extensively trained in the fine arts. Rather, they were creative, sensitive and strong individuals who had found unusual ways to convey powerful messages under difficult circumstances. Their artistic creations were compelling and moving examples of art as passionate declaration rather than clever decoration.

To create a work is to make a very personal statement about one's innermost experiences, dreams, desires and emotions. To externalize one's private, inner world before a public audience requires even more courage, especially if the artist is a woman creating in a cultural milieu which has traditionally encouraged women's silence, submission and exclusion from the public realm. Yet, despite these risks, Arab women artists working in a variety of media are making their mark on contemporary Arab culture and society.

In the file section of this issue of *Al-Raida* we present some established and emerging women artists and their works. Whether painters, novelists, musicians or performers, these women have a passion to express and actualize their subjectivity, to reveal their uniqueness as distinct, creative individuals possessing definite opinions and feelings about the world in which they live. This affirmation and celebration of subjectivity and selfhood is played out against an increasingly bleak background of social, political and economic subjection of the Arab individual, whether male or female. Some of the artists we have surveyed in this issue expressed the hope that, by sharing their visions, concerns and dreams through their art work, they may be able to effect positive social and cultural changes. In confronting subjection with their own subjectivity, these women are redefining their roles, their relationships to others, their place in society and

their impact on social and political developments. Through their art, some are attempting to change the world "from the inside out" by encouraging others to see the world from new angles, to reassess their values and priorities, to call attention to dangers threatening not only the Arab world, but the entire human race, e.g., environmental devastation, economic injustices, psychological and political repression, and the dangerous cycles of warfare currently erupting all over the world.

Other articles in this issue of *Al-Raida* indicate the extent of the dangers, troubles and injustices to which individuals in Lebanon and other Arab countries are subjected. Nada Awar's moving article about the tragedy in Qana in South Lebanon last April and Ghena Ismail's report on a workshop concerning violence against women remind us that a lot of passion, effort, creativity and courage are required of women as well as men, to heal the wounds of our societies and pave the way to a just and healthy future for Arab women, men and children. The free and creative expression and sharing of our dreams, visions, hopes and values, whether through the arts or other media of communication, cannot but enable us to create a better future together.

The next issue of *Al-Raida* will be a special double issue focusing on the topic "Women's Rights are Human Rights: Perspectives from the Arab World." If you are interested in submitting an article, report or graphics for this issue, please do so before 1 October 1996.

Laurie King -Irani
Editor-in-Chief

Announcement

Al-Raida is looking for foreign correspondents to write stories on topics and issues of concern to women throughout the Arab world. If you are a professional or freelance journalist or researcher living in an Arab country, please consider submitting reports on legislation, events, conferences, debates and performances related to women and women's issues. If your article is accepted for publication, you will receive a payment of US\$100.

P

OLEMICS ON ABORTION:

A Pro-Choice Point of View

On January 25th of this year, abortion was the topic of the popular Lebanese talk show, *Al-Shaer Yahki* ("The Wise One Speaks"). As usual, this pioneering program was offering a daring topic for public discussion and debate. The guests invited to discuss the various perspectives on abortion — moral, legal, psychological and medical — included religious authorities, lawyers, doctors and psychologists.

Given a unique opportunity to discuss thoroughly such an important issue, not one of the guests advanced a fresh point of view, reflecting the stultifying atmosphere of public debate in post-war Lebanon. A Catholic priest, reiterating the church's position, was adamant in his rejection of abortion under any circumstances. The program's host invented the most contorted scenarios involving the hypothetical situation of a young woman who is raped, pregnant, poor, and ill — but to no avail. The Church's teaching is clear: No abortion at *any* price, even if it would save the life of the mother. The priest's response to the needs of such an unfortunate young woman indicated a postponement of resolution into the distant future: "the church," he said, "will educate society in order to prevent such incidents from happening in the future." As if women were naive enough to believe the promises of an institution which has been unable to reform society for two millennia!

The lawyers and doctors were almost as cautious. All felt compelled to state their personal position on abortion, especially the women among them. Each stated clearly that they are unequivocally against abortion. The foremost lawyer for women's rights in Lebanon declared "I am, of course, against abortion," and one usually iconoclastic and outspoken gynecologist stated that, as a Catholic, she is against abortion, but then she dared to divulge the one and only exception: therapeutic abortion.

None of those present distinguished between their personal preferences and convictions and the possibility that women have the right to a different personal preference. Women's reproductive rights held a primary place of importance on the agenda of the International Women's Conference in Beijing less than six months ago, a conference to which Lebanon sent a large delegation. Nevertheless, in the course of the talk show, the issue of women's reproductive rights was silently excluded from the discussion.

Thus, what had been advertised as a controversial issue, having at least two different points of view, never matured into a genuine controversy. Everyone was on the

same side. It is unclear whether the program organizers failed to invite pro-choice people or whether the guests indulged in voluntary self-censorship. Regardless of decision-makers' opinions, the truth is that thousands of women in Lebanon are undergoing abortions each year. It is high time for all those concerned to urge the law to catch up with this reality. Abortions are taking place in Lebanon every day. At the earliest stages of pregnancy, they are performed under the guise of a minor operation termed dilation and curettage ("D and C"). Women who can afford to do so undergo this operation in Lebanon, which reflects society's hypocrisy. People are clamoring for the opposite of what they condone. The Lebanese Parliament and the public at large should address the topic of abortion in a mature way because many women who cannot afford a D and C procedure, or who decide to terminate an unwanted pregnancy at a slightly later stage (up to twelve weeks), are at risk of having unsafe abortions, especially when performed in unsupervised and unsanitary conditions.

There is no justification whatsoever for unsafe abortions. Similarly, there is no reason why unwanted infants should be abandoned in Lebanon's garbage dumps or at the doors of orphanages throughout the country. It is a woman's choice, and hers alone: she should be able to make this crucial decision without fear, confusion, or coercion. No matter what she chooses, it will be she, more than the father of the child, who will carry the weight of responsibility for the rest of her life.

At the beginning of the aforementioned talk show program, a report was aired which related the sad story of Ikram, the mother of two children with thalassemia and a third child with Down's syndrome. Having become pregnant once again, Ikram petitioned the Islamic legal court for special permission to have an abortion. She never received that permission. Ikram's plight illustrates the complete disregard on behalf of Lebanon's religious institutions and state authorities for women's and children's rights. In the conflict between self-righteousness and the hard facts of life, I for one, know where I stand.

Dr. Nadia Cheikh
Professor of History
American University of Beirut

(Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Al-Raida, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, or the Lebanese American University. We invite contributions of opinions and rebuttals from our readers.)

Letters to the Editor

2 May 1996
Beirut, Lebanon

Dear Editor:

Al-Raida is an important magazine that deals with women's problems throughout the world, especially in the Arab world. *Al-Raida* takes upon itself the responsibility of the defense of women's rights and offers solutions to the problems from which they suffer. As a magazine having a feminist orientation, *Al-Raida* has very interesting articles that both male and female readers enjoy. However, I would also like to see some other human and social problems discussed so that we, the male readers, may find something that interests us other than simply women's issues.

Yours truly,
Rabih Fakih

Response:

We are happy to receive comments from a young male reader, and to know that you enjoy *Al-Raida*. Although *Al-Raida* is a feminist publication, we do not aim to attract only women readers. All articles published address problems which, in affecting women's lives, have a significant impact on the lives of men and children as well.

Correction

In the last issue of *Al-Raida*, No.72, we presented the story of a young woman named Hala who was murdered by her brother in an "honor killing". The initial reports we received indicated that the brother received a jail sentence of only one year. We have subsequently learned that the young man did in fact receive a life sentence from the military court in which he was tried. We apologize for this error.

4 April 1996
Beaverton, Oregon, USA

Dear Editor:

I am a graduate of the Beirut College for Women who has been a subscriber to *Al-Raida* from its very inception. Although *Al-Raida* is published by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, there is a preponderance of articles, especially in the last few years, concerning Lebanon. Very few articles address the problems of women and children in the wider Arab world. The most glaring omission is the lack of articles on women and children in Iraq. *Al-Raida's* last article on Iraq appeared in 1991. The deaths of more than one million Iraqi children as well as hundreds of thousands of deaths among those most vulnerable — women and the elderly — since the end of the 1991 Gulf War has elicited nothing but a deafening silence from the pages of *Al-Raida*. I find this very disturbing and can only conclude that you have turned your backs on the very objectives and purpose of *Al-Raida's* mission. Shame!

Sincerely,
Aseel Nasir Dyck

Response:

You are correct in noting that *Al-Raida* has been focusing most of its attention on women's issues in Lebanon for the past two years, but it is not correct to assume that we are turning our backs on the concerns of women throughout the Arab world. With the cessation of the Lebanese civil war, we have had the security, freedom and opportunity to make a comprehensive study of the social, economic and psychological repercussions of the long conflict on women and children with a view to formulating hypotheses and recommendations that may be useful in other societies torn by years of fighting, including Iraq. Because of funding constraints and physical dangers, the Institute is not able to send researchers or reporters into Iraq. Because of the closure of the Iraqi embassy in Lebanon, it is difficult to obtain direct, factual information on the truly dire, dangerous and unjust situation confronting all Iraqi citizens. We would be very interested in receiving articles, reports and studies from readers who do have access to up-to-date information on Iraq for publication in future issues of *Al-Raida*.

Quote, Unquote

*A selection of inspiring quotations
from various publications*

“Mainstream media is ‘manstream’ media....Profit is the name of the game in communications and because of this profit-seeking, anything will be made to be sold. The growing pattern of consumerism has included the use of women in pornography. Media globalization is an attack on diversity....Future paradigms need a feminine perspective rather than a continuation of the destructiveness of male norms. Paradigms must be centrally focused and guided by peace, equality and justice. In order to begin changing the current norms, we must begin changing our language. An example of such language is the use of ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ to describe countries. Why should third world countries aspire or wish to become first world when the latter are exploitative, wasteful and unwilling to share? On the other hand, should countries be called underdeveloped only because they do not waste and are willing to share? It is time to embrace new terms, ones which are considered feminine, such as ‘caring, emotional, creative, non-linear and circular’.”

*From an interview with author Kamli Bhushan in
“Communication and Human Agency” in Women
Inquirer, No. 29 September 1998, p.12.*

At the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Tribunal for Rwanda, rape and other forms of sexual violence committed during war are being given a new priority. The tribunal’s mission is to name the crimes, investigate wrong-doing, and punish those responsible. Those who elude the trials can be declared international outlaws. Activists have lobbied for the following: recognition of rape, forced pregnancy, and related crimes against women as instruments of genocide, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the laws of war; equal participation of women at every level of the tribunal; gender-sensitivity training for all the tribunal’s criminal justice personnel; and protection for survivors and witnesses....The resolution that established the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia specifically condemns the ‘massive, organized, and systematic detention and rape of women as a crime against humanity’.”

*From “Will War Crimes Against Women Finally Count?”
in No. 48, Women’s Movement, 1996*

“ Women and girls are disadvantaged throughout their lives. It is estimated that there are some 100 million fewer women alive today than could be expected through the natural pattern of birth and survival in infancy. Deep prejudices against girls means that many are never even born due to pre-natal sex selection. Others are either killed as infants or die of neglect. Will it cost too much? It is unconscionable that a world which is able to spend approximately US\$800 billion on weapons each year believes that it cannot find the money needed for basic education of girls. An extra US\$5-6 billion is needed annually to achieve primary education for all. It must be found.”

*From a speech by Leena Helgare, Executive Director
UNICEF*

“ Ecofeminism is a mode of thought which would restore a lost intimacy between humankind and the planet on which we live....Ecofeminism also understands the well-being of the earth and its ecosystems as inextricably connected with the well-being of women. Abuse one and the other must suffer; to improve the treatment afforded either of this mirrored pair is to better them both. How do we get there?....Rather than bemoan the end of nature, we humans, women and men, need to re-evolve into beings who prefer our local gardens. We must resist the call of Western tradition to bring enlightenment to all of the planet. Paradoxical as it may seem, a respect for the powers of fertility — in all of its diverse vegetative, social and imaginative forms — may be the most prudent, moral and politically effective means for surviving into the 21st century.”

*From Tertile Grinnat: Women, Earth and the Limits of
Critical, by Irene Diamond (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991)*

For millennia women have dedicated themselves almost exclusively to the task of nurturing, protecting and caring for the young and old, striving for the conditions of peace that favor life as a whole....It is time to apply in the arena of the world the wisdom and experience thus gained in activities of peace over so many thousands of years. The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.”

*From the key address of Amig Sun Sun Kye Nohel
Peace Educator, at the UN Conference of Women at
Beijing, September, 1995*

Research Notes

Recent Publications

Gender, Politics and Islam: Islamism, Socialism and the State, by Sondra Hale. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996. (IWSAW has received a review copy of this book; anyone interested in writing a book review for *Al-Raida* should visit our offices during business hours.)

Call for Papers

Current World Leaders, published since 1955, is accepting papers for publication in 1997. The December 1997 issue will focus on the topic of "Women and Politics." The publication will focus on several perspectives on this topic from a variety of geographic regions. *Current World Leaders* is calling for previously unpublished papers that present a particular point-of-view on the topic of women's involvement in political action. Articles should be between 4,500 and 10,000 words in length. For more information and style guidelines, contact Dr. Thomas S. Garrison, Editorial Director, *Current World Leaders*, 800 Garden Street, Suite D, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, USA. The e-mail address is iasb@igc.apc.org.

Grants and Awards

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) announces a new grants program, Promoting Women in Development through Advocacy and Research (PROWID). This grants program will support policy-oriented and action research, pilot interventions and advocacy activities that promote women's full participation in the development process. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development, PROWID seeks to improve the lives of poor women in developing countries by fostering development policies and practices that are responsive to women's needs. The PROWID program encourages the participation of non-governmental organizations, and collaborative efforts between research and implementing agencies and research and advocacy organizations. Grant awards will range from US \$25,000 to \$100,000 for periods up to two years. For further information and grant guidelines, contact Dr. Richard Strickland, Director of PROWID, ICRW, 1717 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Suite 302, Washington, DC, 20036. E-Mail: icrw@igc.apc.org.

The Association for Feminist Anthropology, a unit of the American Anthropological Association, announces the second annual competition for the Sylvia H. Forman Prize for the best student essay on feminist anthropology. The winner will receive \$500, and a summary of the essay will be published in the *Anthropology Newsletter*. The prize is named for the late Sylvia Helen Forman, a founder of the Association for Feminist Anthropology. The essay may focus on any one of a number of topics within the sub-fields of anthropology, including women's work, reproduction, religion and expressive culture, family and kin relations, economic development, women and development or race and class. Essays will be judged on the ability to utilize feminist theory to analyze a particular issue, their organization, the quality and clarity of writing, an effective use of both theory and data, and originality. Previously published essays will not be accepted. Essays should be no longer than 35 double-spaced pages, including bibliography, and should be written according to the style used in *The American Anthropologist*. Four copies should be submitted to: AFA Chair Margaret Conkey, Anthropology (#3710), University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720-3710. The deadline for submission of essays is 31 August 1996. The Prize will be awarded at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in San Francisco in November of this year.

Resources

The Feminist Archive (Bradford, UK) offers a collection of grass-roots materials from the world-wide women's movement. Founded in 1978, the Archive's collection contains materials from 1969-1979, but they are actively striving to increase and expand the collection's holdings. If you would like to visit the Archives, contact Deborah Smith, The Feminist Archive, 21 Claremont, Bradford, West Yorkshire, BD7 1DP. The e-mail address is: keboyle@bradford.ac.uk.

IWSAW Enters the Cyber-Age

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and the quarterly journal *Al-Raida* now have an e-mail address: jabunaser@flame.beirut.lau.edu.lb. In the coming year, we hope to have a home page on the World Wide Web. *Al-Raida* encourages cyber-communications from all subscribers, writers, scholars, activists and friends.

Kuwait Women Demand the Vote

More than forty Kuwaiti women activists from fields as diverse as the law, the sciences, and literature demonstrated outside the Kuwaiti Legislature building in March, demanding the right to vote and run for parliamentary seats. The women, representing a variety of political and ideological perspectives, some clothed in abayas, others wearing western garb, were all united in their belief that the Kuwaiti Government reneged on promises made during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis to give women increased political rights. As a symbol of their cause and demands, some of the women planted a blackthorn tree on a strip of land dividing the highway in front of the Parliament building. An environmental activist, Fatima Abdali, said the blackthorn tree was chosen because it symbolizes toughness and resistance to all hardships and obstacles, and because it is very fruitful in all conditions. The demonstrators, while acknowledging that they have more rights and freedoms than their sisters in Saudi Arabia, stressed that women need to be more involved in political decision-making in Kuwait, especially in areas related to personal status laws, housing, nationality, and education. Lawyer Nadia Tawash indicated that these topics are not adequately addressed by the current all-male Kuwaiti Parliament. Noting a relatively low turn-out of participants for the demonstration, some women complained that the average Kuwaiti woman lacks political awareness and a sense that she can make a change. Nearly all of the protesters were educated urban women. Critics of the demonstration noted that the activists' views do not represent the concerns and priorities of rural women, adding that most uneducated women, if given the vote, would simply cast a ballot for whomever their husbands order them to elect.

UNICEF Report Cites Dangers of Pregnancy and Child Birth in Developing World

In a report entitled *The Progress of Nations, 1996*, the United Nation's Children's Fund provides statistics showing that approximately 600,000 women die during pregnancy and childbirth each year. The vast majority of these deaths occur in the developing nations, mostly among young mothers still in their teens. According to UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, most of these deaths are preventable. The up-to-date statistical data contained in the report show that one in 13 women in sub-Saharan Africa dies during childbirth, compared to one in 35 in South Asia and one in 3,200 in Western Europe. The 600,000 women who die each year while bringing new lives into the world leave behind them at least one million motherless children. The primary causes of death

during childbirth, according to medical data included in the report, are hemorrhaging, attempted abortions, sepsis and obstructed labor. Since the beginning of this decade alone, more than three million young women have died painful deaths during child-birth. UNICEF stresses that lessening the suffering incurred by maternal death and injury will require breaking the silence concerning sex education and family planning in many conservative societies throughout the world. UNICEF demands that every pregnant woman be provided with adequate obstetric care, and notes that such care need not be expensive.

UNDP-Lebanon Director Calls for the Empowerment of Lebanese Rural Women

Ross Mountain, United Nations Development Program Director in Lebanon, declared that "the empowerment of women is a necessary condition to ensure that Lebanon will have a reasonably prosperous future. Mr. Mountain's remarks came in the course of a press conference convened to present the United Nation's 1996 Report on the State of the World's Population. The theme of the 1996 report is "Changing Places: Population, Development and the Urban Future," which dovetails with the world summit on human settlements held in Istanbul in early June. Citing the dire need for countries throughout the world to improve housing and quality of life in urban areas, Mountain called attention to the plight of the war-displaced in Lebanon, not only those made homeless during the 1975-1990 conflict, but also those forced to flee south Lebanon during the Israeli assault in mid-April. Mountain stressed the necessity of developing the rural areas of Lebanon. Efforts must be made by governmental and non-governmental bodies to keep people on their land by improving infrastructure, encouraging agriculture, and extending educational and vocational training to Lebanon's rural areas. In this light, he emphasized the importance of raising the position of rural women, especially by providing them with better educational services and resources.

