



AL-Raida

Lebanese American University

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The Pioneer الرائدة

Arab Women in Civil Society

ABOUT IWSAW

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

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

PROJECTS: IWSAW activities include academic research on women, local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures and 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, Chouran Beirut, 1102 2801 Lebanon; Telephone: 961 1 867618, ext. 1288; Fax: 961 1 791645. 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.



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Picture Credit: Movement of the People

Al-Raida

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SUBSCRIPTION

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

Women's Work in Civil Society Organizations

By Heba El-Shazli

Member of the Editorial Board, Al-Raida

Have Arab women been able to be more effective and empowered through their work in civil society organizations?

The answer to this question is both in the negative and positive i.e. women have made great achievements yet there are still serious obstacles to be overcome in addition to the setbacks that have occurred. This issue of *Al-Raida* will address this question through the articles within its pages.

Arab civil society is composed of non-governmental organizations and some advocacy organizations that represent different interests in society to promote a civil society that is engaged in democratic political reform. These organizations have encountered many difficulties over the last few years owing to more restrictive laws (in Egypt's case) that limit their scope and activities, and to a general apathy on the part of the citizens themselves: "The state in most countries in the region, whether monarchial or 'socialist', had maintained firm control over politics, the economy and society, leaving little space for autonomous social or economic power." (Zubaida, 2001: 232) However, despite those difficulties there are active organizations that are promoting civil society and its important role as an advocate for participation, respect, tolerance and all the other attributes of a democratic society. The apathy on the part of the citizens is the more difficult aspect to overcome. Within a closed political sphere that prevails in the Arab world, it is difficult for a secular civil society to work in an environment that is increasingly becoming more religious and returning to fundamentalist conservative notions. Within this context, one has to

address the issue of democracy and the role of women in civil society since women who are perceived as the engines for reform, are still suffering from discrimination and bias. Saad El-Din Ibrahim, one of the earliest advocates of civil society as a basis for democracy in the region, defines civil society in terms of "volitional, organized, collective participation in public space between individuals and the state." (Ibrahim, 1995: 28) He goes on to list political parties, trade unions, community development associations and other interest groups. Owing to the different situation in the region, women's work in the civil society sector has to be considered as an engine for quiet rather than dramatic change. (Ibrahim 1995:28)

There have been arguments that in the Arab world there is not much of a civil society that faces the predominant but weak centralized state system. However, there is much in the history of the Arab world that point to examples of civil society, from professional guilds and syndicates to religious communities that have often played the role of arbiter between the state and the people and as advisor to the state. Civil society is not a purely Western concept — it is a concept of citizens interacting to achieve a goal through a civilian manner.

A December 1999 article in *The Economist* attributes the rapid growth of the citizen sector to the exponential rise of non-governmental organizations (NGOs): "One conservative yardstick of international NGOs (that is, groups with operations in more than one country) is the Yearbook of International Organizations. This puts the number

of international NGOs at more than 26,000 today, up from 6,000 in 1990. Far more groups exist within national borders." Based upon a recent article by *World Watch*, the bimonthly magazine of *World Watch Institute* (itself an NGO), the *Economist* maintains that "the United States alone has about 2 million NGOs, 70 percent of which are less than 30 years old. India has about 1 million grass-roots groups, while another conservative estimate suggests that more than 100,000 sprang up in Eastern Europe between 1988 and 1995."

So where does the Arab world stand in relation to the growth of civil society organizations (CSOs) and participation of women in civil society and in its CSOs? There are hundreds of CSOs that work in the field of education, literacy, environment, health, youth, sports and even in politics. Within this framework, the question that arises is whether these organizations with their skill base will spill over into the real political realm and pave the way for more participation by citizens in the way they are governed? The answer is yes, yet it will take more time than we have anticipated in the Arab world, and the leadership role of women will be crucial.

Today there are organizations, many of which are managed and led by women, that engage in dialogue, participation and learning that are working in different fields notably in political activities. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) in Egypt is engaged in training women to run for political office in addition to other empowerment types of activities. The Democratic Association of Moroccan Women (ADFM) is

working through a coalition to change the personal status laws in Morocco and to promote the concept of a quota of seats designated for women in the Moroccan Parliament. The SOS for the Disappeared in Algeria is an organization that facilitates the staging of peaceful demonstrations by ordinary mothers to pressure the government to find their sons and daughters who have "disappeared for political reasons". In Yemen, the women who were elected as members of the municipal councils in Yemen (composed of 0.05% of the members of all the councils in Yemen) are trying to make a difference for all citizens in the municipalities. The Sisterhood is Global Institute (SIGI) - Jordan dared to bring to the forefront the heinous honor crimes in Jordan and elsewhere. The AWAL women's organization in Bahrain took the bold move to educate women on their political rights in the municipal elections held in May 2002. The Palestinian Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) challenged the newly formed Palestinian Authority when it required women to secure their male guardian's permission for a passport.

These are examples of women in civil society organizations that are trying to make a difference in women's lives as well as in all citizens' lives. They are trying to promote good governance and reforms in political life in their respective countries. In July 2002, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) presented the Arab Human Development Report 2002. It is the first regional report of its kind for the Arab states and will be published

annually from now on. This is a report that has been prepared in its entirety by a team of Arab scholars - independent from the UNDP and supported by regional policymakers. The report focuses on the progress made by the members of the League of Arab States in political freedom, economy and human development defined as "the process of enlarging economic, social, political and cultural choices".

As a whole, the report affirms that substantial progress in human development has been achieved in the Arab countries. It particularly singles out the fact that the fastest improvement in women's education in the world - starting in the 70s - has been attained in this region. On the other hand, the report focuses on the 3 deficits: the freedom deficit, the women's empowerment deficit and the human capabilities/knowledge deficit. These deficits hinder further human development and also have a negative impact on the region's economies.

Referring to women's empowerment, the following is stated in the UNDP report's executive summary: "Utilization of Arab women's capabilities through political and economic participation remain the lowest in the world in quantitative terms. Women occupy only 3.5 % of all seats in parliaments of Arab countries compared to 11% in sub-Saharan Africa and 12.9% in Latin America and Caribbean countries. In many countries of the region, women suffer from unequal citizenship and legal entitlements. In some countries with elected national assemblies, women are still denied the right to vote or hold office. And one in every two Arab women can

neither read nor write. Society as a whole suffers when half of its productive potential is stifled. These deficits must be addressed in every field: economic, political, and social."

It is a matter of time and hard work when women will be the most vocal voice advocating for change, participation and tolerance — some of the vital ingredients needed in any democratic society. There is still much that needs to be accomplished in terms of the legal context and skills acquisition. Despite the obstacles, there are Arab women leaders who are already forging the way. The outlook is hopeful yet much strategizing and coalition-building needs to take place amongst Arab women and affiliated civil society organizations.

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- Zubaida, Sami. 'Civil Society, Community, and Democracy in the Middle East' in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, editors, Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 232.

Women the Target of Fundamentalists

By Anna Karamanou

Member of the European Parliament and President
of the Committee on Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities

Recently, we experienced the drama of Safiya Husseini, sentenced to death by stoning by the Islamic court of Sokoto in Nigeria, for committing the "crime" of having an extra-marital child. It was followed by the death penalty for Abok Alfa Akok, a pregnant southern Sudanese woman. These two incidents brought to the public debate the issue of the violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms for millions of women around the world. Although the international outcry, the mobilization of the civil society and the European Parliament managed, in the last minute, to save the lives of the two women, the issue of violence against women remains.

Unfortunately, despite the United Nation's international conferences and the various ambitious action plans, a frustrating backlash is being observed, due mainly to the resurgence of Islamic fanaticism and ultra-conservatism. The rise of Taliban and the latest events in Afghanistan is a characteristic example. The most fundamental human rights - access to education, to work, to health services, to politics - were taken away from women overnight. The Taliban, like any despotic and antidemocratic regime, founded their power on

the subjugation of women and the 'return to fundamentals'. In such regimes, sexual behavior, the reproductive functions of women, and their clothing, are usually controlled by the religious leaders, in the name of the - so-called - holy rules and cultural traditions. At the same time, practices of cruel, inhuman and humiliating punishment, such as whipping or stoning are an every day phenomenon.

In September 2000, the United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) estimated that approximately 5,000 women are murdered every year by male members of their families to protect the family 'honor'. In countries where such a form of violence is considered as an acceptable way of controlling women's behavior and not as a serious crime, the perpetrators remain unpunished.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 130 million women worldwide are subject to mutilation of their genital organs, while 2 million women are exposed to such practice yearly. What is tragic is that, at least half of the African countries that uphold this tradition have either adopted laws which prohibit it completely or partly, or have com-

mitted themselves through Partnership with the European Union, without the latter being respected. Obviously, in those countries, the power of prejudices and social rules is higher than the rule of law. In Europe, it is feared, not without cause, that these criminal practices have been imported to the countries of E.E. through the immigration waves. According to the British Medical Association, 3,000 cliterodectomies are carried out every year in the United Kingdom. However, among the countries of E.E. only the United Kingdom and Sweden have laws prohibiting this practice.

Undoubtedly, irrationalism and intolerance impede every effort for women's emancipation. Women's rights, in the eyes of fanatics, represent a threat to the existing male-centric order and a destruction of family values. Even today, fundamentalists all over the world put as their main political objective the control of women's reproductive abilities. The penalization of abortions was one of the primary issues of the political agenda of the USA over the last presidential elections. Usually, those who are 'pro-life' are those supporting with the same zeal the death penalty, the armaments and the warrior foreign policy.

Without any doubt, the most adequate defense against the forces of intolerance is the reinforcement of the secular state and the democratic rule of law. No political regime, no religious movement, no tradition, or custom comes above the respect of fundamental human rights, the democratic freedoms and the rule of law. The full respect of women's rights and the issue of gender equality constitute one of the greatest political challenges of our era. The promotion of a global campaign for the consolidation of these rights would be the most suitable political response to those longing for the Middle Age.

Recent Publications

Chatty, Dawn. *Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Women's Groups in the Middle East*. Oxford. New York: Berg Publishers, 1997.
Deakin, Nicholas. *In Search of Civil Society*. Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001.
Hann, C.M. & Dunn, Elizabeth. *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*. London: Routledge, 1996.
Macdonald, Mandy, Sprenger, Ellen & Dubel, Ireen. *Gender and Organizational Change: Bridging the Gap between Policy and Practice*. New York: Women Ink, 1997.
McCarthy, Kathleen D. *Women, Philanthropy, and Civil Society*. Bloomington; Indiana University Press, 2001.
Sweetman, Caroline. *Gender in the 21st Century*. New York: Women Ink, 2000.

Announcement

H-Gender-Mideast is an international electronic network for social scientists and humanists interested in scholarly exchange on issues of gender in the Arabic speaking Middle East & North Africa, Turkey, the Caucasus, Iran, Central Asia, Western Asia (Pakistan, Bangladesh, India), the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa. It aims to build a network in tune with shifting geographical articulations and to bring together gender-focused issues from within a wide range of (inter) disciplinary positions.

In addition to facilitating transnational dialogue and cross-regional networking, H-Gender-MidEast serves as a resources nexus within and through which discussions, research projects, announcements of conferences, workshops, seminars, policy debates and educational programs on gender issues are

engaged. It's on-line activities include reviews of books, journals and exhibitions, reports on new archival or bibliographical sources, new software, datasets and CD-Roms. Four times a year H-Gender-MidEast publishes an index of recently published articles and books relevant to its geographical focus.

Established at the beginning of this year, H-Gender-MidEast invites scholars, researchers and graduate students (Ph.D. level) to participate in building a network across new geographical and philosophical boundaries. To join H-Gender-MidEast write to: h-gender-mideast@h-net.msu.edu

H-Gender-MidEast is sponsored by H-Net, Humanities and Social Sciences On-line and The Institute for Gender and Women's Studies (IGWS) at the American University in Cairo (www.aucegypt.edu/igws). It is advised by a board of international scholars (<http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~gend-mid/>)

Films

On Boys, Girls and the Veil
Directed by Youstry Nasrallah
72 minutes

Nasrallah, in his documentary "On Boys, Girls and the Veil", takes us on an exquisite tour of a subject normally over-dramatized by the West. Taking the debate beyond the simplistic approach and with familiarity rarely seen, young men and women talk about the 'hijab' and its social implications. Most of the youths regard the head scarf not primarily as a religious obligation, but as a social construction that symbolizes a girl's respectability or sexual innocence. When talking amongst themselves, however, the young men acknowledge the sexual double standard.

Return to the Dying Rooms
Directed and produced by Brian Woods and Kate Blewett
24 minutes

Due to the one child per family policy that was introduced in China in 1979, infanticide is on the rise. Coerced abortions, sterilization, drowning babies, etc. are all means to get rid of unwanted pregnancies. China's dying rooms are orphanages/death camps where unwanted unhealthy baby boys and healthy baby girls are abandoned and left to die. The documentary "Return to the Dying Rooms" uncovers the grave human rights violations that take place in state-run Chinese orphanages where children are tied to chairs, starved, and neglected to the point of torture.

Blackboards
Directed by Samira Makhmalbaf
85 minutes

"Blackboards" directed by Iran's youngest female director is shot in a mountainous region of Iran, close to the border to Iraq, where a group of teachers with blackboards strapped to their backs wander from village to village offering their services to anyone they meet in exchange for money or food. Their blackboards not only serve teaching purposes they also serve as shields, as shelters, and some people even use them to barter for brides. The film depicts the suffering of the Kurd refugees who long to reach their homeland. It also highlights the importance of education in a society where children are desperately trying to stay alive and often question the necessity of being able to read and write. Moreover, it also tackles the theme of love, childhood innocence as well as the cynicism of the war between Iran and Iraq.

Awards
2000 Prix du Jury, Cannes Film Festival

“The gender debate for me has deepened the whole question of power. As a man I feel that there are many dimensions of power where I am not in a position of power. Yet in terms of gender, I am [powerful]; and I am not conscious of that as I am not interested in playing power games, but I realize (with hindsight that I am actually located within a position of power. (Mandy Macdonald et al. *Gender and Organizational Change: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice*, p.42)

“Women flock the corridors of public offices and use their visibility and physical presence as a means of achieving their aims .. Although I did not observe the formation of formal women’s groups in these situations, ... there is, at the very least, the formation of a female front, one that relies on the supposed individuality of each case while evoking particularly female culture categories such as motherhood. Thus women constantly invoke the domestic sphere to legitimize their excursions into the public sphere and their incursions into the formal decision-making arena.” (Dawn Chatty and Annika Rabo (eds.) *Organizing Women: Formal and Informal Women’s Group in the Middle East*, p. 235)

“As a woman working in a male-dominated sector, I find that the gender issue gives me the opportunity and the strength to fight for changes that are not strictly connected with gender but which do promote the sensitivity on ‘difference’, in terms of age, race, ethnicity or class, which is so important for our work” (Mandy Macdonald et al. *Gender and Organizational Change: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice*, p.28)

“The fear that we may be imposing our own cultural values by insisting on promoting gender equity in our development work is a real one. However, it is real not because we have concerns about cultural imperialism, but because we allow our own culture-based assumptions about women to color the way we receive alternative visions of gender equality. We assume that women in developing countries are passive and docile, and that our own view of gender roles, norms, and practices is true for everyone. We also fail to recognize the everyday forms of resistance put up by subordinated groups, because these forms of

resistance may not correspond to our experience.” (Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, *Development and Gender* 3/1 [Oxfam, 1995]: 15)

“Making an organization’s culture friendly to women involves challenging male dominance. Women need to move as freely and comfortably in the organizational medium as men do: to reclaim a cliché usually uttered as criticism, women need to be able to act ‘as if they owned the place.’ To achieve this, an organizational culture and structures of mutual support for women need to be built, so that women can feel they are not isolated individuals but a potentially powerful group.” (Mandy Macdonald et al. *Gender and Organizational Change: Bridging the Gap between Policy and Practice*, p.127)

“As time goes by, it is becoming clearer that the recognition of women’s right to vote, or to take an active part in political life, does not on its own make any fundamental change in the position of women who stand on the lowest rungs of society. Whether they throng to the voting booths or abstain, succeed in getting into parliament or fail, the position of a woman belonging to the poorer classes of society does not improve except in very minor ways. She remains a prey to exploitation and oppression, a vassal to her husband and a prisoner of the class to which she belongs. Even when there is a strong women’s organization that can reap the benefits of new laws, and a sweeping movement towards social change, the progress that women can attain remains limited.” (Nawal Al-Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, p. 178)

“When women’s legal rights are insecure, they demand more children. If women cannot own land, do not have rights to property when their husbands die or if they divorce, or are legally treated as minors, then children provide them with their only security. Unless women’s legal status is strengthened, they will demand large families as insurance against future uncertainty. Laws must be enforced to ensure women’s rights to acquire, own and dispose of property, and to protect them from discrimination. Customary laws and practices that inhibit women’s rights and opportunities must also be addressed (Suad Joseph (ed.), *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, p. 156)

From Palestine

Monday, August 19 2002
RAMALLAH (LAW):

Palestinian female detainees in Israeli prisons are ill-treated. Today, fifty Palestinian women are imprisoned in Israeli prisons and detention centers. Forty female detainees are detained at Al-Ramle prison, including six minors. The other female detainees are detained in al-Jalameh and the Russian Compound (‘Moscowbiya’).

Prison conditions in Al-Ramle do not meet the basic minimum standards. Palestinian female detainees are exposed to humiliating body searches. Those who refuse to undergo this humiliating search are being handcuffed, with the hands on the back, and forced to take off their clothes. There have been cases when Palestinian female detainees were threatened of being stripped and searched by Israeli male guards and of solitary confinement. Inspections of the cells of Palestinian female detainees are done in an aggressive manner, properties are thrown on the floor, to be left for the detainees to clean up.

Palestinian female detainees are exposed to humiliation, degradation and verbal harassment by Israeli prison guards and Israeli criminal prisoners. Only a metal fence separates political prisoners from criminal prisoners. This has especially a negative effect in terms of psychological problems, in particular, on the detained Palestinian minors. There are only seven cells in Al-Ramle prison. Each cell hosts five to seven Palestinian female detainees. Recess periods depend on the relation between the prison authority and prisoners. Regularly, recess periods for Palestinian female detainees have been reduced or banned completely.

Medical treatment is poor. There is a physician at Al-Ramle prison, but since she is Russian, she does not speak or understand Arabic, which makes it impossible to treat psychological problems, which has, in particular, a negative effect on minors. The female detainees are in general not allowed to call their families. Even if the Palestinian female detainee is allowed to call her family, the prison authorities record the phone call, and she is not allowed to inform her family that the phone conversation is recorded. Palestinian female detainees with Westbank identity cards are prevented from family visits. Family visits are only allowed for female prisoners who carry a Jerusalem identity card.

On Monday, July 29, waste water flooded into the prison cells. Prison guards assaulted the Palestinian female prisoners with teargas grenades and two of the female prisoners fainted. This assault followed a request by the Palestinian female prisoners at the prison authorities of Al-Ramle prison to do something about this.

Prison guards broke into their cells and transferred Amna Mona to al-Jalameh prison, and Suad Ghazal (18), who

was arrested at the age of 15, to Abu Kbir detention center, and Ahlam al-Tamimi to the Russian Compound (‘Moscowbiya’) in Jerusalem. The prison authorities placed a number of Palestinian female prisoners in solitary confinement as a punitive measure for protesting the transfer of the three female prisoners. Subsequently, the Palestinian female prisoners started a hungerstrike, which lasted until August 16. As a punitive measure, nine other Palestinian female detainees were held in solitary confinement and Palestinian female prisoners carrying a Jerusalem identity card were also prevented from family visits.

LAW is deeply concerned about the inhuman and degrading treatment of Palestinian female prisoners in Al-Ramle prison. In the same way that Israel is accountable under international law for preventing torture and ill-treatment, it is also required to uphold prisoners’ privacy rights as codified in article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Fourth Geneva Convention clearly prohibits the transfer of Palestinian detainees from the Occupied Palestinian Territories to Israel. Article 76 states that ‘Protected persons accused of offences shall be detained in the occupied country, and if convicted they shall serve their sentences therein’. Israel’s treatment of Palestinian detainees does not meet the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons Under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, and the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners. These instruments are binding on Israel to the extent that the norms set out in them explicate the broader standards contained in human rights treaties. LAW further calls on the Israeli government to ensure that the rights of detainees are protected in accordance with international human rights and humanitarian law. Moreover, LAW calls on the international community, in particular the member states of the European Union to ensure Israel’s respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention and to live up to their legal obligations.

LAW is gravely concerned about the fate of thousands of Palestinian political prisoners who are still in custody, without charge or trial, often under administrative detention orders which may be renewed indefinitely. There is strong evidence that the majority of those detained have been arbitrarily detained, and that thousands of Palestinians have been rounded up, humiliated, ill-treated and held in poor conditions as a collective punishment.

Source: LAW - The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment is a non-governmental organization dedicated to preserving human rights through legal advocacy. email: law@lawsociety.org, web: www.lawsociety.org

International Women's Day

On March 7, 2002 the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Lebanese American University along with the Public Affairs Section, Embassy of the United States of America hosted Dr. Miriam Cooke renowned writer and scholar. In her talk, Cooke shared with the audience her experience in writing on controversial subjects pertaining to women's issues.



Mona Khalaf, Miriam Cooke, and Deborah B. Smith

Tunisian Activist at IWSAW

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World hosted Ms. Amel Ben Aba a Tunisian woman activist who gave a lecture "Feminism in Tunisia: Past and Present." The lecture took place on April 18, 2002 and was attended by LAU professors, students and women activists.

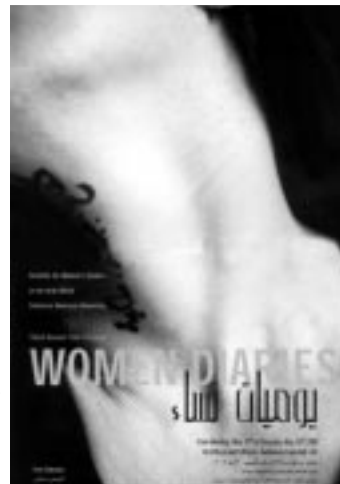


Evelyne Accad, Amel Ben Aba, and Mona Khalaf

Film Festival

Women Diaries

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Lebanese American University - in consultancy with Cine-Club Direct Line - held its third annual film festival from May 27-30, 2002. The movies and documentaries selected tackled three themes namely violence, work, and how women relate to their bodies. The films screened were selected because they highlight universal women's issues and offer an unconventional, non-commercial and alternative vision of the image of women.



International Colloquium on Women and Education

IWSAW Director Mona Khalaf attended the International Colloquium on Women and Education held at the University of Fes in Morocco from April 11-13, 2002. Khalaf spoke in the opening session where she presented a paper entitled "The Impact of Education on the Status of Lebanese Women."



Mona Khalaf with conference participants

Globalization and Economic Participation of Arab Women

IWSAW Director Mona Khalaf participated in the Arab Women and Economy forum held in Kuwait from April 26-28, 2002 where she presented a paper "Globalization and Economic Participation of Arab Women."



IWSAW director Mona Khalaf in one of the panels



Evelyne Accad singing

Evelyne Accad Lectures at IWSAW

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World organized an informal gathering with Dr. Evelyne Accad on June 4, 2002. Accad gave a talk "Gender and Violence in the Lebanese War Novels." Her talk was accompanied with songs written and sung by Accad herself.

UNIFEM Expert Meeting

IWSAW Director Mona Khalaf attended the UNIFEM Expert Meeting that took place in Tunis from June 16-21, 2002. The purpose of the meeting was to examine the training program prepared by the UNIFEM Arab States Regional Office on "Arab Women's Human Rights in the Context of CEDAW." Khalaf critically reviewed the first part of the program which dealt with "Women and Economic Rights."

Arab Women and

Civil Society

How have women in the Arab world fared in the development and promotion of civil society in the region? The following contributions to this issue of *Al-Raida* will give us a glimpse into the world of women activists in Arab civil society and whether they have made any achievements. One will conclude that the road is still long and arduous, yet important steps have been taken by men and women activists working to promote the role of Arab women in civil society organizations.

First *Al-Raida* presents an overall global review of issues in the Arab world pertaining to Arab women's participation in civil society. Valentine Moghadam presents an insightful paper entitled: "Citizenship, Civil Society and Women in the Arab Region" where she addresses the issues of citizenship, civil society and democratization, an increasingly important dimension that has gained prominence in the current debates. There are a number of civil society organizations around the region that are coalescing together to advocate for women's right to citizenship and the right to pass it on to her children. For women, citizenship concerns social standing, political participation, and national membership, writes Moghadam. Empirically, women's citizenship is reflected in their legal status, in access to employment and income, in the extent of their participation in formal politics, and in the formation of women's organizations. Moghadam argues that women in many countries in the Arab world are at the center of the struggles to define and extend democracy, citizenship, and civil society. She concludes with women's struggles – whether around the modernization of family laws, or in the fight against fundamentalism, or around the demands for greater employment opportunities, political participation, or nationality rights – that remain the central drive for the struggle for citizenship and for a civil society.

Laila Al-Hamad gives us an overview of Arab women's organizations' achievements despite their fragility and the tremendous challenges that they face. Arab women's organizations are helping to compensate for women's absence from the political sphere and guaranteeing their presence in the public sphere. Through their increasingly public presence, their efforts at advocacy, raising awareness, network-

ing, and grassroots activism, these organizations are helping to mainstream women's issues, formalize vehicles for change, create transnational alliances, and contribute, to a limited extent, to their countries' overall development.

Through Mary Kawar's work we gain insight into women's participation in employers and workers organizations in the Arab world. Kawar writes, "Despite the visible improvements in the representation of women in employers' and workers' organizations, challenges still exist. For example, the improvements in representation has not translated into decision making positions."

