

# al-raida

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02

## Editorial

**SEIKO SUGITA AND HASAN HAMMOUD**

05

## File

### Family Responsibilities and Women's Employability

06

**MANSOUR OMEIRA**

Schooling and Women's Employability in the Arab Region

17

**YUSUF SIDANI**

Exploring Young Female Entrepreneurial Activity in the United Arab Emirates: Issues, Prospects and Implications for the Region

26

**LARA UHLENHAUT**

Technical Education and Vocational Training for Women: A case study of Yemen

31

**SEIKO SUGITA**

Social Care and Women's Labor Participation in Lebanon

38

**SOUTH-NORTH CENTER FOR DIALOGUE**

Women's Work in the Field of Care and Rehabilitation in Jordan

44

**EUGENE SENSENIG-DABBOUS**

Is a "Father Friendly Workplace" Possible in the Middle East? A Personal Report from the Front

46

**ILO**

Situation of and Assistance to Businesswomen in the West Bank

52

## Book Reviews

52

**TOBE LEVIN**

Highly Valued by Both Sexes: Activists, Anthr/apologists and FGM

62

## News

62

# Arab Women, Family, and Labor Market Participation

**Seiko Sugita and Hassan Hammoud**

The Arab region is currently witnessing more social transformation at all levels of society than ever before, due to the demographic growth, expanded ethnic and sectarian conflicts, accelerated urbanization, global economy, and education, together with changing modes of information and communication. Despite continuous efforts by the state, public institutions, civil society, and private actors, social justice remains a challenge and social policies are not fully responding to the social transformations of the region. Re-thinking the role of the state in social development in the Arab region in the double crisis of neo-liberalism and global finance world-wide and specifically in the context of the Arab region is a challenging task. It entails questioning the relationship between citizens and the state; nationals and non-nationals as a result of migration and displacement; women and men; human rights; the poor and the wealthy in the context of social transformation.

The role, capacity, and cultural identity of the family need to be questioned when societies are increasingly affected by demographic changes, mobility and migration, economic and labor market conditions and by tensions created around such issues as youth frustration, aging, and evolving gender relations. Despite these social changes, there has not been any significant strengthening of society's awareness of or relative change in society's attitude towards women's labor participation. Women's labor market participation is low compared to their achievement in education. What is then the expected role of the state in breaking through two barriers which women's labor market participation confronts: the persistence of a gender ideology that has associated women with family roles and the growth of precarious employment?

The papers in this issue of *al-Raida* address the challenges and opportunities for Arab women's labor market participation in the greater context of globalization and social transformations and examine the issue from a number of complementary vantage points and policy implications. The papers were either originally prepared for the regional gender programme of the International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2007 and/or were presented at the regional research meeting on "The Role of the State in Social Development in the Arab Region" (Beirut, October 2009) organized by UNESCO Beirut in cooperation with the Arab Sociological Association and with the support of the Doha International Institute of Family Studies and Social Development.

Mansour Omeira's article on "Schooling and Women's Employability in the Arab States Region" reassesses the term "employability" in the context of the Arab region by taking into account both the labor supply and demand. The school to work transition for many young people is not easy but young women are more sanctioned by institutional difficulties related to labor markets, especially linked to the gender responsiveness of schooling.

Yusuf Sidani examines, in his article entitled "Young Female Entrepreneurial Activity in the Arab Region: Issues and Prospects in the Case of the United Arab Emirates", the social and cultural barriers faced by the young female entrepreneurs in UAE. He wonders if public institutions are providing adequate support to women to foster this new trend in the region.

Lara Uhlenhaut examines in her article on "Technical Education and Vocational Training for Women - A Case Study of Yemen" the systems of technical education and vocation training (TEVT) and school-to-work transition for young people in Yemen. She shows that the school-to-work transition is more difficult for young women than for their male peers, due to the cultural barriers associated with gender stereotypes in Yemen.

Seiko Sugita in her article on "Social Care and Women's Labor Participation in Lebanon" investigates the perceptions and practices of paid and unpaid care, and questions how the gender division of labor in the household is affecting the chances for women's labor market participation in Lebanon. Moreover, social care is explored as a growing employment market.

Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous in his personal essay titled "Is a 'Father Friendly Workplace' Possible in the Middle East?" views the challenges of the society to achieve work-life balance for both working fathers and mothers.

The article entitled "Woman's Work in the Field of Care and Rehabilitation in Jordan" sheds light on the role of women in care institutions. The care is a growing sector in number but as a work environment for women, it needs to be more structured and regulated. The gaps between the laws and their application need to be addressed to improve the working condition of many women.

How do ongoing social transformations and family change affect chances and conditions of women's labor market participation in the Arab societies? How can labor, in addition to social and education policies address the existing gaps and persisting challenges? This issue of *al-Raida* is part of an on-going effort by regional and international researchers and experts of social development to understand the gender implication of social transformations in the Arab societies, but one that is very crucial as it challenges cultural norms and values related to the family and the role of the State on this very sensitive issue.

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## Call for Papers

**Forthcoming Issue:**  
**Arab Women in Latin America**

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University is soliciting articles for a forthcoming issue of its quarterly publication Al-Raida on the topic: "Arab Women in Latin America" (<http://www.lau.edu.lb/centers-institutes/iwsaw/raida-call-for-papers.html>).

The presence of Lebanese and Arab communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean can be traced back to the late 19th century, with subsequent waves of migration linked to regional socio-political and economic factors. Recent scholarly interest in Levantine communities throughout Latin America has sought to retrace the history of this migration, thus enriching our understanding of both Latin America and the Arab culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This issue of Al-Raida seeks to add to this new-found interest by focusing on the role Lebanese and Arab women have played in the transplanting of Lebanese and Arab communities to Latin America. What role have gender differences played

in the Lebanese and Arab experience in Latin America?

Topics of interest may include, but are not limited, to the following:

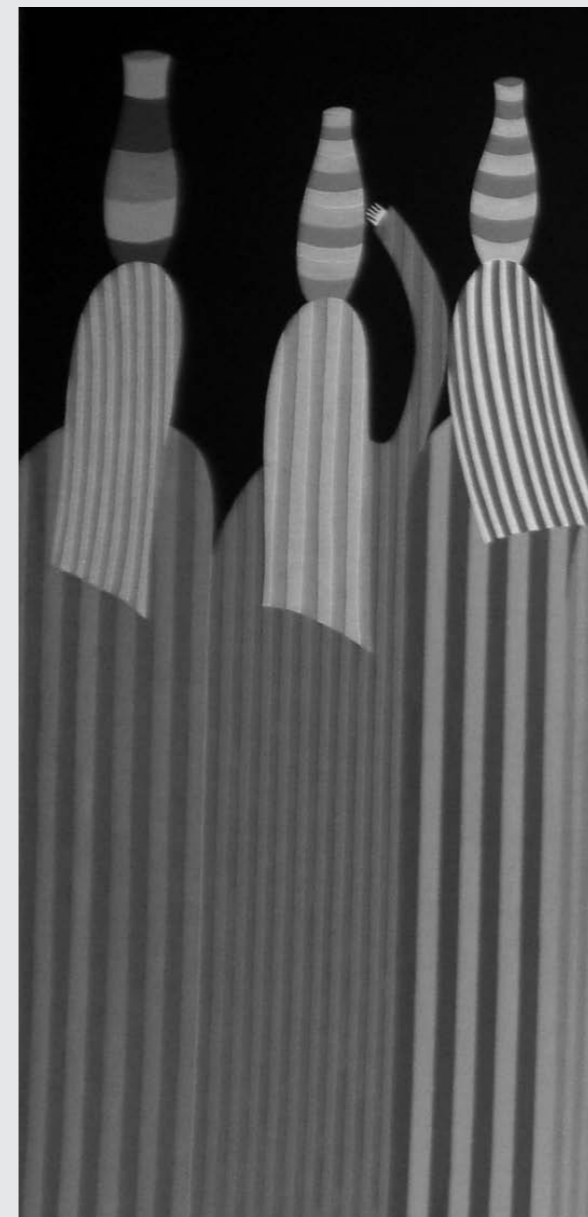
- Reassessing the scholarship of Arab presence in Latin America: How do we interpret the absence of women's scholarship in the field?
- Intergenerational dynamics and cultural identity shifts during acculturation: Women as the missing link in Arab cultural preservation.
- Lebanese and Arab women's contribution to Latin American literature, arts, and politics.
- Double patriarchies: contending with male dominance from the Arab world to Latin America

This issue of Al-Raida will also welcome book reviews, testimonies, commentary/opinion pieces, and especially images (photography, painting) of relevance to the topic of Arab Women in Latin America.

If you are interested in contributing to this issue of Al-Raida, kindly send your abstract (250-300 words) by January 15, 2010. All abstracts submitted are reviewed by Al-Raida's editorial staff and are subject to its approval. Once the abstract is approved contributors will have to submit their paper no later than May 15, 2011. Submissions are accepted in English, Arabic or French. All non-English submissions will be translated by IWSAW and published in English following the approval of the author.

This journal edition will be edited by Dr. George Abdelnour, Director of the Center for Applied Research in Education (CARE) and Assistant Professor, Faculty of Humanities, at Notre Dame University - Louaize, Lebanon. Kindly send your emails simultaneously to the managing editor, Ms. Myriam Sfeir, at [al-raida@lau.edu.lb](mailto:al-raida@lau.edu.lb) and to the guest editor, Dr. George Abdelnour, at [gabdelnour@ndu.edu.lb](mailto:gabdelnour@ndu.edu.lb)

# Family Responsibilities and Women's Employability



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Schooling and Women's Employability in the Arab Region

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**International Labor Office**

Situation of and Assistance to Businesswomen in the West Bank

# Schooling and Women's Employability in the Arab Region

Mansour Omeira

## Challenges in the School-to-work Transition\*

### Global Challenges

The school-to-work transition is a process that young people typically go through as they complete their education and join the workforce to secure a full-time stable job that satisfies their aspirations (ILO, 2006). The ideal transition to decent work, however, was far from being the norm prior to the 2008 global economic crisis, even in developed countries, particularly for disadvantaged youth (Ryan, 2001). The transition can be long, as young people remain unemployed or employed in temporary or unsatisfactory jobs. They may not start the transition because they are still in school, or remain outside the labor force for other reasons (ILO, 2006).

### Regional Challenges

The transition challenges are particularly daunting in the Arab region (Assaad & Roudi-Fahimi, 2007). A school-to-work transition presupposes schooling, yet the absolute number of adult illiterates in the region is on the rise, and reached about 58 million in 2006, two-thirds of which were women (UNESCO, 2008a). Work may start at an early age in the form of child labor, which is linked to dropping out of school. A conservative estimate of child laborers in the region is 13 million, or about 15 percent of the child population (ILO, 2008a). Girls are more likely to drop out because of household work, and boys because of market work (Assaad, Levison, & Zibani, 2005). Moreover, regular full-time jobs with benefits are scarce. In 2004, informal employment as a share of total employment ranged across Arab States from 23 percent in Tunisia to 64 percent in Yemen (Charmes, 2010).

Emerging evidence from school-to-work transition surveys conducted by the International Labor Office in Egypt, Syria, and Morocco sheds light on the gender dimension of obstacles to securing decent work (Alissa, 2007; El Zanaty & Associates, 2007; El Aoufi & Bensaïd, 2005). Women are less likely than men to achieve the transition. One in ten persons completing the transition in Egypt is a woman. The majority of women do not start the transition. Four in five young women in Syria had not started it, compared with one in three young men. Women are particularly vulnerable to restrictions on access to education and to employment because they typically bear a disproportionate share of unpaid household services. Unpaid housework and care work are essential and require considerable physical and emotional energy. Moreover, their costs and benefits are often invisible. Despite its importance, such

\* The current article is based on a report the author previously wrote for UNESCO-Beirut as a research consultant. He is member of the International Association for Feminist Economics and the Lebanese Economic Association. The opinions expressed in the paper belong to the author and in no way represent an endorsement by his institution(s).

work is not considered an economic activity for purposes of measuring employment (Himmelweit, 2007).

Beyond income generation, women's economic activity empowers them and strengthens their status and independence, laying the ground for wider social change (Sen, 1999). In the greater context of the management of social transformations, the current overview of women's employability in the Arab region focuses on schooling as a key determinant of employability.

## Employability as Capability for Employment

### Understanding Employability

Women in the Arab region are the least economically active in the world (ILO, 2008b). Moreover, they face the highest rates of unemployment, particularly if they are young. As a response, initiatives to promote women's employability have spread across the region. Yet the concept of employability lacks clarity because of its multiple definitions (Leggatt-Cook, 2007). In simple terms, employability is the ability to be employed. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ability can mean "the power or capacity to do something" as well as "skill or talent". The difference between the two meanings carries important policy implications.

Employability is often understood as relating to portable competencies and qualifications that enable individuals to make use of available education and training opportunities for success in the world of work (UNESCO & ILO, 2002). Whereas the portability of qualifications varies across the international, national, and sectoral levels, it is useful to distinguish between enterprise-specific, occupation- or sector-specific, and general competencies (Estévez-Abe, 2006).

The relative advantage of each type of competency depends largely on the expected mobility of workers. The expectations of parents and the attitudes of workers and employers are shaped to a large extent by the environment they face. The education system and labor governance institutions such as employment protection and trade unions are part of that environment. For women expecting to have breaks in their employment for childbearing and childrearing purposes or for employers who expect such breaks, general competencies would appear to be more advantageous than more specific competencies. Similarly, public sector jobs would also appear to be more accommodating than private sector jobs.

The relative portability of competencies for women and men workers is inseparable from the broader social, economic, and political contexts. Accordingly, a comprehensive understanding of employability cannot be restricted to a focus on the labor 'supply side' (workers) only. Instead, the concept must include issues related to the 'demand side' (employers, including the public sector) and labor governance institutions (including labor and social security legislation and implementation by Ministries of Labor and Parliaments as well as workers' and employers' organizations). In the Arab region, jobs are scarce and unemployment among the educated is widespread, particularly among women (ILO, 2008b). With the changing nature of work and the decrease of long-term stable jobs particularly in the public sector, an understanding of employability beyond the supply side is therefore all the more important.

The focus on the supply side alone can have dangerous consequences. It can lead to misidentifying priorities and thus misallocating resources, while suggesting that unemployment is the fault of the unemployed. Such an individualistic understanding relieves the State from the responsibility of employment generation. It also encourages the dismantling of workers' protection as a 'motivation' for them to accept low pay and poor working conditions (Peck & Theodore, 2000). In contrast, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes that "[e]veryone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment".

#### Constraints to Employability in the Arab Region

The obstacles facing women and men in finding employment are manifold. From the perspective of employers in the region, the inadequate education of the workforce is the third most important obstacle to doing business (ranking first in Egypt and Saudi Arabia). It follows the inefficiency of the bureaucratic system (ranking first in Kuwait, Libya, and Syria) and the restrictiveness of labor regulations (ranking first in Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar) (World Bank, 2008). Major concerns include the workers' limited ability to apply knowledge learned at school and weak practical training (El Zanaty & Associates, 2007; Alissa, 2007). The large majority of employers in the region are men (World Bank, 2008) who may exercise strong male bias in hiring (El Zanaty & Associates, 2007) and thus perpetuate gender segregation in employment, with women and men clustered in different industries and occupations.