Iraq's Torment Continues

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports that the international sanctions against Iraq have led to the deaths of 650,000 Iraqi children in the last five years. A recent FAO report indicates that in November 1995 alone, more than 8,000 Iraqi children perished as a result of shortages of food and medical supplies. According to the British journal *Torture* (Vol. 5, No. 3, 1995), the deteriorating situation in Iraq is causing irreparable harm to the Iraqi family structure and placing unbearable stress on Iraqi women.

TAHTAL-MIJHAR *Relationships: Young Men and Women*

By Ghena Ismail

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World has been organizing meetings for young people for several months. These young people, who are collectively known as the Friends of IWSAW, are students from different Lebanese universities such as LAU, AUB, St. Joseph University and the Lebanese University. What united this group of students was their enthusiasm for humanitarian and social issues. To share their concerns with a wider audience, the Friends came up with the idea of a talk-in program which was given the title, *Tahtal-Mijhar* ("Under the Microscope"), which had the following objectives:

1. To provide a platform for young people, men and women alike, to voice their concerns, problems and questions in an informal but structured educational setting.
2. To become aware of the existing values and norms of our society.
3. To help IWSAW develop closer links with members of the younger generation.

The first symposium was held on June 6, 1996 and examined



Dr. Mona Fayad

the topic "Relationships between Young Men and Women in Lebanon Today". The discussion was moderated by Ghena Ismail, IWSAW staffer and *Al-Raida* Assistant Editor, and was attended by the Friends of IWSAW and students from various Lebanese universities. The guests of the symposium were Dr. Muna Fayyad and Dr. Nabih Eid. Dr. Fayyad studied applied psychology at the Sorbonne University, is a professor at

the Lebanese University, and has made many socio-psychological studies and publications. Dr. Eid studied family medicine at AUB, completed his higher studies in physio-psychological problems, and is now a professor at LAU. He has also practiced medicine since 1980 in Beirut.

The discussion was divided into three main parts. The first part focused on the beginning of relationships. A video report prepared by the Friends of IWSAW, and

which covered young people in the LAU, AUB, St. Joseph University, Lebanese University and the Arab University, revealed that it was the men who made the first move, and that traditionally the woman is looked upon as promiscuous if she dares to approach someone in whom she is interested. However, the majority of young men said that although tradition dictates such a scenario, most of them did not mind if a woman made it known that she is interested. A few even said they welcomed such a gesture and would feel relieved by it. The response from young women was different. There was much distrust on the part of young women about men's acceptance of their assertiveness. Most of them argued that young men pretend to be open-minded, but in reality a man looks down on any young woman who approaches him. Thus, women do not feel encouraged to make the first move.

The two psychologists explained that the fear on the part of the Lebanese young women was only understandable. Dr. Eid said that the girl needs to feel secure within her society in order for her to oppose traditions which dictate a certain scenario for the start of a relationship. Dr. Fayyad stated that Lebanese society is in a confused and rapidly changing state. It is neither Eastern nor Western in its belief system. There is much tension between forces of change and forces of tradition and perceived ideals that probably never existed. However, she observed that even though it is the man who often makes the first move in our society, he doesn't do so unless he is encouraged by the woman.



Dr. Nabih Eid

Within the framework of the beginning of relationships also, the game of "hard-to-get" was discussed. While some objected to the whole process and thought that when an adult wants to enter a relationship, he or she should need no stimulants or subterfuge, others thought it is part of the process of seduction. However, it was stated that very often this game is so over-played by the young women that it arouses disgust and confusion; the young man ends up not knowing whether the girl truly rejects him or is only playing



Audience members at the talk-in are amused by the comments of young people on a video report

games. Moreover, the "hard-to-get" game, if prolonged, establishes a poor basis for the relationship. The "thrill of conquest" becomes the ultimate aim of the man rather than knowing the girl herself.

The second part of the discussion focused on the goals of a relationship. The video report, prepared by friends of IWSAW, which also covered all of the universities of the first video report, revealed a difference between the definitions of young men and those of young women. While young men emphasized sex, entertainment or friendship, young women stressed the importance of emotional security for them and blamed the men for being 'unclear and evasive'. It is worth noting also that most respondents preferred not to state a certain goal for the relationship, for according to them, a relationship should develop spontaneously and naturally.

While Dr. Fayyad agreed that a relationship should develop spontaneously, Dr. Eid stressed that clarity is needed, because the girl cannot serve as a "field experience" for the man for the three years of college. He explained that once the man enters a relationship, he should be willing to discuss with the girl what is going on and where they are heading as a couple. Obviously, the definition of "clarity" varied from one person to another. While some identified it with a clear, stated definition right from the beginning, others took it for a general framework that might hold a number of possibilities.

It became clear throughout the discussion that age is a determining factor in the goal and nature of a relationship. While a girl can afford to play, or have an undefined rela-

tionship at the age of sixteen, she cannot do so any longer at the age of twenty-five. This was considered a key explanation for the failure of relationships between college students. "While a twenty-two year old girl is ready for marriage, a man of the same age or even three years older is probably not, because tradition allocates the financial responsibility to him if and when he chooses to marry."

Dr. Fayyad pointed that if marriage was not possible, we cannot disregard the emotional needs of either men or women. Dr. Eid commented that according to a study conducted by Masters and Johnson these emotional needs are instinctively the same for men and women. "Any difference in dealing with them is attributed to the socialization process." Dr. Eid explained that,

according to Bell's study, while men replied that they can have sex merely for "pleasure", women consistently tied sex to "meaning".

The final part of the discussion addressed the following question: Within the social context in which we are living, which constricts and condemns any woman who opposes tradition, how should the young woman behave?

Dr. Fayyad stated that the woman needs to decide for herself what she wants to do. She should not bother herself by trying to figure out how the man will perceive her behavior. "Man's perception should not be the criterion for woman's behavior or self-esteem."

Also, it was stated by one of the participants that the woman should choose right from the beginning a man from a similar background. If she is a conservative woman, for instance, she should not go out with a man who is liberal. This would eliminate many of the problems that may arise later in a relationship.

Finally, the conclusion was that the success of any relationship largely depends on how it begins and the basis on which it is founded. Although every couple are free to set their own rules, certain characteristics such as honesty, clarity, knowing what one wants and respecting what the other may want in addition to understanding one's own capacities and limitations can certainly account for the success of any relationship.

The next discussion session of *Tahtal-Mijhar* will take place in October and it will tackle the relationships between young people and their parents.

LET'S TALK ABOUT SEXUALITY

By Ghena Ismail

On March 22, 1996 the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World hosted a lecture about sexuality by Dr. Marie-Therese Khair Badawi, a clinical psychologist, professor of psychology at St. Joseph University, and author of a book about the repressed desire and sexual life of Lebanese women.

Dr. Badawi started her lecture by saying that sexuality is being discussed more frequently in Lebanon in the mass media and even in schools. However, it is always placed within the context of marriage and procreation. She explained that we learn to repress our sexual desires and to view them as being "shameful" from childhood onwards. Parents severely discourage their children from exploring their bodies; when caught touching their sexual organs, children are immediately scolded. She added that many of the children's and young people's queries about sex are often disregarded. Thus, ignorance develops and feelings of guilt in association with this "ambiguous" subject prevail.

Among the issues that are engulfed with much superstition in our society is masturbation. Dr. Badawi asserted that masturbation is part of the norm of self-exploration and self-knowledge. The only time it becomes problematic is when it is used as an alternative to developing relationships with others. Another issue that Dr. Badawi discussed was the importance of apprenticeship in sexual relationships. She explained that sex is not mechanical, and that for a couple to reach sexual fulfillment they need time to get used to each other's bodies and to discover the erogenous zones.

Dr. Badawi thinks that the public needs to be better educated about issues related to sex, and that sex should not be associated with guilt and limited within the framework of marriage only. However, she simultaneously believes that sexual desires have to be restricted within a certain defined framework. This framework necessitates that we understand the following:

First:
We are not supposed to have sex with the people

with whom we are closely related, such as parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, *etc.*

Second:
In light of the above, we should develop a new ethical meaning for sex. This meaning should develop independently of any preconceived ideas or stereotypes about sex. The conditions of this new ethical code are:

- 1) Rehabilitating our bodies, *i.e.*, we should give our sexual desires their due respect.
- 2) Respecting the body, *i.e.*, we have to respect our bodies and the bodies of others as well. We should not place ourselves or our partners in relationships of unequal power in which an individual is used as a means to an end, *i.e.*, to satisfy sexual needs.
- 3) Responsibility. When I enter a relationship with an individual, I should bear the consequences of my words and actions, *i.e.*, if I tell a person that I love him or her, I can not, two hours later, tell someone else that I love him or her.

Dr. Badawi concluded that the adoption of these ideas does not mean that one can attain a sexual utopia, for there is no ultimate knowledge about sex. She explained that we know from Freud that "sexual desire is directly linked to feelings of inferiority and thus it can never fully actualize itself." However, what Dr. Badawi aims at is having all the characteristics related to sex liberated from any preconceived ideas in order to make these characteristics more humane.

Following the lecture was a discussion between Dr. Badawi and the students. Very few of the students were willing to express their thoughts or to openly present their fears. The majority still feel reluctant to talk about the issue of sexuality in public, despite the problems that they may be experiencing. The fact that many of young people desperately need to discuss the issue of sexuality with someone knowledgeable was clearly illustrated at the end of the discussion session. As soon as the session concluded, many students rushed to Dr. Badawi to ask her for the address of her clinic.

ARAB WOMEN IN THE FINE ARTS

The arts are not a primary topic of discussion or concern in the contemporary Arab world. Political, economic, social and ecological problems easily take precedence over cultural concerns during this period of tension, change and uncertainty in the Middle East. Lebanon, for instance, is a country intent on rebuilding its government, society and infrastructure after a long and devastating civil war. Palestinians are grappling with a variety of difficult political and economic challenges, Iraqis are struggling to survive day-to-day, while Algerians are living with the terror of civil war and Egyptians are striving just to earn a living in a perpetually depressed economy. None of these Arab countries is well-situated to support a thriving arts scene. Yet the arts do manage to survive and, in some cases, even to thrive. In fact, it is often during just such times of tension and uncertainty that artists, writers and intellectuals begin contemplating, questioning and reconsidering the world in which they live in new and creative ways.

Women artists in the Arab world have been posing questions and reshaping traditions through their painting, sculpture, poetry, music and theatrical performances for at least a century. Although some women artists continue ornamental and decorative traditions meant to please a wide audience, others create artworks which declare their own views and appraisals of society, culture and politics, often disturbing or jarring their audiences in unexpected ways.

In the spirit of enhancing understanding between Arab women and women throughout the world, the File section of this issue of *Al-Raida* provides glimpses of women artists and their works in the fields of painting, literature, ceramics, music, dance and theater. Although these women artists represent a variety of backgrounds and work in different media, they share some important common characteristics. First and foremost, nearly all of the women artists featured in this issue have grappled with the difficulties of balancing the requirements of their art with the demands of their families. Perhaps more so than American or European women artists, Arab women artists experience pronounced pressures and contradictions when they try to give their utmost to their arts while also fulfilling their culturally defined roles as wives and mothers. Hence, it is no surprise that most of the women we have interviewed for this issue are either divorced or have never been married. As Helen Khal noted nearly a decade ago in her excellent study of women artists in Lebanon, "as a designation, 'woman artist' contains within it a dual and alternate condition of status and role....Unlike her male counterpart for whom life and

work are one, the woman artist suffers from a conflict between her chosen career and the basic functions of her life as a woman, wife and mother....In her status as a woman, she is confronted with certain confining patterns of behavior...imposed by her society and its traditions. In her role as artist, on the other hand, she is offered an existence of her own creation, a private identity freed from predetermined limitations." (1)

Another characteristic shared by the women featured in this File section is their deep need to pursue their chosen art. They speak of this need in terms of a "call" to create. Each of these women has faced conflicts — with herself, her family, her society — as she has chosen personal aspirations over traditional authority. The striving after honesty and integrity of expression demonstrated by these Arab women artists may explain the strong, direct and unabashedly emotional character of their art work. Whereas many contemporary American and European art works (whether executed by men or women), are characterized by a cool, distanced and ironic stance generally described as "post-modern", the art work of Arab women is intimately engaged with the honest expression of emotions and sentiments.

A recurring theme which echoes throughout this File section is that, in Arab women's artistic creations, truth is beauty and beauty is truth. The aesthetic impact is to be found not so much in the design, colors or composition of elements, but in the feelings art expresses and inspires. All the women artists we have featured are involved in a passionate struggle to experience, know, express and defend the truths of their lives. As such, they are engaged, directly and indirectly, in transforming the collective cultural consciousness of Arab society. Arab women artists are truly pioneers in their professional and personal lives. Anyone who wants to know where Arab culture and society is heading in the next century would do well to follow their progress.

Laurie King-Irani
Editor-in-Chief

Endnotes

(1) Helen Khal, *The Woman Artist in Lebanon* (Beirut: The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1987), pp. 21-22.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

by *Hind Al-Soufi Assaf*,
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Academy of the Fine Arts

Prior to the Middle Ages, history did not record the names of many individual artists, whether men or women. Women began to be known as artists only towards the end of the sixteenth century. During this period, women dealt primarily with subjects such as still lifes or portraits, which were considered to be subjects for less talented artists. In the Orient, meanwhile, history records a few names of women calligraphers active in Northern Africa during and after the Middle Ages. Women's artistic creativity in this era was restricted mainly to tapestry and embroidery, which were considered crafts rather than fine arts.

Women artists in the Arab world did not achieve fame until the 20th century. In the West, however, Artemisia Gentileschi gained early recognition for her artistic talent, and her fame eventually surpassed Italy, her home country, to reach all of Europe. Artemisia dealt with subjects that no women had ever dealt with before, and thus succeeded in capturing the attention of a wide audience. The audience of that era was intrigued by erotic and violent themes, and Artemisia's work focused on Judith, the biblical heroine who saved her people by murdering the Ashourian leader. Through her art, Artemisia is said to have expressed her own urge for revenge upon her teacher, who allegedly had raped her when she was fifteen years old. She chose the brave character of Judith to express the inner drama of her own life; blood dominated all of her paintings.

In order to understand Arab women's role in the fine arts, we must first understand the historical context of the arts in the Arab world. Here, we shall limit our focus to sculpture and drawing. We will first survey the Arab plastic arts movement from the end of the nineteenth century up until today, and then we will address the Arab woman's contribution to the arts during this period of time. In the second section, we will shed light on women's qualitative impact on the field of art, noting the relationship between



"Going Back", 1974, Oil on canvas. Jumana Hussein

feminine art and feminist art. In both sections, the comparison will concern the Lebanese art world, since we have more first-hand and scholarly information about art in Lebanon than in any other Arab country. The question which concerns us here can be summarized as follows: Does women's art exist in the Arab countries, and if so, what are the distinguishing characteristics of this art?

Plastic arts, in the western sense of the term, did not appear in the Arab world until relatively recently. In 1799,

Napoleon led a campaign to Egypt during which he was accompanied by French artists, some of whom may have had an impact on indigenous artists and crafts people. Later, artistic influences stemmed from the French occupation of Northern Africa and the impact of foreign missionaries who were sent to various Arab countries, most notably Lebanon. Following the occupation came mandatory rule, which resulted in the aesthetic acculturation of the local population. All of these factors led to a new Arab artistic awareness and creativity which was supported by the lively intellectual and academic atmosphere during the Arab Renaissance. An indigenous Arab modern art tradition began to emerge in Cairo, Baghdad and Beirut, especially in the 1950s.

The traditional arts inherited from Islamic civilization are predominant in the Arab countries. However, this art tradition began to stagnate during the Ottoman period. Thus, a cultural vacuum was waiting to be filled. Of all of the Arab countries, Lebanon in particular was open to the influence of various forms of Western art. However, the evolution of an independent and free art in the Arab World started only after Al-Khidawi Ismail's visit to France. Ismail was the first Arab to attempt the westernization of Eastern thought and art. Arab artists could not adopt all of modern art, though, because many of its themes were culturally unacceptable in the East. Hence, Arab artists were primarily interested in acquiring the technical classical skills from the West. Since Arab art was constrained by a cultural heritage that opposes mimetism, as well as by a conservative social ethic, the first generation of artists found themselves torn between the Western influ-

ence and the Eastern reality. Their mission was difficult, and unfortunately they failed to advance a form of art that had its own distinctive style.

The next generation of artists was more prepared to face modernist challenges. It was then that the Arab woman entered the field of art and changed her historical role from that of “model” to active artist. The Lebanese woman, who was especially eager to acquire the Western woman’s image, faced fewer difficulties than other Arab women. An important factor that enabled Lebanese women’s artistic development was the presence of universities and foreign missionaries.

The Turkish and foreign women in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq helped to advance the Arab Art Movement in the beginning stages. The efforts of these women coincided with Taha Hussein’s liberal ideas. Hence, it was a fertile era for artists, and many women artists became prominent in Egypt. Among them were Khadija Riyad, Jazibiyya Siri, Tahiyya Halim and Inji Efflatoun. In Syria, too, there were women artists who stood out, such as Josephine Rajer, Mnawwar Morly and Ramziyyeh Zunbarkji. Among the women in Lebanon who participated in an exhibition of works by pioneer artists in 1930 were Mary Haddad, Blanche Ammoun, and Gladys Shukeir. Mary Haddad held the first exhibition of works by an Arab woman artist in both Beirut and Paris. In Iraq, Madiha Omar, who had received her art education in Beirut, London and America, became very well known.

In Northern Africa, conversely, women’s participation in arts was relatively delayed. Among the pioneers were Radiya bint Al-Hussein and Khadija El-Azrak in Morocco. In Jordan, there were no prominent women artists before the 1940s. The Palestinians, however, had been active since 1948. In the Gulf, artistic development started with the arrival of Egyptian and Iraqi professors in the 1960s. Parents started to send their sons to study abroad and their daughters to the Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College), where

Fine Arts was a popular major.

The number of women artists gradually increased in many Arab countries, and several names became very well known in the 1960s. Among the prominent names in Lebanon were: Salwa Rawda Chocair, Nadia Seikali, Juliana Saroufim, Yvette Ashkar, Helen Khal, Etel Adnan, Mifriz Rawda, Destia Manoukian and Nicole Harfouche. In Syria, the leading women artists were Leila Naseer, Asma El-Fayyumi, Maysoun El-Jazairi and Khazima Ulwani. In Palestine, Leila Shawwa and Mona El-Saoudi were the most accomplished; while in Iraq, Leila El-Attar, Suad El-Attar, Nuha El-Radi, and Sajida Ulwan led the artistic scene. In the Gulf countries, Safiyya Bin Sakr of Saudi Arabia, Suad Issa Youssef of Kuwait, Badriyya Jassem and Wafika Sultan of Qatar stood out as pioneering artists, Tania Wehbe and Safiyya Abdul-Rahman of Egypt, Amina Farhat of Tunisia, Aisha Haddad of Algeria, and Latifa Tijani and Mariam Mizyan of Morocco were the leading women artists in North Africa.