Al-Raida magazine presents a new concept of training, learning and leadership through a report on a meeting of "learning partnerships" of women in the Arab world and elsewhere sponsored by the Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, and Development and Peace (WLP). The gathering highlighted, among many other issues, the effectiveness of coalitions where in Morocco they were able to put the reform of personal status laws on the Moroccan national agenda. This event is a major achievement in the world of using advocacy and coalitions to influence public opinion and public policy decision-making process. Karen Stone reviews the "Leading to Choices – A Leadership Training Handbook for Women" by Mahnaz Afkhami, Ann Eisenberg and Haleh Vaziri published by Women's Learning Partnership (WLP). Stone asserts that, "Leading to Choices is a timely and significant contribution to training resources designed to enable women to effectively contribute to important public and private decision making

processes. The handbook is different from other resources in that it guides the participant not just through personal development and confidence building exercises, but also through activities that help women to build upon community resources and act as effective facilitators and motivators of individuals and groups."

Following the above articles that set the overall regional 'stage', we will present country examples,

experiences and case studies where women have made a difference through organizing themselves and affecting some changes in their communities. Amani Kandil presents a thorough overview and study of women in Egyptian civil society. This article is valuable since as Kandil writes, "An understanding of women's participation in Egypt's civil society is important in light of several developing trends. Egypt is currently witnessing some movement in the direction of democratic transformation. Since women constitute half of the population, it is essential to understand the extent of their participation in the organizations of civil society. This is especially true since indicators on women's political participation in Egypt over the last two decades (both as voters and candidates) indicate a decrease in female candidates and voters." In this article, Kandil identifies and explores the ways in which women interact with the emerging civil society organizations.

Amira Osman deals with Sudanese women's involvement in civil society and their roles as participants in public life especially in conflict resolution and peace reconstruction. Although Sudanese women face many obstacles, they have managed to find a role in promoting peace and reconstruction which could be their road map to playing a larger role in Sudanese civil society.

The next report is presented by the AWAL Women's Society (AWS) in Bahrain which is especially pertinent due to the current events and changes occurring in Bahrain today. The AWS is an excellent example of women actively participating in civil and political life in their country to bring about positive changes

and promote development through active participation despite traditional constraints.

Finally, in this country-specific section, there is an interesting interview with an activist and founder of Darna (our home in Arabic), Mounira El-Alami. In 1995, a group of people in the city of Tangier decided to create a center for citizen's initiatives called Darna, destined to become a center that would welcome debates about pressing social issues for the purpose of trying to bring public support to those in need and come up with alternative methods. This effort was based on consultation with citizens and the support of the civil society organizations.

Following the general overview and the country-specific case studies, we find it appropriate to introduce two young female activists who effectively direct two influential and active civil society organizations in Lebanon. *Al-Raida* has conducted interviews with Lina Dannaoui and Nisrine Mansour, both young activists who are managing and directing civil society advocacy organizations in Lebanon and facing difficult challenges, yet with great success and zeal.

The report by Rania Al-Abiad on the role of the United Nations in women's developing issues in Lebanon deals with the experiences of some UN agencies in advancing the status of Lebanese women in their particular fields of competence. It seeks to determine the scope of activity of these agencies and to ascertain their contribution to the development of the status of Lebanese women in civil society.

Azza Beydoun examines the performance of two Lebanese non-governmental organizations in combating violence against women. Azza Basarudin, on the other hand, deals with the manner Western and Arab feminists are able to envision solidarity and empower women across local and national boundaries through (1) connecting local and global gender issues and (2) reconciling Western feminist scholarships and Arab women's culturally specific positions in international and cross-cultural frameworks. Last but not least, Rana Hussein recounts the story of Toujan Al-Faisal and the events that led to her arrest and release.

We hope you will find this issue insightful, educational and enjoyable! With warm wishes from the editorial board,

Heba El-Shazli

Citizenship, Civil Society and Women in the Arab Region

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Introduction

As issues of citizenship and civil society have taken center-stage in recent years – partly as a result of the challenges of globalization, and partly as a result of democratic struggles in various parts of the world – the question of women's citizenship has assumed prominence. Some feminist scholars stress the longstanding struggle of women for rights and empowerment (Lister, 1997; Narayan, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1999). Others argue that the autonomous, rights-bearing citizen is a Western construct, and that citizenship and civil society are patriarchal and capitalistic constructs (Pateman, 1988). Nevertheless, rights, citizenship, civil society, and democratization are increasingly in demand in developing countries, including the Arab world. For women, citizenship concerns social standing, political participation, and national membership. Empirically, women's citizenship is reflected in their legal status, in access to employment and income, in the extent of their participation in formal politics, and in the formation of women's organizations.

In T. H. Marshall's (1964) famous formulation, the 18th century was the century of civil rights, the 19th century that of political rights, and the 20th century the era of social rights. Marshall's historical study was conducted in England, but his model has been applied for all of Europe by scholars of social policy and of citizenship. The trajectory of citizenship has not been exactly the same in developing and post-colonial countries. Much of the struggle over citizenship has unfolded in the twentieth century, and continues. Revolutions and liberation movements have contributed to concepts of rights, but in most cases, explicit calls for civil, political, and social rights are part of more recent demands for democratization and civil society. This is true also of the Arab region, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and human rights organizations spread during the 1990s. I argue that in many countries in the region, women are at the center of struggles to define and extend democracy, citizenship, and civil society. By bringing the question

of women's rights to the fore, and by insisting that the state amend existing laws and guarantee rights for women, feminists and women's organizations are challenging the role of the state and the status of the citizen.

On Citizenship and Civil Society

T. H. Marshall's definition of citizenship as "full membership in the national community" encompasses civil, political, and social rights and obligations. As such, it is a legal status as well as a practice and a process. Turner (1990, 2000) points out that citizenship refers to both passive and active membership in a community. It is about universalistic rights enacted into law and implemented for all citizens, and not informal, unenacted, or particularistic. Rights are not citizenship rights unless they are universally applied within the country and backed by the state. Figure 1 shows what civil, political, and social rights for women might look like.

Citizenship is intimately linked to civil society and the state. In liberal theory, the state is the guarantor of citizen rights, while also extracting obligations from citizens (such as payment of taxes, military duty, voting, obedience to laws, and so on). In some interpretations, the state is seen as protecting citizens from the vagaries of the market. Thus the public sphere of the state provides a counterweight to the private sphere of the market. Civil society — the realm of associational life, civility in public discourse, and state-society relations — is the crucial mediator between state and citizen. Civil society organizations balance the strength and influence of the state; they are supposed to protect citizens from abuses of state power; they play the role of monitor and watchdog; they embody the rights of citizens to freedom of expression and association; and they are channels of popular participation in governance.

Debates revolve around the precise nature of the relationship between state and civil society. Marxists

argue that civil society is never independent of the state; in liberal capitalist societies, the state needs and uses civil society to ensure that consensual hegemony is maintained. Others point out that civil society, left to itself, generates radically unequal power relationships, including reactionary movements, which only state power can challenge. "Only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society; only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state" (Walzer, 1998: 305).

The notion of global civil society extends this argument to the international sphere. In this view, international NGOs seek to pressure states and institutions of the global market – such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization – to make them more responsible. The relevance of global civil society to the Arab region lies in the discursive space, legitimacy, and sometimes resources that global civil society offers to women's rights and human rights organizations seeking to achieve their objectives in the region's politically restrictive and culturally conservative environment. International NGOs such as Amnesty International, inter-governmental agencies of global governance such as the United Nations, bilateral agencies such as CIDA and USAID, and the major foundations such as Ford and MacArthur have designed "civil society institution-building" projects to promote think-tanks, human rights organizations, women's organizations, chambers of commerce, purchasing and market-

ing cooperatives, environmentalist societies, community centers, and so on.

Civil society is a modern construct that allows citizens to maintain solidarities through associational life. It consists of voluntary associations, professional organizations, and all manner of non-governmental organizations – some of which may be at philosophical and political odds with each other. Civil society also encompasses social movements and popular struggles, which often are in conflict with the state. How these competing interests and conflicts are handled and resolved depends on the strength of democratic institutions, the nature of the state, and the balance of social power. At present, the Arab countries have strong states and weak democratic institutions (Hinnebusch, 2000). In the sphere of emergent civil society, much of the social power is wielded by religious institutions and Islamic forces; the family is another strong institution, and it is protected by Islamic family laws. In sociological terms, the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* in the region has allowed primordial institutions such as the family

Figure 1. Types of Women's Citizenship Rights

Legal/Civil Rights	Political Rights	Social Rights
1. Right to contract	1. Right to vote	1. Health services
2. Equal treatment under the law	2. Right to run and hold office	2. Family allowances
3. Freedom of expression	3. To form or join a political party	3. Primary and secondary education
4. Freedom of religion	4. To engage in fund-raising	4. Higher education
5. Right to privacy	5. Naturalization upon residency	5. Vocational education
6. Control over body	6. Refugee and contract rights	6. Social insurance
7. Choice of residence	7. Minority rights	7. Compensatory rights
8. Choice of occupation	8. Dissident rights	

Source: Adapted from Janoski (1998).

and religion to retain their power in the face of emerging modern and secular forces and institutions (see, e.g., Ibrahim 1992; Turner 2000). As such, civil society can only be thought of as incipient in the region. The state, Islamic forces and “primordial associations” are at odds with certain emerging civil society demands – especially those pertaining to the human rights of citizens, freedom of expression and association, and the rights and equality of women. Thus citizenship rights – as they are being defined by human rights organizations and women’s rights organizations in the region – are highly contested terrain.

Three final points that pertain to current debates about civil society are in order. First, the concept of civil society was revived in the late 1980s by East European dissident intellectuals who were opposed to the strong party-state. Civil society gained currency in the international development community as an alternative site for the delivery of aid, through the participation of NGOs. The concept of civil society spread in the Arab region in the 1990s, mainly in connection with political and economic liberalization. Its impetus therefore is as much global as it is local and regional. A second point is that civil society is not synonymous with NGOs, as is sometimes implied in the development literature. Third, there is a difference in viewing NGOs in neoliberal economic terms (instrumentally, as the substitute for state involvement in social provisioning for citizens), and in viewing them as civil society orga-

nizations (as the expression of associational rights and a measure of the quality of the relationship between the state and the citizenry). NGOs are proliferating in the Arab region, but many of them are engaged in social-welfare activities while others suffer from state restrictions or repression (see, e.g., Clark, 2000).

General Characteristics of the Movement for Women’s Citizenship

Much has been written about the problematical nature of women’s citizenship rights in Arab societies. It results from several sources. First, it originates in the absence of secularism and the preeminence of religious laws. Religious law is elevated to civil status, and religious affiliation is a requirement of citizenship. Religious-based family laws render women dependents and minors as second-class citizens. Although Islamic law gives women the right to own and dispose of property, they inherit less property than men do. Furthermore, inasmuch as religious/civil laws require that women obtain permission of father, husband, or other male guardian to marry, seek employment, start a business, or travel, this means that women are seen as incapable of entering contracts on their own. Children acquire citizenship and religious status through their fathers, not their mothers.

Second, there is the role of the state, which is best defined as “neopatriarchal” in the Arab region

(Sharabi, 1988; Moghadam, 1993). Although there is some tension between the state and communal entities such as tribes and extended families, the neopatriarchal state upholds the traditional order in a modernizing context. Thus it is the state that reinforces family laws and family and social control over women. Third, there is the discrepancy between constitutions that award equal rights to men and women and family laws derived from the Sharia (Islamic canon law) that undermine this equality. Religiously-based family laws reinforce the distinction between the public sphere of markets and governance and the private sphere of the family.

Fourth, there is the absence or underdevelopment of democratic institutions in the region. The neopatriarchal state is authoritarian, hence the limited nature of civil society and of political participation. Male citizens have few political rights, and women even fewer. In several Arab Gulf countries, women have yet to receive basic political rights.¹ Even in countries where women do have the right to stand as candidates, few make it to national office. In 1996 five of the region’s fourteen countries had women in their cabinets. Jordan, Syria, Egypt and Algeria each had two female ministers. There was one woman member of the Palestinian National Authority. In 1998 two women were appointed to cabinet posts in Morocco, when a socialist was appointed prime minister – both developments highly unprecedented in this conservative monarchy. No Arab woman has ever been prime minister of her country. The percentage of women representatives in the national assembly is tiny: between

one and ten percent. (See Table 1.) This may also be related to their economic participation, which is limited, especially when compared with other regions. (See Table 2.) It is precisely this state of affairs that the women’s organizations are seeking to change.

Women’s second-class citizenship has long been institutionalized, but it is being challenged by Arab women’s organizations. In general, feminists and the women’s organizations are challenging women’s location in the private domain and men’s control of the public domain. In particular, they are calling for: (1) the modernization of family laws, (2) the criminalization of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, (3) women’s right to retain their own nationality and to pass it on to their children, and (4) greater access to employment and participation in political decision-making. They are also pointing out that existing family laws are at odds with the universal standards of equality and nondiscrimination embodied in international instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

My research strongly suggests that in many Arab countries, the struggle for civil, political, and social rights is led by women’s organizations, which are comprised of highly educated women with employment experience and international connections. The fact that these organizations exist at all is a sign of important demographic changes, of women’s increasing access to the public sphere, and of the gradual process of political liberalization in the region. What

Table 1. Women in Public Life, Arab Countries

Country	Year women received right to vote	Year women received right to stand for election	Year first women elected (E) or appointed (A) to parliament	Women in Government: Ministerial Levels (%)	
				1996	1999
Algeria	1962	1962	1962(A)	0	0
Bahrain	1973	1973		0	0
Egypt	1956	1956	1957(E)	3.1	6.1
Iraq	1980	1980	1980(E)	0	0
Jordan	1974	1974	1989(A)	6.1	0
Kuwait	*	*	*	0	0
Lebanon	1952	1952	1991(A)	0	0
Libya	1964	1964	E	4.5	12.5
Morocco	1963	1963	1993(E)	0	4.9
Oman	*	*	*	0	0
Qatar	*	*	*	0	0
Saudi Arabia	*	*	*	0	0
Syria	1953	1953	1973(E)	6.8	11.1
Tunisia	1959	1959	1959(E)	2.9	10.0
UAE	1997+	1997+	**	0	0
Yemen	1967***	1967***	1990(E+)	0	0

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 2001, Table 25.
+ No information or confirmation available
* Women’s right to vote and to stand for election has not been recognized
** Exact date when a woman was first elected or nominated to parliament is not available
*** Refers to the former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen

Table 2. Gender Gaps in Economic Activity, by Region

Region	Female Economic Activity Rate (age 15+)		
	Rate (%) 1997	Index (1985=100) 1997	As % of Male Rate 1997
All Developing Countries	39.3	111.3	68.0
Least Developed Countries	41.1	99.7	76.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	37.8	97.7	73.9
East Asia	55.1	114.2	86.6
East Asia (Excluding China)	41.2	126.1	69.7
South-East Asia a and the Pacific	41.7	118.6	74.1
South Asia	29.1	99.4	51.7
South Asia (Excluding India)	29.5	114.2	55.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	28.8	140.0	51.3
Arab States	19.2	123.7	38.6
Eastern Europe and the CIS	45.6	97.3	82.4
Industrialized Countries	41.9	119.4	72.6
World	40.2	111.3	69.8

Source: UNDP, Human Development Report 1999, p. 236.

is noteworthy is that the women's organizations are working to change the nature of that public sphere, to enhance the rights of women in the private sphere, to advance democratization, and to build civil society.

Organizing Women

The 1990s have been described as the "third wave of democratization", and part of this process has been the proliferation of civil society organizations. Much has been written about the expansion of human rights, environmental development, and various political organizations that are said to comprise civil society. Less has been written about women's organizations and their relationship to civil society, the state, and democratization.

In the Arab region, the 1990s have seen the proliferation of women's organizations – some explicitly feminist. I have identified seven types of women's organizations: service organizations, worker-based organizations, professional associations, women-in-development (WID) NGOs, research centers and women's studies institutes, women's auxiliaries of political parties, and women's rights or feminist organizations. All are contributing to the development of civil society in the region, although the feminist organizations are perhaps doing so most consciously. The WID NGOs have an important function in fulfilling the development objectives of civil society: decentralized, participatory, and grassroots use of resources. For example, in countries such as Bahrain, "women's voluntary associations have come to form an integral part of civil society", which is responsible for "initiating all organizations for the handicapped as well as institutions for modern education" (Fakhro, 1997: 2).²

It is the women's rights or feminist organizations, however, which may be the most significant contributors to citizenship and civil society. These organizations target women's subordinate status within family law, women's low participation in formal politics, and violence against women. Members of such organizations, such as the Lebanese Committee for Women's Rights, often run (successfully or otherwise) for political office. Women's rights and feminist organizations seem to be most numerous in North Africa, where they formed the Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité, which was the major organizer behind the "Muslim Women's Parliament" at the NGO Forum that preceded the Beijing Conference in September 1995. The Collectif (later 2000) formulated an alternative "egalitarian family code" and promotes women's political participation. Social rights were also on the agenda, and were promoted by the Democratic League of Women's Rights, which organized a roundtable on the Rights of Workers. During 2000 there was much controversy surrounding the proposed national plan for women's

development. An ambitious document to extend education, employment, and political participation to Moroccan women, it came under attack by conservative Islamic forces. In response, Moroccan feminists took to the streets in support of the plan. Tunisian feminists and women's NGOs have been more successful in working with government agencies to develop and implement a national action plan in accord with the Beijing Platform for Action (WEDO, 1998). Indeed, more so than in other Arab countries, North African feminists have developed a kind of social feminism, one which emphasizes not only the modernization of family laws (important as it is in promoting women's civil rights), but also the rights of women workers. This may be due to the different history and political culture of North Africa, which includes a stronger tradition of trade unionism and socialist and social-democratic parties. Indeed the women's section of Morocco's Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP, which became the ruling party in 1998), active within the women's section of the Socialist International, hosted a special meeting of the international group in Rabat in July 2000.

Another way that Arab women have been contributing to civil society is through literary efforts, including the publication of books, journals, and films. Morocco's Edition le Fennec has produced numerous books on women's rights issues as well as many literary works by women. Also in Morocco, l'Union de l'Action Féminin produces the monthly 8 Mars. Mention should also be made of the first Arab Women's Book Fair, held in Cairo in November 1995 and organized by Noor, a woman's publishing house in Cairo. Al-Raida itself is an important example of the burgeoning feminist press in the Arab region. It has covered topics such as women in Arab cinema, women and the war in Lebanon, women and work, and violence against women.

Demographic, political, and economic changes are the internal factors behind the growth of women's organizations, but global effects have been important as well. The role of the UN and its world conferences has been especially important. Women's organizations from the Arab countries first met at a regional meeting — sponsored by the UN's regional commission for West Asia as part of UN preparations for the Beijing Conference — which took place in early November 1994 in Amman, Jordan. The two-week deliberations resulted in a document entitled "Work Program for the Non-Government Organizations in the Arab Region" (Moghadam, 1998). That document summarized women's conditions in Arab countries as follows: (1) Women suffer a lack of employment rights and undue burdens caused by economic crisis and structural adjustment policies. (2) The absence of

democracy and civil rights harms women especially. (3) There is inequality between men and women in authority and decision-making. (4) Women suffer from violence, including "honor crimes". The solutions offered were comprehensive. The document called for the immediate ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and a revision of all national laws that discriminate against women. It called for legal literacy and free legal services for women, and the promotion of women judges. It called for "revision and modernization of the legislation related to women's status in the family", and the insertion of the rights of the wife in the marriage contract. And it called for "the amendment of nationality laws so that children can join their mothers and enjoy their nationalities" (pp. 25-26).

What are some recent campaigns towards women's full citizenship that have implications for more expanded political rights and for the development of civil society? The modernization of family law and the enhancement of women's rights with respect to marriage, divorce, and child custody have been the principal objective of feminists in Egypt (among other countries). They succeeded in having reforms adopted that ease the restrictions of women's capacity to divorce and make male unilateral divorce more difficult. In 1999, Egyptian feminists secured the reversal of Article 291 — which exonerated rapists who married their victims. They also succeeded in introducing a new marriage contract that would stipulate the rights of the wife.

In Jordan, the criminalization of honor killings of daughters and sisters has become a major social issue, a preoccupation for feminist lawyer Asma Khader, journalist Rana Husseini, and other activists. The state, however, remains somewhat timid in the face of a tribe and kin-based social structure. Women leaders such as Toujan Feisal and Emily Naffa are also at the forefront of Jordan's democracy movement. In Lebanon, feminists have formed The Permanent Arab Court to Resist Violence Against Women, and a Feminine Rights Campaign to focus on gender equality in divorce. They are also working to increase women's parliamentary participation. In Palestine, feminists succeeded in having more schools established for girls, securing social rights for working mothers in the Labor Law, removing the regulation that a male guardian authorize a woman's request for a passport and travel, and producing the first women's newspaper, *Sawt an-Nisssa*.³

In Morocco, l'Association Démocratique des Femmes Marocaines (ADFM) prioritizes the identification and removal of obstacles to women's political participa-

tion. To that end it formed the Centre pour le Leadership Féminin (CLEF).⁴ Algerian feminists — who are active in the struggles for modernization of family law and against religious extremism — also have a considered position on democracy. As one explained:

If democracy is the predominance of numbers, regardless of quality, I don't want to be a democrat, because this can allow extremist groups to take power and oppress people, especially women — this is my Algerian experience. ... If democracy is the right to speak out and be heard, as a voice and not just as a number, then I am a democrat. But if democracy is the freedom to choose between Coca-Cola and Pepsi, Levis or Nike, BBC or CNN, McDonalds or Pizza Hut, then I am not a democrat.⁵

The cooperation of women's rights and human rights organizations — especially in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Palestine — is a fruitful one, for the expansion of both civil society and citizenship rights. Four examples will illustrate this point. In Egypt, women's organizations, human rights organizations, and some professional organizations collaborated to protest the imminent passage of a controversial NGO law. The women's groups included the Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, and the New Woman Research Center. A hunger strike and a sit-in were organized, mainly by women activists. They included two women psychiatrists associated with the El-Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, a women lawyer with the Center for Trade Union and Workers Services, and a writer associated with the Forum for Women's Development.⁶ In a second example, the campaign against female circumcision in Egypt is conducted by a coalition of women's, human rights, child welfare, and family planning organizations. Third, demonstrations and public support for Youssefi government's proposed Plan of Action for the Integration of Women in Development, which would include reform of Morocco's family law, has been organized by Moroccan feminist groups and political parties such as Al Istiqlal and Al Taqaddom Wa Al Ishtirakiyya.⁷

In the fourth example of collaboration between human rights and women's rights organizations, the First International Conference of the Arab Human Rights Movement took place in Casablanca, Morocco, on 23-25 April, 1999. It issued a Declaration that called for an end to the practice of torture; the need to respect freedoms of expression, assembly, and association; the realization of economic and social rights; securing citizens' rights to participation, including guaranteeing public oversight of

the public revenues of the state; and the recognition of women's rights as an integral part of the human rights system. The Declaration asserted that women's enjoyment of human rights is an integrated and comprehensive process that should encompass all facets of life within and outside the family. It is worth quoting from the Declaration in some detail, as it shows the promise of such cooperation, as well as the obvious influence that the feminist groups have had within the human rights community:

Real equality between women and men goes beyond legal equality to encompass changing the conceptions and confronting the stereotypes about women. Thus, it requires not only a comprehensive review of laws, foremost of which are personal status codes, but also the review and upgrading of educational curricula as well as the critical monitoring of the media discourse.

In this respect, the Conference stresses the necessity of engaging women's and human rights NGOs in the process of reviewing current legislations and in upgrading civil and criminal laws, with a view to res-

olutely confronting all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

The Conference also calls upon the Arab governments that did not ratify [the Women's Convention] to do so expeditiously, and those that ratified it to lift their reservations.

It also calls upon women and human rights NGOs to work to refute these reservations, to challenge the culture of discrimination, and to adopt courageous stances in exposing the practice of hiding behind religion to legitimize the subordination of women. These NGOs should also give special attention to the continued monitoring of the compliance by Arab governments to their international commitments concerning women's enjoyment of their rights.

The necessity of considering the possibility of allocating a quota for women in parliaments, representative institutions and public bodies as a temporary measure. This should stand until appropriate frameworks for women's voluntary activity take shape and

until awareness of the necessity of equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination becomes more widespread.⁸

I end this section with two final comments concerning feminism and Islamism in North Africa, and the implications for civil society and for gender norms. Feminist organizations in North Africa (and especially in Algeria) have been criticized by some for their opposition to fundamentalist movements and the legalization of Islamist organizations. And yet, given that a necessary condition of civil society is the "civility" of its constituent organizations, such feminist opposition is understandable. Surely it defeats the purpose of civil society when organizations (such as many fundamentalist groups) that threaten or brutalize citizens (such as unveiled women) are included in its constituency. A related comment is that in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, feminists (and intellectuals) are seen as rumparts against the danger of fundamentalism. Statements by government officials that are reported by the media, and some newspaper editorials, have referred to the feminists' strong opposition to fundamentalism as constituting a major bulwark against the success of

Islamists and for modernity and democracy. Such representations of women – in which women are depicted as citizens and political actors and not only as wives and mothers – may herald a transition in gender relations, at least in some countries of the region.⁹

Some Concluding Observations

Citizenship and civil society are contested concepts and conditions, reflecting historical processes and social relations, culture and political economy. They are products of internal processes as well as external pressures. (See Figure 2.) Still, Arab women's struggles confirm T.H. Marshall's thesis regarding the historical process of the expansion of the rights of citizens. The incorporation of new groups into the body politic – such as the European working-class in the early 20th century and Arab women in the late 20th and early 21st century – heralds the expansion of rights and the enlargement of civil society.

The building of civil society and women's contributions to it, however, faces formidable obstacles and challenges. These emanate largely from the state and religious institutions, which regard democratization and independent organizations as threats to their power and interests. Thus NGOs, including women's organizations, face legal restrictions, find it difficult to obtain funding, and risk surveillance, harassment and worse. The case of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the Ibn Khaldun Center and the magazine *Civil Society* by the Egyptian authorities is only the most publicized example. Another example, of course, is the unilateral closing down of Nawal Saadawi's Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA), which had the temerity to oppose the Gulf War and Egypt's role in it. Elsewhere, denigration of women's organizations by Islamists has been a problem for women's organizations that are trying to establish credibility and legitimacy. In Algeria, for example, Islamists often derided the women's organizations as "hezbe fransé", suggesting that they carried out colonialist objectives and served as a "fifth column" for France.