In addition to inadequate education and hiring practices, women have specific constraints, including those related to access to and control over economic and financial resources, as well as physical mobility, care responsibilities, and restrictive gender norms. Women in the region own only a small share of land and other property and have more difficulty than men in accessing credit. Gender inequality in access to and control over resources is related to discriminatory legislation and practices with regards to property and inheritance rights.

For young women workers in the region, marriage and the presence of children are typically detrimental to employability in the private sector. The major obstacle related to young women's poor employment outcomes is their lack of previous work experience, which points to the need for better training and labor market integration mechanisms (Omeira, 2007). A less recognized obstacle is that young women's joblessness is more related to their preference for interesting jobs than to their support of the male breadwinner model. One possible explanation is that economic necessity pushes women to seek employment even if they prefer not to engage in it. Moreover, women who value job security and jobs that match their abilities are more likely not to have a job. This is closely linked to availability of child care options and better enforcement of maternity protection in the relatively shrinking public sector, and the mismatch between the education women receive and the jobs available (Omeira, 2007).

#### Human Capital Versus Capabilities

It is telling that a recent review on employability in the Mediterranean region has concluded with the following question for discussion: "Which is more relevant for the region, too few employable (skilled) workers or too few good jobs?" (European

Training Foundation, 2007). Since the promotion of education and training – often problematically labeled as 'investment in human capital' (Rose, 2006) – cannot be taken to translate directly into better job opportunities, a more appropriate definition of employability is 'capability for employment'.

Such a definition can be understood in the framework of the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen (2003). Employability as capability for employment implies the capability for non-employment (a viable exit option) and the capability to participate effectively in the definition of employment (a viable voice option) (Bonvin & Farvaque, 2005). Capability for non-employment protects the free choice of employment, as workers who are not satisfied with the working conditions available to them can opt to not join a job or to exit it later. It implies that a decent standard of living is available for all, including the non-employed. With the advent of globalization, advocates for social justice have argued for a 'global social floor' of basic income and social security benefits for all. The capability to participate effectively in the formulation of employment policies and strategies affirms that persons affected by different choices have the opportunity to be active agents in determining those choices, rather than passive recipients. Such participation can be channeled through various institutions, including open and democratic political processes and trade union activity.

#### Gender-Responsive Schooling

##### The Education System

##### Gender perspective to education

Education can make women more productive, strengthen their status, and open broader horizons for them. Crucially, however, the effect of education can also be negative, by limiting the teaching of girls/women to skills that are not marketable, by confining them to a role of subordination to men, or by negatively portraying economic activity for women, particularly mothers. The way the gender content and experience of education are determined has thus to be uncovered in different contexts to be able to reshape it. The gender dimension of education also shapes the views of men, who may become workers, employers, or parents. Education can make them more or less open to women's economic activity and women's empowerment more generally. Successful programs targeting girls incorporate these various factors from the onset (Brady et al., 2006).

Schooling that is responsive to gender concerns can greatly benefit women's employability in the Arab region, understood as their capability for employment. The recognition of its importance for employability, however, should not undermine its intrinsic value, nor suggest that inadequate education is always the main obstacle to women's employability. Indeed, it would be "nonsense to underscore the centrality of education when it is assigned the impossible task of shoring up the economy. This utilitarian view runs counter to the dignity of young and teenage girls and women" (Muñoz Villalobos, 2006).

##### Historical Context

The historical evolution of economic and political interests and the related power structures, relations, and processes are central to shaping a country's educational



system. In the Arab region, the nature of foreign hegemony has differed across countries and time, and has included European and North American origins (Akkari, 2004; Neal & Finlay, 2008). In Maghreb countries, for instance, technical and vocational education and training (TEVT) systems contain a large amount of general education content, following the French example (UNESCO, 2006). Furthermore, authoritarian political systems in the region stifle freedom of inquiry, critical thinking, creativity, and the spirit of initiative (UNDP, 2006).

The provision of education to promote employability requires the allocation of an appropriate level of financial resources. The Arab region is often cited for having some of the largest spending on education as a share of GDP, averaging around 5 percent in the past three decades (Kabbani & Omeira, 2007). This figure, however, hides considerable discrepancy across countries in the region (UNESCO, 2008b). The prioritization of expenditures between capital and current expenditure (with current expenditure typically at around 90 percent of total), and across levels of education, has often lacked consistency or has contributed to widening inequality. Donors targeting the education sector, such as the European Union and World Bank, play an important role in determining the level and distribution of investment on education in the region (Bardak, 2006).

### Schooling Access

#### Public Versus Private

Differences in financing may reflect the public versus private provision of schooling. The region has a tradition of publicly provided education, with the notable exception of Lebanon; yet recent years have witnessed a rising share of the private sector. Common across the region is the prevalence of the private sector in the provision of pre-primary education (UNESCO, 2008b). Affordability and accessibility of pre-primary education is a key concern for women's employability in terms of time allocations. The charging of fees in some Arab States is a major obstacle that goes against the universal provision of primary education (Global Campaign for Education, 2008). When going to school involves higher direct costs, families often have to prioritize the schooling opportunities among their children. Boys are typically seen as the priority because they stand better chances in gaining remunerated work, while girls contribute to work in the family either in home chores or in the family business.

The promotion of gender parity in access to schooling is an important policy goal with potential positive effects on women's employability. The school itself is a site of gender socialization, and schooling experience as well as schooling content have crucial implications on shaping the self-perception of boys and girls, their aspirations, and the opportunities available to them (Stromquist, 2008). Gender parity has been reached in some countries of the region across levels of education, whereas in others the progress is slow. At the tertiary level of education, for instance, Arab States are far from achieving gender parity in enrollment in science and technology (UNESCO, 2008b).

Illiteracy is a major form of human insecurity (Sen, 2003), yet the Arab region counts more than 58 million illiterate adults (UNESCO, 2008a). With the exception of some Gulf countries, the majority of the illiterate population in Arab States, often more than two-thirds of it, consists of women. Inadequate access to education remains a main

area of concern for youth as well, and substantial gender differences persist in many countries of the region (UNESCO, 2008b). Although indicators at the national level are important, they may hide inequality across regions and social groups and fail to reveal which groups lack participation in the formal education system.

In every country, disadvantaged groups may include refugees, internally displaced persons, people with disabilities, the poor, rural youth, marginalized minorities, illiterates, school dropouts, graduates of TEVT training ill-equipped for available employment, and girls excluded from education and training (Brewer, 2004; Freedman, 2008). In this light, greater enrollment of girls in higher levels of formal education may be directly related to the lack of employment opportunities for women, and may not necessarily translate into better prospects.

### Schooling Experience

#### Gender Segregation

An exclusive focus on access to education is an inappropriate basis for promoting gender equality at school (Stromquist, 2008). With regards to schooling experience, an important question is whether schools are segregated according to gender. Segregation may involve physical segregation such as different facilities for boys and girls or having teachers of the same sex as their students, but also segregation of schooling content whereby boys and girls are taught different subjects, a matter we return to later.

Another question is how physically accessible schools are for girls and women. This may involve school buses, or for adult women access to a car and the possibility to drive it, or access to a car with a driver. If schools are far from home, on-campus student housing may become a necessity, but parents may be reluctant to have their girls living outside home. Baki (2004) discusses these and other issues, such as the use of video conferencing technology to maintain gender segregation between students and teachers, in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Proponents of gender segregation often point out how girls and women are particularly vulnerable to violence and sexual harassment in the school and on the road. Making such a case is an avoidance strategy; appropriate strategies should target the elimination of the sources and causes of gender-based violence.

#### Teachers' Role

Children in primary education need considerable follow-up; pupil/teacher ratios in primary education have decreased across the region (UNESCO, 2008b). Teachers are role models for students, and women teachers can provide a more welcoming environment for girls (Stromquist, 2007); in recent years, the share of women teachers in primary education has generally increased in the region (UNESCO, 2008b). The vertical gender segregation between women as the majority of teachers concentrated at lower levels of schooling and men at higher levels and in the administration negatively shapes gender norms for students (Stromquist, 2008). The behavior of teachers, such as gender-based favoritism or increased attention and encouragement, or even differences in assigning certain tasks (physical tasks for boys, for instance), can also leave a strong mark. Strengthening teacher training is an important component of improving the quality of education (UNESCO, 2008a), yet gender-responsiveness in teacher training has received scarce attention (UNESCO, 2007).

## Schooling Content

### Preparing Youth for the World of Work

Schooling should aim to facilitate the “effective preparation of people for the world of work and responsible citizenship” (UNESCO & ILO, 2002). Life skills should be central to schooling content, including critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, negotiation, and communication skills.

Graduates of technical and vocational education and training (TEVT) institutions have a higher likelihood of getting employed than regular school graduates. Yet across the region, TEVT has a “low prestige”, and students often undertake it as the last option after dropping out from the general education system (Billeh, 2002). TEVT systems in the region are typically outdated and lack adequate resources; traditional gender roles dominate, the private sector is not sufficiently involved, and bureaucratic rigidities impede reform (Bardak, Huitfeldt, & Wahba, 2006). Although workers may receive formal training in the firms that employ them, such practice is limited in the region, with the exception of Lebanon (World Bank, 2008).

In the Arab region, TEVT programs are considered male territory, and girls and women are not encouraged to participate, and go for literary and social tracks. Nevertheless, girls in the region generally score better than boys in mathematics and science, which are prerequisites for TEVT programs (Martin et al., 2008; Mullis et al., 2008.), knowing that both girls and boys score below the international average.

### Guidance and Counseling

Guidance and counseling in education and training that take into account current and future labor market needs are essential elements for the promotion of women and men’s employability (Kabbani & Omeira, 2007), yet policy frameworks for career guidance in the Arab region remain weak. Career guidance in the region is typically given by school counselors who provide general guidance to students, with limited attention to long-term career prospects. Practitioners may encounter difficulties because parents’ preferences may limit the choices available to their children, particularly girls (Sultana & Watts, 2008).

### Promoting Responsible Citizenship

The availability of lifelong opportunities for young women and men in the region is contingent on the prevalence of enabling conditions. The intrinsic value of curricula promoting peace and social justice is a sufficient basis for their adoption; they also have instrumental value for promoting the employability of women, by increasing their safety across the lifecycle and fostering an environment supportive of them (Muñoz Villalobos, 2006).

Regional reports have highlighted the importance of fostering diversity for the socioeconomic and political empowerment of women, and the need for education systems in the region to challenge the dominant social model (UNDP, 2006). Restrictions on academic freedom by political and religious authorities are widespread. An illustrative example is Saudi Arabia, where it is reported that teaching the works of the likes of Darwin, Freud, and Marx is prohibited, with teachers who express dissenting views liable to legal and physical retribution (Education International, 2007).

## Towards Gender-Responsive Curricula

The curriculum and textbooks structure the social norms of young people at an early age; their evolution towards greater gender-responsiveness is important for intrinsic and instrumental reasons, including the promotion of women’s employability. Conversely, changes in the actual experiences of women’s lives can affect the gender content of the curriculum and textbooks. Yet the process, if existent, may be slow, and “the gap between the progress [of women in the Arab region] and the stereotypical images of women in school curricula is enormous” (UNDP, 2006). Indeed, education policies promoting gender equality and curricula that are gender-responsive do not confer the full content of what students learn; textbooks may include substantial gender bias despite the aims of the above-mentioned policies and curricula (Blumberg, 2007).

Studies assessing the extent of gender bias in textbooks and curricula across the Arab region have emphasized that the depiction of traditional gender roles has generally remained static, with some improvements noted in Tunisia (Bouchoucha and Locoh, 2008). A study of gender bias in textbooks across Arab countries that is a quarter-century old (Abu Nasr, Lorfing, & Mikati, 1983), despite its limitations, may bear striking resemblance to studies conducted nowadays, although such a recent exercise has yet to be undertaken at the regional level. Gender bias is manifested in the portrayal of boys and men as the leading characters in lessons, biographies, and images, in the use of gender-biased language, the depiction of men as masters, in addition to the derogation of women and the promotion of their victimization and submission (UNDP, 2006; Alrabaa, 1985).

Whereas men are mainly referred to by their profession, women’s typical representation is as family members, mainly as mothers, with employment restricted to non-mothers (Bouchoucha and Locoh, 2008). Also of direct relevance to women’s employability are gender differences in favorable images that confine work-related attributes to men and the identification of a wide range of occupations as masculine, with homemakers, teachers, and nurses forming the bulk of feminine occupations (Alrabaa, 1985). Even in Tunisia which has made important changes to its curricula (UNDP, 2006), large gaps remain between the reality of women’s increased economic activity and their depiction in textbooks (Bouchoucha & Locoh, 2008).

Evaluators and developers of textbooks and curricula have generally been overwhelmingly male specialists. UNDP (2006) has noted that women’s participation was “less than 8 percent in a random sampling of Arab curricula”, and called for its increase. The importance of women’s participation in curricular development should not conceal the fact that women as well as men may contribute to reproducing gender norms that are detrimental to gender equality. A more important factor is knowledge of gender issues, and knowledge of reproductive health for purposes of sex education. Curriculum reform that does not openly take into account the possible forces of resistance to change may quickly become counterproductive, particularly if it is perceived to result from external pressure, such as the conditions for education loans. In particular, “targeting curricula that include ‘Islamic’ values can backfire by aggravating extremism and internal resistance to change” (UNDP, 2006).

## Conclusions

The negative effects of externally-imposed changes in the realm of education mirror the failure of externally-prescribed socioeconomic policies in the region. In the world of work, a viable alternative model is introducing effective tripartism between States, workers' and employers' organizations, and the voices of civil society organizations in the deliberative process. Inclusion would help expand the policy space and guarantee the collection and dissemination of relevant data and greater transparency in decision-making (Omeira, Esim, & Alissa, 2008). Such a perspective is in line with the broader argument from the capability approach, which stresses that a capability-friendly conceptualization of employability incorporates capability for voice, which involves the active participation of all stakeholders in the policy process, as opposed to the imposition of a top-down approach driven by experts and policy makers (Bonvin & Farvaque, 2005).

Ultimately, the promotion of gender responsiveness in education and labor markets rests on the availability of political will at all levels. Such political will can be translated into revisiting existing institutional frameworks, including those related to gender mainstreaming, with an emphasis on the linkages between the education system and the world of work. It may also entail reconsidering policy objectives. When public policy aims to expand the capabilities of women and men, including their employability, fiscal and monetary policies become subordinated to employment and social policy. Such rethinking can provide a basis for furthering the "new development paradigm", which the governments, employers' and workers' organizations in the Arab region have called for as a response to the 2008 global economic crisis (ILO & ALO, 2009).

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# Exploring Young Female Entrepreneurial Activity in the United Arab Emirates: Issues, Prospects, and Implications for the Region

Yusuf Sidani

This study attempts to sketch a profile of young female entrepreneurs in the Arab region as they start their business organisations and take the first few steps in the development of their business. It attempts to draw a profile of a number of local Emirati women entrepreneurs and their characteristics, what attracts them to their businesses, and the hurdles they face as they enter into their line of business. In addition, it outlines the make-up of their entrepreneurial businesses, and identifies some barriers that women face at the start-up stage, in addition to their entrepreneurial motivations and driving forces, satisfactions, and frustrations. This is preceded by a brief overview of models of female entrepreneurship and an exploration of previous research into female entrepreneurship and women status in the Arab region. To accomplish this, we conducted thirteen interviews with young female entrepreneurs to assess the special challenges facing them as they go about starting and running their business ventures. We tried to gauge the interviewees' entrepreneurial activities, their satisfaction with their business ventures, and the perceived opportunities and obstacles that they face. While this study explores the specific case of the UAE, the wider implications on young female Arab entrepreneurs are discussed.