It is not possible to mention the name of every Arab woman artist. Fortunately, though, we were able to find names of many artists in Dr. Afeef Bahnasi’s study, from which we can compile the following statistics:

A cursory reading of these statistics reveals the prominence of the Lebanese woman artist, followed by the Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian and Iraqi artists. However, this chart is not very indicative of reality because there are many women in the Gulf countries who studied art in Lebanon, Europe or America. It is very difficult to obtain information about them since the policy in their countries is not to document the names of women artists. In fact, during one of my visits to the commercial galleries in the Gulf, I was attracted by a contemporary painting. When I asked about the talented artist who did not sign his or her name on the canvas, the gallery’s owner whispered into my ear, “the artist is a Saudi woman.” Most of the colleges in the Gulf do not even offer a degree program in Fine Arts.



“Prison”, 1960, oil on canvas. Inji Efflatoun



Returning our focus to Lebanon, Helen Khal notes in her 1987 study that the percentage of active Lebanese artists is considered high not only in comparison to the other Arab countries, but also on the international level. In the same study, Khal reports that among the twelve most famous Lebanese artists, four are women. Moreover, most of the students entering Lebanese schools of art

are women. In fact, women art students outnumber men by a ratio of 3 to 1. According to the latest statistical study in 1996, the number of women joining the Lebanese Committee for Drawing and Sculpture is 82 members compared to 81 men members.

To explain this phenomenon, we must note the following factors:

- The Lebanese woman is not expected to earn her own living.
- Art allows the woman to express her feelings indirectly, without words.
- The Arab Renaissance encouraged women to educate themselves and to emphasize their equality with men.
- Western culture was more readily accepted by Arab women than by Arab men, especially Lebanese women.
- Initially, artists used to teach young women from wealthy families. With the advent of specialized colleges, the admission into art institutes was not difficult; it was considered a field suitable for those who were not qualified to enroll in serious majors such as law, medicine and engineering, and arts did not require a high school certificate. The Beirut College for Women also played a significant role in encouraging women to study art, as it attracted girls whose parents did not approve of co-education.
- The non-Lebanese Arab women, particularly the Palestinians, were very daring and ready to experiment with the plastic arts.
- The foreign cultural centers in Beirut offered venues for exhibition and were ready to support the local artists.
- According to Helen Khal, exhibiting art was easy in Lebanon because of the abundance of exhibition spaces and the fact that criticism was rather subjective.
- Arab art initially did not have a political dimension.

On the contrary, woman's art embraced and appealed to those people close to centers of political authority. Lebanese women played a significant role in advancing

and publicizing the arts, especially during the 1960s. Among those worth mentioning were Janine Rubeiz and Samia Tutunji. Rubeiz was the director of the Center for Art and Literature, and she actively encouraged the artists, eventually establishing a gallery. Amal Traboulsi is the owner of the gallery "*Epreuve d'Artiste*", and managed to maintain a high standard for art during and after the civil war. Helen Khal notes that one-third of Lebanese gallery owners were women, and reminds us that the Lebanese women have always been particularly active in the field of art.

However, one has to acknowledge the presence of daunting obstacles confronting women artists. Among these obstacles are:

- Family barriers, especially in the villages and remote areas. The Arab woman still suffers a lot in order to attain some freedom.
- It is difficult for a woman to devote herself to art since she has to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother. Hence she is caught in a conflict between modernism and the role set for her by the society.
- Our patriarchal society forbids women to feel equal to men in any domain, including the arts.

Khal cites a review of an exhibit before the war for its clear emphasis on the achievements of women artists: ".... Another observation is that the only local painters who succeed in being very good, and who have done interesting things and remain original, are the women. We say this without hesitation...." One must note, however, that it is very easy to gain the sympathy of Lebanese art critics and the media, especially if the artist is a woman, because criticism in the Arab countries is rather weak; it is more akin to a literary description than a rigorous scientific evaluation.

Nevertheless, most art critics have noted that the Arab woman artist does not fear experimentation. She does not shy away from new techniques, and indeed appears eager to try all the various styles. We point here to Seikali, who used mixed media, and to Choukair, who was the first woman to introduce abstract art to the Arab world.

Thus, Arab women artists were indeed pioneers in the field of the plastic arts. But was this art feminine or feminist? Arab women artists categorically refuse any differentiation between women's art and men's art. They believe that art is asexual; art is either good or bad, according to them. Women's use of the paint-brush is no different from the man's. While some women passionately express their feelings, some men use the paint brush very tenderly. Someone has said that men are draughtsmen while women are colorists; however this has been



"Tapestry", 1959-61, hand loomed wool.
Saloua Rowda Choucair

statistically disproved. In general, the Arab woman strives to translate her deepest feelings, which most often revolve around family and relationships. Women's drawings are more thematic than men's. Moreover, women are not as subject as men are to the weight of their cultural heritage. The woman tends to be unconventional and rejects all limitations on her liberal thought and aspirations for equality. She is not always convinced by those who call for a return to our traditional cultural inheritance. One cannot separate the reality of the Arab women's movement from the expression of the Arab artist. In Lebanon, for example, women's struggle was not a social and political movement, as it was in the West. The Lebanese woman was keen to imitate the Western woman in her appearance, but not necessarily in her behavior. One of the artists notes: "I would like to be a woman, but

to also have equal rights." Artist Juliana Seroufim says, "consciously, I want to portray a woman's world and how important love is to a woman. Few men understand the quality of love that a woman seeks."

"A woman should remain a woman" is woman's motto in Lebanon. The Lebanese woman tries to achieve her rights in a gentle manner. Helen Khal observed in her book that, "uniquely, the Lebanese woman has been able to utilize the path of the traditional woman to arrive." The Arab woman artist must work and struggle in order to have her skills acknowledged and appreciated in her own society. In art, the Arab woman has often chosen the abstract style, perhaps because it harmonizes with her indirect and subtle manner of tackling controversial issues. Yet, there are many women who present the Arab woman's concerns in a very daring and direct way. We conclude that the Arab woman artist has played a pioneering role in changing not only the art world, but also women's overall condition. However, the Arab woman's obligations as a wife and a mother still constitute obstacles to her artistic development and achievement. She has yet to attain prominence on the international level.

(Translated from Arabic by Ghena Ismail)

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Country	No. of Artists	No. of Women Artists
Egypt	193	15
Syria	150	8
Lebanon	73	14
Iraq	83	8
Jordan	28	6
Palestine	47	7
Libya	17	2
Sudan	14	1
Saudi	23	0
Kuwait	25	3
Bahrain	19	1
Emirates	11	0
Qatar	16	2
Tunis	46	2
Algeria	41	2
Morocco	63	3

AN ARTIST'S SEARCH FOR AN INTENSE SERENITY:

INTERVIEW

A Conversation with Painter Helen Khal

by Nada Awar



"Street boy", 1948, oil on canvas. Helen Khal.

From the large terrace at one end of Helen Khal's eighth-floor apartment is a view of the flat, blue lines of the Mediterranean, her muse. Though born to Lebanese parents in Allentown, Pennsylvania in the United States, it was only when she came to Lebanon as a young woman in the mid-1940s and discovered the remarkable quality of light here, its interplay with color and shape, that she decided to devote herself wholeheartedly to art.

I sit in her living room waiting for the cup of coffee she has kindly offered, and take the opportunity to examine the many paintings leaning against the walls, propped up on stands, or hanging, frameless, on one side of the room. The simple, horizontal blocks of color, as if growing out of one another on one canvas, are familiar, and represent the direction Helen Khal's work has taken for many years now. But one work in progress, a portrait, gives no hint

of any abstraction. It clearly depicts a man and a woman, blended into a background of myriad shades of blue, staring out at the viewer, seemingly timeless. I look from one canvas to the other and suddenly realize the similarities between them. There is a luminosity about both of them, visual as well as literal, expressed by the simplicity of their lines, that makes them appear light, almost weightless. At that moment, I see how abstract art, so often misunderstood by lay-people like myself, can contain representational meaning. It is just a question of looking intensely enough to find it. I first ask Helen whether she feels that the designation "women artists" is a valid one: is there so great a difference between women and men in the arts?

"In general," says Khal, "I don't believe this difference ought to be made. It is a kind of segregation. But it has been necessary because, historically, female artists have not received the recognition they deserve." Khal admits that biological differences between men and women could have an effect on the ways in which they approach their art. "Because of their basic, biological function, women are not psychologically and physically as free as men are to devote all of their time to art. They are also, as a result, more rooted in the earth than men, and they don't feel the need for transcendence through art as much as men do. Women can transcend themselves through child-bearing."

Helen Khal, the artist, is also a mother. Once married to the Lebanese poet Youssef Al-Khal, she has two grown sons, and asserts that if at any stage of their lives her relationship with them were compromised because of her art, she would drop the latter. "As a female artist, human relationships are more important to me than art," she says. "I don't think the same can be said for male artists." This is a point on which Khal may find disagreement with some young women artists in the West. For them, the struggle to make a living while devoting themselves to art usually precludes choosing a partner and having children while also actively pursuing a career in the arts.

The same does not seem to be true in Lebanon. In the introduction to her book, *The Woman Artist in Lebanon* (1987), Khal describes how, through research, she discovered that women artists in Lebanon, when compared with those in other Arab countries as well as the West, have played a leading role in terms of their numbers and the quality of their work. This might have something to do with the fact that, at least until recently, middle-class

women have not had to support themselves. Thus, Lebanese women could, quite literally, afford to spend their time drawing, painting, and sculpting. It is also true that the art arena in Lebanon exists on a much smaller scale than in Europe or North America. "Perhaps," says Khal, "if the competition became too stiff many of these young Lebanese women artists would drop out of the art world."

Like most Lebanese, Khal makes a distinction between Lebanon before the war and Lebanon now. She points out that just before the outbreak of the civil war, Lebanon had become an art center for the whole of the Middle East. It provided the forum for artists from all over the region to exhibit their work, as well as a setting in which to interact with one another. "Had things continued as they were, Lebanese artists could have had a much greater influence on the development of art in the Middle East. As things stand, however, I guess we will never know what the results of that influence might have been."

Does Khal feel that her work has had any effect on the work of other artists in Lebanon? "I think my work may have influenced some of them to an extent, in helping them move away from more complex compositions to a more simple approach," she says. Khal points out that Lebanese artists tend towards the expressionist style of painting, characterized by the use of lots of color and nervous energy in their work. This is characteristic of the abstract expressionist school of art in which the energy of the brush stroke and the quality of the color dominate shape and form.

"My work is different," says Khal. "I focus in on one solitary image, on the emotive power of color. I don't even want the brush stroke to show." The artist's choice, according to Khal, is between using a work of art as a means for self-expression, or using herself as the medium through which the different aspects of the work speak for themselves. "I dislike clutter and noise. I don't even like the wind." She shifts in her chair and looks closely at me. "I'm looking for serenity. Not calmness or dullness, but a serenity that is intense." She pauses for a moment. "There is a quotation from one of T.S. Eliot's poems that I love, it says 'at the still point of the turning world there is the dance'. I'm not sure exactly what those words mean, but it explains how I feel. I'm trying to find that still point where all the life and energy are, and I'm trying to find it through color."

Perhaps that lucidity has been arrived at through the synthesis of East and West, of complexity and simplicity, of what is dense and what is diaphanous, through the soul of an artist who is neither entirely Lebanese or entirely American. "I've lost my sense of national identity, or maybe I've gone beyond it," Khal muses. "This is one of

the inescapable truths of modern life," she continues. "People are moving out of strict notions of identity, and in doing so, they are having an effect on others. Artists who do this can encourage the freeing of society as a whole."

Although noting art's power to transcend social, national and cultural boundaries, Khal is quick to point out that attitudes in the West concerning Arab artists are still pre-



"Young girl", 1959, oil on plywood. Helen Khal.

dominantly patronizing and arrogant. Westerners expect artists from the Middle East to paint in an "Arab way", and they reserve notions concerning the universality of art as a language of expression for their own artists. That is why, explains Khal, it is very difficult for Arab artists to receive international recognition.

One gets the impression, however, that recognition, though it has been considerable, has never been a great priority in Helen Khal's life. She is the kind of artist whose work has represented only one of the many threads woven through a multi-faceted and rich life. She is also a woman who admits that it is only through time and experience that she has been able to understand the true meaning of her work. She describes this meaning as the ability "to create a presence that may be entered visually, and through that sense of sight, find respite from the jarring realities of a world in which serenity is hidden."

DISCOVERING AND NURTURING NEW TALENTS: *A Profile of Gallery Owner Amal Trabulsi*

By Wafa Stephan Tarnowski

*E*preuve d'Artiste, Amal Trabulsi's art gallery, is now 17 years old — give or take one or two years of closure during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the long civil war. Her gallery is a synonym for professionalism, quality and refinement, and reflects much of Trabulsi's character. Tall, dressed in muted colors, and speaking eloquently in muted tones, Trabulsi is a much admired and respected artistic entrepreneur who disguises a formidable will behind a charming smile.

Beginnings, however, were not easy for Trabulsi. She needed a lot of determination and stubbornness to arrive where she is today: owner of a solidly-booked gallery where painters queue up for two years or more for a space and an opportunity to exhibit. Not a professional painter herself, but rather, a lover of art since childhood, Trabulsi says that she never imagined that one day she would be so totally involved in the art world. She began her involvement in art by studying architecture at the ALBA (the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts) in the 1960s. At the age of 18, she interrupted her college studies to elope with her fiancé in order to live a conventional bourgeois life in one of the more refined districts of Beirut. At the time, she says, it was the only means of escape from home and from the influence of a very domineering father who never wanted her to work, as well as the only way to live with the man she loved. She regrets her parents' narrow-minded attitude which pushed her to take such a hasty decision at such a young age. Although she does not regret the marriage or the children, she now regrets the limited choices available to her at the time, and believes that if she had been permitted to live out this love affair without having to marry the man, it would have saved her a divorce.

"When I left home," Trabulsi recounts, "I had no idea of what life was all about, nor did I really know what I wanted. I was in love; I wanted to live this love, so I had to get married. Soon after marriage, I began taking correspondence courses in Fine Arts from the *Ecole Universelle de Paris*, a very serious school with excellent professors who weren't available in Lebanon at the time. I went to Paris once a year to sit for my exams, and it was a very positive experience for me overall. It allowed me to work hard on myself and by myself. I did all of this while having children and raising them. I had one in the womb, one in the stroller, and one playing in the park, yet

I continued to study."

When the Lebanese war broke out in 1975, Trabulsi used her artistic abilities to help her husband run a children's clothing factory. "I used to design clothes and be responsible for the workshop. We had 150 women who worked for us and they all depended on my creations. It was a big responsibility for me. I had to invent a new model for them every day, or else they didn't have any work. So, I took it as my personal responsibility to provide work for these women. I was continually impressed by the women's positive attitudes towards their work and their conscientiousness in performing their duties. They had to punch-in at 8:00 a.m., but they never left at 4:00 p.m. sharp if I still needed them. Never did they say, 'sorry; my work is done. I have to go now'." From this experience, Trabulsi became aware of the very docile and patient nature of Arab women, and realized how much they sacrificed for their families. She recalls this time of sharing with these women with fondness.

As the war raged on, Trabulsi left for Europe with the children. "It was the first time I was alone in a foreign country. Suddenly, I didn't have to see the same films, the same exhibits, as everyone else. This trip to Europe made me realize that I was too closed-up within myself, and that I had made too many concessions." A clash followed, then a divorce. Trabulsi returned to Lebanon, a 34 year-old single mother of three teen-aged children. It was at this time that she met Martin Giesen, a Canadian professor and painter who was giving courses in art history at the American University of Beirut. Trabulsi recalls working on projects at the AUB Fine Arts Department while bombs were falling just outside the campus.

Dr. Giesen's contract with AUB had come to an end, and the only way that he would be able to remain in Lebanon would be to open an art gallery where he would introduce the Lebanese public to the works of famous international artists. Trabulsi, intrigued by the idea, agreed to become his partner. "During the war, decisions were often taken at the spur of the moment," she recalled. Giesen and Trabulsi travelled abroad to survey and buy works of some well-known international artists. They returned to Beirut, having spent all of their savings. For the opening night of the gallery, they did not even have enough money to buy good champagne, so they settled for the local variety, which was undrinkable.

That was in 1979, the year *Epreuve d'Artiste* was born. The gallery was located at that time in Clemenceau, a chic area of West Beirut. However, the war was still raging, and people were turning their backs on what was happening outside the safety of their immediate neighborhoods. In this atmosphere of insecurity and danger, the gallery did not receive a warm welcome. Trabulsi and Giesen discovered that an enormous gap existed between Lebanese and international tastes in art: the Lebanese wanted nostalgia, peaceful village landscapes and traditional sculpture and architecture. Giesen and Trabulsi realized that they had made the wrong wager, so they started to encourage young Lebanese artists to exhibit. To stay solvent, they were forced to sell off their valuable collection of foreign art, now worth a fortune, at very low prices.

By 1981, Beirut had become too dangerous a city for foreigners, so Giesen had to leave. Trabulsi bought up his share and started running the gallery alone. At this time, it had become extremely dangerous for people to cross the "Green Line" which divided Christian East from Muslim West Beirut, but Trabulsi made the crossing daily from her home in the East to the gallery in the West. "It became sort of a political statement for me," Trabulsi noted. "I was crazy; I crossed from Ashrafieh to Clemenceau, even under the bombs. If I took the Ring road on the way in, it might be closed by evening, in which case I had to take the port road, where I often was shot at by roof-top snipers."

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and Amal had to close the gallery for a year and a half. During this difficult time, artists were anxiously looking for galleries in which to exhibit. There was no one to take care of them, so Amal decided to open *Epreuve d'Artiste* No. 2, in a garage in Kaslik north of Beirut. She brought Muslim artists to this Christian enclave, and when some people reacted negatively to this confessional mixing and mingling, she simply pretended not to understand. The gallery in Kaslik was very successful. Each new exhibit was a "happening," she says. Not many people could

have organized or enjoyed such an art event at the time, so they bought art to feel alive and to take some pleasure in life and beauty amidst a world steeped in death and destruction.

Finally, at the end of the war, Trabulsi opened *Epreuve d'Artiste* No. 3, situated in a nicely renovated basement at Rue Sursock in Ashrafieh, where life is punctuated by regular fortnightly exhibitions, opening every other Tuesday night. The exhibits include art work by young and old, women and men, new talents discovered and nurtured by Trabulsi, as well as famous names which bring prestige and a faithful clientele. Each year before Christmas, Trabulsi organizes an event she calls "*Les Artistes s'Amusent*," in which artists forget their usual medium of expression and let their imaginations run wild. They paint on furniture, ceramics, curtains, cushions, and make whimsical jewelry or sculptures. The resulting art works are put on display for sale, and many Lebanese purchase them for that special present for Christmas or New Year's Eve. Recently, Trabulsi has used the top floor of a war-damaged cathedral in the center of town to stage a very special painting exhibit, featuring special lighting of the cathedral from within and without, to the accompaniment of religious music. The opening night was indeed a memorable and moving event for the Beirut art scene.