Legal and financial constraints may be a reason why Arab women's organizations are not as well integrated into transnational feminist networks as are women's organizations in other developing regions (e.g., Latin America, India, Southeast Asia). The current era of globalization is seeing the emergence of new forms of collective action, such as transnational advocacy networks, or transnational social movement organizations, which are said to be part of the emerging global civil society (Moghadam 2000). There are now transnational environmental, human rights, indigenous rights, and women's networks. Transnational feminist networks include DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), Women Living Under

Table 3. Women's Organizations in the Arab Region (By Type and by Country, 1990s)

Type/Country	Algeria	Egypt	Jordan	Morocco
Service Organization	SOS Femmes en Détresse	Red Crescent Society	Noor al-Hussein Foundation	Assoc. for Protection of the Family
Professional Association	SEVE (women in business)	Women's Cmte. of the Chamber of Commerce; Medical Women's Association	Professional and Business Women's Assoc.	Federation of Women in Liberal and Commercial Careers
Development Research Center and Women's Studies Institute		New Woman Research and Study Center; Ibn Khaldun Center Dev. Studies	Princess Basma Women's Resource Center	Center for Studies and Research on Women (Fez)
Women's Rights Organization	Egalite; Triomphe; Emancipation; Rassemblement des Femmes Democratiques	New Civic Forum; New Woman Society; Women's Rights Cmte. EOHR	Jordanian Women's Union	Moroccan Women's Democratic Assoc.
Women in Development NGO		Assoc. for Development and Enhancement of Women		Committee of Moroccan Women for Development
Worker Based and Grassroots Women's Organizations		ETUF Women Workers Dept.		
Official Women's Organization	Union Nationale des Femmes Algeriennes	National Council for Women	General Fed. of Jordanian Women	

Palestine	Tunisia
Women's Health Program	Tunisian Mothers Association
	National Chamber of Women Head of Businesses
Women's Studies Program of Birzeit University	Center of Research Documentation and Info on Women (CREDIF)
Al-Haq Center for Legal Aid and Counseling	Assoc. of Democratic Tunisian Women
Women's Unit, Bisan Research and Development Center	Gen. Assoc. for Vocational Training and Prod. Families
Palestinian Working Women Society	National Commission on Working Women
Women's Affairs Technical Cmte.	Union National des Femmes Tunisiennes

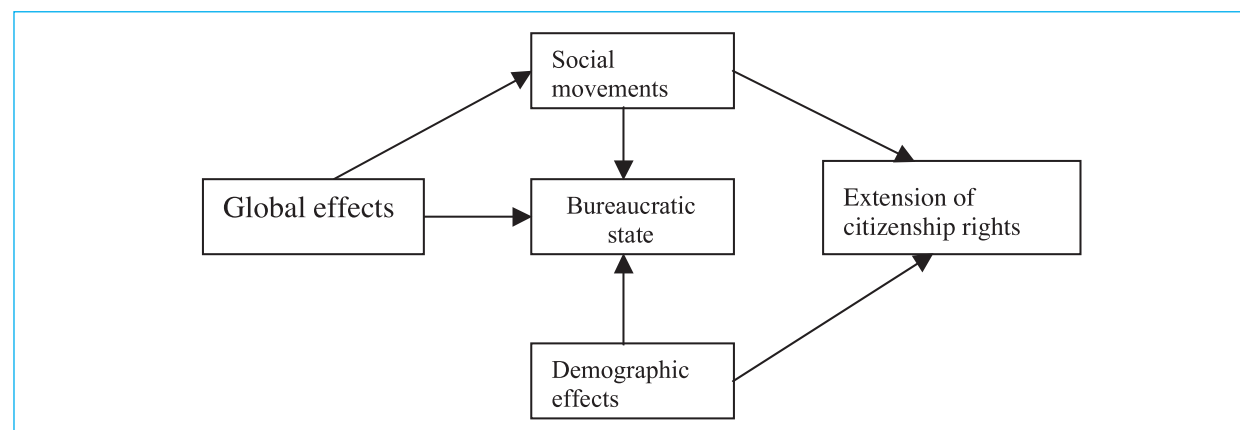
Muslim Laws, and the Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice. Participation in transnational feminist networks and similar global advocacy networks could assist Arab women's struggles at the local and national levels by providing them with needed solidarity and support.

A reading of the literature produced by women's organizations and by women's rights activists suggests some gaps in the conceptualization of rights and obligations, and some tensions that need to be resolved. Among them are class issues (including the social rights of working women and men, and of the poor), the status and rights of immigrants and of contract workers, and the rights of religious and ethnic minorities. The relationship between the state and citizens, and their respective rights and obligations, also require elaboration. It is true, as many feminists argue (e.g., Lister, 1997), that the empowerment or full citizenship of women is an inseparable part of the formation of civil society. But it is also true that the emergence of civil society is contingent upon the existence of a state that enforces universal legal norms and guarantees protection of civil, political, and social rights regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and religion. Through their insistence on the rights of women-as-individuals, women and the feminist organizations are forcing a reconsideration of the role of the state vis-à-vis its citizens. But this role and relationship need to be elaborated and more explicitly addressed. This is admittedly difficult, given the prevailing undemocratic environment and the constant threat of closure and arrests. But it is, in a sense, the "historic task" of democratic associations and civil society organizations.

Perhaps the most difficult tension may be that between a national identity based on Islamic civilization and culture, and the call for civil and political rights, and a democratic civil society, that may be construed as unduly inspired by Western traditions. In many countries there is still a powerful official ideology that

invalidates "Western" concepts and practices and relies on the politics of "authenticity". Thus, nationalism and Islamism remain the major discursive frameworks. Among the countries of the region, Tunisia seems to be crafting a national identity and legal framework that reflect its own Arab-Islamic heritage as well as social and gender rights as understood internationally, albeit within a dirigiste political environment. Elsewhere, the women's organizations need to develop a framework for recognizing identities and elaborating equal rights for all, in a way that draws on history, cultural understandings, and global standards. An advantage to participating in transnational feminist networks such as DAWN is the ability to "compare notes" and exchange ideas on these and other matters with representatives of women's organizations from, for example, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Malaysia, and South Africa.

In the meantime, the "modernizing women" of the Arab world are challenging popular understandings and legal codes regarding the public sphere and the private sphere; they are demanding more access to the public sphere, full and equal participation in the national community, and full and equal rights in the family. These gender-based demands for civil, political, and social rights would not only extend existing rights to women but also, and more profoundly, broaden the political agenda and redefine citizenship in the region. Aziz al-Azmeh (1993: 36) notes that the struggle for citizenship will complete the transition from communal to civil society, but that, like all historical processes, it is highly conflictual. In Arab countries, agents of this conflictual historical process include Islamist movements, intransigent or colluding states, and women's organizations. Women's struggles – whether around the modernization of family laws, or in the fight against fundamentalism, or around the demands for greater employment opportunities, political participation, or nationality rights – are the central motor of the drive for citizenship and civil society.



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End Notes

1. In the latter part of 1999, Qatari and Kuwaiti women won the right to vote and to participate in elections, but they will not be able to exercise political rights for several years.
2. From another vantage point, however, this may be seen in more critical terms as a failure of the state and as a neoliberal solution.
3. Suheir Azzouni, director of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee, Palestine, in a talk delivered at the ERF/MDF3 conference, Cairo, 8 March 2000, and personal communication.
4. Nouzha Skalli, ADFM vice-president, in a talk delivered at the ERF/MDF3 conference, Cairo, 8 March 2000.
5. Nadia Leila Aissaoui, head of the Association for Reflection, Exchange and Action on Environment and Development, as reported in *International IDEA*, winter 1999, p. 19.
6. *Civil Society*, vol. 8, issue 90, June 1999, pp. 22-23.
7. For an elaboration of the proposed action plan and the opposition to it, see Rania Al-Abiad, "A Turbulent Morocco: A Khutba, A Mudawwana, A Reform Movement and Rivalry Frames", *Al-Raida*, vol. XVII, no. 89 (Spring 2000): 30-34.
8. *Civil Society*, vol. 8, issue 91, July 1999, pp. 20-23.
9. That the well-known Algerian feminist Khalida Messaoudi – once a major critic of the state for its Family Code and later a target of Islamic fundamentalists – is now an advisor to President Boutaflika is indicative of this change in attitudes towards activist women. See Moghadam (2001).

Women's Organizations in the Arab World

By Laila Al-Hamad

In late 1996, a women's organization working in the shantytowns of Cairo unexpectedly discovered that approximately 10% of its target group, or 16,000 women, officially did not exist; these women held neither a birth certificate (BC) nor an identity card (ID). Consequently, they were deprived of many basic services, such as schooling and access to credit, as well as of the rights and duties of citizenship such as voting. They encountered serious problems in claiming their personal rights, such as the pension of a deceased spouse or assets bestowed through inheritance. Moreover, their needs were not taken into account in national policy planning and budgeting.

In the months following this discovery, and after ascertaining that this was not an isolated phenomenon but a common occurrence beyond the streets of Cairo, this organization embarked on a campaign to – or at least attempt to – redress this situation. This entailed identifying the roots of non-registration, unraveling the bureaucratic web of registration procedures, and training hundreds of civil society groups on how to assist women in obtaining their official documents. With assistance from an international donor, a campaign was launched to raise the issue at the national and policy levels. To date, approximately 55,000 Egyptian women in 6 governorates in and around Cairo have obtained identity cards and birth certificates, and roughly 300,000 more have been identified in those areas as needing such documents.¹

As illustrated in the above example, in a region where the formal political sphere has been confined to men – and even then only some – civil society has provided many Arab women with the space through which to confront and address their political, social and economic marginalization². From Morocco to Palestine, the emergence of organizations dedicated to women's empowerment has given voice to the needs that have gone unnoticed over the years, and the calls that have gone unheeded by government officials. Furthermore, while civil society is not necessarily a female arena, at least in the Arab world, it has embraced and catapulted women's activism and citizenship, nurtured their sense of leadership, and given them space and recognition for their contributions, whether for issues related to women or not. Ironically, campaigns calling for identity cards, equal rights to nationality, and the right to obtain a passport without male permission have all been launched by civil society and not parliament.

In fact, Arab parliaments are perceived by many as institutions that are weak, unresponsive, and resistant to change. Additionally, they are viewed by many Arab women as having not only failed to articulate their needs, but also excluded them. Women's participation in national parliaments in the Arab world, both in upper or lower houses, is the lowest worldwide. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the average female participation in Arab states stands at 4.6% compared to 12.7% in sub-Saharan Africa or 14.8% in Asia. In terms of world classification, Arab countries

trail at the bottom of the list with Tunisia in the lead in 61st place. In addition, several countries in the region either do not have parliaments or do not grant women suffrage. In terms of local government, only 14.2% of council members are women, the second lowest percentage worldwide. Even on those few occasions where women are voted into parliament, they do not always put forward women's issues. The issue of Egypt's nationality law is one case in point, where one of the female MPs argued against granting women the right to transfer their nationality to their offspring.³ Rare are the women not only in elected but also in decision-making posts, particularly in key ministries such as finance. In Egypt, for example, women held less than 6% of overall decision-making posts in 1986, and 7% of those in the Ministry of the Economy.⁴ Women are also absent from trade unions and with the exception of Lebanon, remain marginal in professional associations.

Though it varies from country to country, women's limited participation in formal politics in the Arab world can be attributed to several reasons, including socio-cultural obstacles, such as social divisions between men and women, prevailing cultural norms and traditions, and the dominant perception of politics as the preserve of men. Other reasons include women's negligible political experience and training, and the lack of awareness among the public, decision-makers of women's potential role, and the lack of media coverage of women's role as active citizens in the governance of their countries. Moreover, although women are an important electoral force, voter-registration and education campaigns seldom target them. This reality is compounded by the existence of election laws that contain measures which devalue women's participation. In Algeria for instance, the election law entitles male family members to vote on behalf of women.

Yet the realities that face Arab women today must somehow be addressed, particularly as the challenges they face continue to grow. Among these is the fact that increasingly more Arab women today play not only the role of caretaker, but also that of breadwinner. Indeed the number of women-headed households is on the increase in the whole region. This is a reality that is usually absent from censuses or surveys, and is neither reflected in laws nor attitudes, which recognize the man as the head of household. While statistics are rare, it is estimated that in a country like Egypt women-headed households account for 15-25%

of all households. The reasons behind this phenomenon include the high rate of male-migration, either internal (from the rural to the urban areas) or external (particularly Yemen, Morocco, and Egypt); wars and conflicts leading to male disability or death; high male unemployment; and divorce and abandonment. Female-headed households are also more likely to be poorer. In Algiers for instance, while overall household poverty was put at 5.9%, poverty among women-headed households was put at 13%.⁵

Moreover, as in other parts of the world, Arab women are among the first to be affected by economic changes and adjustment measures, which countries like Egypt, Jordan, Algeria and Morocco have undergone.⁶ Such measures can contribute to a decrease in the delivery of social services from the state, particularly in the areas of health, education, and social protection, and a drop in real income, which in turn affects consumption and living standards. This is exacerbated by already quite low human development indicators in many Arab countries. In Yemen, the infant mortality rate is 109 per 1000 for the poorest quintile. In Morocco and Algeria respectively, 64% and 43% of adult women 15 years of age and older are illiterate compared with 38% and 24% of adult men.⁷ These figures are alarming, particularly as studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between the level of education and poverty.⁸

While many working women are absorbed by the public sector, an important number of them, particularly poor ones, are found in the informal sector, working in jobs and for employers that provide limited benefits and legal safeguards, leaving women in very vulnerable and precarious conditions.⁹ As for the private sector, female entry is made difficult in many Arab countries. Among other things, this is due to the existence of labor laws, which stipulate certain provisions concerning hazardous and night work, travel, and maternity leave, among others that deter employers from hiring women and reduce their comparative advantage and competitiveness in the labor market.¹⁰ Legal discrimination is also prevalent in other areas affecting women, such as social security (benefits, allowances, pensions, and safety nets), inheritance, freedom of movement, equality before the law, marriage and nationality. Unfortunately, given the high rate of illiteracy among women, many if not most women are unaware or ignorant of the legal rights that they do possess.

*Women's
organizations cannot
be expected
to be the panacea
for resolving women's
issues in the
Arab world*

The Emergence of Women's Organizations¹¹

The emergence of women's organizations in the Arab world has been affected by each country's respective political experience and evolution. Egypt, for example, developed a women's movement earlier than many of the surrounding countries, partly due to its cosmopolitanism and its prominent position in the Arab world. The woman question in Egypt was debated as early as the late 19th century, and women's organizations were established in the early 1920's. In countries like Morocco and Algeria women's activism was born out of the anti-colonial struggle, and women's groups were created before or around the time of independence. Many of them, such as the women's section of Morocco's Istiqlal party, were appendices of political parties or, in the case of Algeria's Union Nationale des Femmes Algeriennes, official bodies created to promote women's emancipation. In Jordan, activism surrounding the woman question was very much tied to political activism and the Palestinian problem.

In general, the influence that these groups have been able to exert has very much depended on the political environment of each of these countries, which has wavered from periods of political opening to periods of restrictions on any civil society. Periods of political turmoil have to a large degree compromised the ability of women's groups to bring women's issues to center stage, as was the case during the anti-colonial struggle. Moreover, the association of women's organizations with political movements has in many cases been to the detriment of the women's movement, because they were undermined by party politics. This trend began to diminish in the 1980's when groups like the Moroccan Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), born out of the Parti Populaire Socialiste (PPS), broke away from political parties and towards independence. At the same time, however, women's issues continue to be used by both the state and conservative elements of society, who transform women into symbols of tradition and culture to counterbalance the turbulence caused by rapid modernization and change. Among other things, this is reflected in inheritance laws, social pressures to reproduce males, and the weight ascribed to women in preserving a family's honor.

The 1980's and 90's saw the proliferation of women's groups. This phenomenon surfaced partly as a result of the window of political opening experienced in

several Arab countries during that period. The third wave of democratization, the movement that started in Portugal in the mid-1970's and spread on to Latin America, East and Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and the states of the Former Soviet Union, also affected – albeit to a lesser extent – some of the Arab countries. From Algeria's transition from a one party to a multi-party system to the freeing of political prisoners in Morocco, some Arab countries were beginning to feel the light breeze of liberalization. While tentative, this opening was taking place amidst important political transitions in the region – namely the re-unification of Yemen in 1990, the end of Lebanon's 15-year civil war, the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, and the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in 1993.

At the heart of this third wave was the reemergence of the paramount role ascribed to civil society in the deepening and consolidation of the democratization process.¹² Throughout the world, but particularly in Eastern Europe and Latin America, civil society organizations were seen as heralding voices of change and democracy that were challenging the status quo.

While less numerous, many civil society groups saw more opportunity in a few Arab countries, namely Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and to a certain extent Algeria, Kuwait, and Yemen.

Prominent and at the vanguard of the movement for greater liberalization and change in the Arab world were many women activists. Underlying many of their efforts was the concept of women and citizenship. Some advocated for women's legal rights, as was the case of the Palestine-based Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC),¹³ a

coalition of women's NGOs and committees which organized the first ever protest against the PNA to contest a new regulation requiring women to obtain written consent from male guardians in order to get passports. Some, like the Morocco-based Espace Point de Depart (ESPOD), worked to enhance poor women's access to micro credit and promote women's entrepreneurship. Others, like the Cairo-based Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR), worked to politically empower women by launching voter registration campaigns. Still others, like the ADFM's Centre de Leadership Feminin, aimed to enhance women's decision-making skills and encourage them to run for political office.

With the goal of building alliances of support, networks were created to ensure greater interaction and exchange of experiences with other women from the region. The Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalite was established in 1993 by Tunisian, Moroccan, and Algerian women to create a joint platform of action in preparation for the 1995 Beijing Conference. The Tunisia-based Center for Arab Research and Training (CAWTAR) was created in 1993 to carry out research on issues affecting women in the Arab world that would help inform the policies and measures undertaken by policy and decision-makers. The Machrik/Maghreb Gender Linking Information Project (MACMAG GLIP) was recently created “as a forum for debate, learning, and exchange on women, gender, and development amongst interested groups in the Middle East and the Maghreb region.”¹⁴

These networking efforts have to a certain extent federated women's issues at the regional level. For example, the nationality law, which in most Arab countries does not grant a woman the right to pass on her nationality to her offspring, has now been raised by many women's groups at the regional level and is becoming the subject of numerous campaigns and conferences. Formal and informal inter-regional networks useful in disseminating the realities of Arab women and in speaking out in their favor, have also been established. These include Women Living Under Muslim Law as well as organizations of migrants from North Africa living in Europe.

The media and information technology have also played a role in vocalizing and lobbying for women's issues.¹⁵ In fact, the Internet has been tapped by many women's organizations as a vehicle of information gathering, dissemination, and outreach. Recently established out of Jordan, AMAN consists of a bilingual website that provides resources on violence against Arab women, and houses a wealth of women-related legal information. Some of this information is being downloaded by women's groups in Jordanian cities to carry out awareness-raising sessions on the issue of violence against women. A “women's” media has also flourished in many Arab countries to provide in print form many of the developments in the area of women's empowerment. Morocco's Femmes du Maroc and Citadines are two such examples. The “Women and Work” and “Women and Civil Society” series launched by the Casablanca-based Editions le Fennec have also helped spread women's issues through the news kiosks of Morocco.

From engaging in advocacy and lobbying activities with the aim of influencing laws and policies concerning women, to providing shelter to women victims of violence, these organizations are helping bring about

the social change which has often been stifled by the patriarchal system. By virtue of their awareness-raising and grassroots efforts, these organizations have been able to mainstream and break walls of silence surrounding such touchy issues as violence against women, prostitution, and AIDS. In this sense, they are contributing to the erosion of the sacred division between the private and public space. In Jordan, for instance, years of advocacy by women's organizations have helped raise the issue of honor crimes, creating a stirring debate within Jordanian society and leading to attempts to amend the penal code in favor of stricter punishment for such crimes. In Egypt, the 1994 UN Conference on Population set the stage for dozens of women's organizations to form a task force to combat Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), a highly sensitive and contentious topic in that country, particularly with the conservatives.¹⁶

Though on a small scale, these efforts are also helping contribute to the development of Arab countries, be it in areas of maternal health, female education, or basic literacy. Appreciation for such efforts as contributing to development has also come about as a result of the evolution in international development practice from the “woman in development” paradigm, where women were seen as a target or beneficiary group, to the “gender in development” one, where gender concerns are integral to the overall development process. Underlying this shift is the broadening of the definition of poverty and development from one based on growth and income, to one that encompasses opportunity, empowerment, and security. This new approach rests on a more shared responsibility for development. Within countries, it entails ownership by the population and partnerships between government, civil society and the private sector. To this end, women's groups in the Arab world and elsewhere have been solicited in helping to contribute to donor cooperation strategies, which increasingly highlight gender priorities and recognize the spillover effects that these have on the country's overall development.

Several reasons have facilitated the emergence of Arab women's organizations. This is partly due to the rise in the number of educated Arab women, particularly university graduates who are increasingly aware of the obstacles that many of the laws and customs pose to their integration into the development process, including their entry into the labor market. It is also due to the fact that women's issues are more mainstream and have become much more a part of the development dialogue at the national and regional levels than in the past. Furthermore, women's groups are increasingly, though not entirely, more independent of political parties, and thus in turn more inclusive of diverse groups of women.

Women's participation in national parliaments in the Arab world, both in upper or lower house, is the lowest worldwide

The international arena has also accommodated the issue of women's empowerment. The UN decade for women in 1975-85, the 1995 Beijing conference, the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), among others, have been instrumental in putting forward a global enabling environment to tackle women's issues. The Beijing Women's conference was a watershed for women activists and particularly women's organizations that were given a voice to balance the traditional government rhetoric through the parallel platforms of action. Beijing also offered an opportunity for women's groups in some Arab countries to work, or coordinate to a certain extent, with their governments on preparatory activities.

The interest by international donors and civil society groups in gender issues also played a role in facilitating the mobilization of women's organizations. Both have found an immediate partner in Arab women's organizations, which are considered effective, innovative, and at the vanguard of civil society in most countries undergoing a certain level of political liberalization. Additionally, both international donors and civil society groups have been keen to work with women's groups given their work at the grassroots level, and their awareness and responsiveness to the needs of the poor and marginalized.

Constraints and Challenges

Many constraints and challenges confront women's organizations in the Arab world. At the head of this list is the political environment, which makes it possible for these groups to emerge and be effective only in times of political stability or openness. For example, the perseverance of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is one of the main problems confronting women's groups in Palestine. Until that issue is resolved, women's issues will not be given the necessary attention, and women's organizations will continue to be tested in terms of their loyalty to the national cause. The fledgling women's organizations which sprouted in Algeria in the early 1990's in the midst of a liberalization process have very much been shaken by, and fallen prey to the violence that has plagued the country following the cancellation of the 1991 elections. Because of their opposition to Islamic extremists, many women's organizations in Algeria have become associated with the state and are seen by many Algerians as having been co-opted by it.

The legal environment is another source of concern for many of these organizations. The emergence of civil

society groups is contingent on an enabling environment, which hinges on a permissive political atmosphere and non-intrusive or lenient association laws. While it differs from country to country, many Arab countries have association laws, which impose restrictions on civil society groups, varying from constraints on accepting foreign funding to raising political issues. With some important exceptions, civil society organizations, particularly women's groups, in the Arab world have been able to maneuver within this controlled environment but are often stifled by these restrictions as well as by the existence of official women's organizations that have greater access to resources.

Organized conservative elements of society also remain a challenge to women's organizations, particularly, as the latter are taking up some of the space that conservative groups have claimed all along in the delivery of services and the empowerment of the disenfranchised. These conservative forces accuse

women's groups of being westernized, elitists, and disconnected from the concerns of most of the female population. One such example arose in Morocco in 2000 on the occasion of women's day, when a counter-march was organized by conservative elements of society to protest the one organized by women's groups supportive of the country's new Gender Plan of action for the integration of women in the development process.

Many constraints exist within the women's movement itself. For instance, many women's groups suffer from a lack of coordination and resources, an overlap in activities and efforts, weak evaluation and institutional capacities, and insufficient outreach to women in the rural areas, among other things. Additionally, while these groups have gained expertise in a number of fields, they remain weak on tackling economic issues affecting women, including budgets and economic policies. Moreover, since most of these efforts are carried out on a volunteer basis, members of these organizations find themselves overstretched, juggling between work devoted to women's empowerment and hectic professional and family lives.

Although they have become much more mainstream than in the past, women's groups are still viewed with a certain degree of skepticism by many traditional Arab women, who are much more accustomed to the informal women's networks that have been their main source of influence. Many of these organizations have

also failed to nurture the new generation of Arab women, particularly to fill leadership positions. As a result, many young women remain uninvolved and disinterested in women's issues. In many cases, these groups have also been fragmented by their own differences, particularly when they are politically affiliated, and have been unsuccessful in reaching consensus amongst themselves. While improvements have been made in some countries, consensus building among male constituencies also remains an area of insufficient focus.

Conclusion

Despite their fragility and the tremendous challenges facing them, Arab women's organizations are helping to compensate for women's absence from the political sphere and guaranteeing their presence in the public sphere. Through their increasingly public presence,

their efforts at advocacy, awareness-raising, networking, and grassroots activism, these organizations are helping to mainstream women's issues, formalize vehicles for change, create transnational alliances, and contribute to a limited extent to their countries' overall development

At the same time, however, women's organizations cannot be expected to be the panacea for resolving women's issues in the Arab world. They must be seen as part of a process that must involve governments, institutions, and above all Arab citizens, male and female, who themselves must become aware and acknowledge the need for such change. Meanwhile, however, these organizations have forged for themselves a much-needed niche within Arab civil societies through which they are slowly but surely influencing the status quo.