In order to understand female entrepreneurial behavior in the Arab region and how women are transformed into entrepreneurs, we draw on earlier research on entrepreneurial intentions and then see how this applies in the Arab region. The intention to start a business is impacted by two broad classes of antecedents: (1) personal variables and (2) environmental factors. Personal variables include such constructs as self-confidence and self-efficacy, having an internal locus of control, willingness to take risks, positive attitudes toward change, creativity and innovativeness, education, and prior training (Hoxha & Krasniqi, 2008; Moy, Luk, & Wright, 2003). Environmental factors include the existence of market opportunities, availability of financing, the regulatory and economic environment, and cultural expectations and constraints. Among the cultural constraints one can cite – among others – the role of gender orientations and socialization (Mueller & Dato-On, 2008). The question that is relevant to us in this investigation is the following: To what extent do such constraints exist in the Arab context?

## Youth Entrepreneurship and Gender

The question of female youth entrepreneurship raises the question of whether such initiatives differ by gender. In other words, do young females face different

challenges and contexts in their drive to set up their businesses compared to males? Previous research about the nature and extent of potential barriers that face female entrepreneurs in different parts of the world is mixed in that regard. But, in general, research studies assert the importance of self-efficacy and self-confidence in moving people into an entrepreneurial career (e.g. Mueller & Dato-On, 2008; Scherer, Brodzinski, & Wiebe, 1990). People who feel that they cannot make it on their own or believe that outside forces are overpowering, tend to lose either the motivation needed or the intention required to start and sustain a successful business. Young people, irrespective of gender, tend to lean on the safer side, and because of parental, familial, or cultural forces, they succumb to pressures and seek work as employees rather than seek self-employment. Both male and female entrepreneurs face difficulties in their entrepreneurial activities, but many studies suggest that females face unique challenges and issues that are not necessarily faced by their male counterparts (e.g. Welter, 2004). While young male entrepreneurship is not an easy endeavor by any means, social and cultural obstacles put additional impediments for female participation and involvement in social, political, and commercial activities.

### Models of Female Entrepreneurship

For both men and women, entrepreneurial behavior is often driven by diverse reasons including the desire for personal accomplishment. The monetary incentive is not always the prime motivator for entrepreneurs. Other considerations often shape entrepreneurial decision-making, including the desire for independence, self-realization, and creative activity (OECD, 1998).

Talking specifically about women, a woman's decision to establish her own business does not usually originate from a single motivating cause. Thus, it is important to evaluate the factors that contribute to "pushing" or "pulling" a woman into business ownership (Stevenson, 1986). The pull/push model endeavors to clarify females' reasons behind opening a business (Brush, 1999; Buttner & Moore, 1997). Push factors include economic and financial reasons, unemployment, glass ceiling, insufficient family income, and frustration with one's current employment. Push factors are defined as either personal (e.g. divorce) or external forces (e.g. job loss) that direct a woman towards self-employment.

Pull factors are related to a desire for achievement, autonomy, self-fulfillment, and social status (Sarrì & Trihopoulou, 2005). Forces that pull a woman towards self-employment also include interest in the area (personal) or the presence of market opportunity (external). Earlier research has found that women turn to business ownership due to a combination of job frustration and market opportunity (Hisrich and Brush, 1986; Scott, 1986), and that female entrepreneurs are, on average, still earning less compared to their male counterparts and are facing more barriers (Davidson & Burke, 2004; Fielden & Davidson, 2005).

While women's presence in entrepreneurial activities is increasing, several impediments are still reported (Davidson & Burke, 2004) both in the start-up and in the operating phases. For example, studies in China, Greece, Malaysia, Portugal, Turkey, and the United Kingdom have reported obstacles ranging from sexual stereotyping and lesser access to capital, to lack of entrepreneurial education and social/cultural impediments

(Petraki & Ventoura, 2004; Cooke, 2004; Omar & Davidson, 2004; Kabasakal, Aycan, & Karakas, 2004; Wilson, 2004; Cabral-Cardoso, 2004). Although many barriers were both common to males and females, the latter suffered a lack of initial funding for their businesses in addition to work-family conflict issues.

Welter (2004) for instance asserted that access to entrepreneurship support in Germany seemed to be gender-biased. Woldie & Adersua (2004) asserted that the greatest challenge for female entrepreneurs in Nigeria pertained to not being taken seriously by male counterparts. Sandberg (2003), in Sweden, concluded that females expressed needs similar to their male counterparts. Orhan (2001) indicated that French female entrepreneurs had entrepreneurial motivations similar to men pertaining to love of independence and self-accomplishment but attached less value to prestige attributes of social status and power. Machado et al. (2002), studying entrepreneurial managerial behavior of Brazilian entrepreneurs, found similarities in male and female entrepreneurial behavior with some significant differences in managerial style, relationship with the market, and entrepreneurial strategies.

Izyumov & Razumnova (2000), addressing the topic of women entrepreneurs in Russia, indicated that those women faced several difficulties that were also shared by men due to common economic disturbances in the Russian economy. In Singapore, women entrepreneurs were found to share many traits with women entrepreneurs in other parts of the world (Maysami & Goby, 1999). Most women in Singapore were found to be operating in the service and retail businesses and some faced problems relating to work-family conflicts, access to financing, and entrepreneurial education. Sigh, Reynolds, & Muhammad (2001) reported that businesses operated by female entrepreneurs in Indonesia were more concentrated in less dynamic markets – i.e. in low income informal sectors such as farming – compared to those operated by men. Watson (2003) affirmed that female-owned businesses in Australia had higher failure rates compared to male-owned businesses, but these rates seem to be more related to the facts that females are over-represented in industries that have higher failure rates.

The above research examples highlight the growing cross-cultural research interest in female entrepreneurship. The fact remains, however, that such research in many regions of the world – including the Arab world – is still open for further exploration.

### Young Female Entrepreneurship in the UAE

Female entrepreneurship participation studies in the Arab region suffer from the lack of reliable statistics, the absence of a clear definition of "entrepreneur", and the lack of knowledge of what types of businesses classify as relevant enterprises to include. The absence of reliable governmental statistics, in addition to the issue of dormant partners in some Arab countries, only complicate the process. In a study about women-owned businesses in the Arab world, Chamlou (2007) made some interesting remarks. It seems that there are marked differences in female entrepreneurial behaviors in different Arab countries. Any attempt to explain such behaviors across the whole region requires access to large datasets, a thing that is not readily available. Accordingly, this paper is based on a study in one Arab country, namely the United Arab Emirates. It is argued that some of the findings in UAE may apply – in varying degrees – to other countries that share similar features, but the existence of differences between Arab countries is

expected to exist given the variety in the economic contexts and regimes in which they operate.

The increased wealth that has improved the standard of living of most citizens led to a decrease in the economic participation of women in UAE economy. The last decade of the twentieth century witnessed, however, a gradual return of women to the workplace. Although UAE women have a higher literacy rate (80.7 percent in 2003) compared to UAE men (75.6 percent) (EIU, 2007), this has not been reflected in more opportunities for women in the workplace. The new female employment outside the home is a modern concept in the UAE society. An attitude and opinion survey conducted by Sayed (2001) showed that 74 percent of males and 65 percent of females believed that when a woman is not at home, her family suffers. In addition, many women give up their careers after marriage or after giving birth and it is usually rare for them to re-enter the labor market.

In an effort to reduce the dependency on the expatriate workforce, the Emiratization policy was introduced (MOP, 1997), requiring a gradual increase of the proportion of UAE nationals in the total workforce. UAE nationals are trained and coached in order to assume jobs previously performed by expatriates. This policy has led to increased female participation in the workforce. Raja ElGurg, President of the Dubai Business Women Council (DBWC), asserted that the contribution of women in the UAE's business increased in 2006 to 14.7 percent compared to 5.2 percent in 2002 (Glass, 2007).

An earlier study that we conducted in the UAE context (Sidani, Itani, & Baalbaki, 2007) attempted to answer several questions about female entrepreneurs, some of them related to: (1) the main barriers that UAE women entrepreneurs encounter at start-up and (2) the recommendations needed in order to improve the situation and career opportunities of UAE women entrepreneurs. Through the help of the Emirates Business Women Council, the second author conducted thirteen interviews with female entrepreneurs who were all under the age of forty. Seven of them were married, one divorced, and five were single. Five of the married interviewees had children; ten had a university degree. Eight of the interviewees were in the services business (trading, educational, etc.); one entrepreneur ran a real estate office and another ran a restaurant.

The interviews were structured with specific questions which all interviewees had to answer. The questions dealt with the respondents' entrepreneurial activities, satisfaction with their enterprises, perceived opportunities and obstacles, and level of family-work conflicts. While female entrepreneurs in the UAE were found to have low levels of conflicts between their social and entrepreneurial lives, many reported several barriers, specifically at the start-up stage of their business ventures.

As explained earlier, many studies on female entrepreneurship indicate that female entrepreneurs start their business with strong economic motivations such as generating extra income (Brush, 1999; OECD, 1998). However, the results of this study show that economic motivations were not the primary reason for UAE women entrepreneurs. On the contrary, when asked to choose up to two reasons for starting their own business, about eleven cited self-fulfillment and/or an opportunity presenting itself to them.

Despite the advancements made over the past two decades, the interviewees indicated that they faced several barriers that hindered the establishment of their start-ups and the development of their businesses. The perceived barriers can be classified into three major categories: (1) cultural concerns, (2) deficiencies in administrative and financial training, and (3) personal reasons relating to the entrepreneur herself. Below we briefly describe those barriers:

**1. Cultural Concerns:** Despite the extensive modernization of the country in many aspects over the past two decades, the UAE remains a traditional Arab society. As prevalent in many other parts of the world, gender role expectations are firmly rooted. There are specific expectations of women – whether as daughters, wives, or mothers – and their societal functions are all culturally bound. While many deviations from such expectations exist, those are considered to be the exception rather than the rule. Several of the interviewees indicated that the deeply-rooted cultural customs – not related to religion – have been hindering their entrepreneurial activities. For many UAE women entrepreneurs in our study, social attitudes and traditions represented one major obstacle for advancement. One interviewee had this to say about this issue: “Society and its mores constitute the main barrier that hamper the advancement of UAE women entrepreneurs... The prevalent values repudiate woman's independence”.

It can be argued that this applies to many parts of the Arab world where females, especially young ones, are not expected to share in the family's income and accordingly such lack of expectation eventually leads to a lack of guidance and support. From an early age, girls are treated very differently in the family and in the school. In many regions of the Arab world, girls are not prepared to lead progressive social or business roles in the future. The girl is defined in relation to a male family member. Such attitudes impact the woman's role once she grows up. It is true that the past few decades have witnessed remarkable developments in women's education and the right to work. Yet women in many parts of the Arab world suffer stricter restrictions on their work participation and entrepreneurial projects (Sidani, 2005; Sidani & Thornberry, 2009).

In the United Arab Emirates, while equality of status for women has been propagated and is desired, some female UAE nationals are still affected and bound by tradition and culture with regards to marriage, family life, education, and work. These factors inevitably have a bearing on their entrepreneurial activities. More than half of the business owners who participated in our study believed that their family hinders them from advancing professionally. One interviewee indicated that: “If [a young female entrepreneur] needs the assistance of her family members in gathering information about a specific business she wants to start, she finds none ... Our parents refuse the concept of their daughter working on her own”.

Male family members in particular seem to be the most resistant to the idea that their daughters or sisters are starting their own business. This stems not only from deeply-rooted conservatism, but also from a lack of confidence in women's ability to excel at work.

Some researchers contend that the nature of the Arab family curbs entrepreneurial activities (Haddad, 1993 as cited in Hadidian, 2004). The existing patriarchal structure



limits the development of creativity, risk-taking, and critical thinking. This is compounded by the collective nature of the culture (Hofstede, 1984, 1997) which often gives little room to individual endeavors and inventiveness. Again differences among Arab countries in that regard should not be ignored.

**2. Deficiencies in Administrative and Financial Training:** Several interviewees indicated that they lacked some basic, but critical, skills in management and administration. Research in entrepreneurship indicates that entrepreneurial self-efficacy is important to success (McGee et al., 2009; Baum & Bird, 2010). When women feel that they lack such skills, this will have a significant impact on their ability to thrive. As put by one interviewee: “Even if women entrepreneurs have the necessary capital to start a business, they still suffer from severe deficiencies in their administrative and organizational abilities”.

Such lack of managerial training reduces young women’s self-efficacy and confidence in the success of their endeavors and accordingly many would rather choose not to risk starting a business venture when they do not feel secure or properly equipped to handle it due to the lack of necessary skills and expertise.

**3. Personal Reasons:** An interesting theme that emerged from the interviews was that female entrepreneurs blamed themselves for not making use of the opportunities available to them or for not willing to take the risk of running a new business. For example, fear was cited by one interviewee as being a major block against pursuing entrepreneurial ambitions: “One chief barrier that female entrepreneurs face is fear, fear of disappointment, of frustration, and fear of not pursuing her dream [of establishing a business]”.

The three above barriers correspond only to a certain extent with the findings of other studies in the MENA region which indicate that the major challenges that face women entrepreneurs include learning management skills, finding and retaining top talent, and access to capital (WEMENA, 2007). It should be noted that the situation of female entrepreneurs is not uniform in the Arab region. In some Arab contexts, the role of cultural constraints may be the most salient force against more visibility of women entrepreneurs. In other environments the most important factor could be the lack of proper managerial training and skills acquisition.

### Conclusions and Future Suggestions

This study tackled the status of young female entrepreneurs in one Arab country, but the implications could be extended to the whole region. Notwithstanding the specific cultural and economic context within which these women operate, one can make some broad conclusions regarding the situation and outlook for female entrepreneurship in this part of the world. Many women in this region strive to establish their own business, out of necessity or for self-fulfillment. Yet being young and female places a double burden on these women. Their potential is often questioned, and their ambitions are customarily curbed. Young people, especially females in the Arab world, need to be supported in their endeavors to find their own voice in business. Societal members should realize that starting a business is a vehicle for personal growth and fulfillment that will pay huge returns on overall economic development.

Female entrepreneurship faces a myriad of obstacles that have no single remedy

(Pardo-del-Val & Ribeiro-Soriano, 2007). In tackling those challenges, several routes should be pursued. First, it is acknowledged that young people have deficiencies in their managerial and leadership skills. Specifically, they lack financial skills, soft managerial skills, business awareness, job-specific vocational skills, and information and communications technology skills (Dunlop, 2006). The business venture passes through several stages from the concept stage to the point where a person is able to generate funds for her project and starts operations. Young females need support in every stage of this process, a thing that is not readily available.

Many young females do not realize the potential that self-employment carries for their livelihood and personal and economic development. This is not unusual given the scarcity of good role models. There are extremely few females who are known to have established their own successful businesses from scratch. Publicly celebrating the (unfortunately still few) female success entrepreneurship cases is very important. This will increase the entrepreneurial self-efficacy among young women and help them overcome hidden fears.