Amal Trabulsi near a painting by one of her protégés

When asked about the artists she discovered, developed and encouraged, Trabulsi mentions at least a half a dozen reputable names: Jean-Marc Nahas, Ali Shams, Youssef Aoun, Robert Helou, Rima Amyuni (see her painting on the cover art of *Al-Raida* No. 68, 1995), Maya Eid and Ghada Saghieh. Commenting on why Lebanon has more renowned male than female artists, Trabulsi opines that it is not for any lack of talent among women artists, but rather, stems from the fact that women lose their single-mindedness, focused energy and time once they get married and have children. Their emotions and energies become divided between children and art work, whereas men, whether married or not, still have time, space, and focused energy to devote to their craft. Male artists in

Lebanon do not have to worry as much as women do about children and domestic matters, because women protect men from being disturbed. Men, therefore, end up giving their utmost to their art, while women leave behind the studio and retreat into the inner world of home and hearth to attend to others' needs. Trabulsi notes that one of the few Lebanese women artists who demonstrate the single-minded urge to create and devote her all to art is Rima Amyuni. The fact that Ms. Amyuni has not yet married or become a mother seems to prove Trabulsi's hypothesis.

One of Trabulsi's favorite women artists is Mary Kelly, an American painter who lived and worked in Lebanon in the 1960s, and who revolutionized many local artistic norms, either by reducing the shape of human bodies to their most linear expression, or by mixing cosmic subject matter with very minute, quotidian figurative details. She had the gift of moving the viewer, according to Trabulsi.

When asked whether she herself is still painting, Trabulsi responded that she has stopped because she is too much of a critic and self-criticism tends to inhibit

creativity. Instead, she leaves creativity to her protégés, with whom she has developed marvelous relationships of support and friendship, just like a family. Trabulsi is quite optimistic about the future of painting in Lebanon. She feels that the Lebanese have a lot to give; they are neither lacking in talent, potential, nor vision, and some have even been recognized and honored by Arab museums. She noted in particular the work of Youssef Aoun, whose style is reminiscent of the Spanish painter Tapies.

Trabulsi dreams of having enough money to be able to exhibit only the painters she herself believes in, but at present, she must make some concessions in order for the gallery to survive economically. Concerning her opinion of Arab feminists, it seems to coincide with her own self-appraisal: "It is a woman who has no violence in her discourse about men, who is not resentful about anything in her own life. It is a person who has maintained her femininity, her respect for men, and who has not tried to belittle them. However, if feminist principles are the same in the East as in the West, the attitude is different and the means to arrive at the same end are different, too."

An announcement of a recent exhibition at Galerie Epreuve d'Artiste.

galerie
epreuve
d'artiste

NUHA AL-RADI

VERNISSAGE

MARDI 21 MAI 1996

18h00 - 21h00

L'EXPOSITION SE POURSUIVRA
JUSQU'AU SAMEDI 1 JUIN

LA GALERIE EST OUVERTE
DU LUNDI AU VENDREDI
10h00 - 13h30, 15h30 - 18h30
SAMEDI 10h00 - 13h30

GALERIE EPREUVE D'ARTISTE
108, RUE SURSOCK
IMM. LIVING - TEL : 01-201636



Nuha al-Radi, 1996 - huile sur bois - "L'Emira Khasthiyah"
نهى الراضي - زيت على خشب "الاميرة خاستكية"

Nuha al-Radi, 1996 - huile sur bois - "L'Emir Fakhrredine II"
نهى الراضي - زيت على خشب "الامير فخر الدين الثاني"

كاليري
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نهى الراضي

افتتاح

الثلاثاء ٢١ ايار ١٩٩٦

الساعة السادسة مساء

يستمر المعرض

الى السبت ١ حزيران

تفتح الكاليري

من الاثنين الى الجمعة

من الساعة العاشرة الى الواحدة والنصف

ومن الساعة الثالثة والنصف الى السادسة والنصف

السبت من العاشرة الى الواحدة والنصف

كاليري ايبروف دارتيس

١٠٨، شارع سرسوق

ملك ليفينغ - تلفون: ٢٠١٦٣٦ (٠١)

CRAFTING HARMONY:

The Art Works of Jumana Sayegh

by Laurie King-Irani

A harmonious blending of materials, ideas and influences characterizes the art works of Jumana Sayegh. Her arresting multi-media pieces, which cannot be accurately described as either paintings, sculptures, tapestries, or pottery, since they combine elements of all of these genres, link east and west, urban and rural, tradition and modernity. Perhaps this harmonization of diverse and sometimes contradictory themes is not surprising, given the artist's childhood experience of living in more than one cultural context. Sayegh, who now lives in Cyprus with her two young daughters, grew up in Beirut in the 1960s and 1970s, the daughter of a Palestinian father and a British mother, both of whom are respected academics.

Sayegh remembers being drawn to colors and shapes as a small child. Her early fascination with patterns and colors gradually developed into a strong desire to explore the arts seriously. At the age of fifteen, Sayegh took her first formal art class—pottery lessons—at the Beirut studio of the Iraqi artist Nuha Al-Radi. Soon afterwards, while she was still a high school student, Sayegh took a pottery course at Beirut University College (now LAU) with the late Dorothy Al-Kazemi. Sayegh's delight in the texture and possibilities of clay convinced her to pursue further studies in the Fine Arts. "I suddenly realized that studying the arts would be very tempting for me. So, my mother made all the necessary inquiries at the British Council concerning the different art courses available in Britain. She also managed to convince my father that this was a serious course of study, at the end of which I would obtain a B.A."



In 1974, Sayegh began her university studies at Hornsey College of Art in Britain, where she had been accepted to begin a one-year foundation course. The following year, she began a four-year program of intensive study at Middlesex Polytechnic, where she focused on three-dimensional design, specifically ceramics. Sayegh also studied metal-working, woodwork, and photography while taking required courses in art theory and art history. Sayegh recalls these years fondly as a time of freedom

to explore creative possibilities with the help of generous and caring teachers who endeavored to give their students a solid grounding in the basics of art. Over the years, Sayegh has come to appreciate the importance of such a thorough educational background, and advises any talented young artist to take courses in various art media. "I believe an artist needs a basic foundation course, and preferably a specialization in a particular field, to allow the student to learn and experiment in an art environment before setting up his or her own studio."

After marrying a journalist and moving to Cyprus in the early 1980s, Sayegh began working in her own ceramics studio, where her fascination with clay grew and deepened. "Although I had many opportunities to work in other media while at art college, clay was my preferred medium. Clay combines so many different stages: the initial soft stage when you can make whatever shape you want by using a variety of techniques, such as slab, coil, or wheel-thrown pottery. Then there is the leather-hard stage, when you can stamp the clay, mark it, in-lay it, or incise and cut bits out to make intricate patterns. The dry stage is useful for sanding down unwanted areas. Finally, there is the firing stage, which, although quite nerve-racking, is also exciting and unpredictable."



Sayegh indicates that the greatest influence on her work has not been the creations of other artists, but rather, her travels throughout the Arab world, particularly Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia, where she has found inspiration in traditional architecture, arts and crafts. Her work shows influences from a variety of folk art media, not just pottery, but also textiles, jewelry, kilims, and architecture. The warm colors, earthy textures and rhythmic patterns of traditional arts and crafts are distinguishing characteristics of Sayegh's work. "One aspect of my work which has been increasingly interesting to me for several years is making pieces inspired by architecture; my aim is to build a whole village out of these house-facades that have balconies, windows and doors, and sometimes even stairs. Another theme in my work is closely associated with traditional village life and the textiles of the Arab world, particularly Palestinian embroidery and woven materials, such as kilims. I enjoy mixing textiles with ceramics both for the combination of colors and for the combination of textures. The softness of the textiles accentuates the hardness of the clay, and vice versa. Ideally, I would like my art works to convey a sense of harmony by merging clay with fabric. Color plays a key role in my work, especially in communicating emotions. We all experience different ideas and emotions when looking at a piece of art. If a person responds to some aspect of my work, be it the shapes, the colors, or the textures, that in itself is gratifying to me."

Since her art work combines work-intensive and time-consuming media, such as fired ceramics and highly detailed embroidery panels, Sayegh cannot produce enough works to exhibit every year. She tries to exhibit every other year, and is pleased that she is able to sell

"My aim is to build a whole village out of these house-facades that have balconies, windows and doors."



"Looking back at my college days, I can't recall too many differences in the ambitions of male and female art students."



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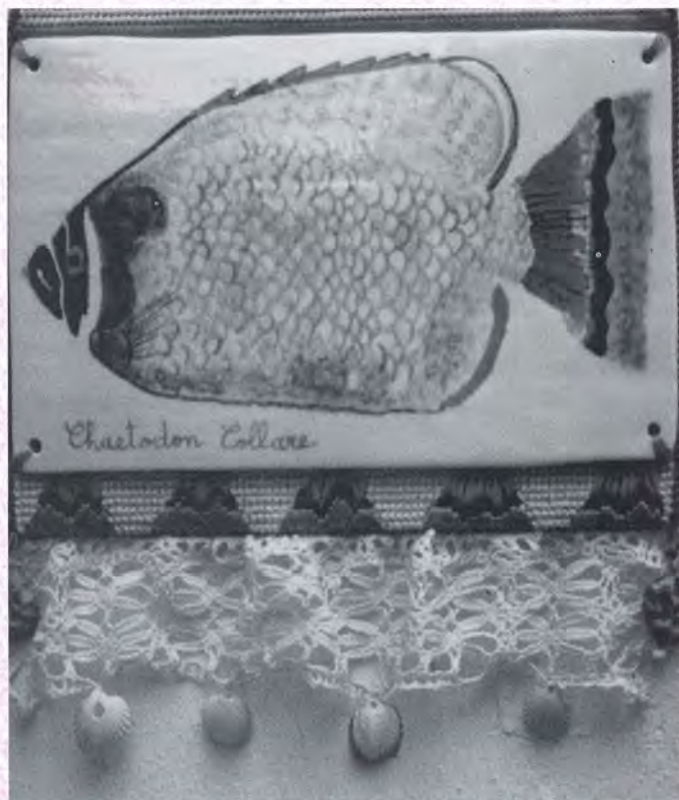
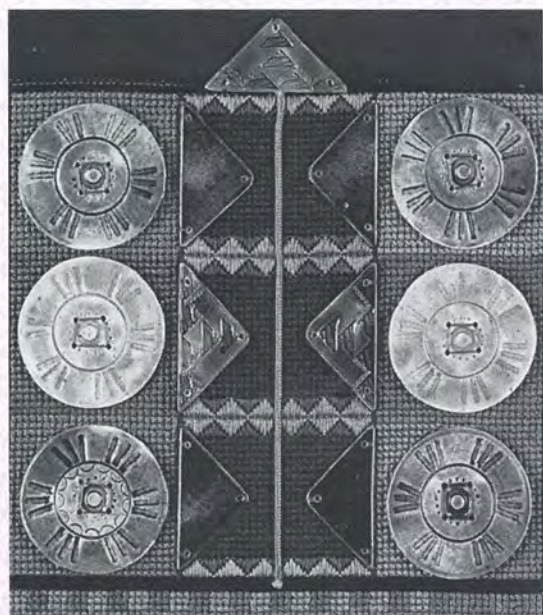
about half of her work. Her greatest challenge as an artist is being able to devote the required attention to both her work and her children following her recent divorce. "My role as a single parent definitely interferes with the time and energy I need to dedicate to my studio work. I work in the mornings while my children are at school; but if they have to stay home due to an illness, then I cannot put in the same amount of hours or concentration."

When asked whether the themes and media of her work reflect her gender, Sayegh suggested that they do. "I suppose my gender has influenced my artistic expression to some degree—the scale of the work, for instance. I tend to produce small, detailed pieces and I shy away from large constructions. As for my choice of colors and my mixing of textiles (embroidery) and ceramics, people tend to label my work as being 'decorative' and thus, 'feminine'. It is hard to imagine what sort of art I would produce if I were a man. Perhaps the house facades, but maybe not the embroidered pieces, although there are men who embroider and work in textiles, but their scale is usually larger and their work more abstract. Looking back at my college days, I can't recall too many differences in the ambitions of male and female art students. Most of us planned to set up our own studios, produce either exhibition or commercial work, and a few wanted to teach."

Sayegh feels that art can and should have a role beyond the studio, gallery or museum. In addition to adding beauty to our lives, art can also affect our social and political worlds. Sayegh's recent pieces featuring the flora and fauna of the Mediterranean Sea bespeak a concern with

ecological issues and a subtle warning about the increasing pollution of the waters and shorelines of the Mediterranean. If the dangers of this pollution are not checked, we may some day live in a world in which the Mediterranean's sea life will be visible only in museums. Sayegh related that "art, when used correctly, can play a powerful role in influencing social and, to a certain extent, political structures because of its visual impact on people. Images projected to a wide audience can make a stronger impression on the public than words can; images remain in the mind a lot longer. For instance, in January 1994 I saw a poignant exhibition of photographs taken mainly in Somalia and Bosnia by three professional photographers who lost their lives in Mogadishu in 1993. Those photographs commanded our attention because they offered rare glimpses into the minds and the hearts of the subjects. We could suddenly understand the events, the despair, the horror, or the hope of a people suffering the brutality of war or the terror of mass starvation. These pictures caused a reaction and elicited compassion around the world. This illustrates how the art of photography can be both informative and meaningful, even to the extent of influencing or altering social and political structures."

Although Sayegh's work does not explicitly address dramatic political issues or pressing social questions, its refreshing naturalness, startling mix of materials, and engaging moods immediately catch the viewer's attention, encouraging him or her to ponder anew the magic and comfort of harmony in a world of discord.



INTERVIEW

CALLED TO DANCE

A Conversation with Dany Bustros

by Laurie King-Irani and Ghena Ismail

“No art suffers more misunderstanding, sentimental judgment, and mystical interpretation than the art of dancing”

—Suzanne Langer,
American Philosopher (1)

The art of dance is ephemeral, ambiguous and magical. Unlike poetry, which can be recorded and recited again and again, or painting, which is an enduring visual image of an act of creative imagination, the dance exists only in the here and now, shifting, changing, inspiring and dissolving before our very eyes. Although we can preserve dance performances through elaborate notation systems, such as Labanotation, or film them for later study or enjoyment, the resulting captured version of the dance is an impoverished facsimile of the actual experience. In watching a dance performance, we are engaged and responsive. Our attention, applause and reactions influence the dancers, who give back to the audience according to what they receive. The magic of dance can only be experienced at the moment of its realization.

Because the medium of dance is the human body, dance's status and value depends to a great extent on cultural conceptions and attitudes concerning the body and physicality from one society to another. In cultures which assign negative characteristics to the physical world in general and the human body in particular, the dance can generate intense controversies and passionate reactions. Since dancing bodies may invoke sensual images associated, however tenuously, with sexuality, many societies have developed dance traditions and genres which may only be performed and viewed by members of the same gender (2). Unfortunately for true artists of dance, unsavory connotations and images have become associated with dancing and dancers in many societies. Just forty years ago in the United States, a young woman hoping to pursue a career in ballet or modern dance would probably have been dissuaded by her parents out of a concern for her reputation. In contemporary Lebanon, such negative attitudes towards dance still hold sway. Performing dances in public, especially classical oriental dancing (misnamed “belly-dancing” in the West), is

not considered an appropriate activity for respectable young ladies. Any young woman enchanted by this art form and inspired to perform it will face significant obstacles in Lebanese society.

No one is more familiar with these attitudes and obstacles than Dany Bustros, the premier artist of oriental dance in Lebanon. Her personal journey in dance and life have been as compelling and dramatic as any dance she has performed on stage. Born to the highly respected Greek Orthodox de Bustros family, Bustros realized early on that she had an overwhelming desire to dance. “Even when I was just a small child, I knew instinctively that I would be a dancer. I studied ballet, modern, jazz, tap and ballroom dancing, but it was always oriental dancing that I loved the best. I didn't study this style of dancing formally, though; I didn't have to. It was already in my blood. I just absorbed various styles, and from them, I developed my own style. In addition to dancing, I also studied music, painting and sculpture, and showed some talent in those arts, too, but dancing was always my real art.” Bustros also enjoys performing flamenco dance and tango. She has also acted professionally on the stage in Lebanon in Arabic and French language theatrical productions of *Carmen* and *play by Moliere*.

Bustros acknowledged that the characters she most enjoys playing on the stage share a basic trait with the dance styles she loves best: passion. “All my dancing is very passionate, because that is a part of my own character. Although the person I become on the stage, as a dancer or as an actress, is a very different persona from myself, the basic message I am trying to impart is the passion and suffering of a woman, her need to express all of the feelings that are inside of her.” Bustros is equally passionate about her need to dance: “When I am dancing, I am giving a lot of myself from within. I don't just give the audience a display of dance steps—steps are just steps, all over the world—I give the audience my emotions. It's more than just entertainment. I am showing them every facet and dimension of my soul through the medium of dance; I play many characters in the course of one performance. For me, feelings are the most important element in the dance. Through subtle gestures, I try to communicate complex sentiments that tell a story about a character or an event. So, as I see it, dance is really a form of theater. When I am dancing on stage, I am not Dany



Dany Bustros in performance

Bustros; I am a character who is feeling joy, anxiety, love, fear, anger or sorrow.”

Commenting on the special chemistry between dancer and audience during performances, Bustros said that one of the greatest joys she experiences as a performer comes when she has totally captivated her audience. “A good performance for me is characterized by the reaction of the audience, more than by my own appraisal of my technique. When I dance, the audience is completely astonished and quiet; they are entirely with me and under my control. There is a sense of having power over the audience, which every good per-

former knows. When I am on stage, I experience a sense of strength, power and control that I rarely feel in my everyday life. Conversely, when the performance isn’t going well, for whatever reason, the dancer knows it; she can feel that the audience is not with her, that she doesn’t have them in her hands.” Bustros distinguished between the experience of performing oriental dance before a small, immediate audience in an intimate setting, such as a night club, and playing a role in a play on a stage in a large theater. “It is an entirely different experience, from my point of view. In a night club there is a lot more pressure on the dancer because the audience is so close and immediate. There is just you, the audience and your movements. If all goes well, it is a great feeling, but if anything goes wrong, there is no escape! On the stage, on the other hand, there is distance between the performer and the public, and the lighting makes it hard to see the faces of the audience; I know they are there and responding through hearing, not through sight. Also, in a theatrical performance, all the pressure and responsibility is distributed among various people; there is a set structure in which I play my part; rarely is there a chance to improvise and take risks.