END NOTES

1. For more information, see progress reports for "Access to Basic Services Through Registration" project, www.developmentmarketplace.org/report944.html.
2. This paper does not provide a discussion of civil society, its history, weaknesses and strengths, or legitimacy in the region. The paper assumes that a civil society, with all its weaknesses and constraints, currently exists in certain Arab countries, in some more prominently than in others. The countries in question consist of Egypt, Kuwait, Morocco, Palestine, Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, and Algeria. For the purposes of this paper, the definition of civil society is that used by the World Bank and defined as "the space between family, market, state, it consists of non-profit organizations and special interest groups, either formal or informal, working to improve the lives of their constituencies. Civil society encompasses formal groups such as charitable organizations, human rights groups, trade unions, religious institutions, professional associations, friendship societies, development associations, community-based organizations, cultural and research centers, the media and political parties as well as informal associations."
3. See "Egyptian Mothers Fight for Foreign Offspring's Rights," in the New York Times, May 14, 2001, where MP Azza al-Kashef denounced changes to nationality law enabling women to give their children citizenship.
4. FAO fact sheet for Egypt.
5. Global Urban Indicators (reference year 1998), UN-Habitat.
6. See for example Heba El-Laithy's study on "The Gender Dimension of Poverty in Egypt," in which she purports that "the status of women is often more critically affected than men by any economic changes. Poor women are triply disadvantaged: as poor people, they live under the same harsh conditions as poor men; they suffer from culture and policy biases which undervalue their contribution to development; and as heads of households, they face the

- same problems as men while having the primary responsibility for the care of children, elderly and housework," page 2, Economic Research Forum, Egypt.
7. World Development Indicators 2002, the World Bank.
8. See Heba El-Laithy, "The Gender Dimension of Poverty."
9. The public sector itself is not free of gender discrimination. For example in Morocco, certain positions in the Ministries of the interior, defense and national security are not open to women.
10. Nadia Hijab's unpublished study for the World Bank on laws that prevent women's entry into the labor market in MENA.
11. By women's organizations, I am referring to women's groups that are interested in enhancing women's status, as opposed to organizations made up of women whose purpose is of a religious, charitable or cultural nature.
12. Some political theorists like Larry Diamond and Robert Putnam have put forward the idea that civil society is necessary for the consolidation of any democratic process and improving the quality of democracy.
13. The Committee was established in 1991 following the Oslo accords, and alongside other technical committees seeking to help the Palestinian negotiating team.
14. See www.macmag-glip.org
15. Nevertheless, access to IT remains extremely limited in the region. Statistics put forward by the IFC's Samia Melhem in her "Women and ICT" presentation show that there are 2.4m Internet users in MENA, 1.7m of which live in Israel. Moreover, women only make up 4% of those.
16. It is important to note that this taskforce benefited from the fact that the issue of FGM had been discussed at the conference despite much worry by the government, and had been raised at the international level by the international media. Still, for the first time, FGM was acknowledged and discussed publicly, in turn allowing it to be legally addressed.

An Overview of Women's Participation in Employers and Workers Organizations in an Era of Economic Restructuring of the Arab Region

By **Mary Kawar**

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One important aspect of civil society is that which revolves around employer-worker relations as well as the extent to which workers or employers participate in economic policies or in the various issues related to their interests and concerns. This includes the laws and regulations governing the economy, workers rights, working conditions and relations and negotiations with the employers.

At first glance, we find that in the Arab region most employers and workers organizations are highly male dominated. The low female representation, particularly at decision making levels in important bodies of civil society acts as an obstacle to the advancement of gender equality issues and in improving the situation of women - both employers and workers. Important issues include equal pay, maternity leave, sexual harassment, family responsibilities and childcare. Low female representation also acts as an obstacle in removing age-old barriers that prohibit women from career advancement and subject them to indirect discrimination through what can be termed as 'cultural attitudes.'

The reasons for the weak representation of Arab women in employers and workers organizations are multiple but also interconnected. Partly, it is due to women's comparatively low labour force participation, in general and which in it self diminishes membership. Another reason is that both women who are either workers or employers may lack the awareness and the skills for organizing and improving negotiating capacity around their own specific needs and concerns. Finally, as a general trend, employers and workers organizations have weak capacities and the predominantly male leadership tends to exclude gender equality issues from the main agendas.

Therefore even when women have the awareness and the will to organize around their own needs, they will not resort to organizations where they see little chance

for change. Many do resort to NGOs that address such needs through separate businesswomen associations or NGOs that address women workers' rights and advocacy. Despite the importance of such separate organizations that deal with women's immediate needs, these separate venues in themselves in many ways exclude women from the mainstream of economic dialogue at the national levels.

Indeed global integration, economic liberalization and restructuring at national levels in many Arab countries are transforming the role of the state and work based relations. The main aim of the State is growth, on the one hand, and debt servicing on the other. Therefore the state is moving away from being the main employer, as national industries and facilities are being privatized. For employers the state is no longer providing subsidies or support for national industries. Therefore, employers find themselves having to play a more dynamic role particularly in terms of performance and productivity in the face of international competition and decreased government protection. Finally workers and workers organizations are facing decreased job security, retrenchment in some cases and again decreased government interference in terms of working conditions. The name of the game is now growth. Therefore economic policies revolve around ensuring this growth and having to keep up with international competition.

So what is the gender related impact on all of the above as far as the participation of women in worker/employer organizations? How do changing labour relations and economic restructuring affect women's participation in these organizations? Does the changing role of worker/employer organizations provide women members with new opportunities? The following is only a speculation on these opportunities/challenges and on whether women's representation is improving in employers and workers organizations in the Arab Region.

In fact the improvements in the representation of women employers in the region is remarkable. Between 1999 and 2001, new units/committees/forums have been established in the employers' organizations of the following countries: Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates. This is in addition to the pre-existing ones in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Businesswomen are also networking at regional and international levels with annual meetings and forums. Therefore, as self-organization around specific needs has become intensified it is still too early to determine the extent to which businesswomen are being represented or have the capability to influence mainstream economic policies. It is important to see to what extent established and influential business women associations will encourage younger and less influential women to start their businesses and become employers.

As for women's units/committees in workers organizations, though they have existed for quite some time in the region, unfortunately they have been characteristically weak. However, some improvements can be detected. The cases of the Palestinian, Yemeni, Tunisian and Kuwaiti workers organizations can be highlighted here as examples of concerted efforts to activate women's roles. However women's participation in Arab trade unions is almost always limited to

"women's issues." Women trade unionists rarely have the chance to participate in hard core issues that require collective bargaining agreements with employers and governments. Another problem is that many working women do not actually see the benefits of union membership and therefore, their membership remains low. This is creating a new challenge because economic liberalization such as export processing zones now exist where national labor codes are not always applicable, and women are more vulnerable to exploitation.

Despite the visible improvements in the representation of women in employers' and workers' organizations, challenges still exist. For example, the improvement in representation has not translated into decision making positions. It is only in the Omani Chamber of Commerce of Industry and the General Federation of Palestinian Trade Unions that women members are represented at the executive levels of these official bodies. Indeed there is yet a long way to go in order to mainstream gender concerns within worker/employer organizations. Finally, it is very important to add that such organizations will always be the backbone of the labour relations in any given country and that women's participation and membership will always be important.

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Women in Egyptian Civil Society:

A Critical Review

By Amani Kandil

An understanding of women's participation in civil society in Egypt is important in light of several developing trends. Egypt is currently witnessing some movement in the direction of democratic transformation. Since women constitute half of the population, it is essential to understand the extent of their participation in the organizations of civil society. This is especially true since indicators on women's political participation in Egypt over the last two decades (both as voters and candidates) indicate a decrease in female candidates and voters. In fact the rates for women's turnout at the poll is now half that of men. At the same time, there is a noticeable increase in the official public discourse placing more importance on the participation of women in public life. This was manifested in recent years in the speeches of the President of the Republic, the First Lady who heads the National Council of women as well as the speeches of ministers and parliamentarians. To this end there has been established a National Women Council (presidential decree 90/2000) which is bestowed with 11 broad areas of concern and expertise. These aim at improving the situation of Egyptian women and strengthening their political, social and economic participation. The Egyptian government has been keen in the past few years, on improving the situation of women and their socio-economic conditions. It has also striven at creating a complementary relationship between the efforts of civil society organizations and public institutions so as to reach gender equality. In this paper, I will identify and explore the ways in which women are interacting with the emerging civil society organizations.

Defining the Framework of Civil Society is a "group of free voluntary organizations which occupy the public space between the household and the state so as to achieve the interests of its constituency whilst complying with values and criteria reflecting respect, consensus, forgiveness, and good management of difference and diversity." Civil society has been given various definitions in the Arabic and Western literature. All these definitions share the following principles:

- The voluntary or free nature of the action: This differentiates civil society organizations from kinship groupings such as the family, clan or tribe where individuals do not freely choose their memberships or affiliations, which comes by virtue of birth or inheritance.

- Civil society is an organized community: As such, it is different from society at large. Civil society is created through organizations and associations which work according to a set of logical rules where individuals willingly choose to adhere as members, while respecting and accepting sets of agreed rules and regulations.

- Ethical and behavioral component: This entails the acceptance of difference and diversity and the right of individuals to have within civil society, organizations that defend their material and moral interests. Individuals commit themselves to managing conflict within their organization and between them and the state through peaceful means, while adhering to values of mutual respect, forgiveness, collaboration, and peaceful competition.

The three above mentioned principles, especially the third, represent the essence of democracy. Indeed, it is impossible to build a sound civil society without the existence of a peaceful mechanism for managing conflict, competition and tension according to rules, which are agreed to by all parties involved. It is also impossible to build a civil society without acknowledging the basic human rights especially the freedom of belief, the freedom of opinion and expression and the freedom to organize. As such, building a developed civil society is concomitant with the development of a civil culture, which respects and upholds the core principles of democracy as described above.

The overwhelming majority of literature agree that tribes and households are not included in the definition of civil society organizations. However, a number of American studies focused again on the tribe and the household in an attempt to revive values whilst reiterating the important role of the family. In addition, the role of the profit-seeking private sector is excluded because it would tend to prioritize its motivation for gain over general public interest. Although there was an overall agreement over the role of political parties as important actors and elements in civil society, there was no agreement over the inclusion of ruling political parties in the definition of civil society. This is because ruling political parties are often keen on retaining power, a matter that may override the interest of civil society. A similar debate was also carried out in relation to the "free press." Whereas many tended to include it in the definition of civil society, some argued that the definition of "free" remains too subjective. In addition, the "free" press is often an essential support to the culture of civil society. (footnote)

The components of civil society that are of concern in this study are: non-governmental organizations (NGOs); grassroots organizations; political parties; professional organizations and business people associations and trade unions. Before proceeding with this study, it is essential to point out the following observations: First, civil society is not a neutral concept. Indeed, certain civil society organizations adhere to different values than those described earlier. Some develop racist objectives against certain religious groups or civilizations as we had witnessed following the events of September 11th and as revealed in the Durban conference of racism (August 2001). Secondly, there are strong and healthy civil societies where social

interactions are built on respect for others, respect for diversity as well as on transparency. Thirdly, the development of civil society requires an essential societal base and a body of values and traditions based on acceptance and respect for others and on diversity which is reflected in a culture, and an enabling environment which provides the legal framework accepted by all parties.

What are the characteristics of the civil society to which we aspire? A number of characteristics can be related to the "essential model" of the civil society we aspire to, namely:

1. A civil society, which includes a group of associations that play an effective role in the process of social, political and cultural change. The further they develop, the more their role as change agents develops along with their ability to respond to their social environment.
2. A civil society, which is based on voluntarism and initiative within a participatory framework.
3. The ability to be aware of and critical of the societal construct and the sources of political, economic, and social strengths and weaknesses.
4. The adoption of advocacy in support of excluded or vulnerable groups advocating for civil rights, or cultural, social, and economic rights.
5. A civil society we aspire to is one that upholds the issue of empowerment.
6. Such civil society strives to strengthen its role in disseminating pilot models of democratic practices as well as transparency and accountability.
7. A civil society which institutions transcend ideological, political and cultural differences, accept diversity and difference, and adopt dialogue as a way of resolving conflict.

Women's membership in executive boards is an important indicator of women's presence in decision-making positions

The question we raise within this context is whether the presence of women and the effectiveness of their role within civil society may be used as a criterion to evaluate civil society and may therefore be included amongst the principles and criteria listed above. I believe that it is essential to take into consideration the gender perspective in civil society organizations particularly in developing countries, which are witnessing democratic transformation processes. This subject is almost absent from the agenda of researches concerned with civil society that has focused for years on women's political participation as voters and candidates in parliamentary elections. This is but one aspect of women's overall political participation.

It is also essential to focus on women in decision making positions in civil society organizations as their presence on a board of trustees and administrative boards represents another indicator to evaluate the presence and role of women in civil society organizations.

In what follows, we will present an analysis of the condition of Egyptian women in civil society organizations from the point of view of membership as well as involvement in leadership and decision-making.

NGOs first started in Egypt in the first quarter of the nineteenth century (1831). The last fifteen years of the nineteenth century witnessed a renaissance in "women's consciousness" which was reflected in a number of feminine literary works, journals and cultural salons. By the end of the nineteenth century, charitable women's NGOs were set up. These were women NGOs that flourished outside the capital in the provinces (Alexandria, Tanta, Fayoum, etc). During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the developments within the NGOs sector affected the position of women in women oriented NGOs as the increase in the number of women NGOs were being newly formed. These were mostly involved in charitable work and the care of mothers and their children. Some focused on civil rights issues (such as the New Woman Association) as well as the traditional women issues related to education, employment, health and the personal status code, culminating in the formation of the Egyptian Women's Union on 16 March 1923.

The development of women NGOs during the first half of the twentieth century was concomitant with the overall national struggle, women's struggle in particular and the demands put forward by women for the improvement of their status and conditions. The fifties and the sixties witnessed a noticeable drawback in the size and effectiveness of NGOs in general and women NGOs, in particular. During the one party rule and the predominance of socialism, the agenda of women organizations was integrated into that of the state overall. As a result, voluntarism decreased and apathy increased.

During the seventies, and despite the advent of a pluralistic political system and the politics of economic glasnost, the situation of women in NGOs in general and women NGOs in particular did not record any significant development whether qualitatively or quanti-

tatively (in terms of the areas of activities). The 1980's and the 1990's have witnessed an increase in the public space for freedom and freedom of speech, which allows civil society organizations, including women organizations, to develop and prosper. We point here to some documented data and statistics, which indicate that by the end of the 1970's, the total number of NGOs reached 8,402 and has increased to 16,000 in the nineties.

In addition, there is a general recognition on the part of the state of the important role played by civil society organizations, and thus considering them the state's partners in social and economic development. This was reflected in President Mubarak's discourse as well as the official discourse of ministers and high-ranking government officials. This was also evident in the government's five-year plans particularly in the nineties where NGOs were designated as partners of the state in the implementation of many major programs in the fields of social care and women.

Further, it is evident that the motivating and supporting role played by the First Lady in Egypt within the NGOs sector has given real support for the new political discourse that emphasizes the importance of participation and voluntary work as well as the role that can be played by women.

It is certain that the supporters of the politics of economic glasnost and the commitment of the state to economic reforms, has constituted another new change factor and has pushed many NGOs, whether novel or those that maintain traditional activities, to adopt projects and goals aiming at ensuring employment and training opportunities as well as small loans

for marginal groups particularly poor women.

Political discourse and enabling environmental and economic policies have all concurred to support the role of NGOs and highlight the importance of investing in human resources and emphasizing the role of the state. Global changes have also provided support for such trends particularly in the nineties where NGOs global forums (within the framework of UN international conferences) have played an important role particularly the ICPD, which was held in 1994, and the UN IV conference on women, which was held in Beijing in 1996. Prior international conferences have participated in highlighting the third (NGO) partner along with the state and the private sector. These conferences emphasized the developmental role that

civil society organizations can play as well as the importance of voluntarism. In addition, these conferences contributed to the drafting of the "agenda of concerns" of the world communities with women at the heart of this agenda. Such conferences were also critical in deepening the awareness of NGOs in relation to the importance and value of their role within the process of social transformation.

Increasing Role of Women in NGOs

Before analyzing the development of the role of women in NGOs during the eighties and the nineties, it is important to make the following observations:

1. There are no comprehensive statistics on NGOs in Egypt. As such, there are no official records (for the reports of the central bureau of statistics or the ministry of social affairs), which describe the level of membership in NGOs during a certain chronological period so as to analyze trends or the sex profile of membership. Therefore we must resort to partial indicators for a study.

2. There is no classification for the distribution of women amongst the areas of activities of the ministry of social affairs. In fact, there are 17 different areas of activities such as social affairs, childhood, health, etc. but no distinction for women activities. As such, this study will rely on research estimates by the author.

What is the weight of women NGOs within the overall NGOs sector? There are two ways to identify women NGOs. First, we can use the identity of the NGOs as determined by its name, which clearly denotes that it is a women's NGO. Second, we can consider the central objective of an NGO and whether it relates to promoting the role of women in the development process.

Statistics indicate that there were 119 women NGOs according to the statistics of the year 1990. This number almost doubled by the year 2000 particularly after the UN Fourth Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). This was partly due to international and national changes and to supporting women in setting up their own organizations. By the end of the nineties, these organizations had spread to most Egyptian provinces. This stands in stark contrast to the eighties when some provinces, such as the border provinces, were almost devoid of women NGOs.

The focus on women NGOs should not overshadow the important role that developmental NGOs play, par-

ticularly those which prioritize the development of women and their integration into the development process amongst their chief objective. The author conducted a study in 1998, which covered a wide sample of development NGOs. The study showed that approximately 26% of the sampled NGOs herald women's issues as chief amongst their concerns.

What is the nature of women oriented NGOs? Most of these organizations have a closed membership. In other words, the board of trustees and the membership are constituted of women only. However, 10% of these organizations have a mixed (male and female) membership particularly in the capital and the main urban centers.

Although this study focuses on NGOs, which are primarily concerned with women, it is important to highlight the situations where women are at the level of decision making within the overall NGOs sector. According to the data of the central bureau of statistics

for the year 1997 and field studies undertaken by the author, it appears that the membership of women in the general assemblies of NGOs varies between 22% and 26%.

However, these results do not show the discrepancies caused by the organization's activities or geographical areas of operations. As such, female membership tends to increase for NGOs concerned with the environment (60% of members are women) and for those concerned with maternal and child care (55% of members are women). The rate of female membership in other areas of activities tends to diminish.

Women's membership in executive boards is an important indicator of women's presence in decision-making positions which is only 18.8%. However, this rate tends to increase in the case of disability NGOs and those concerned with mother and child welfare where the rate increases to about 50%. Here too, the geographical spread of NGOs is an important factor in increasing or decreasing the representation of women in decision-making positions as it is related to cultural and social variables. Indeed, in certain provinces of tribal nature, women's representation decreases greatly.

As a result of the social, economic and political changes that have taken place during the past two decades, a set of new activities have emerged challenging traditional ones which are still on-going. Most prominent activities of NGOs concerned with women

Women have been involved in politics and political work since the dawn of the twentieth century

The law granted women their full political rights in 1956 ... reality shows a poor practice of these legal rights

were in the realm of charitable work and social welfare services. The new activities focused on political and social issues namely political and legal awareness in order to promote women's participation in public and political life (voting and candidacy). This awareness was linked to activities related to issuing of voters cards or birth certificates for women in rural Egypt. Some of the newer activities also involved training women candidates to run for local and municipal councils.

New initiatives related to NGOs concerned with women involved economic activities where NGOs train women in crafts and skills and prepare them to face the job market as well assist them in securing loans for small projects. The above also includes cultural and educational activities in the fields of literacy and education.

In the health sector, there was a transformation of thinking in reproductive health and family planning. Within this framework, much importance was placed on working with young women, which in itself constitutes a positive change.

In summary, the last two decades have generated tens of new NGOs specialized in women's issues in addition to a newfound interest in women's issues on the part of existing NGOs. The conclusions we draw from women in NGOs during the past two decades shows that there has been both qualitative and quantitative developments. The founding of the National Women Council in the year 2000 has undoubtedly given impetus to the NGOs concerned with women's issues as it made these an essential partner in the execution of national development projects aiming at improving the conditions of women.

Women in Political Parties

An historical overview of women in political work reveals that women have been involved in politics and political work since the dawn of the twentieth century through channels which are parallel to political parties rather than within these parties. This represents a global trend in the women's political movement and not only in Egypt.

The second observation relates to the fact that the state had a critical role in directing women toward political involvement. This is possible through the legal frame-

work and through the official political discourse as well as the states political organizations.

The third observation relates to the fact that society through its norms and traditions, sometimes provided an enabling environment for women's political activity. However, the cultural and social environment was also a barrier to women's political activism particularly with the rise of the Salafi Islamist political movements.

As for the position of women's issues within the agendas of political parties, women are often absent. Within some political parties (Watani, Wafd, Taggamo, Naserite), there is some mention of the conditions of women and the desire to strengthen women's roles; however, these lack any real emphasis or focus.

With regard to the makeup of hierarchical structures of political parties (i.e. the political bureau), it is safe to say that most political parties suffer from weak relations with the grassroots, whether male or female. However, the matter is more problematic at the level of women's membership. Despite the lack of gender desegregated statistics on the overall membership of political parties (particularly in relation to the four political parties mentioned above), indicators point out to a limited women membership.

Women appear to be quasi-absent from the executive boards of professional syndicates

This trend is very much reflected in the presence of women in parliament. In 1957, women's representation in the first legislative council was 0.57%. This ratio gradually increased in 1979 with the issuance of a new law (number 21/1979), which allocated 30 seats for women. As such, the ratio varied between 7.8 to 8.9%. Later on the quota system was abolished within the framework

of the system that adopted political lists. The presence of women in parliament dropped to 3.9 in 1990 and decreased to less than 2% upon the adoption of the lists system whereby women become totally dependent on the willingness of political parties to include them on their lists.

Political parties do not tend to include women on their electoral lists. For instance, during the elections of 2000, the Watani party presented the candidacy of 11 women out of a list of 444 candidates. The Wafd party presented seven women out of 272 candidates. As for the Taggamo's party, which has its own

women's union, it presented 3 women candidates only. Local councils showed similar trends. The law 43/1979 had stipulated a 10-20% quota for women. As such, political parties presented the candidacy of 5-10% women in the local elections of 1983 whereas the phasing out of the quota system led to a drop reaching 1.52% in 1988 and 1.3% in 1992 to 1997.

The reasons put forward for the poor presentation of women by political parties are varied. Meetings between political party leaders and the media point out to the poor chances of electing women and the limited number of women cadres within political parties and the fact that the fierce nature of election is not suitable for women. All of these reasons reflect the crisis of Egyptian women within political parties.

Within the framework of our discussion of the position of women in political parties, it is important to note that the general secretariat of most political parties includes a limited number of women, but their political bureaus are almost void of women. Very few parties have a special secretariat for women (such as the Watan party) and very few have women committees. When these women committees do exist, most of them are within small political parties and work as charity organizations.

Some of these women committees (particularly the four parties mentioned above) are striving for women to have an effective political role and are thus seeking to create a general platform that supports the participation of women, the inclusion of women on electoral rosters and the preparation of women political cadres. Despite these efforts, there is still a gap between Egyptian political parties and the public - especially concerning women. The law granted women their full political rights in 1956 within an equality framework; however, reality shows a poor practice of these legal rights. Despite the fact that women have 38% of the total electoral votes, women fail to use this as a pressure to choose the best women cadres, those who would adopt women's issues. Other reasons pertain to the poor political participation of women as a result of the traditions and customs of society, the control of men over electoral voting (men tend to use women's voices for the benefit of local sensitivities in rural areas), as well as the traditional view of women's roles as mothers, wives and housewives who have nothing to do with politics.

Women in Workers' Unions

There are no accurate statistics on the size of women membership in the workers' unions; however, it is important to monitor the membership of the organization of the workers' unions. The unions have a pyramidal structure. The base of the pyramid is composed of the union committees. The middle of the pyramid is composed of the general unions and the summit consists of the general federations of the workers' unions of Egypt.

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of elected women in the workers organizations at various levels. This is due to a higher degree of workers' awareness in general and to the activities of the secretariat for working women and working children within the general federation of workers' union of Egypt.

In the 1996-2001 mandates, women's representation in the unions increased to 800 women in leadership position up from the 1987-1991 period when the number of elected female women union members was 118. The 1996-2001 period also witnessed advances for women in unions reflected by the following indicators:

- Increasing representation of women in general unions by 150%
- Integration of new women members by 60%
- 40% increase of young members.

The presence of a secretariat for women headed by a female union member and its involvement in training and capacity building activities for women members and the support it provides for women candidates has played an important role. Statistics indicate that 1,000

union women benefited during the past five years from skills development programs. Nine-hundred union women benefited from cultural and educational programs on laws, standards and ways of work. In addition, a huge number of union women were trained on conflict resolution and group negotiations, all of which contribute to the development of women cadres within the union. In addition, much attention was given to training women workers in starting their own projects and in starting development projects for investing pension funds in case of early retirement (when public sector companies are sold and privatized). More than 150 women benefited from such training.

Despite this progress for women in unions, a strategic review of the secretariat for working women (2001-

The predominance of traditions and cultures do not value the participation of women in public life

2006) shows no relation between women gaining positions vis a vis the new labor law. This is a contentious issue for all parties concerned as the labor law appears to erode some of the rights of working women particularly in relation to maternity leave and childcare. In addition, the labor law strategy is void of any clear directives related to the impact of economic restructuring on marginalizing women.

The interesting point here is the status of working women in the workers' organizations. Indeed, despite the increase in the number of unionized working women particularly at the level of union committees, very few have climbed the higher echelons of general unions. In the nineties, only four women reached leadership positions. This is hardly significant in representing the interests and demands of women in 23 workers' unions.

Women in Professional Syndicates (associations)

There are thirty-four professional syndicates (or professional groupings) in Egypt. For some, membership is compulsory for one to be able to practice in a given profession. This is the case of the teachers' syndicate that is the largest union (around a quarter of a million member) the press syndicate (600,000 members) the doctors' syndicate (250,000 members) as well as engineers and pharmacists. Though membership may be compulsory for many syndicates, it cannot be used as an indicator in relation to our discussion of the role of women in civil society. It is important to note within this context the increased number of educated women and their involvement in important professional activities. This, however, does not reflect an increase in women in leadership positions within professional syndicates. In other words, the membership of women in some syndicates reaches 43.1% (the teachers' syndicate for instance); however, this does not materialize at the level of women's presence in leadership positions.