A role to be played by governments and parliaments in the region relates to the importance of developing and properly implementing entrepreneurship-friendly laws for women. But laws alone cannot change whole societies. What is also required is a shift in cultural norms and expectations, a reaffirmation of the positive role of religion regarding women’s work. There is a growing, though not decisive, trend in the religious discourse that affirms that women’s work is not against Islamic ideals (For more on this refer to Sidani, 2005). If this trend is strengthened and encouraged, then a positive movement towards a better understanding of women’s role can be realized. Such a movement will not be anti-religious; it actually will make positive use of religious concepts to assert that women’s work is beneficial to society and economic development. There is a major responsibility on the shoulder of religious and civil society organizations to demonstrate that female entrepreneurial activities in no way runs in conflict with cherished cultural norms and religious values.

It should finally be noted that entrepreneurship education should be advanced at the high school level and not be postponed till university years. Much of the entrepreneurial personality is formed at an early age and the earlier the entrepreneurial spirit is instilled in youth, the more effective and lasting such an education will be. Support should be given to teacher training and curriculum development (Bell-Rose & Payzant, 2008), especially taking into consideration the cultural milieu in the Arab region.

Arab female entrepreneurs have come a long way in the past few years. Yet there is a need to continuously support, help, and empower those women in their efforts to overcome environmental, societal, and personal hurdles. The contribution of young populations, both male and female, in the development of new enterprises is key to overall economic development and prosperity of societies in the Arab region.

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# Technical Education and Vocational Training for Women

## A case study of Yemen

Lara Uhlenhaut

### Youth and Women in Yemen's Labor Market

Soaring population growth in Yemen has led to approximately 200,000 young people entering the labor market each year. Figures are outpacing labor demand, in a country where the deteriorating economy is leading to less job creation. The majority of youth in Yemen works mostly in the informal economy with no prospects of regular contracts, social security, or forms of insurance. The limited ability of the formal education system to prepare young people for the labor market is also leading to a chronic 'skills shortage' in Yemen.

Against this background, the Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) System in Yemen absorbs only 0.2 percent of each annual cohort in upper secondary education and of this only 13 percent are young women, a figure that is consistent with the overall low participation rate of women in Yemen's labor market (MOTTEVT, 2007).

To understand the above situation one must look into the main challenges that are being faced by women wanting to enter the work force. Women workers have been constrained by a number of factors that include low educational levels, early marriage<sup>1</sup>, high fertility rates, and persistent cultural negative perception regarding "women workers". The traditional gender roles that are still observed in Yemen mean that women are often concentrated in sectors that are traditionally associated with their roles. In fact, a look at formal sectors where you find women (excluding the agriculture sector where rural women are the backbone), shows that the vast majority are mostly occupying jobs

as teachers, nurses, secretaries, and as customer services, in sectors that are considered 'appropriate' and 'feminine' (Durr, 2004). The situation is however expected to change. The recent increase of poverty levels in Yemen is forcing more and more women to seek work and support their families. Sole incomes from male 'breadwinners' are not proving enough to make ends meet, a situation that is becoming a trend across various social classes in Yemen. Financial necessity is therefore increasingly dictating the entry of women into the work force.

Within this context the following article makes the case that better access and integration of women in TEVT and their empowerment through provision of practical skills that are demanded in the labor market can significantly enhance their opportunity to find gainful employment. The methodology used entailed: a review of strategies and documentation from the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training in Yemen (MOTTEVT) and other relevant United Nations reports, along with semi-structured interviews with MOTTEVT technical staff, institute deans, teachers, and NGOs in Yemen working in skills training. Focus group meetings were also conducted with over 200 TEVT students across three governorates in Yemen namely Sana'a, Taizz, and Aden as well as interviews with employers from the private and public sectors in Yemen.

### TEVT in Yemen and its Challenges

In Yemen and arguably in many developed and developing countries, cultural bias against technical education and vocational training is evident and is shared by parents, young graduates, employers,

and society at large. To many the TEVT sector is an institution associated with 'drop-outs' and an educational system that is 'second-class'. Simultaneously, this system mostly targets the urban youth, mostly males from relatively well off backgrounds. Limited capacity to absorb the graduates that are increasing in numbers means that graduates are chosen according to their grades, a system that arguably marginalizes the economically vulnerable and socially excluded.

In Yemen, institutionally, the TEVT system is mostly supply-driven, with not enough linkages to the private sector and almost no linkages with employment institutions or with the secondary school system. This is consistent with the perception in Yemen, especially amidst the private sector and the business community, that this education system needs to produce graduates with high quality skills that are more relevant to labor market needs.

Young women's low enrolment rates in technical education and industrial institutes mainly stem from the perception that these institutions provide skills associated with 'manual labor' and are therefore dominated by men. Particularly in the context of Yemen where strong traditional gender roles prevail, women continue to be underrepresented in technical education and vocational training centers. The majority of women enrolled in TEVT institutions are found in the traditional specializations such as sewing, embroidery, handicrafts, and hairdressing - sectors which are already over saturated and with limited returns in terms of income. "The main issue with Technical Education and Vocational Training is that it is considered as manual labor which is exhausting and generates low income. That is what vocational training means in the mind of the majority of people in Yemen. (personal communication, teacher in Al Moalla Industrial Institute-Aden).

### Pockets of Diversified Participation

According to recent data from the MOTTEVT, there is evidence of women entering less traditional sectors. Enrollments of women in TEVT institutes for the year 2008-2009 across Yemen are as follows (according to the rate of enrollment starting

from the highest): computer programming, office management, accounting, child nursery, marketing, management, photography, desktop publishing, interior design, PC maintenance, plants production, networks, telecom engineering, engineering construction, and building construction.<sup>2</sup> Graphic design and digital multimedia was in fact the most popular course for women in Sana'a Community College for the year 2008-2009. Women participation is also increasing in the newly established National Hotel and Tourism Institute (NAHOTI) in Sana'a where you find young women wanting to become tourist guides, a sector where traditionally participation of women was generally unheard of. Nawal, a student at the institute, expressed the following in her interview: "When I take the bus and I am asked by a woman next to me what I do and I tell her I attend the center for hotel and tourism she gets cold and distant. Even at the institute, amidst my fellow students, I feel I am being judged as a 'female' in this field".

Enrollment of women in TEVT centers is mostly found in the main governorates and main cities of Yemen, with participation in smaller cities/districts close to nil. Significantly, despite being the capital city, Sana'a has a small percentage of women entering non-traditional sectors, the highest numbers being concentrated in commercial institutes (secretariat, administration, accounting) or traditional skills (such as sewing, ceramics, hairdressing, etc). Increased and diversified participation, however, is noticed in Community Colleges in courses such as information technology, graphic design, and internet technology. Aden is also witnessing similar scenarios when it comes to women's participation in the TEVT sector, despite its past historical experience of women flourishing in non-traditional fields such as marine technology, carpentry, electricians, and mechanics during Aden's socialist period.<sup>3</sup>

### Main Challenges Facing Young Women

Despite evidence pointing towards more women entering non-conventional trades, the numbers are small and based on unique cases rather than up-coming trends. There are a number of important factors that have been identified as main obstacles



to both the entry of women in these centers and to the success of women TEVT graduates who are trying to find employment. Some of these factors are summarized in the following;

#### a. Double Discrimination Facing Women

In comparison to their male counterparts, young women in Yemen are doubly disadvantaged when entering this sector due to a) the traditional perception that TEVT provides second class education and b) a system that is dominated by men. Interviews conducted for the purpose of this research with young students, parents, and teachers, however, indicated that cultural hindrances, while important, do not pose the main obstacle preventing more women from enrolling in this type of education and joining non-conventional trades. As expressed by the female dean of the Girls Commercial Institute in Sana'a; "... If we are talking about cultural inhibitions in Yemen preventing women from entering the technical education and vocational training system, these could be easily overcome by general awareness. People in Yemen are ready to change" (personal communication, ). Lack of awareness about what these technical institutes have to offer is more likely to be the key inhibiting factor. Due to the limited capacity of these institutes to absorb the increasing number of graduates (mostly young men) enrolling, school campaigns to reach out to potential applicants have been, by the admittance of many heads of these centers, restricted. In comparison to men, women are generally more restricted to the private sphere and have therefore less of a chance to know about vocational training opportunities.

#### b. Lack of Infrastructure

Non-mixed classes in mixed vocational and technical institutes where the majority of students are young men (i.e. industrial institutes focusing on mechanics, carpentry, etc) are clearly inhibiting the entry of young women. Priorities must be given to women, particularly to ones entering domains that are un-conventional and normally dominated by men, even if this would mean initial provision of non-mixed classes until a more balanced participation between men and women is achieved.

#### c. Saturation of Traditional Fields with no Potential for Making an Income

With the increasing levels of poverty in Yemen, more and more women are enrolling in TEVT institutes offering traditional feminine specializations in skills such as sewing, embroidery, handicrafts, dress making, ceramics and so on, in the hope of providing an additional income for their family. Yet the majority of these institutes offer very basic skills training which is often not enough to master a trade. The products are often of low quality and no connections to the market are made by these centers (in terms of targeting tourists, expatriates, export, the Yemeni urban middle class, etc). Women graduating from these courses therefore find it hard to find real income generating opportunities.

#### d. Lack of Initiatives that can Further Support Women Breaking into Employment

Entrepreneurship training in basic business skills in the TEVT sector as a whole is neglected despite the fact that the economy of Yemen is based on micro and small family businesses. The need to encourage and nurture an entrepreneurial spirit in the TEVT system, and integrate entrepreneurship training into regular curriculums for these institutes is also recognized in the Ministry's national strategy for TEVT. Little evidence of entrepreneurship training integrated into the institutes' curriculum is found to date. There is also a lack of awareness regarding the link between self-employment and technical education and vocational training.

#### e. Gaps in the Search for Employment

For both young men and women graduates job search and job counseling services are limited. Employment offices in Yemen are structurally weak with little linkage with either the TEVT system or the private sector. The majority of hiring in Yemen is done through personal networking. This is particularly so for men who are more active in the public life and who therefore have more chances to access information on what is available. This method of job search, however, has an implication for young women who are mostly restricted to the private sphere. The high rate of women's unemployment feeds on itself: young unemployed women relying on other unemployed

women to look for a job are likely to have a hard time finding one. The majority of young graduate women interviewed from the TEVT sector for the purpose of this research quoted individual approach to companies as their style of job search and many admitted that this approach mostly fails.

#### f. Limited Capacity of the Lead National Institutions to Support Women in TEVT

At the institutional level, the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training in Yemen, the responsible branch for all state owned centers, has made some important efforts in attracting more women in their centers. These include a) added flexibility when it comes to women with regards to their qualifications and b) reduced fees for women enrolling. The Ministry also established the Department of Woman and Qualitative Training that is in charge of addressing women, people with disabilities, and the socially marginalized. As in many other countries, following the Beijing conference on gender equality and the establishment of national women machineries worldwide, women departments located in major institutions are not proving to be efficient as they possess no human, technical, or financial resources to carry out their mandates. What is more, this approach tends to further marginalize and exclude women by treating them as separate 'targets' as opposed to equal beneficiaries as young men. When it comes to achieving an increased participation of women the ministry is mostly working in isolation and with little partnership with other key organizations in Yemen that can help promote further the advancement of women in various sectors.

#### g. Lack of Research and Reliable Data Informing Policy Planning

As of yet, the biggest challenge that is being faced by the ministry and that is relevant for both young women and men graduates is the lack of a solid monitoring and evaluation system that traces the progress of young graduates as well as reliable qualitative and quantitative data on TEVT graduates. An absence of reliable disaggregated data and studies identifying the needs of the labor market and the performance of graduates in the

sectors they have chosen, as well as a lack of a systematic monitoring and evaluation system mean that no objective policy and planning can be done that can improve the chances of graduates entering the labor market.

#### Possible Policy Responses

In light of the above, the following are a set of recommendations are proposed in order to address the above gaps. There is a need to raise awareness and encourage more young women to enroll in TEVT centers due to an identified need to change the static and stereotyped perception associated with TEVT in order to reach out to more young girls. Initiatives can include: launching a wide-scale national media campaign featuring both young men and women graduates working on TEVT specializations that are not just focusing on 'manual labor'; launching a large-scale systematic secondary school awareness campaign focusing on reaching out to young girls as well as parents and revising the ministry's and institute's promotional materials (institutes brochures, annual reports, website); developing visual imagery that includes both men and women doing interior décor, desktop publishing, or multimedia; and producing pictures that show women as successful agents in the system and not passive recipients (i.e. women handling electronic devices not just sitting at desks).

According to Rina, a TEVT teacher:

Society is still not aware that these new fields of study have demand in the labor market. Fathers and mothers are still holding onto the idea that their daughters should ensure their future by going to universities, even though realistically there are lot of university graduates who do not find jobs. (Rina, Video Photography Teacher at Commercial TEVT Center in Aden)

Creating an appropriate infrastructure for young women to enter the TEVT is another way of bridging the gap. Introducing non-mixed classes in industrial institutes where there is a majority of male students is an easy step that can significantly achieve results. This can be done

through strengthening the current TEVT curricula with training in life skills and livelihood skills, as well as job search, CV writing and job interviews among others. Training in Basic Business Skills and Self Employment could also be incorporated in the current TEVT curricula by using business start-up packages that can be adapted and specifically target traditional centers where women from poorer backgrounds are found.

Finally, the Ministry's capacity needs to be strengthened. In particular, its Woman Department should be supported to mainstream gender issues

in its work. The Ministry can play a vital role in coordinating among national organizations promoting women's employment, including links with the private sector. The Ministry should also take the lead in a gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation system to generate qualitative and quantitative data on young women.

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#### ENDNOTES

1. Early marriage in Yemen is high. A recent early marriage campaign indicated that the average age for women has risen from 10.2 years to 14.7 years in contrast to that of men which has risen from 20.9 years to 21.5 years. See OXFAM early marriage campaign.
2. Participation is limited ranging from 256 enrollments for computer programming down to just three enrolments in construction.
3. Under the Socialist period in Aden 1969-1990, Aden was known to have witnessed an increased number of women working in various industrial fields.

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1. It is projected that 10.2 percent of the population will be over 65 years and above by 2025.

# Social Care and Women's Labor Participation in Lebanon

Seiko Sugita

## Social Care and Social Change\*

Social care refers to work that involves connecting with other people and trying to help them meet their needs, such as caring for children, the elderly, and sick people. Teaching is also a form of caring labor, whether it is paid or unpaid. Social care is a unique type of work. Since social care does not generate financial resources and does not contribute to economic production as measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the classical definition of work has not considered it as proper work (Folbre, 2006).

The care dynamics within each household change with the size and nature of the household, reflecting the demographic trend, change in family structure, and the political and economic situation. In Lebanon, internal and regional conflicts have led to the loss of life for large numbers of people and massive and repeated waves of displacement due to the long years of civil war (1975-1991) as well as the July 2006 war. Due to the lack of adequate job opportunities, male emigration abroad is on the increase, resulting in the sex imbalance in the country. A high fertility rate of 2.29 (UNFPA, 2003) combined with low mortality resulted in a larger proportion of the population consisting of elderly people aged 65 years and over.<sup>1</sup>

The Lebanese labor policies do not include specific laws, policies, or action plans which provide a comprehensive and clear understanding of unpaid care work within households. This may be due to the fact that the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention (1981, No.156) is not yet ratified. Neither the Lebanese social security laws nor the Employment Act and similar regulations protect the rights of workers with family care responsibilities. There is no institutional mechanism to better reconcile work and family responsibility such as part-time, flexible time, telecommuting, paid leave and unpaid leave, and care-centers at the workplace.