I am less afraid when performing in a play on the stage, since I am not the only person who bears responsibility for the success of the performance, but I sometimes miss the intimacy and challenge of dancing in the nightclub setting. I have decided not to perform at all in nightclubs any more, however, because the business aspects have become deplorable and too difficult to deal with. My current show is a good compromise: it is a theatrical stage production that involves a variety of styles and genres of dancing.”

Discussing the preparations required for a good performance, Bustros emphasized that she feels it is more important to prepare herself emotionally and spiritually than physically. “Before I go on to dance, I am always very nervous; no matter how many times I perform, or how successfully, I must always conquer my fear before going on stage. I usually lay down and have a few quiet moments to concentrate and pray before performing. I listen to the sounds of the audience, of the orchestra warming up, and then the strains of the national anthem. Then, I pray, ‘Jesus, stay with me!’ I am afraid each time I go on stage not of failure, or of doing the wrong step, but because I feel I have such a responsibility to the audience.”

When asked why many people do not take oriental dance seriously as a form of art, Bustros related that she is always angered and saddened whenever she confronts negative attitudes towards oriental dancing in Lebanese society. There is no question in her mind that

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oriental dance is a fine art requiring serious study, technical refinement, and great sensitivity to music and emotion. As for those who view oriental dancing as something vulgar or crass, she emphatically responds: "That is wrong! Maybe people who feel this way about oriental dance have never yet seen a real dancer performing this art form in the proper manner. There are many so-called "artists" dancing today who take the easy way; they learn a few simple steps, buy an alluring costume, and market themselves as "oriental dancers," but they do not know anything. They do not realize how very difficult it is to express a wide variety of sentiments. They don't know the proper way to turn or what to do with their hands, faces, or eyes. All they know how to do is to move their hips and chests in a vulgar way. They can in no way be compared to great dancers like Nadia Gamal or Samia Gamal. These dancers aroused more than physical desires in their audiences; they inspired an admiration for a refined form of femininity, a graceful, restrained sensuality and a sense of joy. Too many of the supposed dancers performing today appeal to the basest instincts of their audiences, who are mostly men. Most of my fans are women. I don't dance for men. Men might admire my dancing, the way they would admire a girl with a nice figure wearing a bathing suit, but that is not what oriental dance is all about. When I am dancing, I want people to see and admire my dance, not my body. Most men go to see oriental dance just to see the way a woman moves her hips. It is a vulgar approach to the art. People who approach oriental dance this way, whether as performers or viewers, do the art a disservice; they don't realize that most of the artistry of oriental dance is in the hands, the arms, and especially the eyes. Feelings are the important thing; body movements are not done for the sake of titillation, but for the purpose of conveying the meanings of the feelings behind the dance. Dancing is not a matter of good physical conditioning and sex appeal as much as it is a matter of being honest about the nature and depth of your feelings, about being willing to experience depths of emotion, and then, in the context of the performance, being able to reconstruct and express these emotions in an artful and compelling way."

Bustros reiterated her philosophy of oriental dance as she recounted the various influences that have shaped her as a performer. "Nadia Gamal had the greatest impact on me. Her technique was excellent and she was a true professional. She continued dancing beautifully until she was in her mid-50s; in fact, her dancing was even deeper and more moving, her eyes more expressive, at 53 than at 23, because she was dancing her life experiences." Bustros, too, dances her own life experiences. Although the lovely, talented and intelligent daughter of a privileged and noble family, life has

not always been easy or pleasant for Bustros. She has been through divorce, rejection of her profession by members of her family, and worst of all, the loss of her son, an only child, who died in a freak drowning accident several years ago at the age of sixteen. Bustros acknowledges that all of these difficult experiences have had an impact on her art. "The way I have lived my life, the events I have suffered through, have of course influenced my dancing. A journalist once told me that when I dance, I have a special 'aura' about me that communicates a sense of sorrow and misery. He said that because of this, my dancing comes across as something deep and profound. I think that if an artist has suffered, it will come across in his or her art. If one goes through an ordeal, he or she has to become more aware of his or her internal reality, and thus, he or she can empathize with others who have suffered. For me, the loss of my son was a real blow. It was such a big shock that it took me a long time to absorb it. After it happened, I couldn't grasp the enormity of the loss, the fact that he was really gone. Then the shock really hit. I stayed along for several months. I took a lot of tranquilizers and stopped dancing. I didn't want to see anybody, and I couldn't bear to see children. Later on, I traveled a lot; I think I was trying to run away from the reality of what had happened. When I returned to Lebanon, a friend, a French film director who was visiting the country, heard about my whole story. He made a special effort to come to see me, and asked me, 'why are you destroying yourself? Do you think you can escape? Go, dance, and begin your career again. Dance through your feelings.' It was good advice. I feel that I am dancing now for my son, George. Once, when I was in the depths of my depression and taking tranquilizers, I fell asleep with a lighted cigarette. It was a couple of months after George had died, but I suddenly had the strongest sensation that he was waking me up. I heard him say 'Be careful with that cigarette, Mom!', and I immediately woke up and said 'Thank you, George!'. I didn't get up; I just lay there and felt my son's spirit so close to me. That was the first time I felt his presence, but there have been others since. I know he is there, and that I can count on him. Now, I want to dance for George; I dance for him because I know that he loves the way I dance."

One of Bustros's greatest struggles as an artist has been reconciling her family background, as well as her family members, with her choice of a career in the performing arts. She relates that her mother has finally accepted her choice, and even attends and enjoys her performances. Her brothers, however, are still quite cool about her prominence as an oriental dancer. "The idea of dancing, of being a dancer, had long been a dream of mine. I was always going to my room, shutting the door, and dancing for hours on end all by

myself. I kept asking myself, 'Why am I, a daughter of a noble family, a dancer!?' If I were anyone else, from any other family or background, it would have been so much easier. Because of social constraints and conventions, I felt I couldn't pursue my dream to the utmost, so I held back. As I grew older, I felt dissatisfied, I didn't want to work in a regular career or a profession, there was something missing in my life, something I couldn't or wouldn't acknowledge. Since I wasn't fulfilling myself, I started destroying myself. I overate and abused my body. But whenever I had a chance to dance, at parties, gatherings, or by myself at home, I did so. Finally, I accepted an offer to dance publicly and professionally for the first time at the Jerash Festival in Jordan in 1987. It changed my life. After that experience, I committed myself to being a professional dancer and pursuing a serious career. I didn't consult my family about this decision, and initially they were not very happy with me. My mother, brothers and even some of my friends wouldn't come to see my shows in the beginning. When I invited them, they would come grudgingly, just to humor me, saying, 'well, we don't approve of oriental dancing, but since it's Dany...' And then, after they actually saw me dance, most of them were astonished. They could clearly see the difference between my dancing and the vulgar dancing done by people who call themselves 'artists'. My mother, who initially refused to come see me dance, is now one of my biggest fans. She finally came to see my show after hearing her friends tell her for years 'your girl is a phenomenal dancer! When she is on stage, her entire being is dancing, even her eyebrows and fingernails!' So, because of her friends' opinions, she came, and saw that it was not vulgar, and she realized that she didn't have to be concerned about what people will say about us or our family because I am dancing on the stage.

"Here in the East, this is always a big concern — the judgment of others. I am living only once, and I want to realize my dreams. It's my fight. If I don't dance, I will be sick, literally and figuratively. I firmly believe that people are called to be what they were meant to be. For me, it was a call to be a dancer. I have to follow this call, no matter what."

Endnotes

(1) Suzanne Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 174.

(2) Anya Peterson Royce, *The Anthropology of Dance* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982).

"The basic message I am trying to impart is the passion and suffering of a woman, her need to express all of the feelings that are inside of her."



"Body movements are not done for the sake of titillation, but for the purpose of conveying the meanings of the feelings behind the dance."

“SINCERITY OF EXPRESSION IS THE HEART OF AESTHETIC IMPACT”

A Conversation with Hala Masri

by *Laurie King-Irani*

“The union of words and melody has been inseparable in the Arabic musical tradition; so, too, have beauty of expression and voice been indivisible.”

—Jihad Ali Racy,
Lebanese Ethnomusicologist

Unless one has had the privilege of hearing her clear, strong and expressive singing voice, one would not guess that Hala Masri is one of the best young singers in Lebanon today. Masri, a 1987 graduate of the Lebanese American University who currently works as drama coordinator for theatrical productions at LAU, sings with the Beirut Group for Arabic Music, which performs classical Arabic music, under the direction of conductor Selim Sahab. Masri’s personality is the opposite of the stereotypical “diva”. She is humble, even a bit shy, when discussing her talent and artistic philosophy. Despite her natural reserve, however, one quickly senses the sincerity of her passion for classical Arabic music and her deep respect for all those who strive to preserve and advance this rich musical heritage.

Masri did not consciously choose to become a singer, rather, she stumbled into her musical career during her third year of studies at LAU, where she majored in Communication Arts with a concentration in radio/tv and film. A colleague, Rima Karimeh, upon hearing Masri sing during a theatrical rehearsal, remarked that she had an exceptional voice and unique style and urged her to have her voice appraised by a professional musician. Overcoming her own modesty, as well as her anxieties about her father’s probable reactions to the idea of a musical career for his daughter, Masri auditioned with the respected musician and conductor, Selim Sahab, to ascertain whether her voice held promise. As soon as he heard her sing, Sahab knew that he had discovered a natural talent. He suggested that she attend rehearsals of his choir, train under his tutelage, and eventually perform classical Arabic songs in public. This meeting marked an important turning point in Masri’s life; she even remembers the date, “October 28, 1985,” she recalls, laughing.

Although pleased and excited by the prospect of training and singing with an accomplished maestro, Masri was quite concerned about the reaction of her family, particularly her father, to the possibility that she



Hala Masri performs as a soloist under the directions of Selim Sahab at the Sayyed Darwish Theater in Cairo, 1988

would soon be performing publicly. “Here, in our society, the performing arts are considered inappropriate for girls and women; to sing, dance or act in public is still considered a sensitive issue. I really wanted to sing with Selim Sahab’s choir, but I did not want to upset my father, so I had to present the situation to him carefully. I didn’t tell him about my desire to perform until I had attended several rehearsals and had had a chance to see for myself the nature of the group and the quality of the people. When I was sure that no one could point to anything improper about the choir, I informed my father. He was upset at first, but I convinced him that this was a serious, artistic undertaking. It was not as though we were performing in restaurants, clubs or cabarets at midnight! Gradually, my father’s misgivings disappeared.”

Despite social and cultural pressures that dissuade young women from pursuing careers in the performing arts, Masri noted that “you find many women in all the arts in Lebanon. In our theatrical productions at LAU, for instance, women often fill all the key roles, not only on the stage as performers, but also behind the scenes, as managers, directors and designers. I think that women are so drawn to the arts because they seem to be more sensitive than men. A woman in our society cannot express her feelings as openly as a man can; she can only express them fully in indirect ways, for instance, through writing, painting, singing or acting.” Masri paused for a moment, then added, thoughtfully, “I was reading a book about Umm Kulthoum (the legendary Egyptian singer who died in 1973). In the book, it was mentioned that Umm Kulthoum had composed two songs; however, neither of them found its

way out to the public. It came to my mind then that, although we have women who are very well known as singers, we do not have any women composers or conductors of music, and women instrumentalists are not as numerous as men."

Masri is very reflective about the music she sings, and was eager to discuss her insights into the aesthetic principles which inform Arabic classical music and distinguish it from other musical traditions and genres. "Although I am not an expert in musical theory, I love singing Arabic classical music, and I really enjoy listening to all forms of classical music, whether Arabic or Western. I love to listen to anything that is precious. I like classical music because it is classical—it is music that has withstood the test of time and maintained its value, whether it is an Arab muwashah or one of Beethoven's symphonies." Noting the differences between Arab and Western music, Masri commented that "melody is richer in the Arabic tradition; it's in the melody that we find the aesthetic impact. In the Western classical tradition, melody is not as important as the distribution of the sounds, the harmony. Here is where we find the aesthetic heart of Western music. When I am singing classical music, I want the audience to feel the beauty and the sincerity of what I am expressing. If they are affected, if my message of the song's sentiments arrives, I am satisfied. However, I have to say that when we Arabs first encounter Western classical music, we have to train ourselves to hear it as it was meant to be heard; we must learn how to understand it before we can enjoy it, as if we were learning a new language. Unfortunately, young people in the Arab world nowadays have to be trained to listen to Arabic classical music too! The current generation, and their parents, seem not to appreciate our own national classical music, or to understand and value its tradition. This problem is related to other problems we are confronting in the post-war period in Lebanon. There is not enough concern with the arts in general; too many people see the arts as something secondary, a luxury that they can live without, and I think that this is sad. We need to improve art and music education in our schools, we must introduce students to the richness and beauty of Arabic classical music from elementary school onwards."

Masri's own formation as an artist took place against a social, political and cultural background that was quite different than the current situation in the Arab world. Coming of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s, she was exposed to Arabic classical music to a far greater degree than the Lebanese youth of today, who are increasingly influenced by cheap, common musical forms through the media of radio, and, most notably, through music television videos. The artists who most

influenced Masri's own musical tastes and styles were Asmahan, Abdel Wahab, Umm Kulthoum, and other singers who are not very popular among Lebanese teenagers of today. Masri noted, with dismay, a growing tendency among the Lebanese people to worship everything Western and to denigrate everything Arab. "Unfortunately, we have this complex that Arabic music is not as advanced as Western music, whether classical or popular."

The musical environment of Masri's childhood and adolescence were markedly different; she recalls that the relationship between Arabic music, culture and politics was much closer when she was a child. "During my childhood, the period just before the seventies, Arab artists and composers were producing a fantastic type of music that had a very powerful impact on audiences throughout the Arab world. Here in Lebanon, I remember from my early childhood that we would listen every night to Sowt al-Arab (Voice of the Arabs), 'idha'at Lubnan (Lebanon Broadcasting) and 'idha'at al-Qaahira (Cairo Broadcasting), and everyone, children and adults, would sing along with the songs and become enthusiastic and feel deep sentiments. When you hear the music of the 1960s and earlier, it leaves a distinct impact on you; you even get 'goose-bumps'! The songs of Abdel Wahab, Umm Kulthoum, Layla Mourad, Abdel Halim Hafiz, Faiza Ahmad, and others were incredibly moving to all who heard them; even small children knew the words and melodies. This period was the zenith of our classical Arab music. Many years will pass before we again have great musicians like Sayyed Darwish, Muhammad Qasabji, Riyad Sumbati, Zakariya Ahmad, Muhammad Abdel Wahab and others. "

If Masri were to give advice to young Arab women aspiring to careers in the performing arts, she would tell them to start earlier than she did in studying music seriously. She advises gifted young women singers to go back to their own music heritage and learn it in-depth. "No culture can improve without a fundamental knowledge of its origins. For me, the experience of singing with Sahab's choir and orchestra has been a school in itself. I learned a lot, and I am still learning a lot!" Masri is happy that she was introduced to this group, as it made such a difference in her professional and personal life. She is also pleased that more young people are discovering the joys and richness of classical Arabic music through the performances and rehearsals of the Beirut Group for Arabic Music. "Lately, I have noticed that most of the audiences attending our concerts in Beirut are young people. They are curious about this music, even though they don't learn about it in school and cannot hear it as frequently as I did when I was their age. I think this is a good sign for the future of Arabic classical music."

SCHOLARSHIP... NOVEL WRITING AND MUSIC

A conversation with Evelyn Accad

by Laurie King-Irani

Although Dr. Evelyn Accad is a renowned scholar, a talented novelist and a gifted singer and songwriter, the predominant trait one notices after two hours of talking with her is not only her intelligence, creativity and sensitivity, but first and foremost her bravery. Dr. Accad's personality is a rare combination of intellectual courage, deep empathy, emotional vulnerability and spiritual strength. She is not afraid to ask any question, to experience any feeling or to explore any emotion, whether in herself or in the other. This unique amalgam of qualities and gifts has enabled her to be a pioneer in her academic work, her art, and her personal life.

Evelyn Accad is currently Professor of French Comparative Literature at the University of Illinois in Urbana, Illinois in the United States. She does not lead the conventional life of a cloistered scholar, however, as a quick glimpse at her impressive curriculum vitae reveals. In addition to teaching courses and writing scholarly articles about modern French Literature, the role of women in Francophone Literature, postmodern criticism, and feminist theory, Accad has also penned three critically acclaimed novels, *L'Excisee* (1982), *Coquelicot du Massacre* (1988), and *Blessures des Mots: Journal de Tunisie* (1993). At present, she is working on two books which do not fit into pre-existing academic genres such as analytical research or autobiography. The first, entitled *From Setting to Rising Sun*, is a collection of interviews Accad has conducted over the past ten years with a wide variety of women throughout the Arab world. The second book is based on a journal that Evelyn Accad has been keeping since March of 1994, when she was diagnosed with cancer: a malignant tumor was discovered in her left breast. Entitled "My Night with Cancer", the book details every aspect of Accad's battle with the disease (see Accad's moving article, "My Journey with Cancer", in *Al-Raida*, Vol. XI, No. 67, Fall, 1994, pp. 10-13).

During Accad's July visit to Beirut, the city of her birth and childhood, she shared with us some of her views on the artistic process, the role of the artist in society, and future trends in feminist studies. No matter what the topic of discussion, Accad's basic principles and ideals shone through. She strives for mutual understanding, the widening of consciousness and the deepening of compassion in every project she undertakes. The ordeals she has recently confronted, which might have left many women bitter and broken, have instead strengthened Accad and enabled her to transcend all forms of pettiness. She brings a spirit of love, empathy and harmony to all of her endeavors.

Evelyn Accad was born in Lebanon in 1943 to a Swiss mother and a Lebanese father. She grew up during Beirut's golden era, a period of relative peace and prosperity that witnessed a rich cross-fertilization of East and West. In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of 1960s Beirut, the young Accad explored a variety of ideas, musical trends and art forms. A growing concern with women's issues in general, and a dissatisfaction with women's status in Lebanon in particular, contributed to her decision to pursue an academic career in the United States. In 1973 she received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Indiana University-Bloomington. The topic of her dissertation was the image of woman in the contemporary fiction of the Middle East and North Africa. In 1978, Accad's dissertation was published under the title *Veil of Shame* to critical acclaim; nearly twenty years later, it is still recognized as a pioneering study of literary depictions of the sociological and psychological realities confronting women in the Arab world.

After accepting a teaching position at the University of Illinois at the age of 31, Accad felt a deep desire to write a novel inspired by some of the books she had read on female circumcision in the course of researching her dissertation. It was not her first foray into creative writing; in 1971 she had entered and won a short-story competition. Her entry was entitled "In Between", and dealt with the relationship between two sisters living in two different countries and cultures. Accad recalls that she wrote her novel, *L'Excisee*, in one long stretch during her first year of university teaching. "It was like being in a trance; I wrote and wrote and hardly made any corrections. It was a very spontaneous process, there was nothing studied or forced about it. They say that novelists tend to be emotionally attached to their first works, and in my case, this was certainly true." Accad relates that the novel was so long and detailed that her editor in Paris wanted to cut out substantial parts of the text. She adamantly refused, telling him "I will not excise *L'Excisee*!" The novel was published by L'Harmattan, without any editorial excisions, in 1982. (An English version was published in 1989 by Three Continents Press.)