A review of the presence of women in leadership positions within the executive boards of professional syndicates shows an important gap, which deserves to be analyzed. With the exception of three syndicates where women have been present in decision-making positions (the social workers' syndicates, the press syndicates and the bar association) women appear to be quasi-absent from the executive boards of professional syndicates.

In analyzing the formation of the management board of the press syndicate since 1995, we notice that during the consecutive electoral rounds, only eight women won, the first being Amina Said. The same can be said about the social workers' syndicate and to a lesser extent about the bar association. As for the doctors' syndicate, which is the most effective and active syndicate concerned with public issues, only one woman

doctor won in the elections of the executive board in the mid nineties when the Islamists list won in full. While interviewing a leading Islamist on the executive board about the reasons for the absence of women, the board member replied that "membership of the executive board is not appropriate for women's nature."

This is important in understanding the reason for the weak presence of women within the most important civil society organizations in Egypt, namely professional syndicates that include 3.5 million members of whom women constitute some 53%. The overwhelming presence of the Islamists movements within the professional syndicates (doctors, engineers, lawyers, scientists) in the nineties may partially explain the absence of women from decision-making positions within these syndicates. For instance, in the elections of the bar association which was formed in 1911, only a few number of women won (no more than 3).

This can be attributed to the fact that women are reluctant to participate in the elections of the management boards of professional syndicates particularly at the national level (given that there are partial regional branches for the syndicates). Since such responsibilities need full time commitment in most cases, they create additional burden on women in addition to the fierce nature of electoral battles and the predominance in the nineties of conservative political forces on management boards of some professional syndicates.

Women in Business Groups

Within the framework of the economic policies in Egypt in the mid seventies, which included opening up the markets followed by economic restructuring and privatization in the late eighties, a number of business groupings were formed. The first of such groupings was the Egyptian American council set up in 1975 followed by the Egyptian businessmen association in 1978 and the Egyptian American Chamber of Commerce in 1973. Following that, many business groupings were formed in the new cities and Mohafazat (governorates) reaching a total of 18 businessmen associations.

In the end of the nineties, a new trend started with the support of the USAID in order to start the business-women associations. Five such associations were formed early in 2002.

The first associations of "businessmen" included some prominent businesswomen even in their early inception years. The representation of women within these formations has always been high either at the level of membership or involvement in leadership positions (membership in elected management boards, membership of committees, etc...)

In business women associations, membership is limited to women and as such, it is difficult to evaluate them from a gender perspective. However, it is evident that these associations are quite active as more women NGOs are being registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs. More so, they are involved in small micro credits as well as in small industries related to the business sector. As such, its membership is mixed, including doctors and engineers as well as public and private sector employees. Businessmen associations (which also include business women) for their part, tend to limit their membership to business people. This lack of selective membership is a main weakness of businesswomen associations.

Women in Human Rights Organizations

In the eighties, only one human rights NGO was registered. Presently in 2002, there are twenty-two organizations. Some of these NGOs are concerned with political and civil rights. Others are concerned with economic and social rights, while others work for the rights of a specific group such as workers or peasants.

The important aspect is that the common denomination amongst these organizations is their focus on advocacy. In a study conducted by the author on human rights and other similar organizations involved in women and children's rights, women's membership in such organizations is 27.4%, while women constitute 30% of executive boards. If we exclude women organizations, then the rate drops to 13%.

The field study indicates that if we focus on human rights organizations only, most of them do not include women on the general assemblies and executive boards. This is an interesting finding as there is weak representation of women as members in human rights organizations and a quasi absence of women in decision-making positions.

Final Discussion

The above study reflects a high degree of importance and concern. The first finding is the poor representation of women in civil society organizations (especially if we exclude professional groupings where membership is compulsory to be able to practice the profession). The second result reveals the weak presence of women in decision-making positions in civil society organizations. The third result, which is related to the previous one is the predominance of males in leadership positions even in old organizations where women's historical presence goes back to the nineteenth century.

The fourth result is the relation between the participation of women in constitutional councils and the participation of women in civil society organizations.

These results indicate the need to conduct a wide field study to identify the reasons for the decrease of women participation in civil society organizations. Studies on this issue point out to a number of underlying factors. First there is a high illiteracy rate amongst women and the predominance of traditions and cultures which do not value the participation of women in public life. In addition, there are economic reasons that keep women occupied in trying to make a daily livelihood. The second factor relates to women themselves. This is about women's own awareness of the importance of their role and their view of the distribution of roles as a result of social upbringing and their belief that public and political roles are "male concerns"

The matter is therefore complicated and requires a strategy, which reforms concepts and beliefs through mechanisms of social upbringing particularly through education and the media. In order to implement this strategy, legal reforms are needed to correct the situation of Egyptian women and ensure a high level of awareness raising for both men and women.

Some Final Observations/Recommendations:

1. It is important to have a national capacity building program for NGOs concerned with women's issues. This is a tri-pronged program that includes training, development of a database and research aimed at improving the current situation of women.
2. The law that regulates the work and activities of NGOs is of critical importance. Law 23 (dated 1964) for NGOs and private institutions is still the law which regulates the work of NGOs despite the fact that its origin was in the era of one party rule and the socialist social and economic orientation. As such it is important to pursue the collective effort started in 1998 for developing a new law for NGOs.*
3. It is important to encourage and mobilize women to take part in public life through NGOs, support and help them to reach decision-making positions especially since the representation of women in such positions is still less than a fourth of that of men.
4. There is a need to set up a center to support volunteers, both male and female, in order to guide them and coordinate their general volunteer efforts with specific focus on women's issues.

End Notes

* Since the submission of this article to *Al-Raida*, a new NGO law #84 has been promulgated in Egypt. NGOs are now waiting for the executive regulations to be published that will complement the law and provide guidance for its implementation. In general, the new law is not favorable to the continued independence of NGOs. [This editorial opinion does not necessarily reflect the opinion of this article's author.]

Women in Arab Civil Society:

A Case Study from Sudan

By Amira Osman

This article will endeavor to explore Sudanese women's involvement in civil society. It will investigate their roles as actors in public life with emphasis on their roles in conflict resolution and peace reconstruction. The paper argues that Sudanese women are active members in civil society, yet they face many obstacles, which could hinder their full involvement in development and the peace process.

The Country (Area and Population)

Sudan is the largest country in Africa, with an area of one million square miles. It is located between the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa. This location largely explains the diversity of its 30 million population where 80% of the inhabitants live in rural areas. There are more than 130 tribes in Sudan. Black Africans are dominant in the South, whereas, people of Arab origin dominate in the North (Suliman 1992:3). Islamic religion and Arab culture exist beside non-Arab/African culture and the Christian religion.

Gender Profile

Sudan has a low Human Development Index (HDI) so it ranks at 143 out of 174 countries. Female adult literacy rate is 43% while 68% for male. Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrollment ration for female is 31% whilst for males it is 37%. Maternal mortality rate (per 100, 000 live births) during the period 1990-98 is 550. Female life expectancy is 54 years (Human Development Report 2000: 157-165).

In terms of Gender Related Development Index (GDI) (e.g. female professional and technical workers), it ranks at 118 (value 0.45). Statistics on Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) are unavailable. Female economic activity rate (as % of male rate) is 40%, and data on unemployment rate is unavailable. In terms of women's political participation, as I will indicate later, Sudanese women got the right to vote and to stand for election as early as 1964. However in 1998, there were no women at the ministerial or sub-ministerial level in the Sudanese government (Human Development Report 2000: 166-265).

From the above data, it is clear that both the political arena and public service are generally dominated by men. However consciousness-raising campaigns run by women's organizations and other civil society organizations (e.g. trade unions) have raised the number of women who have entered these areas.

Definition of Civil Society

There is a considerable debate about the meaning of civil society, its relation to the state and its relevance to social and political life. For example, G. White defines civil society as:

An intermediate associational realm between the state and family populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values (White, 1994: 379).

In civil society people work collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, ideas and goals. Civil society organizations (e.g. trade unions, women's organizations, ex-soldier associations, environment associations and community-based organizations) have no fixed boundaries as they represent the need of people. Their wider range of activities includes political, cultural, ethical and economic activities which enrich the public work and the democratic process.

Despite the fact that non-partisan, active and creative civil society is required to foster development, conflict resolution and peace processes, many governments still have the right to ban any civil society organization which does not abide by the rules. The state fears that the potential and ability of civil society organizations (e.g. trade unions) to organize people outside of the state structure may undermine its control on the public order especially in remote areas and among ethnic minorities.

Civil Society in Sudan

Historically, civil society in Sudan has been active in social and political life. Trade unions, professional associations, farmers' union, journalists, academics, lawyers, women's organizations and the like have been active in setting the agenda for human rights and democracy (Alternatives 2000).

In fact, non-violent and organized civil society protests had overthrown military dictatorships in 1964 and 1985 and sought democratic changes with other political parties. However, in 1989 the military regime dissolved trade unions, professional and women's organizations and intensified its assault on civil society and democracy activists and ethnic minorities. As a result, the number of civil society organizations declined and fewer people were involved in voluntary work. Union membership has also declined and political and social activities have been made illegal. Nevertheless, this did not last long owing to a number of factors. First, people have felt that the government is not doing enough to address their social and political problems especially the issue of poverty, unemployment, education, democracy and peace. Second, the government is more concerned about establishing civil society organizations, which support the government rather than encouraging the growth of grass-root organizations, which represent the interests of the masses, especially the poor and marginalized groups. Third, the brutality of the civil war and its human costs have brought the issues of peace, human rights and democracy to the forefront. Civil society organizations are becoming increasingly more concerned with the related problems of war at the local, national and regional levels.

They have realized that violent conflict is the major obstacle to development.

Sudanese Women in Civil Society

In Sudan, the number of women's civil society organizations is not as numerous as other civil society organizations. Some of them are voluntary or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which focus on the well being of society. They provide services and are engaged in welfare activities such as child-care and income generating activities, but they do not challenge the status quo in many civil arenas. Some of them have links with international organizations and most of them are urban-based though they conduct many activities in rural areas.

This welfare approach adopted by most women's civic organizations is part of the Women in Development approach (WID). The most remarkable contribution towards the WID approach was Easter Boserup's (1970) pioneering book *Women's Role in Economic Development*. In this book Boserup highlighted, for the first time, women's contribution in the production process. The welfare approach assumes that women are basic recipients of development benefits because their role is a reproductive one: motherhood, child-bearing and rearing and caring for the elderly. By contrast, men's work is productive (Synder and Tadesse, 1995: 9).

Moser has argued that welfare programs tend to increase women's dependency rather than help them to be more independent because these programs do not question traditional gender division of labor (1993: 61). The criticism of the welfare approach and its limitations has resulted in the development of alternative approaches such as Gender and Development (GAD).

GAD approach has been used by a few of the women's civic organizations, which have succeeded in going further and challenging the sexual division of labor and women's empowerment. These organizations challenge the unequal distribution of power between men and women. They seek to improve women's access to development resources by challenging male culture, economic and social privileges. They emphasize that women should be able to make equal social and economic profits out of the same resources. In order to mainstream gender into the development process, strategic gender interests should be met (Moser, 1993: 40).

The Role of Women's Civic Organizations in Conflict Resolution and Peace Reconstruction

Although Sudanese women's role in development is generally acknowledged, their participation in policy

making and the democratization processes is limited. This has marginalized them in this area and denied the country the use of women's talents, experiences and skills as agents for peace and development. This neglect of the role of women in policy-making can only make any political process weaker and less insightful.

The lingering aspects of the war e.g. death, torture, violence and rape have brought conflict resolution and peace building issues to women's civil society organizations agenda. For example, immediately after the UN Fourth Conference in Beijing many women's organizations including Sudanese Women's Union, Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace and Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women Studies have come together calling on warring parties to end the war and work towards a lasting peace" (Engendered Peace Process 1998). Women in exile have also formed their own organizations. For example, The Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace in Nairobi has placed peace building and the strengthening of the role of women in the peace process on top of its agenda. Recently, the Netherlands' Initiative has yielded a profound networking for peace. It has given support to Sudanese women to:

- * identify important issues related to the peace process
- * contribute to peace education and culture
- * move the peace process forward
- * take a lead in the peace process
- * benefit from international support and recognition (Initiative to facilitate the participation of Sudanese women in the peace process, Royal Netherlands Embassies, Khartoum/Nairobi)

The positive outcome of this initiative can be summed up as follows:

1. It has focused on the issue of engendering the conflict resolution and the peace process in Sudan as well as recognizing the importance of women's participation in peace negotiation.
2. It has brought women with different cultural and geographical backgrounds to work together for peace.

However, this initiative has not fully succeeded to mobilize women's grass-roots organizations. For example, awareness-raising campaigns haven't been extended to reach women in remote areas, displaced women, and refugee women. This raises a new challenge for women's organizations. They have to expand to include the interests and contributions of victims of war, particularly women. In this respect it helps if local languages are used when addressing grass-roots and community based organizations. This will facilitate building common peace consciousness and allowing women to speak for themselves using their own native language.

Women's civil society organizations still have a long and difficult road ahead. Gender-based discrimination is still deeply entrenched. Women are overburdened with domestic work which prevents them from participating in public work or in decision-making activities, and men are not yet willing or sensitized to share some of the load that women carry in this area.

Nevertheless, women's civil society organizations are eager to take a leading role in the peace process and to become active partners in official efforts to promote peace. Since a legitimate peace process requires the elimination of all forms of oppression and discrimination, women's civil society organizations should encourage and lobby the government to ratify international instruments promoting the rights of women including the convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Another issue is how to use the media to disseminate a culture of peace. Unfortunately, women's civil society organizations generally lack access to the media even though the role of the media in conflict resolution and peace building is essential. Women's civil society organizations and other civil society organizations should be aware of that and should work towards using the media to disseminate a culture of peace by broadcasting messages of peace through songs, drama and other forms of entertainment using local languages. Here I would like to mention how a group of women who represented many women's organizations used the media to disseminate a culture of peace in 1987 immediately after returning from an international peace conference in Moscow. Radio interviews and a night program including peace talk and songs were presented to tell the public about what had been achieved in that conference and what should be done to continue working for peace at the local level.

As indicated earlier, women's organizations as a part of civil society have expressed their willingness and commitment to work for development and peace. They have been involved in social mobilizations, empowering women and generating small-scale livelihood projects, reducing potential conflict among marginalized and impoverished groups. Their livelihood programs help to meet immediate necessities, reducing communal conflict on natural resources (e.g. water and pasture) and thus contributing to peace building. Unfortunately, this potential has not been given due recognition in the official peace process.

Although women have formed their own organizations for conflict resolution and peace building and have their own initiatives for lasting peace, they haven't been represented in peace processes at the official level (e.g. the IGAD initiative and Libyan and

Egyptian initiative) since these initiatives are male dominated, irrespective of women's efforts to resolve conflict and promote peace.

How to take women's civil society organizations into consideration in the above mentioned initiatives and other future efforts for peace?

First, a dialogue with political leaders should be held to discuss the issue of women's participation at the decision-making level for development and peace initiatives. Women's civic organizations need to enhance their organizational capacity by taking the initiative to seek out effective ways of achieving peace, supporting networking among themselves and other civil society organizations, and fostering improved dialogue among non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations (CBS) and trade unions. In other words, enhancing the chances for peace by building from below.

Second, gender awareness campaigns have to be launched, and perceptions and attitudes must be changed. Decision-makers have to understand the role of women in promoting the peace process, and to work towards integrating women in peace efforts. Therefore, the proposed women's conference which was announced by NDA leaders in the second NDA congress in Mosawa (Eritrea) in 2000 can be seen as a serious step towards the participation of women in decision making and their involvement in efforts for making peace a reality.

Another issue to be raised at the official level is human rights abuses that accompany armed conflict. Experience has shown that armed conflict has a disproportionate effect on women. However, women's experience in times of war is often un-acknowledged. Women have been socialized into a culture of silence, where their experiences of pain and suffering are ignored. That silence must be broken and women must be encouraged to tell their stories. This remains an urgent issue which must be addressed if there is to be any chance of a lasting peace in Sudan.

Women's civil society organizations also need to address the issue of protecting innocent civilians especially women and children. The collapse of the social infrastructure e.g. schools and hospitals and the break down of communities and families during conflict, destroy children's immediate sources of care and protection. Furthermore, children, are abused, oppressed and forced to carry guns and fight. Accordingly, women's civic organizations, human rights activists as well as the international community need to act together to ensure the protection of children during conflict.

Another issue that must be handled is the need to prepare for the post-conflict period. As one woman from Lebanon puts it, "The real experience of war is not the shelling and so on, those are just moments, though they are the ones you see on TV. War is what happens afterwards, the years of suffering hopelessly with a disabled husband and no money, or struggling to rebuild when all your property has been destroyed" (Bennett et al 1995).

Women's different needs in post war reconstruction periods need to be dealt with seriously though there are some difficulties with women's contribution in conflict resolution. Since women have been excluded from democratic participation for so long, the need arises for consciousness raising campaigns about the importance of women's participation in the peace process since it will yield gender sensitive programs for reconstruction and building peace.

Rensen (1998) refers to women's political reconstruction by arguing that women's participation in post-war political reconstruction depends on two main issues. First, the nature of the emerging political system and its understanding of women's rights, needs and interests. Second, whether or not women will be allowed to be active participants in the political process. Of course, women's earlier position in the conflict (as displaced refugees, victims of rape or torture or ex-combatants) will determine their post-conflict concerns, needs and contributions. For example, displaced women may be more interested in re-building their lost livelihoods, whereas women who suffer rape may need psycho-social help before getting involved in any socio-political activities.

Women's civil society organizations need to provide psycho-social support and related health care services for victims of gender-related violence in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. This is not only a good mechanism for healing the pain of the victims of the war. It is the foundation on which society has some hope of living in peace and justice.

Although war may "empower" women by increasing their responsibilities in taking on what is traditionally referred to as male roles, experience has shown that traditional discriminatory social attitudes may re-emerge immediately after the war is over as was the case in Eritrea (Eugenia Date-Bah from ILO in a WILPF conference) where women were asked to leave the public arena and go back to their traditional domain. The challenge is how to ensure that women hold on to the changed roles they acquired during war.

In some countries the post-conflict constitutions may generally recognize women's political rights

e.g. the right to vote. However, women may face some difficulties exercising that right because they are expected not to vote against male relatives. Another obstacle in this regard is time. Women may face difficulties in finding time to participate in politics and to understand political programs. To solve this problem, women's civic organizations could disseminate political information in a simple way using simple/appropriate techniques which can be understood by women especially those who lack political experience and consciousness. This could also help more women to stand for election. Furthermore, women need to be represented in committees that will supervise the election process (Rensen, 1998).

In Eritrea, the constitution has recognized women's rights in general. A draft stated that "any act that violates the human rights of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role or participation is prohibited" (Tesfai 1996 cited in Rensen 1998). Furthermore, women have been given access to land and female circumcision is prohibited by law. Furthermore, maternity leave has been extended (Iyob, 1997). This Eritrean experience, among others, should be considered when drafting legislations related to women's rights in post-conflict Sudan.

Finally, improving the role of women's civic organizations in the peace process and conflict resolution requires building the leadership potential of women to make meaningful contributions to the peace making process at all levels: "Joint decisions are not the only outcome or even the most common response to conflicts, but such decisions may be one of the most valuable outcome" (Accord Handbook in Basic Conflict Resolution, undated: 12).

Conclusion

Civil society in Sudan has been active in many fields including development, politics and peace. Although there was a time when civil society contribution to public life was abandoned and ignored by the government, civil society organizations have not given up and have continued to play a leading role on issues concerning development, peace and democracy.

Sudanese women have entered the public life as active members in male dominated civil society organizations e.g. trade unions. Later they were able to form their own civil society organizations concerned with welfare programs such as income generating activities for poor women. Nevertheless, few women's civic organizations have been able to question male domination of public life in regard to conflict resolution, the peace process and development.

Recommendations

1. More training for women leaders is needed in conflict resolution, mediation and negotiations.
2. Women's civil society organizations should appeal to the international community to support democratization and the peace processes in Sudan.
3. Women's civil society organizations should mobilize marginalized women e.g. displaced women, refugee women and poor women and ensure that all voices of oppressed women are heard.
4. The government should listen to the voices of the masses through their civic organizations and give a "bottom up approach" a chance.
5. Women's civil society organizations which have committed themselves to networking should be active members in all decision-making process.
6. Women's organizations should improve their capacity building to be active actors in the post-conflict reconstruction.
7. Women's civic society organizations should work to meet women's strategic gender interests for empowering women.

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Bahraini Women and Municipal Elections: A failure or a step towards the future? An Analytical View

By the AWAL Women Society

Background Information:

Since coming to power in 1999, King Shaikh Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain has initiated important political reforms. Whether these reforms are a sincere attempt at democratic reform or a limited appeasement of the internal opposition is the challenge at hand. A review of the recent changes in Bahrain may shed light on how this small nation can move to a stable democracy that respects the rights of all its citizens, including women. We will have to determine the nature of these reforms and whether they will concretely take Bahrain on the road to participatory democracy. The starting point of these reforms was in February 2001, when Bahrain held a plebiscite in which an overwhelming proportion of Bahrainis approved the National Action Charter, a series of wide-ranging proposals for democratic reforms.

Bahrain is an archipelago of 33 islands in the Persian Gulf that gained independence from Britain in 1971, and adopted a constitution and elected a National Assembly in 1973. The majority of Bahrain's population of 650,000 is Shi'a Muslims, yet a Sunni Muslim family, the Al-Khalifa family, has ruled the country for the last 200 years.

Bahrain's fledgling democracy was aborted in 1975 when Emir Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa dissolved the National Assembly and ruled by decree until his death in 1999. The 1973 Constitution became the rallying cry for opposition groups who organized pro-constitution petitions, demonstrations and civil disobedience. The government reacted by clamping down on political freedoms suppressing political dissidence, giving rise to more unrest and violence, which peaked in the mid 1990s.

Soon after ascending the throne, King Shaikh Hamad announced that he would work towards national reconciliation. He reversed decades of suppression of political dissidents, released political prisoners, invited exiles to return home, and repealed emergency state security laws and courts. In February 2002, he transformed Bahrain from an emirate into a kingdom, introduced an amended constitution that established a bicameral legislature, and set the stage for municipal and national elections. In May 2002, Bahrain held municipal elections for the first time in almost five decades, and parliamentary elections are scheduled for October. For the first time, women are eligible to vote and to run for office.

The following is an analysis presented to Al-Raida by the AWAL Women Society in Bahrain.

The Awal Women Society (AWS), founded in 1967, is one of the leading women's organizations in Bahrain. AWS is dedicated to improving the lives of Bahraini women by increasing women's rights and participation in development and by opposing all forms of discrimination against women. Their past accomplishments include activities to eradicate female illiteracy, promote family education, and to educate and train women in their human rights and increase their participation in all parts of Bahraini society.

Undoubtedly, women in Bahrain deserve recognition for the participation of Bahraini woman candidates in the recent municipal elections (held in May 2002). Their strong belief in the importance of women's participation has resulted in women accounting for 10 percent of the total candidates. Such a percentage is considered to be high compared with other Arab countries and reflects women's confidence in their abilities to

deal with the municipal affairs. By participating strongly in the elections, these women have proved once again the pioneering role of Bahraini women over the last eight decades in many fields.

If women candidates did not win a single seat in the first municipal elections held in Bahrain, the mere fact that they were eligible to participate in those elections requires a comprehensive and serious analysis of the status of women candidates and the general circumstances in Bahrain. In order to accomplish this, a women's organization must conduct a detailed study to identify the real reasons why women did not win a single seat in the municipal elections.

We will try to present a quick analysis of the comments made in the last few days by local and international media on this historic event. The comments mainly concentrated on one headline: 'Not a single woman has won a seat in Bahrain's municipal elections'. The results of the elections were disappointing to many local, Arab and international observers since allowing women to vote and participate as candidates, reflects the wishes of many people who have been looking for a better status for Bahraini women.

We should also not ignore the importance i.e. significance of how boys and girls are brought up to think about the role of women. According to most men, women should be hidden and if they come out into the open, they should take a backseat to men. Such thinking, in addition to the family and school upbringing, continues to present women in their traditional role.

The current era of political reform in Bahrain has seen the rise of Islamic, democratic and liberal forces. However, these forces have not succeeded in erasing the dominant Bahraini thinking about women's role in society. Instead, many have attempted to demean the leadership potential of women and have used their power to maintain the traditional role of women. The view that women should participate in society by following a plan set by male leaders is deeply ingrained in the minds of citizens. This thinking was reinforced in the election campaign when some Islamic political societies failed to support female candidates, despite their popularity among women.

Is it possible that a woman could win an election within this social and political context? Although the answer is negative, it does not negate the hard work and perseverance of the female candidates, who used sophisticated, intelligent and civilized methods to reach out to voters. They have proven their ability to intelligently debate and discuss social and political issues as political candidates representing this diverse nation.

The backgrounds of the female candidates in the municipal elections are impressive. Among the candidates, 50 percent have Bachelor of Science degrees, reflecting high academic abilities. They have excellent proven employment records and play highly administrative roles in their professional fields. Eighty percent of the candidates are over 40 years old. Despite their experience, and academic and professional records, the general public did not seem to find these qualifications important in the selection of their candidates.

Forty eight percent of the women have a lengthy and strong record of volunteer work in civil society. An additional 13 percent have a shorter record of volunteer service showing that the majority of women have practical experience dealing with the public through their voluntary charitable service.

Another observation is that about 80 percent of the female candidates were in districts with more than six candidates. Having such a large number of candidates meant that there are fewer votes for each candidate, thus decreasing the opportunities for women in these districts. Many of the candidates tended to receive a large number of their votes from relatives, friends and neighbors. Many eligible voters did not even bother to go to the ballot boxes when they knew that their candidate had already had wide support in the community. It is also surprising that in about 55 percent of the districts, there was more than one female candidate.

We believe that it is important to conduct a detailed analysis of the percentages of votes won by the women in the elections compared to their qualifications, professional experience and involvement in community service. This analysis will reinforce the perception that the average voter desires women to remain in the "back seat" or as others might simply put it 'a man's wife' with no other role.