## Research Methodology

The present study benefits from a large quantitative and qualitative data collected from phone interviews and individual interviews guided by a semi-structured questionnaire and visits to various actors involved in social care. The study includes 30 private



nurseries, two private home-based care firms, five non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 1 non-profit nursing home for the elderly, one private children day care center, and 3 individual care-providers. In addition, a short survey and individual interviews were conducted with 22 Lebanese female and 2 male caregivers, who either are currently or have been in the last 18 months giving care to their children, elderly, and disabled family members. Interviews with 7 caregivers were complemented with follow up interviews with one of their family members (the husband in six cases and the mother-in-law in one of the cases). The survey helps to understand how care is perceived, executed, shared, and negotiated. Life histories on the daily struggle of care giving make up the main body of the analysis. Most interviewees come from the middle class and urban areas. However, given the small size of the sample, the survey results cannot be generalized. For more conclusive results, there is a need for a survey with a random sample and a time approach.

**Women’s Labor Market Participation in Lebanon**

In contrast with social changes, there has not been any significant change in society’s awareness of and attitude towards women’s work. In the absence of significant public or private initiatives to create employment opportunities, the labor market participation of women in Lebanon is not proportional to their high education level, both from quantitative and qualitative aspects. The labor force, at roughly 1.2 million, is estimated to be approximately 50 percent of the working age population (15-64 years). Although there may be undeclared participation of women in agriculture and other informal economic activities, women’s participation in the labor force remains low. There has been only a slight increase from 21.7 percent in 1997 to 22.3 percent in 2004. Women are mainly employed in the services sector and are permanent salaried workers. In general, the proportion of women employed as salaried workers has increased since 1997 (72.5 percent to 83.3 percent in 2004). However, it is noteworthy that the women employers represent only 1.1 percent of the workforce, as compared to 6.4 percent for men. It is estimated that 42 percent of women’s employment in the country falls under social care (ILO, 2007). Unemployment is particularly acute amongst Lebanese youth aged 15-24 years, with young women being more adversely affected than young men.

Women choose and/or are obliged to enter, remain and/or retire partially or entirely from the labor market for a variety of reasons, objectives, and constraints, such as financial and material survival, additional income for families, and self-realization. The participation of women in the labor market and in civil society activities can be limited by their family responsibilities, care, and non-care tasks. In some cases, women are expected by other family members to handle issues related to care responsibility, and thus decide to leave the labor market to fulfill their care responsibility at home.

**Perceptions and Practices of Social Care in the Households**

Social care in Lebanon is often considered as a family and private matter, in which the state is traditionally reluctant to intervene. In fact, the various kinds of household chores are all considered as a woman’s job. Moreover, social rituals within the extended family structure are usually time consuming and labor-intensive, and constitute thus an additional burden to the care needs of the nuclear family. The social transformation above has created new challenges for women to balance work and family life. In the 19 households studied (with 15 elderly care) and (4 disabled care), care

2. The survey covers 1652 married couples and their families residing in three communities: Nabaa, Hay el Selloum, and the Burj Barajneh refugee camp.

tasks such as feeding, giving a bath and assisting in using the toilet, administering medicines, giving massages, supervising, and keeping company inside the house, are executed by caregivers with or without assistance everyday, along with non-care household tasks.

Hours spent on non-care household tasks on a daily basis on weekdays varied depending on the composition of the families (number of household members and age distribution), the working status of caregivers, and the type of house-help they have. For many households, social care carries a strong emotional and moral message and is considered a family duty. Services such as nursing homes for the elderly are perceived as facilities that mainly cater for those living without family support:

My mother passed away last year. She was bed-ridden and suffered from leg pains and sight problems. She was 70. I am her only child and she lived in our house. It was really difficult to take care of her and raise two young children while having a full-time job. My husband and I had to split the household chores. After work, he cooked and took care of the children, as we did not have any domestic workers to help. My husband’s sister sometimes gave a hand. My father and my husband’s parents are all dead. We had no one else to assist us and share our care responsibilities. My mother was Spanish and all her family are in Spain. I did not leave my work. I never thought of it. My salary is as important as my husband’s and I share in all the expenses of our household. (Marie Louise, 37 years, secretary, married, two children, Achrafieh)

Gender dynamics affect the allocation of housework even in the absence of unequal earnings, and this is nowadays accepted by both men and women (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre & Matheson, 2003). According to a cross sectional survey of 2,797 households in three communities in Lebanon (Khawaja & Habib, 2007)<sup>2</sup>, there is a clear division of household labor, with more than 70 percent reporting that the wife performed in-house chores such as cooking and washing cloths and dishes. The analysis shows the correlation between the lack of involvement of the husband in housework and the wives’ psychological distress, marital dissatisfaction, and overall unhappiness. In comparison with wives whose husbands were highly involved in housework, wives whose husbands were minimally involved were 1.60 times more likely to be distressed, 2.96 times more likely to be uncomfortable with their husbands, and 2.69 times more likely to be unhappy. (Khawaja & Habib, 2007)

Among the 16 households where the main caregivers are married, only one household responded that the husband is the main executor of the non-care household tasks such as cooking and cleaning. In 15 households, women are the ones most responsible for the execution or supervision of the housework. Indeed, only 9 out of 22 people interviewed in the context of this study thought that men should take more responsibility in carrying out household tasks. In many cases, the lack of participation and contribution is explained by the long working hours:

I have a full-time job. I leave the house around 7:30 and come home around 16:00. My husband takes my son (1 year and half) to the nursery on his way

to work. My sister-in-law picks him up at 15:00 and keeps him at her house in our neighborhood, till I come home around 16:30. My husband comes home around 20:00 after 12 hours of work. While waiting for his return, I take care of my son and do all the house work for the day: cleaning, cooking, and ironing. We do not have a paid domestic worker. I find it natural that I do the work. My husband does not participate at all in housework. We never discussed it and I never asked him for help. Sometimes, I feel tired doing all the work but I got used to it. My husband may help me but I will not ask for it, as I know how exhausted he is after 12 hours of work. (Marie-Therese, 27 years, secretary, married, Bourj Hammoud)

Indeed, the gender division of labor supports the patriarchal power structure and the men breadwinner model (Folbre, 2006). However, in practice, there are many households headed by single, divorced, or widowed women, whereby unmarried and married women make a regular contribution to the family budget. In the case of married couples, the woman's income can be as important as the husband's income. Despite this trend, negotiation of sharing social care within a couple or family members is not happening in all households, especially when they can have external help such as migrant domestic workers at home.

### Perceptions and Practices of Social Care in the Households

The choice of participation of women in the labor market can be limited by their family responsibilities, care and non-care tasks:

When I decided to take care of my mother who is paralyzed and unable to take care of herself, I quit my job. I did not have any choice but I feel bitter when I think of the pension fund I could have received had I worked for four more years. I was the closest to my mother among my siblings. My brothers bought some medication and thought it is normal that I took care of her. Their wives never proposed to help. A few months after her death, I started looking for a job. I did not realize how difficult it was going to be. After all, I do not regret my decision. I took care of my mother myself and I am satisfied. (Leila, 40 years, babysitter, single, Bourj Hammoud)

The motivations for market/paid work vary. The most common ones are supporting family and economic autonomy. Many married couples have a joint account to which part of or all of the woman's income contributes and from which the couples spend on all kinds of family needs: food, clothing, medical expenses, and children's education. Many of the interviewees consider another set of common motivations for market/paid work such as self-realization and putting their knowledge and qualifications to use:

With all humility, my role and presence at the habilitation center as a manager has been vital to others. I needed money given that my ex-husband did not help me financially. In my opinion, work makes the person strong. Unlike my personal life that was a disappointment (several years of separation, fighting over the custody of my children and finally a divorce), work gave me confidence and made me succeed in my life. (Nahla, 50 years, occupational therapist, divorced)

Indeed, many women are penalized for their reproductive role directly or indirectly due to the lack of legal protection and labor policies that protect and promote their rights as workers with family responsibilities. Unpaid care work remains invisible and never questioned at the policy level. Furthermore, the value placed on the family is mediated by the behaviors and perceptions of employers within labor market institutions. This includes the predominance of the male breadwinner model among male and female employers; e.g. reluctance to pay for the costs of maternity leave, and expectation of lower productivity of women workers (requests for extra sick leaves, days off, unwillingness and/or inability to work overtime, etc.).

### Social Service Provisions to Reduce the Burden of Social Care in Households

In our study, 13 interviewees responded that they are assisted by different types of care facilities and providers (elderly homes, nurseries, nurses, domestic workers, etc.) whereas 11 interviewees provide such care by themselves without regular assistance. In general, households with modest incomes perform care and non-care tasks without any paid help. Among the 11 households who responded that they do not have any paid help, seven households are de facto headed by a woman and ten households have less than 500 US dollars/month as regular income. In these households, women play an important economic role as well as the role of main caregiver. Other female family members can provide support or help on a regular or irregular basis.

The social policy in Lebanon, despite its shortcomings (Jawad, 2002; World Bank, 2007), offers today different collective social care services through community development centers. The available services are however not sufficiently responding to the growing needs of the nuclear families and of households with working women for more tailored and personalized services. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including religious institutions, have been successfully reaching out to the needs of communities and populations.<sup>3</sup> They have been playing a complementary role to the family that continues to be the primary caregiver among others. However, existing care services are not fully accessible to all households that need care responsibilities because of their high cost, their geographical location, and the stigma associated with them. Managing social care is not an issue only for low-income households but it is also the every day issue of the middle class.

### Social Care as Employment Opportunity

Social care is a growing market where foreign housemaids supply their labor for the Lebanese middle class (Jureidini, 2003). Traditionally, Lebanese women from poor families, namely from the Lebanese mountains, worked for families in Beirut as domestic workers and were assigned both care and non-care tasks. Although this type of job is considered as rather shameful and is nowadays relegated to migrant domestic workers, Lebanese and Palestinian women with few qualifications and less job marketability can still find a place in this informal job sector. The standard remuneration is on average five thousand pounds (3,5 dollars) per hour for Lebanese and Palestinian women and freelance foreign workers.<sup>4</sup> This type of freelance care service is attractive to many households where there is not enough room for a live-in domestic worker and where there is no need for a full-time domestic worker.

3. Directory of NGOs working in Lebanon (2004) can be found at: <http://www.undp.org.lb>

4. The field work was undertaken in 2007.

Nadia is a Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon (35 years, married, living in the Shatila camp) and works for Mona (36 years, married, researcher, Hamra). Nadia takes care of Mona's 2 year-old son from 8:30 till 15:30, 5 days a week. She is paid 300\$ per month. Mona also pays for Nadia's youngest son's schooling (around 2000\$ per year including private tutoring lessons):

Yes, my day is very long. I work at home and at my employer's house. But I am not tired. Having my own salary is a new experience. I feel very strong and I am happy that I don't have to ask my husband for money. (Nadia)

For Mona, this arrangement not only makes her life easier but also makes her feel that she is contributing to her community by creating a work opportunity for other women:

I prefer to have someone like me, which means a working mother. First, I can learn from her experiences. Second, I will force myself to return home at 15:00 so that she can join her family as well. By being a good employer, I can be a good mother. Third, I wanted to share the chance I have as a working mother with another less advantaged working mother. I am very happy that this work opportunity and financial autonomy are empowering Nadia. This is the whole idea. I am contributing to my community, I mean Lebanon, by empowering women like her.

The labor conditions of the above mentioned women care providers are however vulnerable. In most cases, these women do not have contracts, social security, union membership, or social networks. There is no legal framework or political will to improve those women care workers' rights. Educational and professional backgrounds do not seem to be important for employers. They describe their employees in terms of their personality rather than their qualification.

## Conclusion

This paper analyzed the perceptions and practices of paid and unpaid social care gives within Lebanese households to look into the gender division of labor in interface with women's labor market participation, which is relatively low. The paper sheds light on the lack of a holistic social policy approach in Lebanon concerning social care and the promotion of women's labor market participation. Social care is not an issue for a particular group of the population but rather a concern for all groups and classes. A comprehensive social strategy should target a wider range of citizens and families in need of social care. This should include a comprehensive labor policy (paid and unpaid leaves and subsidies), and social care policy including tax deductibility on social care services. Not only a thorough review of the regulatory framework on social care but also further research at a national scale on the differential impacts of care-giving on women and men are a necessary step for a comprehensive policy formulation process.

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# Women's Work in the Field of Care and Rehabilitation in Jordan

**Paper presented by the South-North Center for Dialogue Amman, Jordan**

## Introduction

In the last few decades, Arab society has witnessed remarkable changes at the social, economic, and demographic levels. These changes have left their mark on the size of the family, its function, role, and interrelations among its members. As a result, fertility rates among women have dropped, late marriages have become common, and the percentage of women and young girls seeking education has sharply increased. In addition, more women have joined the labor market.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of these changes, the Arab family has abandoned some of its traditional roles, such as providing continuous care for babies and house-care for the elderly, the bedridden, and the sick. Other examples of these chores include babysitting, educating, feeding, cleaning, and attending to the health of the family and its disabled members. All these tasks were traditionally done by the women due to the division of labor along gender lines in the family. Women's abandonment of their care-taking roles has led to the transfer of those roles to social institutions founded to replace the family in providing care and service to those in need.

The care and rehabilitation sector refers to all labor and chores that have to do with the physical, psychological, and developmental needs of those

receiving care, namely, children, the sick, the elderly, and disabled people, whether these services are provided by the government, the private sector, or non-profit organizations. These services vary in type and duration, ranging from watching over individuals for several hours to intensive personal services that cover details of day-to-day life, such as feeding, cleaning, nursing, training, escorting, and round-the-clock monitoring.

In response to the increasing demand for caretaking and rehabilitation, many social institutions, such as day-care centers, kindergartens, orphanages, and homes for the elderly, as well as rehabilitation centers for the disabled, were established. Women rushed to work in these institutions, driven by a desire to enter the labor market and restricted by the scarcity of job opportunities for females in other fields.

The care and rehabilitation sector in many Arab countries has developed in part as a result of women's increasing interest in joining educational institutions and in entering the labor market, as well as women's abandonment of some of their traditional household roles. In addition, many employers in this sector believe that women have an innate readiness and a natural gift to carry out care tasks, and do not, as such, require prior training.

Despite the increase in demand for care services and the development this sector has witnessed, many challenges still face both givers and recipients of care services and rehabilitation. The

sector is unable to meet the increasing demand for such services at a reasonable cost. Moreover, the poor infrastructure of governmental and non-governmental organizations for care services has contributed to a deterioration in the quality of services offered by these organizations. This has led care recipients to seek services outside the institutional framework through hired caretaking at home, and through the recruitment of foreign domestic workers.

In light of these facts, it is important to comprehend the nature of the work in this field, and to highlight the obstacles facing working women as far as level of training, rehabilitation, gender pay gaps, working hours, leaves, breaks, insurance, and job security are concerned. Being aware of those obstacles would ensure that services being provided to those in need are of a high quality and contribute to the development of work in this sector and to human development, more broadly.

Awareness of the obstacles working women face has led the International Labor Organization (ILO) to take the initiative to conduct a regional study on the conditions of working women in the area of care and rehabilitation in many countries, including Jordan. The study is part of an overall ILO project to identify the working conditions of women in the area of care and rehabilitation. ILO also seeks to determine the level of commitment of the employer - whether the government, private, non-profit organizations, or families - to work conditions and regulations, and to labor rights, including contracts, wages, leaves, working hours, insurance, professional development, and job security. The importance of this study lies in the fact that it tackles, on the one hand, an area of work in which performance and quality of labor entail a degree of love, affection, and compassion shown by the caregiver toward the recipient. On the other hand, the quality of service can be negatively affected if the caretaker does not feel s/he is being treated with dignity and equality.