Now a published novelist and an accomplished scholar, Accad was not able to bask in the glow of her considerable successes. Rumblings of war in her homeland, Lebanon, did not permit her to enjoy such simple pleasures or peace of mind. In the late 1970s, disturbed at the monstrous violence that had suddenly engulfed the beautiful city of her childhood, Accad began composing and performing songs to communicate her anguish and ease

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her pain. "I was so upset and shocked to see my country destroyed and my friends hurt and killed; the only way I could really express the sorrow I felt was through music, and it was quite cathartic to do so. Some people commented that my songs from that period are too sad and plaintive, but it was the healthiest way for me to deal with the war at the time."

Soon, Accad was back in Beirut. She returned in the early 1980s as a Fulbright scholar, but instead of spending her time in libraries, classrooms and seminars, she frequently found herself huddled on the basement stairs with her sister's family as shells fell incessantly on Beirut. In this stressful

and dangerous environment, Accad's second novel began to take shape. *Coquelicot du massacre* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998) is set in Beirut during war-time. The main character is a woman who, with her small daughter, is trying to cross the military demarcation line separating the two halves of the wounded and divided city. She overcomes her hardships with courage, the help of compassionate strangers, and song. Accad produced a cassette tape of her own musical compositions to accompany the book and enrich its meaning by providing melody for the lyrics of songs which appear throughout the book. Although some people might find the mixing of two distinct genres, literature and song, surprising, Accad finds it only natural. "For me, there is no problem in combining my music and my novels; I see writing as a form of music. In fact, whenever I experience 'writer's block' in the course of writing a novel, I pick up my guitar and resolve the problem through music." She had hoped to sell the book and the cassette together as a package, but the publisher did not agree to this unusual arrangement. Accad revealed another unconventional aspect of *Coquelicot du massacre*: its ending was not her own choice and creation, but rather, a collaboration between herself and some friends and family members who had been reading the draft chapters as she wrote them. "I had wanted to end the book on a tragic note, but people around me said 'No! End it on a note of hope!', so I did."

In her third and most recent novel, *Blessures des Mots: Journal de Tunisie* (Paris: Cote des Femmes, Collection Premices, 1993), Accad draws not upon singing and song-writing, but another of her favorite daily activities, journal-writing, to tell the fictionalized story of the year she spent in Tunisia on a Fulbright scholarship in 1985. The novel deals with the personalities and relationships among a group of progressive Tunisian women activists and scholars who come together to found a women's studies journal, *An-Nisaa'*. Accad now realizes that she was



Evelyn Accad: Scholar, Novelist and Musician

fortunate to be in Tunisia at such a crucial period in the history of the North African women's movement. The novel captures all of the excitement of this historical moment, and also describes the problems—personal, social and political—that led to rifts among the women and the journal's demise. Accad admitted that not all of the women she had known and worked with in Tunisia were pleased with the novel. "Of course, the women portrayed favorably in the novel loved it, and those portrayed in a less than favorable light were upset!". Regardless of individuals' personal responses, the novel clearly struck a chord among many of the women Accad had known and interviewed during her year in

Tunisia. In 1995, some of these women, who appear as fictional characters in the book, decided to stage a play based on *Blessures des Mots*. It was an instance of life imitating art imitating life, the textual richness and ironies of which were not lost on Accad. She traveled to Tunisia especially to view the play, and relates that "it was one of the most moving experiences of my life, to see one of my novels staged as a play. I was crying! It is so touching to hear your own words spoken eloquently by an actress before a rapt audience. Even if some of the women gave different interpretations to the characters and to the plot of the original novel, I didn't mind in the least; they brought their own meanings to it — they made it their own."

Noting that novels do not, unfortunately, count as much as researched articles in the world of academe, Accad quickly pointed out that she is able to reach more people through her songs and her novels than she can through her scholarly writings. She gave a compelling example of the different effects of scholarship and art by recounting her involvement in an academic conference in the 1980s, at which she delivered a scholarly paper providing objective criteria for condemning the practice of female circumcision, which Accad terms female mutilation. "After I finished reading my paper, the male scholars and policy-makers present jumped up and attacked me, saying 'It is our culture! You have no business judging it!'. African women who were present immediately and vociferously agreed with the men. A polarization along racial rather than gender lines became very apparent during the final plenary session of the conference: Black men and women for female circumcision and against whites who were asking critical questions about this practice. Later that night, I performed some of my songs about the horrors and injustices of circumcision, accompanying myself on guitar. Many of the African women who heard the songs were crying. Some came up to me after the performance and said that they agreed

with my position, but indicated that in public, they had to be loyal to their men. This experience was very moving for me, but it also left me with a lot of questions I have been trying to answer for the last decade, specifically, why is loyalty more important than the truth? Camus phrased this powerfully when he said, 'between my mother and justice, I choose my mother'. It clearly has something to do with the difference between a mentality based on the individual and a mentality based on the group."

Such questions lead Accad back to her professional field: academia, specifically multi-cultural studies and women's studies. Although she is pleased with recent developments in her own field and in the wider, interdisciplinary field of feminist theory, she voiced some concerns about the relevance of scholarship to those beyond the walls of the academy, and raised questions about the dangers of pronounced politicization of scholarly research, whether from left-wing or right-wing perspectives. She also finds academia increasingly stressful and overly bureaucratized: "all the unending paper-work keeps one away from important work and conversations with colleagues and students!". Concerning the issue of "political correctness", which seems to preoccupy so many people inside and outside of academia these days, Accad says, "political correctness can be extreme from either direction, left or right. The positive aspects of so-called political correctness center on the fact that it has allowed us to introduce a lot of worthy topics and courses that were previously neglected. Also, we have a new generation of graduate students who are highly interdisciplinary and multi-cultural in their personal and professional outlooks. On the negative side of the ledger, political correctness, whether from left or from right, can prevent the search for truth for the sake of truth. It is not good for scholars to have a political agenda. Again, we are up against the 'truth versus loyalty' phenomenon."

Accad is particularly pleased and excited by the new work coming out of the wide and inclusive field of women's studies. "Feminist studies have enriched so many other fields of study — anthropology, literary theory, history, art — feminist theory englobes so many different trends and ideas and connects so many different scholars all over the world. But, I worry about a trend I see in Women's Studies, a trend towards a certain kind of elitism. We in the academy are losing touch with the average woman outside the university. Non-academic women cannot even begin to understand the jargon and theories we use; they feel alienated. Because of her consistent concern to break down artificial barriers and enhance communication and understanding, Accad embarked on a project with the French sociologist, Dr. Paul Vieille, which took her to the most impoverished sections of Cairo. There, she and Dr. Vieille conducted lengthy interviews with men and women who "live in oceans of misery" in an

effort to understand, from their perspective, the concerns and realities of daily life in one of the most important cities of the contemporary Arab world. Accad reports that the women's lives are hemmed in by unbelievably harsh conditions. In spite of this, they are strong, witty, and quite eloquent and insightful in describing the joys and travails of their lives. She mentioned in particular the four hours of testimony she collected from an elderly woman, Um Ashraf, who recounted a childhood spent in poverty, an unhappy forced marriage, problems related to contraception, difficulties in dealing with governmental bureaucracies, political corruption and economic uncertainty.

Accad clearly felt the same sort of connection and empathy with Um Ashraf as she does for the privileged women she met in Tunisia and her colleagues in Urbana, Illinois. In a world characterized by competing groups and divided loyalties, it is clear that Evelyn Accad, scholar, novelist and musician, is one of those rare beings who live in a world without borders, a world without fear. Perhaps this is the source of her ability to face life with so much love and courage.

Samples of Evelyn Accad's song lyrics

PERHAPS IT WOULD BE ENOUGH

Perhaps it would be enough
to have one single word or two interlaced hands
To turn madness into love
To turn leaving into coming back
To change death into life

O South of my country
O heart of the madness
Where the child has fallen
At the point weaned of hope
At the point where we should have planted love

Perhaps it would be enough to have one gesture
To have one saying or one symbol
For the sword to turn into flower
For the blood to become earth
For your name to be inscribed in me

O heart of my country
Heart of the universe
O center of the earth

Where the camp gave up
Where we should have given hope

Perhaps it would be enough to have faith
To reinvent some words
There where hatred is let loose
Where the bird is burnt to ashes
Where my past remains caught

Perhaps it would be enough to write
One melody or one chorus
For the screams to become songs
For the child to become bird
For man to learn to love all over again

O city torn apart
O vineyards stained with blood
O bodies tortured
O ravaged faces
Where we should have weaved love

Beirut, 1978

THE CITY IS IN FLAMES

The city is burning twisted with fear and encircled
with wires
A blind child is groping for the road of the river
His hands are getting bruised on the thorns
The stars have been extinguished consumed by the
flames of hatred

The woman is looking for a way out
The woman is scratching with patience the stone that
hits her
The woman is holding in her arms a dead child
The city has become quiet under the ashes

I am screaming for the women sewn under their tents
I am screaming for the women excised in the gardens
I am screaming for the bird dying at the crossroads

The South is divided
Torn from one side of the sea to the other
The waves are rolling over a shore of blood
The bird soars and falls in the wind of the plain

Tyre has become quiet under the ashes

Man pounds the earth and man hits his brother
Man pounds the earth and man kills the child
The wind is heavy with the dust of hatred and mad-
ness
I am screaming out for tenderness
I am screaming out for love
I am crying for the bird dying on the crossroad

South of Lebanon, 1980

WE HAVE A CITY TO PATCH UP
(or She writes what is not popular)

She writes what is not popular
She unveils hidden problems
She hits herself on the walls of reason
Of semiotics and of criticism

She saw the sun of harvest
She put her heart in a prison
She took the bird of her novels
She told it to go, to go to the horizon

Chorus: We have a city to patch up
The orange tree, the vineyard to
replant
The sun above to search for
Woman to help rise up
Hope to find again

They will go on holding hands
They will trace flowers on the roads
They will plant trees in the gardens
They will light the morning star

She moves on encircled by canons
She draws wings to her prison
She picks up each line of her violin
She leads the child to the evergreen's dawn

I learnt to sing in your hands
I wove the thread you stretched out
I found the words you missed out
And I wrote, I wrote tomorrow's vision

Urbana, Beirut, Tunis, 1981

INTERVIEW

THE IMPACT OF THEATER ARTS

A Conversation with Dr. Lina Abyad

By Juhaina Razzouk

Lina Abyad, Professor of Theater Arts at the Lebanese American University and Director of the recent production, "The Royal Pardon", studied Child Development and Communication Arts at Beirut University College, Psychology at American University of Beirut, before pursuing her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Theater Arts in Paris. Abyad had wanted to study theater since childhood, but her family could not really grasp the idea of a career in theater; it was too puzzling for them. But since she insisted, they agreed, but only after telling her that she should go as far as possible, i.e., to achieve her Ph.D.

Dr. Abyad felt that working in the field of theater is preferable to achieving a high degree in it, but now she does not regret obtaining her Ph.D. at all, since this degree will allow her to become financially independent by teaching at the university, because working in the theater is rarely lucrative. Her parents also emphasized this point foreseeing the obstacles she was likely to face, whether she married or not.

When asked about the specific influences that led her to study theater, Abyad's reply was, "Nidal Ashkar was my starting point. I saw her when I was fifteen years old in a play called "Al-Bakara", and I remember being astonished by the freedom of this woman on the stage, her ability to speak Arabic so well, and to live a character so intensely. I wanted to be like her one day — I wanted to be someone who could be so free to say whatever she wants. Also, I have to say that I was a very lousy student at school, and when I started acting, I became somebody very special for my teachers and for the students around me, and so for the first time I was recognized as something very special. At first, everyone found me so bizarre, but after I started acting, they understood why I was this bizarre!"

Everything changed for Lina Abyad the moment she went into theater. She suddenly started liking books, texts, and paintings, because she felt she needed to understand things with a deeper sense in order to express them fully on the stage.

Through the medium of the theater, Abyad feels capable of saying so much more than mere words can convey. "Through theater, I was able to talk about the war, about how difficult the life of people in theater is, the pressures they face due to politics and the opinions of influential people. I like choosing beautiful texts for such topics, or for any topic in general. "The Royal Pardon", for example, talks about anarchy, and how rules in such a system become beyond reach of the law.

Dr. Abyad thinks that her gender makes a difference in her work. "In "The Royal Pardon", for example, I was telling my actors that it is very obvious that the director is a woman, because the women in it are much stronger, they are characters who tell their husbands what to do, and their sexual desires are stated very clearly." Abyad thought it was very important to emphasize the role of women in her play, "because we in Lebanon should never forget at any moment that we have a role to play because we are



A scene from "The Royal Pardon".

facing a great danger." When asked to identify this danger, she immediately replied that it was the various fundamentalists and political extremists who limit the role of a woman and try to narrow it down to being only a mother and a wife.

Dr. Abyad feels that her greatest reward and satisfaction as a director is not reaching the audience, but more importantly, the actors. They discover something about themselves when she is able to move something in their minds, hearts and souls.

As an artist, Abyad is glad to be back in Lebanon contributing to the local arts scene. As a person, however, some aspects of post-war Beirut are disturbing to her. "I would like to talk about my own memories about Beirut. I went away for fifteen years and things have changed drastically. I feel that the changes in our behavior are especially due to architecture. In the past, we used to have nice, small houses with neighbors all around. The people were closer to nature and closer to the sky which is something that is very important for me. We are losing all of this now, for we don't even have balconies anymore in Beirut. All of this has altered our social behaviors so much."

"For me, coming back to Beirut is like going on a trip. I wanted to go back to the culture, to Arabic literature, to Gilgamesh, to discover things about the language that I have completely forgotten."

Abyad's greatest challenge is to strive for a Lebanese national theater, and to encourage government support of the arts, because private sponsorship is not enough.

"Theater is very important for our society, it 'rings a bell' and it becomes a reference, and through the communicative and educating force of theater, we can have hope for changing so much in our society." Abyad's advice to talented young women who are just beginning their art careers is simply "to strive".

POETRY

BY ARAB WOMEN

Poetry, more so than painting, theater, music or dance, is the premier art form in the Arab world, where facility with language has always been highly regarded. Arab women have been writing beautiful verses for centuries. In fact, one of the most celebrated Arab poets of the pre-Islamic era was a woman, Al-Khansaa'. In our own century, several women poets have achieved fame throughout the Arab world and even in the West for their compelling imagery, technical virtuosity and bold experimentation with verse. The following poems, composed by three of the leading Arab women poets of the twentieth century, offer but a glimpse of Arab women's considerable poetic talents.

(These poems are reproduced from a monograph published by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in 1985 entitled Contemporary Arab Women Poets and Writers. Rose Ghurayyib compiled, edited and translated the poems. The monograph, which also features two highly informative critical essays on Arab women poets and novelists respectively, is available from the IWSAW office.)

*Andree Chedid
(Lebanese, born in 1921 in Egypt)*

The Sailing Heart

Far from rituals
Which reduce us into ashes,
Far from temples
Where the sky vainly forces an entrance,
Far from brass powers conquered by other powers
Let us choose life
At the summit of the wounded day
Rather the haphazard fruit
Than the marble letter
Rather to continuously seek and never to know
Than to despair and stop moving.
Rather an arch through the jungle
A wing through pitfalls
Than a sinister fresco
Of a hidden truth.
Time melts like wax,
Bolts will yield to the sailing heart

The Distance

I often inhabit my body
To the very hollow of my armpits
I engrave myself on it
To the very finger tips
I decipher my belly
I inhale my breath
I sail in my veins
At the tempo of my body.
To have been my body
I have often lived
I live
But often from a vague point,
I see this body knocked by the days,
Assailed by time
Often from a vague pint
I keep it at a distance
Out of this alternation itself
I live.

File *File* *File* *File* *File*

Nazik al-Mala'ika
(Iraqi, born in 1923)

To Wash their Shame Away

“Ah, Mama!” the fateful cry pierced the air,
A pool of blood submerged the head, the ebony
hair,

A final shiver from the corpse, lying inert,
“Ah Mama!”, only the executioner heard.
Tomorrow dawn will peep and roses will awake,
A call to youth, to dreams, will be heard at day-
break,

But the green fields will answer, the red poppies
will say:

“Yea! She is gone! To wash their shame away!”

The executioner and his friends will meet again.
He'll say, wiping his knife, “we've done away with
shame!

We're free again and honest, our honor is restored!

Bring the cup, barman, fill it and take my gold!
Call the perfumed, the languid, the sweet cabaret
girl,

Her eyes are more precious to me than gold or
pearl!”

Fill the cup, O assassin,
Be merry and gay!
Thy victim's blood will surely
Wash thy shame away!

O women of our quarter, O maidens far or near,
Tell your lords, tell your men, to be of good cheer.
With the tears of our eyes we'll knead the bread we
eat,

We shall cut off our locks and skin our hands and
feet,

So their clothes may remain pure, shining and
white.

No smile, no laugh, no sign, no look to left or right.

And tomorrow, who knows? How can we ever
guess,

How many of us will be thrown in some wilderness
To wash their shame away.

Fedwa Tuqan
(Palestinian)

My Sad Town

On the day we beheld death and treachery,
The ebb moved back,
The windows of heaven were closed,
The town held its breath
When the wave was repelled,
When ugly depths were revealed to sight,
Hope fell into ashes.
My sad town was choked, assaulted by misfortune,
Children and songs disappeared
No shade, no echo;
Sadness in my town crawled naked,
With blood-stained steps,
Silence crept, heavy and fast like mountains,
Obscure like night, tragic,
Burdened with the weight of death and defeat.

O, my sad, silent town,
Is it possible that in the season of gathering,
Crops and fruits are burned?
Is this the ending of our long journey?

To A Foreign Friend

My foreign friend,
If the road to you
Were now as it was before,
If deadly vipers did not lie in wait on our way,
Digging tombs for my kin and my people,
Sowing death and fire;

If disaster had not been raining stones
of shame on the soil of my country,
If my heart were not bleeding on the dagger of
defeat.

If I were still as before
Proud of my people, of my country, of my name,
I should have been now near you,
Anchoring my boat on the shores of your love;
Together we would have been like a pair of young
doves.

File File File File File

POETRY

BY YOUNG LEBANESE POETS

Mercy

Waves

Search,
And you will find me
On the sand by the sea
Beneath its master moon.
Content,
Conversing with the waves that
Lap tenderly against my face.
My hands wrinkled,
but not by them.

Waves knowing and close,
So close,
Whispering in my ear
Words wise and old,
Old as the sea.
Waves clever,
Reaching up to kiss my eyes.

Try to fool me,
But I know
My tears from their own.
And they want me to smile,
As they gurgle and foam,
And they roll and break.
And I smile.