An important issue that we will examine is how far ladies' societies supported female candidates in the municipal elections. Before the elections, some of the women's civil societies made the decision to play an important role in the municipal elections. Both the Bahrain Women Society and the Bahrain Society for Ladies decided to support one of their members as a candidate. Both societies provided support and formed an electoral committee to assist both candidates. Furthermore, both the Bahrain Young Ladies Society (BYLS) and Awal Women Society (AWS) formed special electoral committees to support women in the municipal elections, and laid out goals for these elections in order to increase female participation.

AWS and BYLS created campaign slogans based on their election goals. AWS' slogan was 'Vote, the future

is yours', while the BYLS slogan was 'Vote, participation is a right and responsibility'. Both slogans voice the importance of the right of women to participate in the electoral process. To strengthen this message, both societies organized seminars and awareness meetings to educate women on how to select appropriate candidates. These meetings were held in all-female gathering places such as 'matams' in order to maximize attendance.

The two societies also coordinated with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), to conduct a training workshop for members of civil society. The purpose of the workshop was to raise participants' awareness on how to work and interact within a democracy. Another aim of the workshop was to educate participants on how to plan and conduct election campaigns. More than 150 people attended the workshop, with women making up 51 percent of the group. We believe that this demonstrates that the goals set by both societies have been successfully achieved.

To further support female candidates, both societies held separate meetings with the women to review the difficulties they faced before and during the campaigns. Although both societies provided support for the female candidates, some of whom are active members, neither society chose one particular candidate to represent them. Both societies have taken this stand because they believe that all women should have equal support and that choosing a specific candidate would

be detrimental to increasing the numbers of female voters and candidates.

After the disappointing results of the municipal elections, we call on all women's societies to adopt slogans for the upcoming legislative elections such as 'A parliament is incomplete without a woman'. It is the responsibility of all women's societies to work together to achieve the above slogan and to promote women in the next parliamentary elections in October 2002.

In order to achieve this goal, the support of all national, democratic and progressive Islamic movements is required to maintain Bahrain's image as a pioneer of democracy in the region. Women's movements should form a consensus on what qualities and characteristics in women candidates will generate approval from all political groups in society. This is one of the difficult but important tasks that must be accomplished. Bahraini political societies (parties) will have to prove in the next elections whether or not they believe that women can succeed as members of parliament.

We hope that the success of creating a voice for women in parliament will serve as the foundation upon which a strong and developed women's civic movement will thrive.

[Thanks to Katie Croake for her editorial contributions]



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Interview

Lina Dannaoui and Nisrine Mansour were interviewed by IWSAW staffer Myriam Sfeir for this issue of *Al-Raida on Civil Society in their capacity as young professional women heading Non - Governmental Organizations.*

Lina Dannaoui

Development and Municipality Studies Center (DMSC)

Lina Dannaoui, executive director of the Development and Municipality Studies Center, is a young woman who managed to make it in a very conservative part of Lebanon - North Lebanon.

After graduating from secondary school, she attended the American University of Beirut and graduated with a BA in Economics. She then traveled to England and majored in Development Economics at the School of African and Oriental Studies (SOAS). Talking about her experience at SOAS, she asserts that "it was a wonderful experience, it helped me mature and become an independent person." After graduating with a Masters degree, Dannaoui returned to Lebanon and started working for "Information International" a research center in Beirut. She worked there for around two years after which she was forced to return to Tripoli. Dannaoui recounts: "After two years of living and working in Beirut, my parents decided that it was time for me to go back to Tripoli. I don't know what got into them, all of a sudden they started giving me hell. I think it was because I was going to live on my own. At first I was living with my brother, but once he graduated he had plans to leave for the United States, and so if I were to work in Beirut I had to live on my own. My parents strongly opposed the idea and after arguing incessantly for around 6 months, I complied." Dannaoui admits that even though she didn't want to upset her parents, whom she loves dearly, going back to Tripoli was her own decision. "At that time I was offered a part time teaching job at two universities in the North - Balamand University and Universite Saint Joseph (USJ) - and I considered it a challenge to be 24 and to be teaching university students, so I accepted the offer.

While teaching at Balamand, Dannaoui was approached to work on a feasibility study for a school opening in Batroun. By chance she met Wafa Shaarani, the wife of the president of the municipality of Tripoli, who was looking for people to organize training sessions on municipality management. The aim of the

project was to train presidents of municipalities (in the North) in administration, management of municipalities, budgeting, planning, etc. Dannaoui recounts: "I had no experience on the subject given that it was a very new concept. I started preparing for the training, along with a colleague, and it took us two months to come up with a good program. We had to devise our own program, and it proved to be a challenging experience. After completing the training, we printed a module and repeated the training 4 times where around 65 presidents of municipalities participated. With time, our training skills improved and the participants' feedback on each session was always very encouraging."



Lina Dannaoui

As a result of the successful training sessions, Dannaoui was chosen as Executive Director to the Development and Municipality Studies Center (DMSC), a non-profit, non-governmental organization specialized in municipal development. Dannaoui recounts: "Even though most founding members and the Board of Trustees of the Center were convinced that I would do a good job, some doubted my capabilities and were certain that I would fail. During my first 6 months working at the DMSC, I felt very much alone because the Board members and founders were not always involved especially early on. It was my first experience at management level and it wasn't easy to learn everything: accounting, cost control, project development, project execution, public relations, fund

raising, internal management, etc. Being female and young was not always helpful. Many people were shocked upon finding out that I am the Executive Director. However, that didn't bother me. I am a person who is result oriented, so I tried to do my assignment to the best of my knowledge. My initial strategy was to meet with every single municipality president in the North to introduce the center and promote its activities. Some municipalities were welcoming and friendly, while others were not. Sometimes my age and gender got in the way, but I always managed to convince traditional individuals that efficiency has nothing to do with one's age and sex."

Dannaoui maintains that the Center, the first of its kind in Lebanon, was the fruit of the efforts of local experts and local presidents of municipalities of the North: "It came into existence thanks to the vision and determination of Tripoli's Municipal President." Dannaoui believes that municipalities, if developed, can play an important role in national reconstruction, local development, as well as in economic and social transformation, and thus ensure greater participation of all segments of society. The Center, Dannaoui explains, is engaged in a number of activities aiming at equipping municipalities of North Lebanon with the basic capabilities needed to assume an active role in society: "It investigates the situation of the municipalities in North Lebanon and works on building their strategic capacities. Moreover, the Center strives to improve understanding of the current system of administering local affairs. It attempts to overcome the difficulties involved in connecting remote municipalities with the central authorities and to other municipalities, and works on facilitating collaboration between municipalities and the central administration. Last but not least, it tries to improve relations between the municipalities and civil society."

Over 70 municipalities, out of the 156 in the North Governorate, have joined the Center: "We are very proud of the 50% participation rate in the North. We are working on membership development and are pursuing creative ideas to encourage more municipalities to join in the near future." With regards to funding, Dannaoui explains that the DMSC receives money from international organizations and donors as well as contributions from municipalities and membership fees of municipalities: "The main contributing municipal body so far is the union of Al-Faiha municipality

which includes Tripoli, Al-Mina and Al-Baddawi. As far as donors are concerned, we have worked with various funding organizations namely Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the National Democratic Institute, the USAID as well as AMIDEAST."

According to Dannaoui: "Even though the DMSC is still very much a local NGO that works with the municipalities of North Lebanon, there is a future plan to expand to other areas. I doubt it will take place in the near future given that there are around 152 municipalities in the North, and working with them keeps us very busy." Dannaoui goes on to explain that the DMSC is a small office whose staff fluctuates according to the need: "Since we became operational our staff members have fluctuated. We started off with two staff members and then more staff was needed so we became six and now we are back to three."

The DMSC is engaged in a number of activities aiming at ameliorating the conditions of municipalities in North Lebanon. The Center is involved in training and technical assistance to improve the administrative



capabilities of municipalities, thus enabling them to develop effective and innovative programs. The Center also undertakes projects based on the municipality's needs and priorities. In addition, it forms joint councils and committees to assist municipalities in their dealings with accredited international organizations in Lebanon in order to obtain funds needed for projects. Furthermore, it follows-up on projects presented by municipalities to the concerned ministries and serves as a databank for disseminating information. It organizes seminars, conferences and discussion groups that instigate debates and benefit presidents of municipalities, municipality staff, as well as municipality partners (NGOs, universities). Last but not least, the Center issues a monthly newsletter for the municipalities of the North.

Nisrine Mansour

Lebanese Association for the Democracy of Elections (LADE)



Nisrine Mansour

Other than the fact that she is the executive director of the Lebanese Association for the Democracy of Elections (LADE), she is a firm advocate of human rights, with great interest in gender issues, development and politics.

Nisrine Mansour studied Sociology and Anthropology at the American University of Beirut. After which, she landed her first job with Save the Children where she worked on economic development for women, namely income generating activities. Mansour recounts: "Save the Children had a group guaranteed lending and saving scheme targeted towards women. It provided loans for women who run very small businesses and guaranteed each others' repayment on trust basis. I worked there for one year and was based in the South." After that she worked as a training coordinator in an entrepreneurship development program for women at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs. The

purpose of the project was to help develop the entrepreneurial skills of women who have micro businesses or who were in favor of having a micro business. Following that Mansour took a year off to work on her Masters degree at the Lebanese University. Her Masters dissertation concentrated on local and rural development, and her thesis tackled the credit programs available in Lebanon.

After completing her MA, Mansour worked with the Cooperative Housing Foundation as the AMEEN program coordinator, a credit program which entailed individual loans for both men and women borrowers. Throughout her experience, Mansour sensed that microfinance tackled only the economic aspect of women's empowerment, and more focus was needed on strengthening women's status in society as independent active citizens. So, shortly after that she started working for LADE, a non-profit organization that aims at monitoring elections and strengthening democratic electoral processes. According to Mansour, "LADE came into existence on April 1996 and ever since it has been involved in monitoring elections. It was founded by a group of academics, researchers, journalists, lawyers, and civic activists eager to advocate electoral democracy in Lebanon. It is important to note that LADE is the first NGO concerned with electoral monitoring, voter's education, and awareness building in Lebanon. It has received wide support within the country and has around 250 members and volunteers from all over Lebanon."

On her work at LADE, Mansour explains: "Since I am the Executive Director, I coordinate activities along with the board and we set the plan of action for LADE and it's long term vision. With the help of the board, we work on raising funds, writing and developing proposals, networking, as well as communication both internally and externally." According to Mansour, "Since its inception, LADE has always had a very dynamic structure. Our secretary general and board members are exceptional, progressive, and gender sensitive. We have twelve board members, and since we strive to apply democracy internally, six of the twelve members are changed every year."

Mansour asserts that LADE strives to increase citizen awareness and commitment to electoral democracy, and is engaged in a number of activities that work on improving the electoral system and laws. It organizes training sessions where observers, voters, and citizens are trained on the techniques of monitoring elections. Mansour recounts: "We started off by organizing introductory meetings with citizens in different Lebanese regions to explain LADE's goals and activities. We also arranged several workshops and training sessions to educate voters on their rights and explain the elec-

toral process. We prepared and published a monitor's guide and kit to train volunteers on how to monitor and observe the elections. The guide and kit were distributed to the volunteers and voters during the training sessions. The monitor's guide contains information on the election law, the principle guidelines of monitoring the citizens' voting rights, the monitor's preparations the night before the elections, as well as information on how to monitor before and during the elections. As for the monitor's kit, it consists of a working agenda for the day of elections and observation forms to be filled out by the monitors in the field." Mansour strongly believes that: "In Lebanon there is an acute need to educate voters and especially women on their rights, and the importance of voting as a means of voicing their views. Many organizations are realizing that, and are insisting that their staff be trained on election monitoring."

According to Mansour, one of the most successful campaigns launched by LADE was "the National Campaign for Holding Municipal Elections". The aim of the campaign was to lobby for the holding of local elections, to participate in the formation of a civic network as a base for democracy, and to encourage citizen involvement in local governmental issues. According to Mansour, "the government wanted to postpone the municipal elections and appoint members and presidents of municipalities, so LADE initiated the call to hold the municipal elections. One hundred and twenty non-governmental organizations responded and participated in the official launching of the campaign. We struggled for it to be an independent coalition, and even though there were representatives from LADE, the campaign was also supported by many non-governmental organizations, newspapers, associations, business corporations, activists and volunteers from all over Lebanon. The campaign was on a national grassroots level and was able to collect over fifty thousand signatures in support of local elections. Since many people were in favor of holding the elections, we did not work alone, rather we worked collectively, mobilized our efforts, and succeeded in exacting change. The media also played an important role in promoting and propagating the campaign as newspapers and television stations covered the campaign activities in an effort to encourage citizens to sign the petition."

Mansour explains that LADE coordinates with the media on all activities and findings yielded. The media, in turn, plays an important role in disseminating information regionally and locally. The findings of

LADE's final report, which gives a detailed and comprehensive overview of the monitoring process, are published in local and international newspapers, and hence the Lebanese citizen is informed of the monitoring results and observations of the election process. Mansour adds that "the monitoring report of the elections was considered by the local and international press as a neutral and professional reference."

According to Mansour, there are several problems prevalent within civil society institutions. There are many good intentions and initiatives to face various problems in society, however, they should be translated



ed into a clear vision and action plans. There is a need for training and capacity building on volunteer and project management. Furthermore, there is a prevalent obsession with personhood in Lebanon, and organizations are often restricted to one person, namely its head, rather than involving efficient members in the decision making process. Not to mention the fact that some organizations are highly politicized. According to Mansour, various NGOs have to gear their efforts to be task-oriented and network with others to address common issues. In order to achieve more efficiency, we have to set our objectives and work collectively on realizing our goals. Indeed, more work is needed on the level of coalition building and networking and a change in the mentality is pertinent for one can't do things alone."

Mansour asserts that most civil society institutions in Lebanon are not democratic in their structure, nor are they gender sensitive in their approach. Women, who



constitute large numbers, fail to reach decision making positions because most civil society organizations are patriarchal, male dominated and traditional in structure. There is a general misconception that women know nothing about politics and shouldn't interfere in politics. Accordingly, women ought to put extra effort to prove themselves especially in local traditional communities. Mansour admits that women are sometimes to blame for the secondary position they are relegated to. Even though they have inherent capacities, they limit themselves and play secondary roles especially in political spheres and in democracy building. Nevertheless, one must admit that women in Lebanon differ from their counterparts in most Arab countries. Lebanese women have more opportunities and a better potential to make a difference, an asset that should be utilized. Women need more confidence and courage to break the glass ceiling and achieve better results: "The gender dimension should be introduced, and women should be chosen according to their merit. It is not enough to have a woman in a position, a qualified woman is what is needed."

Mansour ends by insisting on the importance of voting: "It is unhealthy to abstain from voting because voting is one's right and duty in a democratic system. The act of voting reflects on four years of our existence within the political system. It is our only opportunity to choose freely our representatives and demand solutions to issues of our concern. Even if we are not convinced about any of the candidates, we can take a stand by opting for a blank paper, but the least one can do is participate. We at LADE are working on changing this defective voting system by making every vote count. The people should have a say in the elections and if they opt for a blank paper this should be counted and stated in the official results."

Interview with Mounira El Alami, founder of Darna

By Laila Shereen

- Can you speak to us a little about what Darna does exactly?

In 1995, a group of people of the city of Tangier decided to create a center for citizen's initiatives called Darna (our home), destined to become a center that would welcome debates about pressing social issues, in order to try and bring support to those in need and come up with alternative methods based on consultation with citizens and the support of the civil corporation.



Mounira El-Alami

We wanted freedom on a wider scale in the country, and it became possible to create an NGO without having to face the big issues of repression. To this date, political power is the exclusive prerogative of the central agencies, and all initiatives undergo strict control and sometimes are often repressed. It is clear that our vision is to break through a repressive system, and understand that without equality, no change is possible.

Darna has gradually become a place of freedom, counseling, exchanges and solidarity. Our first locality, Tangier, is situated in an impoverished neighborhood, and we immediately noticed the children and adolescents living on the streets. Facing this reality, we are trying to gain a better understanding of the needs of the youth in this town (drugs, poverty, delinquency, despair, homelessness, etc.). In 1995 we opened the first counseling center managed traditionally by men. Until today we were able to keep our autonomy from political powers and equality in decision making when it comes to internal issues. I think that this year, since we will be opening the community center for women, where women can decide everything, we will be able to evaluate the local male reactions.

- How do you see the state of women in NGOs in Morocco? Has their situation progressed or regressed?

It is clear that in Morocco, women who are frustrated for not being recognized in political organizations or syndicates, have invested in the field of NGOs. They have the decision making power and are well represented. For that reason, women from the local communities created and promoted the social and economical integration plan for women. They stressed on changing the "Moudawana" which is blocked today by the Parliament and the king, and the majority of the assembly power is male dominated. A current revolutionary notion manifested itself when the prime minister imposed, on his political party, a 20% quota of women in his last congressional meeting. This party came up with a list of women candidates to be elected at the September legislative elections. Therefore



we can say that at least the elite Moroccan women are moving with big strides. When it comes to the majority of women, their advancement, decision-making, and mobility, is related to the global dilemma of women's illiteracy rates, and to the success of the elite women against the regressive machismo and Islamic movement of the leftist and rightist male dominated culture.

I am optimistic that daily things are changing and believe in the actions taken by the NGOs. I am sure that women are becoming more and more of an internal pressure on families and on the social system. They are also becoming an external pressure on the local and national levels. It is a very complicated matter, but I think we will succeed.

Darna was created by a number of women, but today we are only two founders. The others were not able to follow our rhythm for personal reasons. Out of all the hosts, founders, advisors of Darna, the female element is the majority. Women are apparently more tenacious and more capable of performing daily tasks, as well as dealing with social disasters and violence caused by youth. They also have better listening and negotiating skills because they are more patient. Shall we say, "Is this the burden of the new century?"

The creation of Darna did not constitute any pressure on men. And I personally think that, it is only when the work is visibly important on the local and national levels, that it can be a serious competition against the "establishment."

The Role of United Nations Agencies in Women's Development in Lebanon¹

By Rania Al-Abiad

Introduction

Women in Lebanon often suffer from widespread discrimination that seems to inhibit their full participation in society. Discrimination manifests itself, for example, in the lack of full human rights and in scant provisions for educational opportunities. Other instances include under-representation in the political spheres and in decision-making positions, unequal access to health services, as well as subjugation to a patriarchal system of living. Many women feel that they are prohibited from freely expressing their ideas and their wishes, and fear being alienated from the social milieu in which they live. Moreover, even into the twenty first century, incidents of honor crimes still echo in the far outskirts of the country. While Lebanon is witnessing breakthroughs in many social, technological, economic, and other civic spheres, much remains to be done, when it comes to women.

Lebanese women's status leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Where are the civil institutions at a time of dire need? What is the role of the government in its executive, judicial, and legislative branches? What can non-governmental organizations (NGOs) do to ameliorate the situation? How can the United Nations System (UN) interfere to better an existing situation and prevent it from deteriorating? It may be the case that a working combination of all the above agents

needs to be developed and adapted to ameliorate the living conditions of Lebanese women, without forgetting, of course, the valuable role that the Lebanese citizens themselves can and should play. Yet it seems that at this point in time, the UN is best adept to undertake the task at hand.

UN agencies have long posed themselves as the proprietors of international standards that should be maintained across nations. They are involved in so many aspects of civil life that it is difficult to name one area in which they are not engaged. In Lebanon, many UN agencies, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), have been involved in advancing the status of women in several ways. Their initiatives include providing statistics about women and the difficulties they face, and implementing training and awareness-raising campaigns to empower women.

In this light, the central issue of this report deals with the experiences of some UN agencies in advancing the status of Lebanese women in their particular fields of competence. It seeks to determine the scope of activity of these agencies and to ascertain their contribution to the development of the status of Lebanese women. It holds that the contribution of these agencies is both urgently desired and



intensely beneficial. However, their roles are not without fault and there remains many a thing that they can do to enhance their performance in the area of women's development in Lebanon.

The agencies selected for this study operate in the domains of human rights and education. They are the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Their efforts in promoting the human rights and educational opportunities of Lebanese women respectively will be scrutinized seeking to determine the scopes of activity of these two agencies, and to ascertain their contribution to the development of the status of Lebanese women.

To provide a non-biased and practical approach to the topic, a reflection on how the Lebanese official and civil society view the work of these agencies is provided. Accordingly, representatives of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Non-Governmental Committee for the Follow-Up of Women's Issues shared their thoughts on the work of their UN counterparts. They offered some insights on the particularities of the contribution of the UN agencies to the advancement of Lebanese women and facilitated the assessment of this contribution. They also critiqued the UN agencies' system of work and advanced suggestions to overcome the shortcomings of this system in order to ensure better chances for success.

United Nations Development Fund for Women

Human rights are fundamental entitlements that all persons are supposed to enjoy. Yet reality has shown that these rights need to be protected by international covenants and declarations, the crux of which came in 1948 with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Despite the Declaration, however, males and females remained distinct in this enjoyment, with the latter being at a disadvantage. As a result, further international intervention was needed to ensure that signatory states were in fact applying what they had voted on. This brought on UNIFEM to see to it that women are enjoying their rights equally with men.

In 1994 UNIFEM established its Western Asia Regional Program (UNIFEM-WARO), which plays an integral part in achieving a world free from inequality. Its work is guided by an empowerment framework recognizing that the gender perspective is still not being systematically considered in national planning processes, and that female participation in the decision-making process and in public life remains limited. UNIFEM-WARO's initiatives hence focused on economic empowerment, governance and women's human rights.

The Economic Empowerment Program was instituted with a focus on strengthening institutions for the development of women's enterprises. This consisted of working with national institutions to enhance services directed towards making small and medium business enterprises more responsive to the needs of women employees, as well as to encourage the emergence of women entrepreneurs.

The Governance Program was directed to building the institutional capacity at the national level for gender planning, gender mainstreaming and gender sensitive development activities. It hopes to increase women's participation in the decision-making processes that shape their lives.

The Women's Human Rights Program was aimed at reinforcing the capacity of women's organizations that deal with human rights issues and enhancing women's access to, and use of, international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It also seeks to ensure the state's and community's accountability in the protection of the human rights of women, as well as supporting NGOs, governments and international organizations interested in the human rights of women.

Of the more important projects undertaken by the Agency, UNIFEM-WARO engaged actively in promoting the CEDAW. This included efforts to integrate a large component of the CEDAW into school curricula and into UNIFEM-WARO sponsored training for human rights advocates. It also consisted of holding awareness raising campaigns and providing training on CEDAW reporting and implementation. To begin with, a comprehensive kit on the CEDAW was translated into Arabic, with a supplement on the application of CEDAW in the Arab region.

As important as the work of UNIFEM-WARO is, some agency characteristics make it difficult to fruitfully cooperate with the Office.

The rigidity of the organization in financial matters undermines the work being done. While projects themselves are allocated considerable amounts of money, the budgetary system is such that it is not transparent leaving no room for freedom of expenditure. "There is mystery when it comes to financial matters," holds Aman Shaarani, president of the Non-Governmental Committee for the Follow-Up of Women's Issues, who sees the Committee as a mere executor.

A second factor is the nature of the programs themselves. The Agency's system is such that it does not leave room for flexibility whereby programs can be

amended as the need arises: “the programs that we receive are drawn up and should be carried out as they are.”³ Likewise, all the projects are UN dictated and do not take into consideration national priorities. In other words, though programs and projects need to be tailored to the country’s needs and priorities, this is rarely the case, as ready-made proposals are delivered.

In this view, UNIFEM-WARO should consider some of these remedies:

- With respect to financial rigidity, more transparency and awareness of the allocated budget, and more financial flexibility is entrusted to implementing agencies.
- With respect to program rigidities, programs should be amended as the need arises allowing the executors to use their discretion.
- Establishing a tripartite cooperation and coordination between the Agency, the government agencies and the NGOs to draw a clearer, more practical and political free framework for advancing women’s issues.

United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization

Education is a fundamental pillar of human rights, democracy and sustainable development enabling a person to be involved in the community and to contribute to its development. Education should no longer be considered a privilege, but rather a national priority. This message was sent to all nations after the adoption of the Convention Against Discrimination in Education in 1960, the CEDAW in 1979, and the World Conference on Education for All in 1990. As such the role of the UNESCO has become more vital than ever before.

Among other activities, UNESCO participates in evaluating operational projects, monitoring the development of education, promoting literacy and adult education, and establishing programs to enhance educational opportunities for females.

In addition, it has been one of the most active promoters of the CEDAW. The implementation of the Convention is a major commitment of the UNESCO, which intervenes to ensure women’s equality with men in the field of education, including physical education and sports. In addition, through the ‘Passport to Equality’, a personalized presentation of the CEDAW and its Optional Protocol, UNESCO led an international campaign to promote the right of women to education as well as to raise awareness to the existence and importance of the CEDAW. It is published in ten languages, including Arabic, Hindi and Chinese, and is distributed worldwide for free.

In Lebanon, the UNESCO-Regional Office cooperates with the Ministry of Education to establish programs in

accordance with Ministry-set priorities. Currently the Office is engaged in the Basic Education Project, conducted in partnership with the National Center for Research and Development (NCERD), a subdivision of the Ministry.

The aim of this project is to provide continuous support to the ongoing national educational reform process, to strengthen the public education sector, and give it back its credibility. It also seeks to evaluate the new textbooks, screen the curriculum for gender stereotypes, and ensure international standards of educational information. Furthermore, it trains teachers and Ministry and NCERD staff to be gender-sensitive and to overcome gender stereotypes.

Though of great value to the community, the efforts of the UNESCO Regional Office do leave room for speculation. For one, the Regional Office does not hold any partnership with private schools. While it can be argued that the private sector is not in as much need as the public one for assistance, such an argument does not hold true. The inadequacies, especially those related to gender issues and that abound in the public educational sector, are the same as those in the private sector.

In the same light, the Office does not interact with institutions of higher education, whether private or public. While it does advocate the importance of higher education, it does not interfere to ensure equal access to it. Neither does it interfere to make institutions of higher education gender balanced and gender neutral.