Therefore, exploring the challenges that face

female workers in this field, and giving adequate recommendations, may help develop this sector and improve the quality of services. This will, in turn, enable the sector to offer suitable job opportunities for women. Furthermore, it will attract women who are capable and willing to perform these services under appropriate work conditions that ensure their freedom, justice, and rights, and help create ideal circumstances for quality service.

## Women and Labor in Jordan

Female participation in the Jordanian labor market is 12 percent, and might reach 20 percent if the sectors of agriculture and security are excluded. Fifty-six percent of working women in Jordan work in the fields of education and health whereas men work in the fields of public administration and commerce.<sup>2</sup> Reports reveal the existence of a total of 1,047 institutions for care and rehabilitation, 32 of these are governmental organizations and the other 1,015 are either private or non-profit organizations. They offer services to orphans, pre-schoolers, youngsters, beggars, abused women, delinquent girls, in addition to the elderly and the disabled.

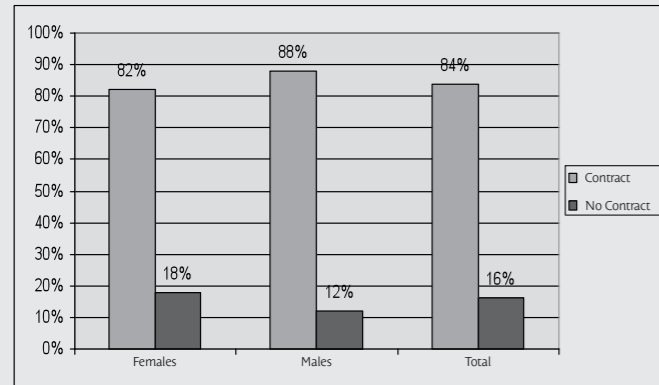
While accurate numbers of people receiving care services at home are unavailable, unofficial reports estimate the number of female foreign workers to vary between 40,000 and 70,000. These foreign helpers are in charge of caring for children, the disabled, and elderly people.

## Methodology

In order to explore the extent to which working women in the area of care and rehabilitation enjoy labor rights, and the effect of gender on the conditions of laborers, in addition to exploring the quality of services provided and the characteristics of the recipients, a field study was conducted on a sample of 207 individuals from government and private institutions as well as non-profit organizations. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with female foreign workers in the area of care and rehabilitation within families. The sample included both males and females from different parts of Jordan.



### Work System: With or Without a Contract



work more hours than stipulated by law, in some cases reaching as many as 120 working hours, in obvious violation of laborers' rights. They are denied rest and money in return for their additional working hours. The weekly rate of working hours for the entire sample was 46. It also reflected a slight difference in working hours per week between males and females (47 hours for males and 45 hours for females).

After having analyzed the findings, the following conclusions were made:

#### 1. Work System

Eighty-four percent of the sample work under the umbrella of labor regulation, whether the Civil Service Law or the Jordanian Law of Labor and Laborers' whereas 16 percent work outside of this umbrella. The study also revealed a slight difference between males and females, whereby 18 percent of the females and 12 percent of the males work outside the umbrella of labor regulation. As such, the likelihood of their labor rights being violated thus increases. There was no big difference in legal status between workers offering rehabilitation to the disabled and those offering care services to other categories, such as the elderly. The percentages reached 85 percent and 80 percent, respectively.

#### 2. Salaries and Wages

The study revealed that 91 percent of the individuals sampled earn monthly salaries that do not exceed 300 dinars (every 1 Jordanian Dinar is equivalent to 1.4 US Dollars). Fifty-three percent said they earned less than 200 dinars, while 4 percent still receive a salary less than 100 dinars per month even though the minimum salary according to the Jordanian Law of Labor and Laborers is 150 dinars.

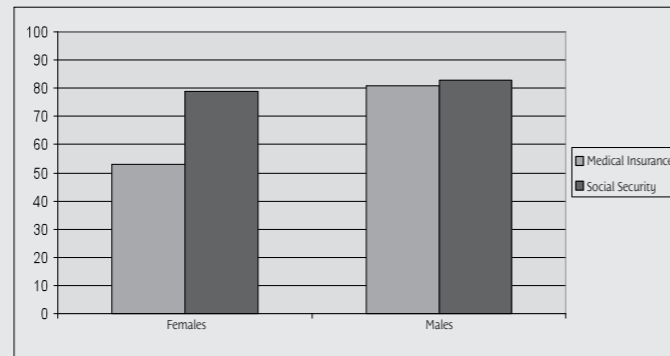
#### 3. Work Hours

The study showed that 14 percent of the sample

#### 4. Work Insurance

According to the results of the study, 80 percent of the sample benefited from the social security law while 20 percent worked without receiving social security. As for health insurance, 59 percent of the sample enjoyed health insurance while 41 percent did not. Reports have revealed that a high percentage work in the area of disability services compared to those working with other groups, with percentages reaching 69 percent and 38 percent, respectively. Sixty-one percent of laborers said they felt secure in their jobs as opposed to 39 percent who said they did not.

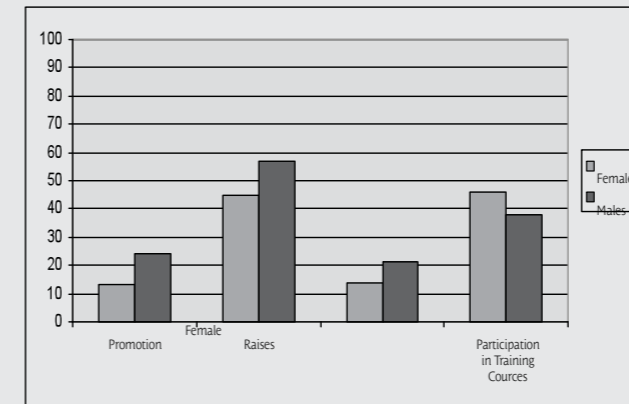
#### Work Insurance



#### 5. Opportunities for Training, Promotion, and Raises

The study has revealed that more than 50 percent of the workers do not receive any training. This rate reached 58 percent for workers in the area of care and rehabilitation of the disabled, and

### Opportunities for Training, Promotion, and Raises Based on Gender



51 percent in other areas. Although females participate more than males in training programs, which are considered a requirement for job promotion, results have indicated that females receive fewer employment benefits than do their male counterparts.

#### 6. Leaves

Ninety-six percent of the sample said that the terms of their contracts stipulated that they had the right to leaves while 4 percent said the terms of their contracts did not include leaves. As far as the different kinds of leaves are concerned, 12 percent reported that they did not get days off during weekends and 18 percent did not get leaves on holidays. Nineteen percent of the workers in the study receive no annual leave, and 25 percent are denied emergency leaves. Eighteen percent of the workers in the study did not benefit from sick leave whereas 51 percent were denied maternity leave and 44 percent were denied leave to observe religious rituals.

#### Female Foreign Workers

As far as the circumstances of female foreign workers are concerned, the study has revealed that the latter faced more problems than Jordanian women who work in the area of care and rehabilitation in both the public and private sectors, and in non-profit organizations. The interviews conducted with a number of female foreign helpers working for Jordanian families

for the purposes of this study have confirmed the reports released by Amnesty International in 2008, and the National Center for Human Rights in 2006-2007. The report by Amnesty International released in 2008 has revealed that many house helpers are paid only a small portion of their already meager salaries or do not get paid at all over many years. In its report, the organization relied on testimonies of foreign workers who confided that they suffered from isolation, abuse, and exploitation. Many of these women work 16 to 19 hours daily without any vacation, are treated like prisoners, and endure physical and psychological abuse. They are frequently beaten up and cannot leave the country because their employers do not renew their residency and, as a result, these workers have to pay fines. They are also subject to rape or other types of sexual molestation in the workplace.

The extent of suffering that female foreign domestic workers endure and the types of human rights violations they are subjected to were revealed in the interviews conducted. Here are some cases illustrating the work conditions of some of these foreign domestic workers:

#### Case-Study Number 1

Taisy, a Philippina helper, has been working for a family in Amman for 4 years, without a contract and with a salary below 150 dollars (below the official minimum wage in Jordan). She has not received her salary in 4 years. Thirty-four year-old Taisy works 18 hours daily spent between the household and a beauty parlor owned by the family. Taisy, who has a B.A. degree in Hotel and Restaurant Management, does cleaning, laundry, and cooking, and washes the four cars owned by the family members. As soon as she finishes housework, she rushes to the beauty parlor to clean and prepare for the arrival of customers. Then, Taisy carries out tasks such as manicures, pedicures, foot massages, facials, and hairdressing. Sometimes she does that outside the beauty parlor. Taisy misses her 4 family members in the Philippines and contacts them by phone only on special occasions. As for

the work atmosphere, Taisy has no sleeping space or privacy of her own, for she has to sleep in the living room. This means she has to wait until all family members have gone to bed so that she can sleep, and she wakes up ahead of them all. Taisy suffers from malnutrition, and says she is fed up of eating *shawarma* sandwiches which she often buys using customer tips. Taisy is very annoyed with her employers because they force her to wear second-hand clothes. What adds to her sadness is that she cannot afford to send gifts and money to her children during holidays and on special occasions. She sometimes borrows money from her fellow-workers.

**Case-Study Number 2**

Erany is a 31-year old Srilankan house-helper who has not completed her education. She is satisfied with her work conditions and circumstances. Erany works for a Jordanian family on the basis of a legal contract. She is treated well and receives her monthly salary on time. The family respects her privacy concerning sleeping arrangements and residency, and sets her working hours according to need. Although Erany earns the same salary as Taisy, she is satisfied with her employers' treatment and the quality of food and clothing they provide her with. She feels secure in her job and contacts her family by phone once a month. Erany sees no need for vacations.

**Case-Study Number 3**

Twenty-year old Anda, who is single, came to Jordan from Indonesia 3 years ago after finishing ninth grade. She was encouraged to seek employment abroad by other Indonesian house helpers. She also had a personal desire to work and become independent. Anda signed a work contract with a Jordanian family based on which she earns 125 US dollars per month. She receives her salary every 4 months and is very happy with her own bedroom overlooking the swimming pool in the garden. She feels secure because of her employers' good treatment, and although her contract does not include health insurance coverage, Anda is not worried about that; the family addresses her needs just as it does those of its own members.

Anda takes care of all household chores, including washing dishes, cleaning, helping in preparing and serving food, laundry, ironing, and attending to the needs of employers who require help while walking, for example. She does not find her work exhausting as she has time-off when she can watch television, for instance. Anda has her own cell phone and can send text messages to her family anytime she wants.

Clearly, there is a difference in the work conditions of the above-mentioned three foreign house helpers as far as salary, labor rights, working hours, overtime, breaks, medical insurance, and safe work atmosphere are concerned. This difference reflects a contrast in the employers' levels of commitment to giving full rights to their employees and avoiding exploiting them, rather than their abiding by the law and avoiding violating its terms. Lack of implementation of work regulations have left female foreign workers at the mercy of their employers. This has led to a violation of these helpers' human and labor rights. It has exposed them to dangers and crimes as serious as human trafficking at times.

Amnesty International is demanding that female foreign house helpers be able to work without fear of abuse and threat of imprisonment and deportation. These women play a huge role in the economy, both in Jordan and in their own countries. Their work contributes to the well-being of the families they serve, and they are providing a substantial income to their own families and societies back home.

**Recommendations for Change**

In light of the findings of the current study, it is recommended that the government, civil society, and human rights organizations, supported by ILO and international organizations, direct their efforts towards achieving the following goals:

- The development of a national program adopted by the Ministry of Labor in partnership with media institutions and labor syndicates to boost social awareness about the conditions and criteria for productive work. This kind of productive work can only be done in an atmosphere of freedom,

competence, security, and human dignity equally applied on men and women. Furthermore, there should be dialogue between the parties concerned; namely the laborers, the employers, and the government, in order to achieve such goals.

- The development of a comprehensive national strategy to train female graduates of humanities and social sciences faculties for work in the field of service, care, and rehabilitation, based on the principles of social service. Moreover, female workers should be able to climb the professional ladder, bearing in mind the individualized character of the service based on the needs of the recipients. In addition, the graduates of the training programs should be familiarized with the labor market.
- The adoption by the Ministry of Labor and the judiciary system of effective measures to ensure the commitment of parties offering care services and the prevention of violation of the terms of labor laws.
- The adoption of a just system for rewards and motivation, and ensuring faster promotion and advancement at work.

- The creation of effective mechanisms to detect and censor violations and prevent their recurrence.
- The creation of hotlines to report violations and ensure a swift response and immediate action.
- The establishment of broad partnerships with the media and human rights organizations to diminish violation of laborers' rights, with special emphasis on foreign workers.
- Building new partnerships between diplomatic missions and labor liaisons of countries exporting laborers on the one hand, and the Ministry of Labor, human rights organizations, and labor syndicates, on the other, in order to strengthen coordination and cooperation between countries importing and exporting laborers and ensure that measures are taken to safeguard female foreign workers' rights.
- Encouraging the establishment of training programs and professional standards to modernize and develop jobs based on the changing needs of recipients, and implementing those programs widely and making them part of the criteria for promotion and professional advancement.

Translated by Nazih Khater

**ENDNOTES**

1. In the past decade, the Arab women's participation in the labor market rose by 7.7 percent, a percentage higher than any rise in other sectors. There has also been a 33.3 percent increase in woman's participation in the labor market (International Labor Organization, 2008).
2. Indicators of Jordanian work market, reported by the Department of General Statistics, 2007.

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# Is a “Father Friendly Workplace” Possible in the Middle East?

## A Personal Report from the Front

Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous

Work-life balance has been on the agenda for almost half a century throughout the Western, industrialized world. More recently, assisting working fathers to reconcile their career and family needs has also gained the support of governments, the social partners (labor and business associations), NGOs, and the media in North America, the European Union, Australia, Japan, and more recently in the new democracies of Europe and Latin America. The international business community has become aware that family-friendly hiring, scheduling, and promotion schemes are good for business. Expanding the logic of family-friendliness from a uniquely women's issue to a genuinely gender mainstreamed approach has boosted productivity, sales, and retention rates and thus benefited employers, employees, customers, and the public sector servicing all three. The bottom line doesn't lie. In the case of the family-friendly workplace, the interests of profits and people go hand-in-hand.

The internationalization of the corporate world in the second half of the 20th century forced companies to deal with the cultural diversity of the workplace throughout the West. With the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, the multicultural workplace became even more complex. Today, Indian, Chinese, Mexican, Brazilian, South African, and Russian manufacturers and trading companies are becoming global players, complicating this diverse mosaic of entrepreneurial traditions even more. Flextime, working online from home, extended parental leave for fathers and mothers, creative promotion schemes allowing working parents to keep up with the

changes in technology and workplace organization while on leave, and part-time employment for mid-level and senior staff all belong to the spectrum of gender mainstreaming options of any modern Western organization. Extending this model to the rest of the world has proven challenging, even daunting, in many cases.