*Anita Nasr
LAU Alumna*

If it be a smile they want
To soothe their aching veins,
Then smile I will till summer dawns
And weary winter wanes.
If words of wisdom light their eyes
And learned lip abides,
Then cradle them with words I will
Until the dark subsides.
Let consolation be my gift,
Its price fidelity.
And praise I will till flowers wake,
But leave my heart to me.

If slack surrender does appease,
Then I should fall their prey.
And bleed I will till blood runs hard
and drowns the budding day.
The tears I weep may quench their thirst,
So break the dam I must,
And scream I will till fervor peaks and feeds the
savage lust.

My pain is naught, my anguish dim,
When weighed against my plea
To have them furl their fangs at dawn
and leave my soul to me.

The sacred truth may numb their brains
So lies become my trend.
Feigned laughter lends to lucid limbs
And squeamish glee amends.
They'll writhe in my idolatry
And foam at frilly fashion.
But stark remains this sullen slave,
Devoid of plot or passion.
The crimes subsist as I await
The dormant amnesty,
And hope that soon their shadows fade
And leave my life to me.

*Anita Nasr
LAU Alumna*

Special Features

D R. NAJLA NA'AMAN, MEDICAL PIONEER

I was born in Sidon, Lebanon, a conservative Muslim town, to a conservative yet progressive Druse family. My grandfather had migrated from a village named Atrine, located in the Shuf mountains of Lebanon, before the First World War. He had come to Sidon to begin a business venture, as Sidon was the commercial capital of Lebanon in those days.

After my grandfather retired and returned to Atrine, my father, who had not shown much interest in school, took over the family business and helped my uncle to continue his education in medicine, enabling him to become an ophthalmologist. My father was married at a young age to a thirteen-year-old cousin named Salha who lived very happily with him for thirteen years, bearing him four children — two boys and two girls. Unfortunately, Salha, my mother, died at the age of 25 from a very complicated child-birth that was not terminated. She could not be saved by any of the doctors in Sidon, due to lack of facilities and inadequate training. How deeply shocking that such a tragedy should occur in the twentieth century!

I received my schooling at the Sidon Girls' School, a Presbyterian mission school that specialized in the teaching of home economics. Since I was the eldest in the family, I took over household and child-care responsibilities upon the death of my mother, while still attending to my scholastic work for five years until my father decided to remarry and raise a second family that harmonized well with his first family, thanks to his wise management and my assistance.

In those days, a high school diploma was more than any young woman could expect. Following graduation, a bright young woman could look forward to a sheltered life, far from any exposure to a mixed environment, in which work outside of the home was prohibited. A veil covering one's head and face was required for girls in Sidon from the age of 12 onwards. I had to acquiesce to these traditions, because, even though my father encouraged girls' education, he was the product of a very conservative society. Thus, on the way to school, we were not allowed to stop and talk to anyone, not even a brother or close male relative.

In 1937, I graduated from Sidon Girls' School with distinction. Instead of immediately pursuing further studies, I was obliged to stay at home, applying my home economics skills in the raising of our large family. Meanwhile, I also became very active in Sidon's

Women's Society, eventually becoming its secretary and chairperson of the children's welfare committee. However, these activities did not satisfy all of my ambitions. I wanted to teach outside of the home, even outside of Sidon, if possible. When a demand for teachers for Iraq was publicized in 1939, I joined the hundreds of Lebanese girls who traveled to Iraq to teach, on the condition that I would live with my uncle, who was now a practicing physician in a remote village named Shamiyya in southern Iraq.

The school in which I taught was a small primary one for less than a hundred students. Its staff consisted of just three teachers and a principal who was less educated than the instructors. When discord arose between the principal and her staff, I was appointed principal myself with hardly six months of experience, since I was a foreigner and the niece of the district physician. I did fairly well in my new job, and the other teachers cooperated with me.

After three years of teaching in Iraq (two years in rural public schools and one year in a sophisticated private school in Baghdad), I returned to Sidon, where life suddenly seemed quite boring after my experience of independence, travel and self-reliance. Nothing but higher education would be stimulating and exciting enough for me now, I realized.

Due to the post-World War Two economic depression, my father's business suffered. He had a family of seven children to support and educate by this time. Family planning and modern forms of contraception were not in use in those days; the common belief was that God would send the necessary fortune to care for each new child.

Upon graduating from Sidon Girls' School, I had refused a scholarship from the Beirut Junior College because higher education for women was considered unnecessary by my community at that time. Why spend money on girls' education, it was thought, when they will only get married and look after a family? Boys, on the other hand, were expected to financially support their fathers as well as their own families. Hence, they were to be given all the education they asked for.

Marriage did not intrigue me at all during my twenties, whereas higher education and academic degrees were a tempting challenge. Thus, when my appreciative and admiring high school principal, Miss Irene



Teagarden, offered me partial financial support, I didn't hesitate to seize the opportunity to join the Beirut Junior College (today LAU). I applied for work-study assistance to cover the rest of my expenses, along with whatever my father was able to contribute.

Afraid of failing after a long interruption of my studies (seven years), I worked very hard, was considered a "book-worm", and graduated with distinction. I was also elected to receive the Torch Award for 1946, and subsequently received two very good offers for teaching positions. However, my achievements had instilled in me an insurmountable drive to pursue further studies. I felt that I should not stop until I obtained a doctoral degree, but that, I knew, would limit me to education, and I preferred an independent career.

Living in Sidon near the Shabb Hospital gave me the opportunity to consider a medical profession. Nursing had always appealed to me; I found the white uniforms, the handling of medicines and the care of the sick attractive and admirable. Long before, my late mother had noticed my interest in medicine and my success in school, and had expressed her desire

and hope that she would one day see me become a doctor like my uncle. I had once assisted my uncle, an ophthalmologist, in performing an operation. I had been a good and brave assistant, and the experience added to my desire to pursue a career in medicine.

So, why not be a doctor? I asked myself. During the years 1946-1950, while I was employed at the Junior College, I completed the required premedical courses at the American University of Beirut, and was admitted to the AUB Medical School. This was a great privilege which I should not turn down. I began my medical training in 1950. The five years of medical course-work were very hard for I also had to work in order to earn some money.

As a new M.D. in 1955, I completed one year of residency training in internal medicine, and received my license for medical practice. Soon thereafter, I found a job with ARAMCO (the Arabian-American Oil Company), which enabled me to earn money quickly and repay all of my loans. With ARAMCO at Dhahran, I was stunned to find an American small town with trees and shrubs and lawns, complete with pools and comfortable homes, in the middle of the

desert. A paradise amidst the sand dunes, I wrote to my family and friends.

ARAMCO at that time provided any Saudi patient, whether native or foreign, with free medical care and hospitalization. The laboratories were more up-to-date than those of the American University Hospital in Beirut, so it was a pleasure to practice medicine scientifically without worrying about the patient's pocketbook. In Dhahran, where I was appointed to work, I saw numerous unusual medical cases, which I never would have had the chance to see again, such as small-pox in its different stages, pediatric dehydration and malnutrition, tetanus, etc.

My two years with ARAMCO (1956-1958) gave me wonderful experiences and an excellent background in general medicine (now known as family medicine), but specialization had become required, so I decided to focus on obstetrics and gynecology. I chose this sub-field of medicine because I still felt the pain of my mother's early and tragic death from complications during child-birth. Also, the strong demand by Lebanese women for the services of Dr. Susan Williamson, an American obstetrician and gynecologist at the American University Hospital, further encouraged me to focus on this specialization. After three years of residency training at AUH and four years of successful private practice in Beirut awaiting an opportunity for further training in the United States, a good offer came and I was encouraged to take it by Dr. Bichers, Chairman of the Obstetrics Department at AUH at that time. With very short notice, I had to leave my flourishing clinic and asked my family to pack it up for me. During these four years of private practice, I was delivering and performing operations at different hospitals with skill and self-confidence. My first operations were at the Ras Beirut Hospital, where I hesitated at first to operate in the absence of Dr. Abul Husn. But I soon convinced myself that since I knew exactly what to do, I could go ahead with his surgical team, and sure enough, all went well.

I spent three years in the United States, the first year at the Worcester Foundation, a renowned institution for basic research in endocrinology. It had been established by two scientists in a small shed, one of them was Dr. Gregory Pincus, who had discovered the contraceptive pill. The institute had grown very rapidly from its humble beginnings to become a major research center equipped with the most sophisticated laboratories. At the Worcester Foundation, I participated in a course on reproductive physiology with fifteen other doctors from various parts of the world. I will never forget one morning in particular.



While preparing the test tubes for a chemical experiment, I experienced the most thrilling moment of my life. A space ship was launched and reached its destination in outer space in a couple of minutes while I was still at the sink preparing my tubes. What a moving and incredible experience that was! It was some time later that I saw the launching on television and then watched the astronauts walking in outer space.

From the Worcester Foundation I next went to the Boston Lying-In Hospital (now the Women's Hospital of the Harvard Medical School), where I trained in sophisticated methods of hormone analysis that were just then being discovered. At that time the United States was short on physicians due to the Vietnamese war. Hence, many foreign fellows were offered employment applications to fill in if they desired to stay. I, however, never had any intention of staying longer than my fellowship required, because I believe that it was my duty to return to my country to assist in the scientific and medical progress of Lebanon. On my way back from the United States, I spent a few months with Dr. Beverly Murphy in Montreal. Dr. Murphy had discovered simpler methods of hormone analysis, which were becoming more popular at the time.

Returning to Beirut in 1969, I discovered that no agreement for my professional future had been reached with American University Hospital. They claimed a lack of funders or excess of obstetricians and gynecologists, or no need for a woman obstetrician and gynecologist in the department, but the plain truth was that my colleagues, teachers and classmates

did not want a qualified and dedicated woman in this field to share their privileges and facilities at the AUH, which would have undoubtedly affected their practices negatively. Having decided not to stay in the United States, I very bitterly resumed my private practice, which I had lost to my competitors due to my long absence. The struggle to re-establish myself and deal with my disappointment was quite tough and challenging, but I prevailed. Building up a new clientele was especially difficult at this time because many Lebanese women had become more relaxed and even took pride in choosing a male obstetrician/gynecologist to prove their liberal attitudes.

By 1974, I had resettled and was satisfied with my achievements. I had overcome my frustrations with AUH and my competitors, and was starting to plan for an exciting team project with some competent colleagues. We planned to open a specialized women's clinic, an all-women surgical team, a women's private hospital and were considering other, related possibilities. But bad luck was about to call: The first explosion of the Lebanese civil war, in February of 1975, destroyed the building which houses my clinic on Abdel Aziz street. My patients could not come to me for months and in some cases, even years. Not anticipating the long and brutal war that awaited us, I lost no time or effort in repairing the damaged building and re-opening my clinic. In 1976, I returned to the United States briefly, with the idea of obtaining a license to practice there, but I decided to return so as not to lose my practice in Lebanon for good.

Practicing medicine during the war in Beirut was very hard. Air raids, blockades, explosions and chaos sometimes hindered physicians' ability to provide the best possible care for their patients. Thus, in 1978, I opened a second clinic in Aley in the mountains east of Beirut in order to be closer to my clientele. With two other colleagues, a pediatrician and a general surgeon, I initiated the Al-Iman Hospital of Aley, which remains up until today the best hospital in the area.

During the Israeli invasion of 1982, my home in Raouche was destroyed. Three of my siblings lost our homes and businesses in minutes that summer, and still the war went on and on.

Practicing obstetrics during war was very risky and often quite dangerous. Many times I had to rush to different hospitals under the shells and rockets between Aley and Beirut to deliver patients, some of whom had come down to Beirut under equally difficult circumstances to be delivered by me. This con-

stituted a tremendous responsibility for many human lives, which I could not disregard. I remember once, while driving at high speed at midnight to reach the hospital in time for a delivery, I passed a Syrian barricade without heeding their calls to stop. In their fury, they fired a barrage of bullets into my car, some of which just barely missed me. A colleague saw the car and thought it had gone through an Israeli raid. Neither the soldiers nor their chief could believe I was still alive and unhurt, driving a car with four flat tires, a fallen gas tank, and the back window transformed into jagged shards of glass. I begged the soldiers fervently for a lift to the hospital, where I found my patient all ready to be delivered smoothly and safely. When the hospital director, who took care of the car, called to congratulate me on my safety, I told him I owed my life to my short stature; had I been taller, the bullet that pierced my car seat would have ended up in my head. The sight of the car the next morning was horrifying; it was only then that I shivered with fear and realized the extent of the danger I had confronted.

Regardless of the war, in my private practice I was a pioneer in gynecological surgery. People could not believe nor easily trust that a woman surgeon could be as good as a man. "She must have a male surgeon who assists her," they all thought. But with adequate training from AUH and my confidence in myself, I operated without hesitation at different hospitals with trained nurses for assistants. I also insisted on working with female anesthesiologists whenever possible so as to refute anyone who assumed that I had the assistance of male doctors or health professionals in the operating room. I remember one case in particular: the wife of a Druze shaykh needed a hysterectomy for a fibroid that was reaching up under her rib cage. Her brothers and male relatives stood at all the doors leading to the operating room to ensure that no man was present. The operation was a complete success. This enhanced my reputation and opened more and more doors for my success as a surgeon.

Looking back on all of the challenges, triumphs and adventures of my life, I can say that my greatest accomplishment was to successfully practice a difficult medical specialty during tough war-time conditions. It was very dangerous and enervating, but I survived. Having surmounted and persevered through all those hardships was my greatest achievement. I was always hoping and planning for a more productive research career, since I loved science so much, but the atrocious civil war did not give me the chances I desired. I had decided long ago not to abandon my country by leaving for good. Did I do the right thing?

ONE DAY IN THE SOUTH

by *Nada Awar, Journalist*

The cat trotted across the street to join us on a covered terrace. Rain pattered gently on the canopy above, and the air cooled. I leaned against the balustrade and gazed out at the lush, green valleys of southern Lebanon. On the hills beyond, houses stood empty and shuttered. The fields below us, bathed in diffused light, were waiting untended. The forced exodus had left behind a pervasive quiet that showed the area's beauty to advantage. I crouched down and motioned to the cat. It blinked and stared back at me, then wrapped its tail in a soft hook around its body and waited, too.

Some minutes later, the bombardment began: distant thudding sounds that shocked the stillness. The men carried the camera equipment up the hill across the road, searching for a good spot from which to shoot the rising clouds of smoke on the horizon. The reporter and I waited for them, nibbling on chocolate creams.

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We had driven down from Beirut that morning of April 18th in an aged, green BMW that had "TV-Press" emblazoned all over its body. I sat in the front seat by the driver, and the reporter and her producer sat in the back. The Australian crew had arrived the day before to cover Israel's latest attacks on south Lebanon, code-named "Operation Grapes of Wrath." We sped down the highway, the film crew following in a second car close behind us. I spent much of the drive staring out at the horizon, looking for the Israeli gun-boats they had told us about at the news office earlier. Soon, we noticed a gray, almost imperceptible hump rising from the water. "See?! See?!" we all called out. I handed the reporter a detailed map of Lebanon and tried to point out the areas under fire. The names of more and more villages were constantly being added to the list of bombarded areas broadcast on the radio news.

Between the road and the sea there were banana groves and fields of lemon and orange trees. Their borders were covered with great bushes of yellow daisies, with an occasional red poppy or two standing amongst them. As we approached



The mass grave at Qana in South Lebanon. Most of the victims were women and children.

Sidon the dwindling amount of traffic on the road was noticeable, and by the time we had reached Tyre, the absence of any sign of life was glaring. "A ghost town," murmured the reporter.

I watched as the cameraman filmed a street whose shop windows had been hastily boarded-up. A lone cyclist rode slowly away from the scene. I could hardly believe that this was the same bustling, noisy city I had visited with friends only a few weeks before. We spent the rest of the morning driving through tiny villages further inland, and interviewing some of the few people who had chosen to remain.

"We want only to be allowed to live in peace in our own homes!", they had all said.

There was the young father of half a dozen children, busy skinning the lamb he had just slaughtered, trying to do his best despite dwindling resources. His wife, waving her arms and calling out to us, cried "We will stay on here together, and either live or die together!" On the outskirts of yet another village, we met a unit of Lebanese soldiers, all young and anxious, many lonely and far from home. An army private from Tripoli smiled again and again at me, and finally said, as we were bidding them good-bye, "Come again!". In another village, we met a family of twenty-six people taking shelter in an abandoned garage. The eldest among them, a man in his late fifties, stifled a sob as he tried to describe the humiliation and anger they felt at having been forced to live like this.

....

The cat sitting before me on the terrace suddenly perked up its ears and ran away. The film crew returned and we piled into the cars, heading for Tyre. I now know that Qana must have happened as I stood on that terrace falling in love with the south of Lebanon.

The car radio blurted out news of many injured being rushed to hospitals in Tyre. When we reached the Jabel Amel hospital, crowds of people were gathered at its entrance in a state of hysteria. We pushed our way, cameraman and soundman in front, to the emergency section downstairs, and discovered the cause of the chaos.

Dozens of bloodied and broken children, women and elderly people were lying on stretchers on the floor, or were being pushed on trolleys into the operating room. Surrounding the injured were

what seemed like hundreds of able-bodied people pushing, yelling and crying. In one corner, a very old man with a foot suddenly missing was sitting with his back against the wall, quietly vomiting. Someone rushed past me carrying a little girl. Her head lolled dangerously backward, and I noticed that her entire face was gone.

We climbed up the steps to the ground floor and around to its entrance. There, we learned that a UNIFIL base in a village called Qana, at which hundreds of civilians had taken refuge, had been repeatedly hit by Israeli shells. Rushing back to the cars, we made our way to Qana. The drive was not long: fifteen minutes up a twisting mountain road. Ambulances, sirens screaming and tires screeching, flew past us on their way to Tyre. The car swerved around corners, and my heart raced.

There are two things I will never be able to forget about that hour at the UNIFIL base in Qana. The first was beyond my control, but I shall never forgive myself for having done nothing about the second. I remember the smell. I suppose it must have been the stench of human flesh, burnt to black. Incinerated.

I also remember the wails of an elderly woman who had been placed on a doorstep of a building a few meters from the shelter. "Why have you left me alone like this!?", she shrieked. "Why have you left me alone?!". I did not know if she was calling out to God, the authorities or her murdered family. I did not go to her, but instead stood fixed to a spot on the ground, taking temporary comfort in my utter disbelief.

On our way back to Beirut, I began to sneeze. The producer reflexively said "bless you," then added, "not that my blessing can count for much in this world!".

"*Everyone* counts," I replied, and turned to look out at the Mediterranean rushing past us.

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On April 30th, 1996, twelve days after the massacre, the Qana victims were buried in a mass grave a few feet away from the UNIFIL base at which they had sought refuge. All of Lebanon watched, in horror and grief, as plastic covered bundles were taken, one by one, out of the 102 flag-draped coffin and placed gently in the immense common tomb. Women wailed, men shouted, and I stood on a rooftop, saying good-bye.