The limitations of the Office’s mandate, which establishes its relationship with the official sector of the community, thus imposes shortcomings on the work being done. Incorporating a “broader and more inclusive spectrum of the country”⁴ would not only provide the society with benefits, but would also enable the Regional Office to augment its own knowledge of the problems of the Lebanese educational system and to enhance its activities.

In this light, initiatives to further enhance the intervention of the Office should include efforts to:

- Improve the literacy and general education level of women, particularly rural women, through the initiation of illiteracy-fighting campaigns,
- Reduce the drop-out rate of women, particularly those from lower-income levels, through the provision of incentives,
- Improve women’s access to vocational training and continuing education, by facilitating their admission to vocational institutions, as well as to institutions of higher education,
- Develop the quality of the educational system where-by it disseminates gender-sensitive information and

ensures the adoption of gender-sensitive curricula,

- Introduce mass communication programs that aim to change the attitudes of both sexes towards women,
- Act to ensure that the government establishes adequate measures to enforce compulsory and free education.

Conclusion

This study has examined the particularities of the two UN agencies to advance the status of Lebanese women. It has reflected on some of their initiatives and portrayed their shortcomings. It has shown that there are still some gaps in both the operational and program dimensions of their interventions. As the agencies strive to address gender disparities within the national context, it is crucial for them to assess and understand their role in both cultivating and challenging gender inequalities, and adapting their programs to the specific needs of the country. A few key ideas are shared below to render this possible:

- Expand the strategic partnership network. Recognize the importance of identifying and cooperating with an expanded range of strategic allies, both traditional and non-traditional, to plan and implement more effective programs for the advancement of women and gender equality.
- Address gaps in gender-sensitive quantitative and qualitative data. Ensure the collection of gender desegregated quantitative data to document gender disparities.
- Concentrate support to strengthen the national women machinery with the necessary human and

financial resources. Include the exploration of innovative schemes so that gender mainstreaming is integrated into all national policies, programs and projects.

While reflecting on this work, it should be kept in mind that the contest against the prevailing discrimination of Lebanese women is ongoing. This contest is not a matter that can be isolated and examined under controlled circumstances; it is rather a dynamic process with new achievements taking place in a constant manner. Consequently, this study does not present a static picture of the work being done. More exactly, it represents a segment of the actual reality and marks a starting point for further investigation into the matter.

End Notes

1. A thesis submitted for the attainment of the degree of Master of Arts to the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut, May 2001.
2. Aman Shaarani, interview by Rania Al-Abiad, tape recording, Non-Governmental Committee for the Follow-Up of Women’s Issues, Beirut, 16 January 2001.
3. Ibid.
4. Mona Mourad, interview by Rania Al-Abiad, tape recording, Lebanese Women Council, Beirut, 3 February 2001.

Forthcoming

Arab Women and Sexuality

On Combating Violence Against Women:

The Performance of Lebanese Non-Governmental Organizations

By **Azza Sharara Beydoun**

Translated by Rania Al-Abiad

Edited by Hania Jurdak

This paper was presented in one of the panels of the conference "A Hundred Years since the Liberation of Women", the Higher Council for Culture, Cairo, 23-28 October 1999.

As international conferences and conventions gave a public concern for domestic violence, the "domestic inviolability" pretext of our patriarchal society has become an ineffective cover for domestic violence against women. Although Lebanon, at the beginning and like other patriarchal societies, exhibited much indignation and obstinacy when charged with domestic family violence in general, and domestic violence against women in particular, well-publicized incidents soon occurred, undermining the legitimacy of both indignation and obstinacy, and rendering open to question the halo of sanctity enveloping the family in such societies. These incidents received media, and particularly television, exposure. Granted, media exposure of such events was driven by the need for sensationalist coverage, presenting these incidents as very rare and as consequences of exceptional conditions, but media coverage, nevertheless, enabled women to realize what they had been forbidden to realize: that suffering was not the fate of all females, that they could publicize their feelings of pain and report their aggressors. This media exposure also prompted those in contact with possible women victims to become aware of violence against women in its overt as well as covert manifestations.

Such progress happened in a relatively short time. Today, attention to the issue of violence against women goes beyond criminal practices to encompass daily practices as becomes evident in surveys, studies, and reports by doctors, researchers, social workers, and university students in different faculties (journalism, health, sociology, psychology, etc.). Nowadays,

the set of signs indicating violence is expanding to include the physical, psychological, legal, economic, and social dimensions of violence in all its forms.

In Lebanese society, and under the rule of a regime of a multi-sect structure, each of the separate groups is led to take matters into its own hands. As such, many types of organizations were founded, and these continue to respond to new social needs and to play a main, and often pioneering role in expressing those needs. These organizations began forming prior to the founding of modern Lebanon and took on different forms during the past hundred years. The founding of the modern Lebanese state did not undermine the role of these organizations; on the contrary, the problems confronting the country's progress constituted a *raison d'être* for these organizations' continuity and prosperity.

How do these organizations, which are non-governmental and which (as we here claim) are the first to sense social issues and address them, regard violence against women? Do they face it? What are their strategies for facing violence, and how do they implement these methods?

This paper profiles two non-governmental organizations on opposite sides of a bipolar continuum. One is a religious Muslim organization, and the other is civic and secular. They share the same coordinates of time and place (i.e. Lebanon today) but adopt opposite approaches to violence against women. The first organization craves to restore the first Islamic era and

anchors its performance in a historic cultural background of handling women's issues in general, and violence against women in specific. In contrast, the second organization views itself within a global context, from which it directly derives its reference frameworks and performance methodology (after adapting these frameworks to local social culture). Unlike the first organization, the second is futuristic; i.e., it is most probably based on a model to which non-governmental organizations in Lebanon increasingly aspire to reach.

Najat Social Organization (Islamic)

This is an organization with female-only members. It is based on Islamic thought, solidly affiliated to the Sunni Moslem "Jamaa Islamiyya" group, and consists of Sunni Muslim women who abide by the legal (religiously decreed) Muslim attire.

The Organization's headquarters are in Beirut, but the Najat is active in various Lebanese regions and among women of all groups (students, workers, housewives, etc.). It provides welfare services to needy Sunni Muslims, particularly on religious occasions, but it is primarily interested in raising women's awareness of Islamic religious affairs and in urging them to get involved in the public domain, both in religious and social affairs.

The organization holds general and specialized lessons and educational lectures, works to eradicate illiteracy, and teaches the Koran. It also hopes to establish training centers for upgrading the skills of mothers in their community by teaching them sewing, household management, and basic sanitation principles.

The Organization publishes a 36-page monthly journal (more than 80 issues have already been published)

that expresses its attitudes and relates its activities. In particular, the journal provides a forum for exchange and debate among organization members and their male and female readers, on issues specifically related to women such as polygamy, divorce, domestic violence, marital relationships, spinsterhood, media exploitation of the female body, obedience and tribulation, socialization and friendship between the sexes, wearing the veil, men's guardianship over women (al-quwama), female role models, etc.

Najat Social Organization has an image of itself as "open-minded", evidencing that image with its membership in the "Lebanese Women Council" (which

brings together all types of women's groups and non-governmental organizations) and its participation in this Council's general assemblies and in some of its activities.

How does the Organization deal with violence against women?

To begin with, we should state that violence, according to this Organization, is mainly physical and involves brutal beating intending harm and injuring or disfiguring the face. Light beating of other parts of the body, aimed at merely "humiliating" and not injuring, is permissible by virtue of men's guardianship over women (al-quwama), similar to a mother's guardianship over her children, whereby occasional beating intending humiliation is a viable educational method. This is particularly so since the Koran frankly mentions such beating as an allowed method of treating disobedient women. Najat leaders do not accept the definitions of violence adopted by other working non-governmental organizations in this domain; Najat instead defines violence as solely "physical" though some of its young leaders do describe some forms of humiliation, dishonorable labeling, censure, cursing, restriction, subjugation, and compulsion to action as a form of "psychological violence" even more harmful than physical violence.

Violent attitudes and practices towards women are entrenched in the public consciousness

Aside from criminal cases that require police and legal intervention, Najat spokeswomen believe that physical aggression in the home is primarily the woman's fault and only secondarily the man's fault, and that thus, women must face violence via two strategies:

- Through prevention: By adapting to the man's God-given temperament, avoiding raising him to anger or creating problems by being too

demanding, rebelling against his will, or speaking to him inappropriately, for women are often 'capable, sly beings' with great cunning and can thus use trickery (emotion or wit) to reach their goals rather than direct confrontation, which leads to violence.

- Through acceptance of her lot: Disregarding the man's violence as long as he provides her with food, shelter, and clothing and does not force her to disobey God's Word. The organization believes that a woman in this case should instead be discreet and accept her lot in order to protect her family, thanking God that she is not forbidden to worship Him, and should accept her earthly God-given situation while awaiting the fruits of Heaven.

The Organization addresses men through its public channels, such as its journal, and through personal contact should the need arise, to convince husbands to use their guardianship over their wives with mercy, and to remember that women too are human beings honored by God and should not be brutalized.

Other actions such as arbitrary divorce, denial of custody over children, reduction of allowance, and other injurious practices following divorce and second marriages (or constant threat of them), in addition to yet other practices of psychological violence and legal aggression, are all objects of complaint by women readers but are not considered acts of violence by the Najat Organization. These issues exist only as topics of debate, that sometimes extend over several issues of the above-mentioned monthly journal, between women, men, and religious figures, reflecting a certain intellectual vitality and openness. Participants in this debate base their arguments on the Koran and on Prophet Mohamed's life as well as on the realities of contemporary life. The solution resides, according to all these participants, in returning to the fundamental laws of Islam, which are constantly being violated. Perhaps the best example of such violation, as Najat leaders themselves admit, is the performance of legal Islamic courts. Muslims should work to restructure these courts so as to guarantee the application of Islamic Law (Shariaa), which honors Woman and guarantees her rights no matter what her status: a daughter free in her basic choices when her father is alive, his inheritor when he dies, whether a single wife or one of several, a divorced woman whether a mother or not, a widow, or a holder of special funds. All of the rights given to women in these situations are currently being violated due to malpractice in Shariaa implementation.

However, the task of restructuring legal courts, which may require the appointment of women and not only men, ranks low on the Organization's agenda of priorities, so much so that its members and target groups do not find it necessary to give the matter its due consideration despite their realization of this matter's effectiveness not only in alleviating the suppression of women but also in effecting Islamic justice and demonstrating its recognition of women and their rights.

That is the way Najat addresses physical and psychological violence and the wrongs and subjugation from which women - in its milieu tend - to complain. As for

general incidents of violence that strike women not belonging to the Organization's religious sect, Najat does not find reason to discuss them, and if it does so, the language becomes very general and vague (by evading, for example, the expression "rape" and replacing it with three periods) and casts blame on the government for not protecting the abused and not punishing abusers.

Najat Social Organization does not address violence against women in specific because it views itself "not as a women's organization", for its aims and purposes center around organizing society and ensuring its Islamic orientations in accordance with the visions of the "Jamaa Islamiyaa" group. As such, women are asked to work in the Organization not to ensure the victory of women but rather that of Islam. Women's motives in joining the organization vary but all share a common characteristic: each of these women is related to one or more male members of the "Jamaa Islamiyya" group. Sisterhood in this women's organization is established through the brotherhood of these men; perhaps the extent to which such women succumb to the will of their male relatives makes them less attentive to the pleas of abused women from their direct milieu who publicly seek their help on the pages of the Najat's above-mentioned publication.

Najat members' criticism of abused women's male abusers does not go beyond being a cathartic means of helping them vent their suffering. This venting is bounded by a well-defined ceiling expressed in a consistently recurrent theme, in both oral and written discussion, as follows: that women must obey men, that this is part of the worship of God, and that women's disobedience of men is one of western culture's manifestations of corruption, which has struck men in their manhood, prior to striking women, and thus allowed women to disobey men and to disobey God equally.

The Najat Organization refuses approaches to women's issues that are adopted by other Lebanese NGOs, under the pretext that these approaches are sponsored by the West, a West that "is invading us with its sinful values and traditions". Effective confrontation of violence against women, in the agenda of Najat Social Organization, is thus postponed as long as its women members remain operative under male guardianship (*quwama*) and as long as they continue to believe that obeying men is part and parcel of religious practice and righteousness.

The Arab Court broke the silence that surrounds violence against women

Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women

The "Arab Hearing Session" for physically abused women paved the way for what came to be known as "The Arab Court for Women", held in Beirut in June 1995 in preparation for the Beijing Conference and what followed it - the founding of "The Permanent Arab Court for Combating Violence Against Women" in November 1996. These two occasions paved the way for founding "The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women" in March 1997. It was composed of women's civic organizations, some with women-only members and others with mixed members and social workers from both sexes (around 15 organizations, among them the Lebanese Council for Women, which itself consists of tens of women's organizations). All of these members hope to "unify their efforts to address the problem of violence against women specifically because women are the weaker group in a society where patriarchy prevails and where women are the victims of violent practices that have prevailed and that continue to prevail in the different types of wars in our country".

In its foundational declaration, the council holds that "there is no way to solve the violence issue except by confronting it". It thus calls on the government to be a fair arbitrator and the ultimate authority in protecting women, especially legally. It also holds that confronting violence against women is achieved not only by legal reform, but also by diligent work on the level of local communities in order to undermine the misconceptions they harbor vis-à-vis women.

How does this organization address violence against women? Why does it choose the methods it does, and how does it apply them?

Inherent in the multifaceted definition of violence adopted by the council are the corresponding multifarious functions it is required to perform. This definition identifies violence as "physical or psychological attack inflicted by one party, (material or moral), upon another". However, the manifestations of such violence are difficult to discern "because they have been part and parcel of our culture and their justification internalized in such a way as to delude our awareness and faculty of observation". The Council's performance during its short history has been constricted to identifying, specifying, and categorizing these manifestations whether in the complaints of more than 150 cases of abused

women who sought this Council's headquarters for help, or in the context of the few public "battles" that it fought in defense of some women who suffered different types of violence.

In addition to defining violence as causing direct physical abuse to the other party, the Council's perspective views the following as manifestations of violence: physical confinement, social defamation (by instigating the crowd via activating their traditional conceptions and criteria), economic abuse (where the abused is denied her material rights, whether money or inheritance), intellectual abuse (where the expression of ideas is prohibited, silence is forced, and the proclamation of an attitude opposite to the woman's own is imposed), or finally civil and religious legislations instigating and perpetuating discrimination against women.

Physical aggression in the home is primarily the woman's fault and only secondarily the man's fault

It is justifiable to describe public and private inclinations, behaviors, and societal structures as "violent" to the extent that they generate, permit, or conceal violence within their folds. Perhaps the most demonstrative examples of this phenomenon are the decrees of Article No. 562 of the Lebanese penal code, from which a man is almost excused for murder: "If a man witnesses his wife, daughter, or sister committing fornication or illegal forms of sexual intercourse, kills her or harms her unintentionally", he is practically absolved of his murder. This law solves the fornication problem with the murder solution. The legal Article here is a justification for murder, enabling us to describe the law as violent and indict the way it "justifies" murder.

The Council's primary mission lies within the path paved by the "Arab Court", which "broke the silence" that surrounds violence against women. Since media was a main channel for breaking this silence, the Council resorted to the media conservatively and efficiently. This is because commercial media coverage is sometimes exceedingly provocative and exaggerated, and other times incomplete and shallow, thus, potentially harming the cause at large. Efforts to break the silence have thus taken many forms. In addition to utilizing visual media (films, documentaries, spots, talk shows), the Council's Media Committee conducts campaigns to familiarize the public with the Council and its work, sensitize journalists and media to the topic, and spread awareness among school students, particularly by distributing a dual-purpose survey: to discover

the extent to which the violence phenomenon has spread, to raise awareness of its manifestations in one's direct milieu, particularly the familial one, and to call this abuse for what it is and reporting it for being a crime and not a normal occurrence.

On the legal level, the Council aims at spreading awareness of the legal texts that decree punishment for acts of violence and of those texts that oppress women's rights. The Council participates in campaigns to eradicate 'legal illiteracy' and urges the government (guardian of the law) to develop existing laws and create new ones that protect women from violence; it also urges the government to apply international conventions that prohibit discrimination and violence against women. The Council, through a special committee of judges and lawyers, also provides abused women with legal consultation services and judicial assistance.

The Council's Social Committee organizes public and private hearing sessions for abused women. It provides women with direct help that takes different forms though it remains lacking in response to actual demand.

Furthermore, the Council has an abused women's hotline and goes beyond that to provide counseling services and emotional support through specialists in the field – therapists and social counselors. Providing safe shelters for abused women remains an urgent necessity; the council seeks to found such shelters by appealing to the government through the Ministry of Social Affairs or through non-governmental organizations (such as clerical Christian organizations).

In the absence of local studies on familial violence, the Council undertakes documentation and research efforts that have yielded some publications, an effort that indicates the nature of the Council's work and development and that provides its members and friends with a methodological means of understanding the violence-related issues, with knowledge as a necessary condition for dealing with them.

The Council also participates in the ongoing "Women's Rights Campaign", held by the "Arab Women's Court" and aimed at breaking the silence regarding the legal injustice targeting Arab women, especially in the personal status code- the Family Law. In its primary phase, this campaign concentrates on laws related to divorce. Furthermore, the Council attends to emergency criminal incidents against women whether publicly, as in "the case of student Soleen", or privately away from media attention, as in the case of "Fatima the minor" convicted of murdering her neonatal offspring.

Expanding the significance of the concept of violence from direct physical and psychological violence to that which may incite it has led the council to undertake both diverse and specialized tasks. These tasks are diverse in the sense that they require specialization in varied areas of intervention comprising law, social services, medicine, media, public relations, research, etc. The need for specialization, however, is dictated by the methodology used to approach the issue. Anger, direct confrontation, group allegiance on the one hand, and emotional, legal, material, and psychological support of abused women on the other, are important actions. Yet, these are only circumstantial confrontations. Violent attitudes and practices towards women are entrenched in the public consciousness. Consequently, combating such violence means combating inherited beliefs that derive the "obviousness of their appropriateness" from religion, family education, law, politics, and economics, etc. and from all societal constructs that protect the dominant and traditional group's interests.

Resisting these inherited, violence-generating beliefs requires tracing their effects, undermining them within the folds of these constructs (in law, education, and economy), and deconstructing them to specify the premises of discrimination and violence against women. Discrimination and violence are dictated by the continuity of patriarchal dominance, a dominance no longer compatible with contemporary cultural and social reality. The need to be in harmony with the prevailing Zeitgeist, which essentially involves adhering to human rights, is no longer a choice for these societies but rather an imposed necessity. This deconstruction aims at specifying the most appropriate entry points of intervention to resist discrimination and violence against women. The functions proposed for that resistance require specialization of tasks in accordance with the many specialized fields involved in the practice of discrimination and violence against women.

Even though the Council has only been operating for five years, it has actively participated in helping abused women. It continues to strive toward raising the governmental and social awareness that would put forth conditions that minimize violence against women. Through considering this task, it becomes clear that programs in this endeavor require the efforts of human rights activists as well as researchers and academicians. Success comes by capacity-building of the workers involved through training and sensitization, by constant documentation, evaluation and good management, by planning and testing, by mutual cooperation between the various parties involved, by openness to other organizations working on the same issue, and by building

coalitions that will create enough pressure to alter discriminatory policies and laws.

We described above two non-governmental organizations' approaches to dealing with violence against women and the ideologies underlying them. The first, the Najat Social Organization, does not directly address violence but merely responds situationally to that violence's most crude manifestations and postpones dealing with the many modes of subjugation and suppression imposed on women. It appeals to what it dubs as women's "natural" capacity for sacrifice of her individuality (which is equivalent to tolerating the conditions of violence, subjugation, and suppression) for the sake of the group to which she is affiliated- "Jamaa Islamiya" - and thus calls on women to return to Islam and reject western civilization.

The second, the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women, is civic and is working to combat the visible aspects of violence and to reveal its invisible aspects in societal structures that conceal or justify such violence. As this organization seeks to break the silence, it aims at making violence and discrimination against women a public matter: that is, a matter belonging to the province of society and of the government (as a representative of society), and not the province of the family, the religious sect, or any of the other fundamentally patriarchal structures.

The approach of the first organization - The Najat - is a traditional approach to women's issues in the Arab world. Organization spokespeople, especially those of women organizations in the Arab world, have consistently announced that their work aims to elevate society as a whole and to serve its cause(s), and not women or their causes as a group or as individuals. Their societal roles - as dictated by the hegemonic patriarchal system - are highlighted at the expense of their "subjectivity", thus marginalizing their issues on the priority list of social movements and organizations. The lesson learnt from the Algerian women activists of the Algerian Revolution, which was widely acknowledged by feminists all over the world, seems to be wasted on our traditional women organizations. These continue to affiliate themselves with social and political forces that involve them in their causes, revolutions, struggles, and wars gauged to the vision of "their" men in control, strategized accord-

ing to their priorities and implemented according to their ways and methods.

As for today, we witness a transformation in women's activism in social work through the establishment of non-governmental organizations, some with women-only members and others that are mixed, carrying issues that concern women in general or particular groups of women. While women's traditional organizations previously proceeded from an ideology and attempted to perceive reality through that ideology, the new organizations tend to respond to actual realities limited by time and space and act on them in accordance with a frame of reference.

That frame of reference consists of a few premises relating to Human Rights proclamations, but mostly adhering to these realities, and deals with them at a pace and reach determined by the specific rhythm of our society and the conditions of its people.

Violence in Lebanon's not-so-distant memory is repulsive in all its forms; how so if its practiced within the family by one member against another? Combating it is hence justified in all cases. When a group of people act to achieve that, it receives support and allegiance from all groups (sects, regions, fanatic groups). When combating such violence collides with existing patriarchal societal structures, the

distribution of forces, supportive and oppositional, will probably not occur on a sectarian or regional basis or on other "natural" ones. As such, the performance of a non-governmental organization combating violence against women has a focal mission: it must attract and organize the societal forces supporting its work by upgrading its organizational skills, building its members' capacities, building coalitions, undertaking public struggles, capitalizing on its successes, and learning from its failures etc.

These tasks seem simple for a traditional patriarchal organization such as the Najat Organization, for it is likely to draw upon the repertoire of experience of its male counterpart. The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women is working in a novel space, targeting a varied heterogeneous group (abused women), and attempting furthermore to undermine the deeply entrenched patriarchal gender system...for this organization, "innovation" (creativity) in its daily tasks and endeavors seems to be the "fate" of its activists.

Violence according to Najat Social Organization is mainly physical and involves brutal beating intending harm and injuring or disfiguring the face

Dismantling Bridges, Building Solidarity: Reconciling Western and Arab Feminisms

By Azza Basarudin

Abstract

This article attempts to address how Western and Arab (North and South) feminists are able to envision solidarity and empower women across local and national boundaries through (1) connecting local and global gender issues and (2) reconciling Western feminist scholarships and Arab women's culturally specific positions in international and cross-cultural frameworks. Given the historical background of the Middle East, there is a need to understand multiple factors such as class, nation, racism, sexism, colonialism and imperialism that influence Arab women's struggles for liberation. Arab women's struggles cannot be defined and situated in a context that removes the diversity of their historical experiences, location, religion and cultural factors. I would like to examine how Arab women are marginalized within the sphere of Western feminism(s) because they have been portrayed as passive victims instead of active participants seeking mobility and changes in their society. In dismantling the binary construct of East/West, liberated/oppressed, colonizers/colonized and progressive/backwards in global feminist discourses, there is an urgent need for a cross-cultural dialogue between Western and Arab feminisms in order to create space that allows differences to be recognized and examined, and crafting a meeting point for women to relate across their differences. For Western feminists trying to make sense of Middle Eastern issues and Arab women's struggles, solidarity will remain elusive unless they recognize that women's experiences and struggles cannot be separated from race, class, nation, colonization and imperialism.

Introduction

Feminism is seen as a political and philosophical movement, which challenges all power structures, laws, and conventions that keep women servile and subordinate. Various Western feminist theories such as Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Marxist Feminism and Post-Modern Feminism have been formulated with an effort to better understand and overcome women's oppression. There is no doubt that the struggle of Western feminist movements have brought

changes in the lives of women since Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her masterpiece, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, which became the foundation of modern feminism.

Today, feminism has crossed the boundaries of the Western world and has become transnational. Women's response to their social, economic and political situation varies from location to location and their empowerment strategies are also diverse. Originally, feminist theories were an effort to bring insight from the feminist movement and from various female experiences together with research to produce new approaches towards understanding and ending female oppression (Humm 1992: 173). However, the Western feminist movements have fallen short in comprehending and conceptualizing the diversity of women around the globe. This is partly due to the fact that the discourses of Western feminisms are "largely shaped by gender relations in Christian capitalist cultures and by the exhausted paradigms of Western social thought" (Majid 1998: 334). Approaching Arab women's rights, struggles and liberations through Western feminists agendas cannot be effective because these agendas were cultivated in a different environment based on Western history, needs, experiences and values. For feminism(s) to be accepted in the Middle East, Arab women need new liberation movements that are based on their experiences and values with some acceptable feminist ideas and practices.

The dominant ideology of feminism as cultivated by the West, and the idea that women everywhere experience a 'common oppression' is a dangerous platform that is narrowing women's diversity in a complex social, economic, and political reality. Borrowing Chandra Mohanty's term, Western feminists should start 'theorizing from women's struggles' instead of assuming that women around the globe suffer from the same kind of patriarchal domination (e.g., patriarchy operates differently from different countries, regions and cultures without regard to history, racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism and monopoly capital). Despite having struggled for social, economic and

political changes for decades in the Middle East, Arab women have been marginalized because they are portrayed as passive victims of society who have no control over their lives. By focusing on Middle Eastern women's veiling, passivity, and subordination; Western academia, media and feminists have created the image of the "other." The category of the "other" has denied the recognition of Middle Eastern women's active participation in the public arena (e.g., Iranian women's participation during the Islamic Revolution, Arab women soldiers during the Gulf war, Palestinian women's role in the Intifada). There is a wide gap between Western feminist discourses and the actual lives and practical needs of women from various ethnic groups, cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial for the survival of feminism(s) to devise new approaches that acknowledge individualities and particularities of each woman and feminist movement.