As a developer and designer of gender mainstreaming and family-friendly assessment and training tools in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, I personally experienced how employers in the public, private, and NGO sectors struggled to keep up with the rapid changes in the workplace in this phase of rapid globalization. The work-life balance approach was developed simultaneously in many EU member states and in North America, based on their individual socio-economic traditions. In the US, the women's movement, and more recently the nascent men's movement, worked hand-in-hand with state-of-the-art multinational corporations to convince employers that balancing career and family needs was profitable. In Europe, both the labor movement and the church played a larger role in promoting family-friendly business practices. As the former communist countries prepared to join the EU, they swapped their centralized, Marxist-Leninist gender equality regimes for the Western model, which highlighted flexibility and personal motivation. I was on the ground as a trainer in Hungary in the mid 1990s as this former East bloc country struggled to prepare its workforce for EU accession. The most common argument given for not introducing gender mainstreaming and work-life balance at the time was that “this is a luxury that only the West can afford”. Today Hungary is a

member of the European Union in good standing, having proven capable of integrating the logic of the market and the needs of its nation's workers and families.

While transitioning from Austria to Lebanon over a decade ago, I attempted to adapt the human resources development tools we had designed in Europe for use in the MENA region. At the time, this approach was rejected by both employers and scholars in the region alike as “a luxury that only the West can afford”. Ten years later, globalization has forced MENA organizations, be they non-profit, commercial, or governmental, to become more in tune with international realities. The trend towards American and European certification and accreditation has brought Western monitoring bodies to the region that are also paying closer attention to gender equality and family-friendliness issues. I am now working as an academic with administrative responsibilities and have come to realize how difficult the uphill battle of reconciling career and family needs in Lebanon can be. For example, suggesting that a conference, training program, or career advancement seminar should provide childcare services still meets with resistance from both female and male colleagues.

It remains to be seen who will take the lead within the MENA region in promoting global gender mainstreaming standards in the workplace. Both subsidiaries of multinational corporations and American system Arab universities, with their international format and global perspective, would be a good place to start. For this to work, however, gender policies in general, and work-life balance schemes in particular, must deal with the specific socio-economic traditions prevalent in the region. Reform must be organic if it is to take root and thrive in the Middle East.

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# Situation of and Assistance to Businesswomen in the West Bank

*In line with its mission to enhance networking and communication by extending ties with international organizations working on gender issues, Al-Raida will be reprinting policy and issue briefs prepared by the International Labour Organization in its upcoming issues. The purpose of this joint venture is to promote research on the condition of women in the Arab world, especially with respect to social change and development, and to reach out to women and empower them through consciousness-raising. This brief below is reprinted with permission from the International Labour Organization Regional Office for Arab States published by ILO, 2008.*

This policy brief aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on women enterprise development in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by focusing on the situation of and assistance to businesswomen in the West Bank. It identifies the key constraints and opportunities they face and provides an institutional assessment of their involvement in private sector institutions and the nature of services available to them.

## 1. Context Palestinian Economy

Israel's response to the outbreak of the second intifada in 2000, most critically the ongoing restriction on the movement of people and goods, has been economically devastating to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Israeli closure regime has intensified dramatically, and the expanding network of Israeli settlements, military outposts, checkpoints, and restricted-access roads have effectively subdivided the West Bank into three parts, in addition to East Jerusalem (see United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2008). By 2006, GDP had plummeted to 40 percent below its 1999 level, and an economy once driven by investment and private sector productivity has been reduced to dependence on government consumption financed primarily by international aid, with a rapidly shrinking private sector (World Bank, 2007).

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip public infrastructure has deteriorated due to the damage caused by Israeli incursions as well as neglect by the Palestinian

Authority, which has devoted an ever-increasing proportion of its revenues to the payment of salaries for public sector employees, whose ranks have swelled to compensate for the loss of jobs in the private sector. Recent studies have noted a trend in informalization of jobs, rising levels of own-account employment, greater numbers of micro-enterprises, and more flexible forms of work (Hilal, Al Kafri, & Kuttub, 2008).

## Women's Employment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have very low levels of labor force participation, and those that do participate are segregated into a few sectors. Over the preceding decades, Palestinian workers, mostly men, had become increasingly dependent on the Israeli labor market, while women were confined largely to agriculture, services, and household work in the occupied territories. In the past five years, however, women's labor force participation has increased by more than fifty percent (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Competition among women for jobs in the service sector is intense, and jobs go almost exclusively to those with higher education. Even then, educated women's unemployment rates are very high, especially among young women between the ages of 20 and 24. Women also face family reservations to working outside the home or outside their immediate surroundings because of social and security constraints imposed on their mobility.

## 2. Businesswomen in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

### Situation of Businesswomen

Women-owned enterprises are growing in number at all levels but continue to remain a small minority of all enterprises. Women often indicate to starting own-account work on account of economic necessity and lack of employment opportunities. This increase, especially since the second intifada, is mainly in response to the increase in the unemployment rates of men in the same households. In 2006, 5.4 percent of all enterprises in the West Bank and Gaza were women-owned compared to 26 percent of micro and small enterprises (six employees or less) which were owned by women (PCBS, 2007).

In general women's businesses are small scale, although a few own larger businesses. Types of businesses operated by women vary according to locality. Home-based businesses are more common in rural areas than in refugee camps or urban areas. Education levels appear to have a major impact on the type of business. Women with secondary education or less often tend to run home-based micro enterprises. By contrast, women with post-secondary education and exposure to modern business practices and approaches, run growth-oriented, professional businesses.

The primary constraints to women's entrepreneurship in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are access to

finance, cultural attitudes, and market access. Women entrepreneurs are largely dependent on the support of husbands or male relatives in the form of finance, advice, and encouragement to start up and run their businesses. Among existing women-owned businesses marketing their products and services remains a pressing issue.

## 3. Businesswomen in Private Sector Institutions

**Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture**  
Women constitute 1.5 percent of the membership in the Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture. Women in the chambers are largely involved in the retail and services sectors. The representation of women in the chambers is not often in line with their representation in the labor market.

There are no women representatives on the boards of directors of any of the chambers. A major barrier to change is the delay in the chambers' board elections, which have not been held since 1992. The Federation of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture indicate that women's membership is on the rise, although conclusive data do not exist.

While 62 percent of the women registered in the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture are in commercial activities; the sector of Commerce, Hotels and Restaurants employs only 7.4 percent of employed women. Similarly 34 percent

Table 1. Potential Growth Sectors for Women-Owned Businesses in the West Bank

Sectors	Characteristics	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Agro-processing</li> <li>• Handicrafts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally rural</li> <li>• Little or no formal education required</li> <li>• Any age</li> </ul>	Economically viable only if production is linked to broader domestic market or export markets; Product diversification and quality standards needed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban</li> <li>• Highly educated</li> <li>• Generally younger</li> </ul>	Domestic demand is growing; the market is dynamic and open to women's participation.

of employed women are in Agriculture, Hunting, and Fishing; yet only 2 percent of women registered in the Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture are in agricultural activities.

Chambers that have reported the highest levels of women's membership are those of Bethlehem (7 percent), Jericho (6 percent), and Tulkarem (6 percent). A Businesswomen Committee has recently been formed at the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce to represent the interests of businesswomen. The committee is in the process of developing its mandate and scope of activities. Other local chambers are exploring similar arrangements.

#### Other Private Sector Associations

Recent years have seen the formation of new private sector associations, led by a young generation of business owners with modern management, networking, marketing skills, and a substantive understanding of global economic trends and issues. These newer private sector associations operate in parallel to the Federation

#### Box. 1.

##### Bethlehem Businesswomen Committee

The idea of forming a Businesswomen Committee within Bethlehem Chambers of Commerce has existed since 2001, although it did not materialize until 2007. The committee was formed by eight women members of the chambers from a variety of sectors: tourism, hotel management, cosmetics manufacturing, gift shops, import, and export.

The Businesswomen Committee has conducted a number of activities including training courses, workshops, and conferences. The Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce is planning to allocate a budget to support its activities. Future plans of the Committee include expanding its membership to other women business-owners registered within the Chamber, developing an internal mandate, and electing a board.

of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry and typically specialize in a particular economic sector or sub-sector. They are often established with financial and technical support from donor institutions, with donor contributions often exceeding membership dues and service fees.

Businesswomen and businessmen belong to one or several of these associations in addition to their local chambers. These newer associations exhibit similar patterns to the chambers of commerce, industry, and agriculture regarding women's representation on their boards. A key difference is the fact that they hold regular board elections allowing for greater dynamism and renovation within their leadership. The Palestinian Shippers' Council is one exception to the rule where the board is chaired by a woman.

#### Support Service Providers

The microfinance industry in the West Bank and Gaza Strip consists of nine microfinance institutions and one microfinance bank, which are heavily dependent on donor funds (such as USAID, the

#### Box. 2.

##### Businesswomen Forum-Palestine

In 2006, eight businesswomen founded a women-only association in Ramallah, Businesswomen Forum-Palestine, with the core belief that women's economic participation plays an essential role in the development of the Palestinian economy. The Forum targets self-employed women who do not belong to professional syndicates or unions like the union of pharmacists or lawyers. To date the Forum has received support from numerous donor organizations in the form of funds, training, and technical assistance. A part of the MENA Businesswomen's Network, the Forum currently runs four programs in collaboration with various international organizations. The services it provides include one-on-one consulting for members, organizing workshops and conferences, and networking.

Islamic Development Bank, and the European Commission). Many microfinance initiatives target women enterprises. Despite the growth in recent years of financial services for micro- and small enterprises, the vast majority of women-owned enterprises do not borrow from banks or microfinance institutions in order to avoid risks involved with indebtedness during uncertain times. Real demand for credit remains largely unfulfilled. Moreover, the microfinance industry has been under pressure in recent years due to political and economic conditions. Expansion of services is likely to remain limited unless the environment improves. A number of service providers specifically target women in the form of very small loans through solidarity lending groups of five to seven women who agree to guarantee one another's loans. Business development service providers engage in a range of activities including training, counselling, strategic planning, referrals to financial service providers, and business incubation services. Most business service providers reach only a limited number of beneficiaries as they can not cover their expenses through service fees, and depend heavily on donor funding. Currently, these services are generally provided by NGOs and a small network of private sector specialists. GTZ Small Enterprise Centre is a significant training and consulting service provider to micro- and small entrepreneurs through a network of local providers. However, neither the Small Enterprise Centre nor other providers of business development services have made headway in mainstreaming gender in their programmes.

The technical education and vocational training system in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is small compared to demand, fragmented, and largely unresponsive to labor market needs. Women constitute 30 percent of the graduates from the system, which is highly segregated by gender along traditional lines (for instance with clerical work, hairdressing and sewing for women, and construction, auto repair, and electronics for men). To date the system does very little to encourage entrepreneurship among its graduates. While reform efforts are underway, they have not taken effect to show improved outcomes for young women

graduates in the form of paid employment or self-employment opportunities.

## 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Advancing employment and self-employment of women is being promoted by governmental, private, and non-governmental organizations. Businesswomen in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have made progress in the past decade with respect to their increasing numbers, representation in relevant institutions, and support services they receive. However, they still constitute a small percentage of business owners and continue to face institutional, financial, and social barriers that hinder their success. In particular, women need better access to finance, more education on how to run their business, exposure to growth industries and new market niches, and legal protection to be able to compete and succeed in the business world.

#### Institutional Reform of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture

The legitimacy and influence of the chambers are most likely to increase by holding democratic elections, and expanding membership to include more women, youth and micro- and small enterprises. The Chambers of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture can also better target sectors such as agrobusiness where women business activities are more prominent for bringing more women members on board. The experience of Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in establishing a businesswomen committee provides a good example for replication in other local chambers.

#### Further Progress Needed in Newly Formed Private Sector Associations

Newly formed private sector associations need to prioritize women entrepreneurs. They can start by identifying and documenting good practices among their midst and closely collaborate with organizations such as the Businesswomen Forum in policy advocacy efforts. Immediate actions can include active encouragement and support of women candidates to take part in their boards' elections.

**Gender Mainstreaming Among Business Development Service Providers**

The existing business development service providers need to integrate gender analysis in their work plans and mainstream gender needs and concerns into their programme design and implementation. Specific consultancy services are needed for women business start-ups in determining the feasibility of their business projects. Services also need to better target the large population of unemployed youth, in particular the large number of highly educated unemployed young women. Services that can improve market access through improved product design, quality standards, and links with broader domestic or export markets are a priority for all businesses, but especially women-owned businesses.

**Recalibration of Microfinance Services**

Microfinance services need to be better linked to business development services through backward and forward referral efforts, and market products and services through relationships with other stakeholders providing services to micro- and small enterprises. They should also incorporate gender analysis into market research efforts and solicitations of feedback from clients and improve tracking of gender-responsive data on borrowers and characteristics of their businesses.

**Coordination Role of Palestinian Authority Institutions**

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Ministry of Labor should build linkages between Technical and Vocational Education and Training entrepreneurship, including fields dominated by either men or women, and integrate basic business and financial education into

technical and vocational education curricula to provide graduates with the tools they need to start new enterprises.

**Better Targeting of Businesswomen-specific Advocacy Efforts**

As it expands its membership base, the Businesswomen Forum can document good practices, and collaborate with other advocacy organizations on policy dialogue. The Forum is well positioned to play an advocacy role on regulatory reforms, and commenting on pending legislation.

The Forum can also collaborate with business development service providers for better targeting of businesswomen's needs including: individual and group business counselling, identification of existing and potential markets, legal support, enterprise registration support, and exchange visits with relevant institutions abroad.

**Improved Visibility of Women Entrepreneurs**

The Women Business Forum can establish better visibility, support businesswomen, and enhance their publicity through initiatives such as the Palestine Award for Businesswomen, in coordination with professional organizations that can provide support for the nominated businesswomen of the year. The Forum can also encourage women to enter sectors that have been historically dominated by men. Taking the lead in initiating research projects and coordinating them jointly with the Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics and other business development support organizations can ensure the collection, documentation, analysis, and dissemination of gender-responsive data on businesswomen and women entrepreneurs to inform policy and advocacy initiatives.

**ENDNOTES**

1. This policy brief is based on a study on the "Situational and institutional assessment of businesswomen in the West Bank", a joint research initiative of the ILO Regional Office for Arab States and Riyada Consulting and Training in the West Bank.
2. Among these institutions are: Palestinian Federation of Industries; Palestinian Businessmen Association; PALTRADE; Palestinian Banking Association; Palestinian Information Technology Association; Insurance Association of Palestine; Palestinian Tourism Association; Palestinian Contractors' Union; and Palestinian Shippers' Council.

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# Book Reviews

## Highly Valued by Both Sexes: Activists, Anthr/apologists, and Female Genital Mutilation

Tobe Levin

Review of Hernlund, Ylva and Bettina Shell-Duncan, Eds. *Transcultural Bodies. Female Genital Cutting in Global Context*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2007.

On the back cover of *Transcultural Bodies. Female Genital Cutting in Global Context*, Richard Shweder praises the volume for taking “us a huge step beyond the global activist and first-world media (mis-) representation of FGM” that fails to acknowledge “genital surgeries ... [as] highly valued by both sexes.” Strongly implied is that the “highly valued” is, in fact, worthwhile. This characteristic complicity with a decidedly harmful traditional practice makes the book ineffectual for activists; of limited use for journalists; and downright dangerous for intellectuals who already prefer passivity. In an attempt to condone, Shweder points out, where genitals are altered, most people approve. But of course, in ethnicities that cut, the majority conforms. Who knows this better than NGOs do?