WORKSHOP ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

By Ghena Ismail

In cooperation with UNIFEM, the National Committee for Lebanese Women's Issues implemented nine workshops targeted at defining the national strategy and the future work agenda for the Lebanese woman. These workshops, which were held in the Center for Continuous Care on June 26 and 27, covered a wide variety of topics such as women and the law, media, environment, economics, health, Israeli occupation and imprisonment, violence, education, and the decision-making process.

Every workshop was convened in a separate room. The resource person for the violence workshop was Dr. Nazek Yared, a novelist and Arabic professor at Lebanese American University. The moderator was Mariam Sleem, a psychology professor at the Lebanese University and the reporter was Ghena Ismail, IWSAW staffer and Al-Raida Assistant Editor.

The objective of the workshop was formulating plausible solutions and tangible actions to respond to the existing problem of violence. The discussion was primarily based on a paper submitted by Dr. Yared, focusing specifically on the work agenda.

A comment was made on the various forms of violence against women. The commentator explained that violence against women is not committed only by strangers. He noted the presence of other forms of violence, such as violence inflicted by the husband and by other women as well. While everybody seemed to agree on the presence of various forms of violence, there was not as much agreement on the exact definition of violence. One of the participants inquired as to what types of actions constitute violence. He raised the following question, "Is the father who slightly hits his son or daughter, in order to reprimand him or her, considered violent?" The audience seemed reluctant to respond. It appeared to me in the beginning as if they did not know the exact answer. Later on, however, while a number of the women participants were preparing the final paper to be submitted to the national committee, the answer came out: Even such slight hitting is a form of violence that necessitates a response.

It is worth noting that the title of the workshop was critiqued by one of the participants, who stated that "domestic violence" would be a better term. She argued that since violence may afflict all members of the society, it should not be associated with a certain gender. Most of the participants, however, disagreed with her; they based their disagreement on the fact that "women are the primary victims of violence."

Because women are primary victims of violence, and since violence will persist regardless of all the measures that may be taken to fight it, the idea of founding shelters was discussed. One of the participants expressed her fear, though, saying that the shelter can have harmful effects in the long run. She observed that "in the United States, for example, any woman who enters a shelter is then subject to worse forms of violence once she leaves the shelter and returns home." The reply to her

warning was that once a shelter is founded, a follow-up committee should be formed to stay in continuous contact with the victim. The topic of shelters aroused the most debate.

Eventually, the workshop yielded the following resolutions and suggestions:

1. Unite the efforts of the various NGOs concerned with the problem and divide the work among them in accordance with the national strategy.
2. Conduct statistical studies in Lebanon about violence and the attitudes of people towards it.
3. Change woman's traditional image in school text books, and incorporate subjects related to the problem of violence within the educational curricula.
4. Monitor the messages transmitted by the media, change woman's traditional image in it, and produce quick, engaging public service announcements that condemn violence.
5. Give licenses to the institutes that fight violence against women.
6. Amend laws and watch over their application.
7. Import experts on violence from the West to train social workers, police forces, psychologists, doctors, lawyers, judges, educators and parents.
8. Attempt to find a voluntary team of social workers, lawyers and psychologists who are willing to help the NGOs in this domain.
9. Teach the women means of self-defense and self-respect.
10. Found centers for receiving complaints, guiding victims of violence and supporting them, and spreading the word about these centers.
11. Encourage the women to study the science of religion, so that they can reinterpret religion in an objective manner.

Following the discussion, the participants were expected to complete a form in which they had to clearly specify the measures that need to be taken, the obstacles that may arise, the expected results, and the institutes or organizations to be involved, and finally, the financial and human capacities required to implement the program.

Overall, the workshop was successful. The participants succeeded in formulating a realistic work agenda. Yet, I have to say that at certain points the participants were not able to communicate or discuss their ideas very clearly. This may be attributed to the fact that violence against women is a "new" topic in our society. Of course, when I say "new", I do not mean so in terms of practice, but rather in terms of public discussion. Up until very recently, this type of violence was a "taboo" that no one dared talk about in Lebanon! Women who were subject to violence felt too embarrassed to talk about their situation. Today, after the topic emerged in public, many battered women feel more encouraged to share their experiences with others. In this workshop, for instance, among the participants was a thirty-four year old woman who has recently separated from her husband after seventeen years of physical and psychological abuse.

Faith and Freedom: *Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*

Edited by Mahnaz Afkhami
London: I.B. Taurus and Co., Ltd., 1995

Reviewed by Nathalie Sirois
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"Few words in contemporary political and ideological lexicons have been as misused and abused as 'Islam' by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike" (p.33). With this statement, Fatima Mernissi, the noted Moroccan sociologist, begins her contribution to *Faith and Freedom*. Her brief comment captures the spirit of this volume as a whole. Under the leadership of Mahnaz Afkhami, ten women and one man come together from varied ethnic and disciplinary backgrounds to challenge both Muslims and non-Muslims to re-assess their opinions and re-examine their perspectives concerning the current status of women's human rights in the Muslim world.

This volume is the fruit of a conference entitled "The Washington Dialogue". It was presented by the Sisterhood Is Global Institute (SIGI) in September 1994 in preparation for the 1995 UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing. In her powerful introduction, Afkhami, who is the Executive Director of SIGI, first pauses to acknowledge the great diversity among the now half a billion women living in the Muslim world before speaking of their common struggles in the face of Islamist intransigence. This book is about their struggles, which Afkhami refers to as the "casting off of a tradition of subjection" through a process of rewriting women's identities. Islam denotes a submission to Allah, not to men. Afkhami condemns the flawed use of the concept of cultural relativity in debates concerning Muslim women's rights, whether invoked by Westerners or "fundamentalists". Her critique, while not original, is clearly and concisely articulated and speaks to the heart of the matter.

Faith and Freedom is divided into two distinct but complementary sections. The first is entitled "Women, Islam and Patriarchy" and focuses on the patriarchal structures that have led to the presentation of Islam as incompatible with or contradictory to women's human rights. Afkhami notes that

"increasingly, women are questioning the framework within which Islamic discourse has developed. The primary question is no longer what Islam has said, but who has said what on behalf of Islam and why. Thus, increasingly, the politics of achieving the rights to interpret Islamic texts becomes salient" (pp. 13-14). Here, women's calls for change resonate mostly from within Islam; the respect and protection of women's rights are viewed as part and parcel of a rich Islamic tradition. The book's contributors attempt to expose the existing disparity between what religion advises and what those who hold power say, and also examines the confusion which results when the two are presented as one and the same. The book's analyses center on the issue of power and its uses in contemporary Muslim societies.

In her review of the politics of gender in the Middle East, Deniz Kandiyoti surveys Western influences on Muslim women's rights from post-colonial state-building to present-day Western aid and IMF policies. Fatima Mernissi's critique of the attribution of the quality of "rationality" to the West and democracy and "irrationality" to Islam is insightful, albeit best formulated in her endnotes rather than in the body of her text. Mernissi confesses her contribution to this volume may have been something of an exercise in therapy, and her first few pages certainly convey that flavor. After the confusing introduction, however, she very effectively articulates her views on the true nature of the Muslim World's resistance to the "outside world".

For his part, Abdullahi An-Na'im's presentation is one of action: although the dichotomy between religious and secular discourses on women's human rights in Islamic societies have been, in his words, "somewhat false or grossly exaggerated", he nevertheless acknowledges its very tangible impact on reality. His reflections are positive and well-balanced as he stresses the importance of activists engaging in Islamic discourse in order to counter-act fundamentalists, and further, the necessity for women to formulate their own Islamic justifications for women's human rights.

Bouthaina Shaaban's examination of the contribution of women interpreters in the history of Islam and the position they are given today

presents an inspiring model for readers. Farida Shaheed's promotion of a complementary mode of action, networking, is convincing. She explores its effects on fostering empowerment among women while respecting the complexity and diversity in backgrounds and aspirations of the immense population of the Muslim world. Both Shaaban and Shaheed reemphasize the essential perspective of the book, i.e., that Muslim women should define their own identity for themselves within the context of the rich Islamic tradition.

The first section closes with a comprehensive view of the international scene in Ann Elizabeth Mayer's clever juxtaposition of the forms of rhetoric employed by Muslim countries, the U.S. Government, and the Vatican vis-a-vis women's equal rights. Her analysis is as thorough as one could wish to see expressed in 25 pages and successfully demonstrates that Islam presents no unique obstacles or hindrances to the achievement of women's human rights.

The second section deals with women and violence by surveying the experience of women in Saudi Arabia, "political rape" victims in Pakistan, the war against women in Algeria, the plight of refugee and returnee women in Afghanistan, and Toujan al-Faisal's recent experiences in Jordan. The cases chosen provide concrete examples of the kind of physical intimidation and oppression many women experience as daily realities in some Muslim countries. As Mahnaz Afkhami observes: "The stories generally corroborate Ann Mayer's thesis that Muslim women's predicament is significantly exacerbated by governmental hypocrisy" (p.9).

Eleanor Abdella Doumato's chapter analyzes women's relative successes in Saudi Arabia, particularly in the academic field, as direct challenges to the prevailing conception of women's inferiority in the Muslim world. She, too, places her hopes for the future in the very quality of the shari'a (Islamic legal code) which she describes as being used to justify the oppression of women: its ambiguity.

Shahla Haeri defends her claim concerning the existence of "political rape" in Pakistan as a modern expression of "feudal honor rape" by presenting as cases in point the rapes of women associated with Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party in 1990. Sima Wali likewise takes an example from this corner of the world, this time from Afghanistan. She reminds us of the forgotten ones: refugee, returnee, and displaced women, emphasizing that approximately 80 percent of the world's 20 million refugees are Muslim, 75 percent of whom are women and

their dependent children (p.176).

Mahnaz Afkhami's editorial approach is inclusive. This is reflected in the structure as well as in the tone of the volume. Concerned with developing a concrete plan of action that will lead to the empowerment of Muslim women and the protection of their human rights, she calls for the contribution of people from all social strata, from Muslims and non-Muslim societies, from the North and from the South. She offers a straightforward list of realistic actions that she believes must be undertaken by Muslim women and "women from the North" in a cooperative effort if such goals are to be accomplished (see specifically pp. 5-6). The reader's only regret here is that these points are still not regarded as self-evident on any significant scale. The contribution by Karima Bennoune best captures this cry for cooperation and respect between Muslim and non-Muslim women.

One of the first steps toward achieving a better understanding of the situation of women in the Muslim world may be the very act of reading this important volume. The book's language is clear, the arguments are well-structured, and although it contains many references to historical events and conventions, the volume is extremely well-annotated and may therefore serve as a good tool for those interested in exploring these issues more closely. The volume would make an excellent text for a course on women's issues in the contemporary Muslim world.

Faith and Freedom certainly should be read by Western, non-Muslim women activists interested in helping their sisters in the Muslim World (it would certainly help to dispel misplaced fears of political incorrectness!). For those who may already be familiar with the positions expressed in Faith and Freedom, the volume should not be dismissed too quickly. The combined efforts of these competent scholars have generated a well-balanced survey of the most important facets of the issues while providing realistic articulations of the possibilities for future coordinated action between Muslim and non-Muslim women. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice the differences in positions expressed on certain details (for example, when Bouthaina Shaaban recriminates Fatima Mernissi on her lack of acknowledgment of Nazira Zin al-Din's work in her own studies). These women are not interested in parroting one another. It is admirable and exemplary that, despite occasional differences, they have still come together and remain standing together in their fight for women's human rights. In this sense, the authors practice what they preach.

Arab Women Novelists: *The Formative Years and Beyond*

by Joseph T. Zeidan
Albany, NY: State University of Albany Press,
1995
363 pages

Reviewed by Dr. Kristiaan Aercke,
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Dr. Joseph Zeidan, Professor of Near Eastern Literature at Ohio State University, has published two editions of the Bibliography of Women's Literature in the Modern Arab World. In his latest book, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*, he surveys a relatively new genre in Arabic literature: novels by Arab women. The study is limited to women writers from the Arab East, i.e., Lebanon, Egypt, Syria and Palestine, where the genre originated, and focuses upon women who use Arabic as their vehicle of creative expression. In his Introduction, Zeidan argues that Arab women writers deliberately refused the use of European languages in order to better express local issues and concerns to a larger Arab audience and thereby directly influence Arab culture and politics. A key issue confronting these women novelists is the need to grapple with the patriarchal traditions of Classical Arabic language and literature which tend to marginalize women's self-expression.

Chapter One, "Women in Arab Society: A Historical Perspective," discusses the status of women in the Arabian Peninsula and the Arab East from pre-Islamic times up until the 1960s. The information is standard. Zeidan summarizes the well-known theories on the position of women in the pre-Islamic period, the formalization of women's rights and duties in Islam, and the heated discussion regarding the veil, women's education and segregation. Western readers may be surprised to learn that the 19th century Arab women's movement was almost exclusively run by male scholars who only gradually lost their exclusive right to speak and write on behalf of women.

Chapter Two, "The Pioneering Generation,"

reveals how literary women in the Arab East, from the 19th century *nahda* (Renaissance) period until the mid-twentieth century, slowly validated their participation in cultural life, in spite of the fact that the patriarchal environment made it so difficult for them to imagine themselves as writers, let alone to be accepted as serious artists. Among these pioneers, we must consider the privileged, educated women who animated literary societies, journals and salons. Though numerous, they achieved little else than bringing mainstream cultural activities into their otherwise isolated lives. The first real contribution of Arab women to their literature was poetry, especially eulogies, elegies and love lyrics. Few of these early women poets, however, diverged from the conventions of European and Arab male poets, and fewer still dared to break away from the "puritanical approach to the Arabic language taken by the mainstream [male] writers" (p. 61). The remarks on Egypt's Aisha Taymur, "perhaps the most outstanding female Arab writer to emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century" (p. 59), provide a good transition to Zeidan's survey of early writers of fiction, since Taymur was both a "remarkable" poet and a "mediocre" story-teller (p. 61). The pioneers of women's fiction (e.g., Alice Al-Bustani, Zaynab Fawwaz, Labibah Hashim, Labibah Sawaya, Faridah Atiyyah, Afifah Karam and Mayy Ziadeh) deserve praise for their courageous determination to write rather than for their artistic achievements. They hewed to historical plots and conventional melodrama (again imitated from European novels or from patriarchal Arab literary traditions). Their control over form was weak and they were only slowly learning to construct narratives and to ply the language to convey their intentions. Mayy Ziyadah is cited as the most gifted and original of these women, "the first Arab woman in modern times to be recognized as an established writer in her own lifetime" (77). The work of Bint al-Shati represents a significant change in Arabic women's fiction the world wars: real-life social problems of ordinary women (especially in the country-side) gradually replaced the conventional historical themes and the *cliché* characters. Overall, these pioneers were certainly not feminists; none of them tried to topple the "whole superstructure of [literary, cultural, social and linguistic] norms set up by men" (p. 90); instead, they generally conformed to these norms.

The third chapter, "The Quest for Personal Identity," surveys the 1950s and 1960s, when "Women novelists began to assert themselves as

'beings in society' and at the same time achieved a heightened sense of individuality" in the face of often very harsh criticism (p. 235). Zeidan devotes separate sections to Aminah al-Sa'id ("New Beginnings"), Layla Ba'albakki ("Rebellion"), Colette Al-Khuri ("Unconvincing Developments"), Layla Usayran ("More Experiments"), Emily Nasrallah ("Village Novelist"), and Nawal As-Sa'adawi ("Militant Fiction"). These authors exposed the many negative repercussions of the patriarchal social system for women and, through their heroines, demanded the right to personal self-determination in matters of social activities, sexuality and politics. Obviously, much work produced in this period resembled that of earlier feminist writers in the West.

Chapter Four, "The Quest for National Identity", covers the period from 1967 through the early 1980s. In this section, Zeidan gives particular attention to the impact of the Palestinian question and the Lebanese war on women's writing. As a result of these national crises, many writers' interests shifted from the private female experience to the collective one. Women began writing novels about traumatized women in a world made hostile by international political maneuvering and dilemmas of national, ethnic and confessional identity. In this Chapter, Zeidan examines work by artists such as As-Sa'adawi, Az-Zayyat, Khalifeh, Badr, As-Samaan, Al-Shaykh and several others whose work is directly inspired by the war experience.

Finally, the book's reference section is impressive. It accounts for fully one-third of the book: five appendices with publication data on women's journals in Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and "the rest of the Arab world and abroad", a 26-page appendix of novels written by Arab women between 1887 and 1993, substantial end notes, thirty pages of bibliography and a fine index.

Arab Women Novelists aims to convince the Western target audience of the fact that women have been writing in the Arab world for a very long time; that, in spite of a slow start due to cultural and religious circumstances, they have gradually established their creative and intellectual presence; and that today *i.e.*, by the early 1980s, they have achieved much as artists. To this end, the author offers an avalanche of factual information (such as names, dates, titles and lists — both in the reference section and in the main body of the book) a predictable chronological organization, an impressive number of often lengthy plot summaries, and fine analyses of many novels. He makes adequate connections between the literary developments and the concurrent sociopolitical changes in the Arab world. He also compares the women's movements and women's literature in the Arab world and in the West. All of this

is very illuminating. However, what is lacking is an agenda or a critical argument which would have made this study truly fascinating. The author presents the fruits of his exhaustive research (and wide reading in several languages) in a chronological and deterministic framework while refraining from taking a critical stand. There is nothing about which to argue.

It is therefore difficult to establish what type of scholarly book *Arab Women Novelists* really is. Is it primarily a reference work, a literary history, a work of literary criticism, or an attempt to be all of the above? In his Introduction, Zeidan seems to hint that he mainly aspires to literary criticism namely when he posits that a book on women writers must be grounded in literary-critical feminist thought and discourse, although Western feminist thought should not and cannot be indiscriminately applied to non-Western culture. But in spite of its good intentions and regardless of its many merits, this book does not really have much of a significant literary-theoretical foundation, feminist or otherwise. (There are a few passages of a theoretical nature and a few token bows to feminist scholars such as Elaine Showalter and Helene Cixous.) Moreover, over-indulgence in plot summaries has become unacceptable in literary criticism; the fact that many of the novels under discussion remain untranslated and unavailable to the target audience is not a valid excuse. And finally, as mentioned earlier, the author does not propose any critical argument or agenda with which we can agree or disagree.

Consequently, we read on, but we are not entirely engaged; we learn much, but we do not feel particularly challenged or stimulated. In fact, we have the impression that we are reading neither genuine literary criticism, nor a pure reference work nor a narrowly focused literary history, but...a doctoral dissertation. Doctoral dissertations, even when exceptionally solid, seldom provide intellectual thrills and challenges. They aim at encyclopedic completeness. Their formal organization is predictable. Numerous plot summaries and discussions prove that the author has read much and that he has acquired a solid grasp of the techniques of literary analysis. Theoretical references suggest familiarity with basic names and ideologies. And a strictly impersonal, detached attitude toward the material is unlikely to upset any member of the dissertation committee.

In spite of its dissertation-like character, however, this is a very useful book. Thanks to its solid scholarship and rich documentation, it should remain useful for many years to come. It is an important and timely contribution to Arabic literary studies, Arab women's studies, Middle Eastern studies, cultural studies and comparative literature.