Beyond Borders: The North-South Dialogue

Nawal El-Saadawi, the founder of AWSA, believes that "solidarity can only grow in the light of knowledge and understanding" (1997: 28). In envisioning solidarity with Arab women, Western feminists should utilize the vast resources and knowledge available in dismantling global oppressions, which include not only gender apartheid, but also social, economic and political components to understand how Arab women have continued to be victims of racism, colonialism, and imperialism. Western feminism(s) tend to focus more on individual rights of women (although there are some women's groups that take up structural, social, cultural and global issues), whereas many Arab feminists, while recognizing the importance of these individual rights, also stress the problems faced by many women in the Arab world as a whole due to social, structural, cultural and global factors. Most Arab women's groups place their struggle against gender inequalities within the overall context of social and global problems and inequities. Gender issues are very important to address, but is that enough? Focusing on gender relations alone is insufficient to bring about the liberation of women. Women of the South would no doubt argue that gender issues and feminism, in actuality, is a concept that is associated with privilege and power. How can women of the South talk about feminism(s), when they are faced with poverty, starvation, unequal access to education, resources and health care, culturally sanctioned violence against women (e.g. female circumcision, honor killing), and armed or other kinds of conflict (e.g.

Palestinian women under Israeli occupation)? But how can women of the North understand why they (women of the South) are not overtly concerned with the importance of a woman's individual autonomy and why their struggle is so embedded within the concept of nation-state, globalization and (neo)- colonialism? How can Northern feminists begin to develop an understanding of international social relations, power relations between different cultures, and the social, economic and cultural effects of discourses of colonialism in the context of race, class and gender?

From these questions, we are able to look at how women's groups and movements, through participating in community-based political, social or economic concerns, are able to promote activism on the local

level, and connect it to the global arena. There has been considerable evidence that despite the local/global divide, women have come together around diverse issues, and are able to cut across regional, national and international differences in solidarity, demonstrating a powerful global vision that transcends lines of division. For example, in armed conflict such as in Palestine, local³ and international⁴ women have come together as activists and peacemakers, embodying and challenging the Arab/Israeli or other divisions that have defined the conflict. In another example, activism on the part of Arab women about the practice of honor killing, which started off at

grassroots levels has now been framed as a global human rights issue. Although a local problem, the practice of honor killing has not only gained international attention but has also increased awareness and activism through connecting local and international women's groups. As El-Saadawi (1997: 19-20) has stressed, "Women in the South have to cooperate with the progressive forces in the North who are fighting the same battle (of oppression and discrimination), but resistance starts at home. We can only change the international order by each one of us, step by step, changing the system in which we live." In this case, the diversity of women's organizations is a rich pool of resources and ideas from where all women can build upon and confront the existing power structures that sought to dis-empower women.

However, we should remember that this cooperation should not be perceived as a triumph of Northern groups over Southern based organizing and issues. I would argue that the exchange should never be in the terms of "how Northern feminists should help the

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united by shared
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solidarity*

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oppressed Southern women in their struggles.” It should be about understanding and respecting our differences, while meeting at a point where we (North and South) would be comfortable in facilitating dialogues and exchanging information. Arab women should not hesitate to take the lead in defining the international women’s movement and what should be on its agenda. Solidarity with Northern feminists is important, but they must be willing to broaden their framework to include issues such as social, economic, political and global inequities in addition to gender. As Bell Hooks (1984: 65) wrote:

Women do not need to eradicate differences to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression. We do not need anti-male sentiment to bond us together, so great is the wealth of experience, culture, and ideas we have to share with one another. We can be sisters united by shared diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist oppression, united in political solidarity.

Therefore, in the struggles for liberation, Arab women should not be robbed of their identities, culture, history and beliefs as they struggle for empowerment and self-determination.

The Veil - Between Sexism and Racism

I have chosen to discuss the veil in this paper because there is a need to reconsider Western feminists discourses on issues of the veil, a discourse that has witnessed veiling as a sign of submissiveness and male domination. The images of most Arab-Muslim women in the eyes of Western feminists (inherited and kept alive from the days of colonialism) are ones that are oppressed, secluded and hidden behind the veil. They are often the nameless, faceless and voiceless victims of culture, religion and tradition, which can be taken as a symbol of women’s passive and insignificant existence, warranting little or no recognition of individuality.

The relationship between the East and the West during the period of colonialism is best defined in this phrase, “We came, we saw, we were horrified, we intervened”(Ghosh and Bose 1997: 189). In the Middle East, colonial rule not only gave birth to ethnic nationalism but also heightened female consciousness. Leila Ahmad (1992: 154) states that, “the

idea of Western feminism essentially functioned to justify morally the attack on native societies and to support the notion of the comprehensive superiority of Europe.” As women were seen as transmitters of social values within the private spheres of the home, they were the key to converting the so-called “backward” and “savage” Arab society into a “civilized” Western existence by Colonial patriarchs and missionaries. Islam was attacked and accused as one of the primary reasons for Arab-Muslim society’s inferiority, and the veiling of women was seen as the most visible form of oppression. The colonial rule sought to Westernize Arab-Muslim women by unveiling them, encouraging women to adopt Western ideas and culture, reject Islam and the Arab culture completely. As a result of this, veiling has not only become the most visible marker of cultural identity, but is also entangled with issues of colonialism and imperialism.

By defining the veil as a form of cultural oppression, Western feminists are subjecting themselves to the role of racists and oppressors, perpetuating an oppression that is considered “taboo” in the feminist

movement, of women oppressing women. However, Western feminists would undoubtedly deny this by saying, “I’m a feminist, therefore I could not be a racist,” or “I am also oppressed as a woman, so how can the oppressed become the oppressor?” As Joan Wingfinger wrote, “Other indigenous women can understand a lot better than most Whites...We’re not all the same, we have differences but they can accept the differences without trying to change us to being the same as them...Many Whites don’t accept differences” (cf. Bulbeck 1998: 216). In other words, Western feminists are asking Arab-Muslim women to choose between fighting racism and sexism. That is, in struggling to overcome their own social, political and economic oppressions, they have to accept Western superiority.

Leila Ahmad states the dilemma of Arab feminists in choosing between fighting racism and sexism:

It is only when one considers that one’s sexual identity alone is more intricately oneself than one’s cultural identity, that one can perhaps appreciate how excruciating is the plight of the Middle Eastern feminists caught between these two opposing loyalties, forced to choose between betrayal and betrayal (cf. Kandiyoti 7).

By forcing Arab-Muslim women to choose, Western feminists are forcing them to reject feminism(s) in their struggles. Did Western feminists ever stop to think that in an intricate tradition where culture, history, and religion are closely intertwined, the veil might be a tool for women’s liberation? Hence, universalization of the veil solely as a manifestation of patriarchal domination is unjust, creating a “double oppression” for some Arab-Muslim women. Western feminists

have laid the foundation for accomplishment in women’s social, political and economic standing, and therefore should assist Arab women in their struggle for liberation instead of “forcing” them to rank their oppression.

The Future of Global Feminisms

The International Decade for Women (1975-1985) taught Western feminists that their priorities, inter-

pretations and political solutions are not acceptable or adaptable for women from other various ethnic groups and backgrounds. The United Nation’s Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995 was an important catalyst for Arab feminists as the conference not only increased their visibility and activism, but also the opportunity for open interaction with Western feminists. Building solidarity while acknowledging and accepting the differences of women from diverse ethnic groups and backgrounds would produce a coalition that would be beneficial to the feminist movement. The ultimate challenge for feminist movements is providing new ways of linking the particulars of women’s lives, activities, and goals to inequalities wherever they exist. A cross-cultural dialogue between Arab and Western feminists might overcome the cultural blinders and help develop a deeper understanding of the two different feminisms. Western feminists should look at themselves and see what other women see in them. They should also look at the “other” women and see those women in their own social, cultural and historical context. Without accepting Arab women as subjects in their own right, and “making way for them to come forth not as spectacles, but in their contradictions”, cross cultural inquiry will remain a relationship of domination, and feminist solidarity will continue to be elusive (cf. Ghosh and Bose 1997: 203). For feminism(s) to succeed in Arab society, it must be an indigenous form of

feminism, rather than one conceived and nurtured in a Western environment with different problems, solutions and goals. I leave you with this quote:

“It would seem that if the outsider wants you to understand how she sees you and you have given your account of how you see yourself to her, there is a possibility of genuine dialogue between the two” (cf. Bulbeck 216).

End Notes

1. Western feminisms usually refer to the work of North American, Australian and European-descended feminists (Bulbeck 1998: 2).
2. The term North and South in this paper are interchangeable with Western and Arab feminists. The terms North, Northern women, women of the North represent the Western world while the terms South, Southern women, women of the South represents the so-called “Third World” – the economically underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa, Oceania, and Latin America with common characteristics, such as poverty, high birthrates, and economic dependence on the advanced countries.
3. In Palestine and other parts of the Middle East
4. In the United States and other parts of the world

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Toujan Al-Faisal

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — Toujan Al-Faisal, the first and only woman to ever be elected to the Jordanian Lower House of Parliament, who recently was pardoned by HM King Abdullah for slandering the state and its officials, vowed to continue her political struggle by running in the upcoming elections expected to be held in the Spring of 2003.

Al-Faisal, 53, made history in 1993, by ending male monopoly in the Lower House by becoming the only woman to be elected to Parliament. She served for four years, but lost her re-election bid in 1997. Al-Faisal, claimed vote rigging for her defeat.

Al-Faisal, made history again in March when she sent an email to King Abdullah accusing the Prime Minister, Ali Abul Ragheb, and his family of benefiting from a recent decision by the government to double car insurance premiums.

Al-Faisal's email, which was also published on the - Arab Times - website prompted the state to take action against her. State Security Prosecutor filed a case against the former deputy accusing her of defaming the state and its officials. Al-Faisal was imprisoned in mid-March but was released on bail on March 27, to be rearrested two days later for attempting to hold a press conference to describe her arrest and case circumstances.

On May 16, Al-Faisal was sentenced to 18 months in prison on charges which included publishing material deemed harmful to the country's reputation and that of its citizens, and tarnishing the state. She was also convicted on charges of uttering words [while detained at the women's prison] deemed to be detrimental to religion.

As a result, Al-Faisal stopped eating prison food in protest and subsequently, was admitted to hospital after her health deteriorated. Local and human rights

activists and organizations described Al-Faisal as a 'prisoner of conscience' and sent appeals to the King and the government calling for Al-Faisal's release.

Islamists, whom Al-Faisal clashed with in the past over issues such as polygamy, stood next to her this time and called on the government to release her since she was tried under a temporary law introduced in October 2001, which many said was aimed at limiting freedom of speech and expression.

Almost a month later, King Abdullah pardoned Al-Faisal by a Royal Decree the day after the Chechen-Circassian community, to which she belongs, appealed for her release on humanitarian grounds. "It was a tough experience which only motivated me to go further," said Al-Faisal, a mother of three. Al-Faisal said her main concern now is to prepare for the upcoming elections although she was convicted with a criminal offence.

The Royal pardon did not order the reversal of the conviction, which may block Al-Faisal from running in the next parliamentary elections, according to legal experts. Under the law, those convicted in non-political cases and receive prison sentences over one year are ineligible to run for office. But Al-Faisal said this does not apply to her because she considered herself as a "prisoner of opinion." "This is a political verdict and I am not worried about it. I have already started working on the coming elections," said Al-Faisal.

Al-Faisal rose to fame in the early 1990s with battles with Islamic groups in Jordan over subjects like polygamy and later on in the Lower House over dress code. In 1989, Muslim groups declared her an apostate, and called on Jordanian courts to annul her marriage and grant immunity to anyone who shed her blood, charging that she was calling for an end to polygamy. In the end, the court dropped the case, claiming it was outside its jurisdiction.

When Al-Faisal made world news headlines by becoming the first woman ever to be elected for the Lower House, a fellow Islamist deputy welcomed her by offering sweets and 10 Islamic robes if she stopped wearing make up and started wearing Islamic dresses. However, Al-Faisal ignored his remarks and said she will devote her time to fight for the rights of people to enjoy a decent life and full democracy.

Al-Faisal had said that her liberal upbringing with its atmosphere of equality helped her achieve most of her goals. But most importantly, Al-Faisal was always proud to be elected by the people and not appointed. "I wanted to tell everyone that I was the deputy of the nation, not a deputy for a certain constituency or group," said Al-Faisal, who holds an MA in English language and literature. "I came from an open minded family that offered responsible freedom and never discriminated against women," she said. She also received full backing from her father and husband. As she time went by, Faisal said she rebelled against any rule or law she felt was unfair or illogical. "I never bowed to any law I felt was unfair without questioning it," she said.

But the real challenge for the former deputy was her first encounter with corruption, when she started working as a Jordan Television presenter of a series on women's affairs. Al-Faisal was removed from her post because she discovered an unlawful deal and since then she preferred to resign and become a standard-bearer for democracy because she felt it was her duty to inform the public about what was going on.

Al-Faisal said her future project is to write her memories in which she would document all the corruption cases she had witnessed, as well as her elections experiences. Al-Faisal concluded that her struggle is still long and filled with challenges. "When I believe in a legitimate cause I fight for it till the end - and I will never give up."



A “Learning” Gathering of Women Civic Activists to Promote a New Concept of Leadership and Learning

“Women’s Learning Partnership’s dynamic and innovative Roaming Institutes have begun to shape the future of women’s leadership by empowering women in the Global South to play significant roles in their nation’s social, economic, and political development.”
– Sakena Yacoobi, Afghan Institute of Learning

Imagine an advocacy coalition campaign to amend personal status laws in Morocco led by a women’s organization. Amina Lemrini, an activist in the Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), based in Rabat and Casablanca, gave a detailed account of how a civic organization led by women and dedicated to women’s issues successfully developed a coalition of nine organizations that legitimately put on the national Moroccan agenda the issue of the reform of age-old laws that restrict women and are basically unjust. ADFM led the “Le Printemps d’Egalite” (Spring of Equality) Coalition, a mobilization for the rights of women. Amina asked the participants in the “learning” gathering — Why should we reform laws? Laws are what govern our lives and when we have a discriminatory law, it prohibits women’s participation. So the coalition’s aim was a strategic one to reform the laws, and thus amend the mechanism that will ensure women’s rights and participa-



tion in civic life in Morocco. She outlined the strategy, vision, mission and tactics of the 9 - organization coalition. ADFM has been also successful in lobbying for the creation of 30 seats in the Moroccan Parliament for women members of Parliament. This will encourage Moroccan political parties to include women candidates on their electoral lists in the next elections in September 2002.

Women’s Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace (WLP) recently brought together 17 women leaders from Afghanistan/Pakistan, Cameroon, Jordan, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Palestine, and Uzbekistan for a week-long conference on enhancing women’s rights, leadership, and political participation in the Global South.

WLP’s first Roaming Institute for Women’s Leadership was held at the Bolger Center for Leadership Development in Maryland from June 22-27, 2002. The Institute was a multimedia leadership learning meeting during which participants strategized about ways to empower women in diverse Muslim societies to take on leadership roles within their communities, and to develop the skills to become better advocates for women’s equal

participation in decision-making and civil society. “This was an excellent opportunity to network with other organizations, improve our facilitation and communication skills, and strategize about ways to collaboratively empower women in our communities,” commented Mishka Mojabber of Lebanon at the conclusion of the Institute.

WLP’s concept that inclusive, horizontal, and participatory leadership empowers women and leads to the development of gender equitable and democratic societies forms the basis of the Roaming Institutes for Women’s Leadership and is described in WLP’s collaboratively developed manual *Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women*. Trainers from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East simulated scenarios on conflict-resolution and negotiation, women’s political participation, and gender-sensitive leadership styles. The simulations enhanced participants’ facilitation skills and emphasized country-specific successes and challenges experienced when implementing this alternative leadership concept. For example, WLP’s partners in Afghanistan conducted a role-play scenario that encouraged participants representing diverse Afghan ethnic groups to communicate and negotiate across cultural barriers to achieve a shared goal for girls’ education and advancement. WLP’s Jordanian partners facilitated a session in which participants analyzed challenges to women’s involvement in local and national elections, and strategized on ways to motivate women at the grassroots level to become politically active.

The Institute also focused on skills training necessary to plan and conduct media campaigns, communications strategy development, and cross-regional democracy building. The communications training included conducting, critiquing, and evaluating individual simulated interviews with the media. Participants also learned from one another by sharing the strategies they use in grassroots advocacy campaigns, mobilization initiatives, and establishing community networks. For instance, WLP’s partners in Malaysia discussed their mobilization and advocacy efforts to raise public awareness and influence politicians in order to improve legislation on violence against women. WLP’s Moroccan partners discussed their initiatives in creating dynamic local and regional networks to change legislation governing women’s rights within the family. Following these sessions, Asabe Audu of Nigeria said, “I appreciated the comprehensive com-



munications and advocacy training— a number of strategies that were discussed will be useful to my organization’s campaigns.”

The Institute concluded with a session during which participants developed strategies to implement future national and regional Roaming Institutes. Participants agreed that the goals of future Institutes are to enable women in Muslim societies to claim their human rights, develop leadership skills, and become strong participants in the social and political developments of their communities and nations. Future Institutes will accomplish this by using a variety of methods, including organizational capacity-building, training of trainers, and the development of further collaborative leadership learning materials such as interactive videos, on-line training manuals, and distance-learning courses. National Roaming Institutes are being planned in Afghanistan/Pakistan and Morocco, and regional Roaming Institutes are being planned by WLP’s partner organizations in Jordan, Nigeria, and Uzbekistan. “Our experience here at the Institute with workshop simulations, development of communications strategies, and advocacy training will be extremely useful to my organization and others in my community,” commented Amina Lemrini of Morocco. Asma Khader of Jordan concluded, “I have a renewed sense of purpose and belief in the implementation of the women’s leadership program, and eagerly anticipate the Roaming Institutes to come.”

Daughters of the Nile Photographs of Egyptian Women's Movements

Edited by Hind Wassef and Nadia Wassef

The American University in Cairo Press,
2001, 178 P.P, L.E 90.

Reviewed by Kamal Labidi

Feminist research has often been described as "research by, about, and for women." But *Daughters of the Nile* edited by two active members of the Cairo-based non-governmental feminist organization, the "Research Center for the New Woman" is for anyone who does not want to be kept in the dark, as far as women's contribution to the struggle for the independence of Egypt and their march on the thorny road to social and political rights from 1900 to 1960. Many Arab countries have paid a heavy price for overlooking the role played by women during the resistance to colonial occupation and for denying them basic rights after independence.

Hind and Nadia Wassef provide the reader with a useful historic insight about the emergence of photography in Europe and its immediate invasion of the Middle East "at a time of exploration and imperialism." In the latter half of the nineteenth century, hundreds of European photographers flocked to Beirut, Cairo, Istanbul and Jerusalem and roamed through the region to capture "its exotic splendor for a thirsty European public." The authors explain how in these photographs, "women were constructed as sex objects and metaphors for the Orient itself (and its connotations of the sexual and dominated other)." Egyptian women's rights activists soon realized that the photographs could be used to mirror their struggle for emancipation and that the press is an important tool that could further their cause: "When Huda Sha'rawi and Seza Nabarawi publicly unveiled, they provided the press with their photographs for wider circulation. Women began courting the press for its power to disseminate images."

The book opens with pioneering women who "through their lives and work achieved 'firsts' that enabled later generations to follow in their footsteps." They came from different social and geographical backgrounds,

like Princess Fatma Ismail who sold some of her jewelry to contribute to the construction and the management of the Egyptian University; Na'ima al-Ayyubi, the first Egyptian woman to graduate from the Faculty of Law; Zaynab Fuad, founder of one of the early design workshops; and Umm Kulthum who rose to the top of the world of Arab music after moving from a small village in Upper Egypt to Cairo. Others came all the way from what later became Lebanon and Syria, such as the two writers Anisa Shartuni and Afifa Shartuni as well as the actress and publisher Fatima (Rose) Al-Yusif.

The second chapter "Feminists Making History" contains photographs of women who identified themselves as human rights' activists, such as Huda Sha'rawi and Seza Nabaraoui. Some used journalism and poetry to promote women's rights such as: Alexandra Avierino, Malak Hifni Nasef, Labiba Hashem, Aisha Taymourriya and May Ziyada. Others campaigned for women's rights through the Egyptian Feminist Union, like Eva Habib al-Masri, who became in 1928 the first Egyptian woman to enter the American University in Cairo.

The following chapter focuses on the role played by women in the social field, particularly their part in fighting illiteracy and resisting the British occupation and helping the Palestinians who took refuge in Egypt in 1948. Chapters four and five show how women used journalism and took collective initiatives "to assert themselves on the local and international scene." The photographs of Egyptian women discussing women's rights issues with a Muslim authority in 1945 and exchanging views with French feminist Simone de Beauvoir during her visit to Cairo in 1961 with Jean Paul Sartre, highlight the determination of Egyptian feminists to take further steps on the road to equal rights with men. Such determination led many women to go on hunger strikes and to improve their lobbying skills in order to achieve political rights, two years after the Free Officers' Revolution (chapter six and seven).

Chapter eight mainly contains photographs of Egyptians mourning the death of their leader Sa'd Zaghlul and of his wife Safyia and other women's rights activists, like Huda Sha'rawi. The last chapter shows "women in action" campaigning for various issues on political participation and equal rights with men from the end of the British occupation until the Nasser revolution. Women's independent action and contribution to civil society and free press comes to an end in the early sixties. That is why the editors of this book chose to focus only on photographic documentation of Egyptian Women who enjoyed a certain degree of freedom of movement and initiative in the first half of the twentieth century. This book would undoubtedly shed new light on the recent history of Egypt and might encourage researchers to re-evaluate women's contributions to the independence of their countries, in the days before freedom of movement, associations and speech were confiscated by emerging Arab states.

Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women



Over 1,000 activists (mostly women) in Afghanistan, Cameroon, Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Nigeria, Palestine, Pakistan and Uzbekistan are using *Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women* during leadership training workshops. These workshops are designed to promote and enhance women's voices in government, community and household decision making. "I have participated in other workshops before, but none as intensive or exciting as this one," said a Cameroon women's activist who studied from this manual. "I have now come to understand that even 'ordinary' women can be leaders, and this is very empowering," a Moroccan literary teacher said after using this handbook. A Jordanian workshop facilitator attributes her nomination to a local council seat to the lessons she learned from *Leading to Choices* and to the friends she made during the training workshop. The women who use *Leading to Choices* are realizing that they have skills they never knew they had.

Leading to Choices is a timely and significant contribution to training resources designed to enable women to effectively contribute to important public and private decision making processes. The handbook is different from other resources in that it guides the participant not just through personal development and confidence building exercises, but also through activities that help women to build upon community resources and act as effective facilitators and motivators of individuals and groups. "A good leader", the handbook states, is a leader who "can capitalize on the ideas and skills of as many individuals as possible." She must be a good communicator and use her personal skills to "listen, build consensus, create shared meaning and foster learning partnerships at work, at home and in her community."

The handbook is divided into 12 workshop sessions. These sessions move the participant: from self investigation, developing the self for leadership; to best ways of communicating and motivating others, communicating with others; to building successful organizations that have strong relationships with other NGOs, creating learning partnerships. Each session includes stories of individuals or groups that have succeeded or failed in some way to draw upon collective input, communicate ideas effectively and build upon lessons learned. Workshop participants are asked to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of these different approaches. The sessions also include group activities, evaluation exercises and thought provoking questions for individuals and groups to answer. Workshop participants conclude many sessions by designing action plans that address the issues raised and

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Reviewed by Karen Stone
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Soon to be available in Arabic,
French, Hausa, Persian and
Russian

Book Review



investigated during the discussions. The handbook includes tips for facilitators on building consensus among participants, directing conversation, stimulating discussions and leading group activities. Portions of the handbook can be extracted and adapted, depending on the goal of the users, or the entire handbook could be used from start to finish in a 5 day or 36 hour training workshop. The handbook is equipped with evaluation forms, case studies and a list of leadership training resources and organizations from around the world.

Women's Learning Partnership, a creator of this handbook, is working with NGOs in different countries to customize *Leading to Choices* to relate to their particular community needs and challenges. They are adapting the handbook to include culture-specific scenarios that reflect local concerns and priorities and translating the handbook from English into local languages such as Arabic, French, Hausa, Persian, Russian and Uzbek. Some groups are also using the handbook to inform male NGO heads about effective ways to lead and to develop a well-functioning and successful organization.

Facilitators in workshops in Nigeria noted that after using **Leading to Choices**, participants gained mutual respect for each other's opinions. Facilitators in Pakistan reported that women had learned to think of themselves as leaders and were eager to put into practice the information and skills they had acquired through the workshop. At a leadership workshop in Jordan, participants discussed the many obstacles that women face in achieving leadership positions, such as unequal opportunities with men, lack of support and encouragement from their communities, and the stereotype that women are incapable of maintaining a leadership role. The women at this workshop identified possible solutions to these obstacles and emphasized that women are qualified to occupy leadership positions if they have equal opportunities.

Just as **Leading to Choices** promotes a collaborative leadership style, the handbook was produced in a collaborative way. Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace (WLP), an NGO based in the United States that works to empower women and girls in the Global South to re-imagine and restructure their roles in their families, communities and societies led the initiative in cooperation with: l'Association Democratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), one of the largest NGOs in Morocco that works to defend and promote the human rights of women, and to foster equitable policies and social practices; the BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (BAOBAB) in Nigeria that promotes human rights and legal rights for women under religious, statutory and customary laws; and the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), a coalition of women leaders and groups in Palestine that works to eliminate discrimination against women and to promote a democratic society.

To empower women is to increase their control over the decisions that affect their lives both within and outside the household. There is no single or right path to women's empowerment or development as leaders, but using **Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women** is one important way to achieve these goals.

If you are interested in receiving a copy and/or using this handbook for workshops, please contact: Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace (WLP), 4343 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 201, Bethesda, MD 20814, USA, Phone: 1-301-654-2774/Fax: 1-301-654-2775, Email: wlp@learningpartnership.org, Web: www.learningpartnership.org.