Yet this book, assigned to students, goes beyond a single (possibly forgivable) instance of ‘talking-down’ to activists: its designated adversary is “the global movement to ‘eradicate FGM’” (p. 1). Were you aware, for instance, that “the global eradication campaign itself ... violate[s] several human rights” (p. 26)? Perhaps sensing the fragility of such a charge, the editors warn us not “to draw up overly simplistic dichotomies between ‘Western activists’ on the one hand and ‘African women’ on the other – as such identities often coincide – nor to trivialize the powerful and committed engagement of ... ‘insiders’ with a true stake in the practices who are working for their elimination” (p. 26). Seemingly apposite, on deeper reading this passage reveals a perilous distinction between the “insider” stakeholders who can only hail from FGM-practicing cultures [“‘insiders’ with a true stake in the practice”] and other volunteers whose fervor is nourished by empathy alone. Such a triage can only be based on ignorance (or worse, deliberate suppression) of anti-FGM work as not only honorable but indispensable.

Yet, the recurring dismissal of courageous efforts by African, African-American, Afro-European and European activists together, however deeply disturbing, is still only a hint of what is wrong with the tone of this collection. More serious are repeated expressions of disdain for (most) NGOs that oppose FGM; consistent misunderstanding of the challenging relationship between advocacy and journalism; and, ultimately, the gauntlet thrown to activists by that portion of the academy in anthropology departments, mainly and significantly based in North America, who claim the issue for their discipline as best suited to pontificate about it. Let me be clear: writing this review during a teaching stint in China, resident in Germany, active in Europe, I see in this volume a U.S.-based export that has already had a corrosive influence on some European university approaches to the subject (fortunately less so in Africa). Close textual analysis reveals a consistent unhelpful undercurrent: the issue is too fraught to touch! Such a hands-off message paralyzes the academic conscience and may well end in depriving NGOs of active support and research funds.

“Oh, dear,” you may think by now, “this book has reached the unintended reader.” Perhaps. Not an anthropologist, I have little patience for co-opting (and subordinating) FGM to illuminate “wider discourses and ensuing debates” (p. 203) on allied topics, an approach shared by these essays. But

I am credentialed: an Associate of the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research at Harvard University and a thirty-two year veteran in advocacy to eradicate FGM, my activism embraces the EuroNet FGM, FORWARD-Germany, and Feminist Europa (Heidelberg) which, since 1998, has carried my reviews of books on FGM published in German, French, Italian and Spanish. The dearth of attention in U.S.-based writing to other-language sources deserves mention, for Africa and Europe offer alternative approaches. Finally, a pioneering collection of essays co-edited with University of Ghana’s Augustine H. Asaah called *Empathy and Rage. Female Genital Mutilation in African Literature* (Oxfordshire: Ayebia, 2009; distributed in the U.S. by Lynne Rienner) shows that what *Transcultural Bodies* refuses to do can indeed be done: advocacy and academia can join hands IF we want to see FGM end. This, however, is not what *Transcultural Bodies* aims to achieve

Despite lip-service to hopes of the rite’s demise, hardly a chapter in the Rutgers UP publication is likely to speed eradication (a word, by the way, that its editors dislike). From terminology that refuses to see the amputation of girls’ genitals as a mutilation to multiple framings of the issue that neglect international consensus on human and children’s rights, the book reveals the serpentine nature of its discourse in seemingly acceptable (if repetitive) statements such as this by contributor Aud Talle: “Writing about female circumcision cannot be anything other than a blend of rigid scholarship and ‘sympathy’ writing” (p. 106). But “female circumcision” is not the issue! “Circumcision” means surgical removal of the clitoral prepuce, hardly the kind of ablation to which most girls are prey.

This is what FGM victims confront:

As soon as the circumciser began cutting her flesh, the [fourteen or fifteen year old Maasai] girl started to fight back. ... The women [who thronged around her] ... did not manage to hold her down. Finally, the elder brother and guardian ... told the women ... to use ropes to bind her. ... The operation had to be executed immediately because the cattle were restlessly waiting to get out to ... pasture, and all the guests who had gathered were eager to begin ... feasting. (p. 94)

As a result, the assistants attempted to lasso

“the [girl’s] ankles [as she] ... tried desperately to kick ... off [the restraints]. The struggle continued for a while before [she] tired” enough to permit bondage. But without room in which to wrench her thighs apart, the actors needed outside intervention. It was soon forthcoming. “One of the men watching the scene ... and waiting for the women to ... finish... approached the house to offer his [help. He] forced his stick through the mud wall..., made a hole, and pulled out one of the rope ends. The other rope was fastened to a roof beam at the entrance to the house” (pp. 94-95).

This narrative, not yet at its climax, covers one entire page in Talle’s chapter, for attention is deliberately diverted from the action by interventions explaining each step from the perpetrators’ point of view, so that what is happening shall not appear to be what it is: violence, and quite specifically a form of violence criminalized by most nation’s laws and international covenants. But to get to the point:

At last, the circumciser could proceed with her work. With tiny movements she carved away the clitoris and the labia minora, while the women in loud voices instructed her

how to cut. The blood rushed forward, and for us outside the actual scene, it was as if the excited voices of the women and the heavy breathing of the girl would never ... end. (p. 95)

Wait a moment. If the observer is outside, how does she know about these “tiny movements”? How can she discern what’s cut? In fact, she “peeped through [an] opening in the roof that the women had made beforehand to lighten up the room” (p. 95). Spying with her are any number of children of both sexes as well as the volunteer male who is “all the time holding tightly on to the rope [while gazing] into the narrow room to check that the women did a proper job” (p. 95).

By this time, you, too, feel your stomach clench and, as intended, your sympathies may well have shifted from the teen to the anthropologist who, almost by accident, has found herself ethically compromised. I respect the integrity that leads Talle to admit:

The smell of blood and sweat forced itself through the wall and incorporated us into what was happening inside. My own pulse beat more quickly than normal. Instantly, I understood what a personal challenge anthropological fieldwork could be. I was witnessing ‘torture’, [distancing quotation marks glaring in the original] and the fact that I remained standing with the others outside somehow sanctioned what happened inside the house (p. 95).

My point exactly, with one proviso: anthropologists don’t “somehow sanction” such an event. They give legitimacy to it and thereby vitiate activists’ urgent appeals. For FGM IS torture – sans quotation marks. And even when performed in clinics under general anesthesia, the amputations remain medically pointless and a violation of human rights.

More than a few authors in the collection sustain similar distortions, with Talle singled out for being so typical of much that is dubious here. If, admittedly, some chapters rely on objective data and even contain intriguing new data on sexuality after FGM, many also share faults with the above passage where emotional withdrawal abrogates scientific rigor. For example, Talle scripts like a creative writer in attributing thoughts and motives she could not possibly know to various actors and, in her effort to mediate the violence, abandons objectivity. She notes that “the nervousness of the women who executed the operation [how does she know they feel nervous?] had spread to the observers [who, we have been told before, were, if anything, hungry], and it was as if we sought support in each other’s glances and presence” (p. 95). Support? Why? Is there something untoward going on? Something, perhaps, thought to be wrong? Procedurally, certainly, as the victim was expected to cooperate, but by now she has been subdued and the usual ululations are, presumably, covering her screams, notwithstanding the “heavy breathing” curiously audible despite the reiterated loudness of in-hut attendants. Given our common understanding of the English language, the author can only be projecting her own malaise, – her own sense that indeed, she is witness to a crime –, onto those whose behavior shows no sense of wrong-doing whatsoever. Yet, in the end, like others in the guild, the anthropologist holds to a creed that pardons what she sees.

Evidence of the author’s ambivalence and thereby her honesty is, to her credit, shared with us, emerging from a repeated disclaimer that prefaces this scene: her Maasai informants told her that this time, things “did not proceed ‘normally’” (p. 93) and she wishes her readers to believe this too – despite a dearth of scientific data in support. The research question is: given a statistically relevant sample of girls subjected to the cut, how many buck? How many grit their teeth in silence?

While told what is supposed to happen, what actually takes place, and how often, we simply don’t know. And while I, too, lack the hard facts, having read testimonies and talked to victims, I have good reason to believe that girls’ opposition is hardly uncommon. They do fight back.

Before the halaleiso had even touched her, Yurop cried out. At once, one of the women slapped her. ... The general consensus held that this was no time to exercise forbearance ... but in Yurop’s case [nothing] quiet[ed] her down. She went right on screaming so they [gagged her with the cloth] ready for that purpose. ... [And when] it was Ifra’s turn, ... like all the others, she [too] lit out of there. .... So first [they] had to catch her and, with fanatical violence, threw her onto the box. Then, repeat performance: Ifra screamed and tried to free herself, and again the women fought and gagged her. And so it went with Fatma, Muna, Suleiha and Nasra. All shrieked, all were gagged, the halaleiso never slowed down. Between girls she wiped blood off the box and with her foot kicked sand over the puddle on the floor. And now there was only one left, and that was me. (pp.173-174)

Nura Abdi, in this excerpt from *Tränen im Sand*, presented as Desert Tears in the last chapter of *Empathy and Rage*, is, admittedly, not scientific. We see only five girls who resist but in ways that seem both believable and representative.

Representing the challenge that anthropologists face when confronting scenes like the above, Talle has come to terms with an early admitted distaste she eventually sheds. Because “female and male circumcision” were “the order of the day,” as a:

cultural phenomenon [they] no longer raised feelings of anxiety or indignation. In Geertzian terms I could remain ‘experience-distant’ to that sort of bodily intrusion (Geertz 1983). Particularly when confronted with this piece of ethnography, it felt safe to repose in the cognition of cultural differences (p. 93).

Such a monumentally unsafe stance – vulnerable to ethical scrutiny – makes even the editors queasy. Hoping to shroud complicity, they evoke a “dual” among “FGC” scholars who oppose “rights and culture,” enabling them to mediate by applying a “prorights anthropology” and Marie-Bénédicte Dembour’s “pendulum” theory. As Hernlund and Shell-Duncan present her, Dembour sees in universal human rights one ‘extreme’ influence on society and in cultural rights (including misogyny) an equal and opposite ‘extreme’. These concepts mark two ends of an arc. However, once one tendency ascends, the pendulum swings back toward the other.

Agreeing that human rights and cultural rights signify extremes, Hernlund and Shell-Duncan write:

It is our ambition that this volume add to the growing number of voices in the field of FGC studies and activism that call for a move ‘to the middle’. (p. 2)

If you are, like me, unsure of what “the middle” means when the topic is ablation of a five-year-old’s genitals, the editors clarify by quoting Elvin Hatch, an “extremist” with whom they disagree. He exemplifies the ‘questionable’ tendency to see excision as a “‘test case’” for the limits of cultural relativism by “group[ing] FGC with political executions, genocides, and honor killings as ‘situations in which ethical relativism is untenable’” (Hatch 1997, 372 qtd. in Hernlund and Shell-Duncan 7).

Now, am I correct to understand that whereas political executions, genocides and honor killings really are ethically reprehensible, FGM is not? And if FGM is not reprehensible, that is because the non-anthropologist fails to distinguish among more harmful and less harmful, that is, not reprehensible, types? The answer is yes.

While some scholars “wrestl[e] with ... alleged and real health effects of FGC” (p. 1) others “casually lump together under the label FGM/FGC/FC ... diverse practices with varied consequences,” thereby causing “confusion” with regard to “the effects that FGC can indeed have on health and well-being” (p. 2). Yes, as this wording suggests, more than a few contributors imply that some forms of FGM aren’t all that bad, an argument whose legitimacy should, at the very latest, have ceded to the Lancet whose findings have not guided editorial choices but have merely been acknowledged in a footnote about “the World Health Organization[’s taskforce] ... on female genital mutilation and obstetric outcome [that] released a six-country study” (p. 44). The first such investigation based on a statistically relevant sample, “did find that women with [any form of] FGM, compared to uncut women, experienced an elevated risk of certain complications such as postpartum hemorrhage, stillbirth, or early neonatal death (WHO 2006)” (p. 44). One can, I think, conclude, supported by the impeccable authority of one of the world’s leading medical journals, that reducing risk of “postpartum hemorrhage, stillbirth, or early neonatal death” means FGM is not a good idea for anyone.

Now, in June 2006, when Lancet appeared, “the manuscript was going to press,” so that, we are given to understand, it was too late for changes. Untrue! After all, the footnote is there. Decisive for inaction was rather the fact that Lancet’s results make invalid not only considerable amounts of text but even entire chapters based on the idea that FGM’s damage to health had not yet been measured and hence could not be known. Or as Shweder would have it, “lack of evidence of harm is equivalent to evidence of lack of harm” (p. 14). So why not err on the side of those who cut? Granted, adapting the text to new knowledge would have been a Herculean task, but allowing misinformation not only to remain but keep its place at the heart of the project vitiates the credibility of the book as a whole by revealing it to be even more strongly in thrall to ideology.

More important, though, than the medical journal’s inconvenient timing is the option the editors neglected that could have avoided this embarrassment altogether. Had they only relied on activists, and in particular the study’s principal collaborator Efua Dorkenoo, they would at least have known the work was underway and what it intended to uncover. They then could have anticipated outcomes. This is not to say that Dorkenoo wasn’t discrete; even when speaking with insiders, confidentiality was strictly observed. Nonetheless, simply talking to her or another of the activist investigators, one of whom is at Harvard Law School, might have prevented faulty scholarship occasioned by the *idée fixe* that cultural majorities are, if not somehow in the right on this specific issue, also not entirely wrong.

As to the ethics here, if ending the practice brings clear advantages, continuing it does not, a state of affairs recognized by Ousmane Sembène, the pioneer Senegalese cineaste, whose Moolaadé prefigured Lancet’s findings. In 2004 in Cannes, the movie took first prize in the category “un autre regard,” and both Sembène and starring actress Fatoumata Coulibaly told me in private conversations that, without a doubt, it is against FGM. Nonetheless, in another egregious example of its sleight of hand, *Transcultural Bodies* reads Moolaadé quite differently – as not primarily about FGM at all.

Really? Here’s our synopsis of the film:

The storyline revolves around Collé Gallo Sy, an excised mother, who had freed her only daughter from the so-called purification rites, or ‘salindé’, organized every seven years. In this particular season, [six] little girls run away; [two drown themselves in the well while four others] seek protection – called Moolaadé – from Collé, whose defiance is known. She protects the children but [in doing so] revolts against her husband, his family, and the village as a whole. In conflict are the right to [protection] and attachment to tradition that approves excision. For her opposition, Collé is subjected to a brutal public whipping, her enraged husband trying to [compel] her to recant. His efforts elicit rapturous applause. ‘Break her! Break her!’ the crowd shrieks. But the forces of change are too strong. Increasingly, women join Collé to triumph over male-authored repression symbolized by the edict to burn all radios, a source of enlightened ideas. (Empathy v)

This quote, from Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana’s dedication in *Empathy and Rage*, honors Sembène for being the first to produce a “full-length feature film contesting FGM” (v). Now, in her contribution to the Hernlund and Shell-Duncan volume, L. Amede Obiora provides further evidence of the book’s ideology-driven perspective as she takes Sembène and vitiates his forthright message. Interpreted not as a film against FGM, in Obiora’s hands, its

Important lesson ... is that to respect the autonomy of individuals and the significance of their membership in local cultural worlds is to empower them to engage in critical deliberations of their positioning and commitments. This lesson is, arguably, subverted by the tenuous but relative expansion of the menu of options achieved for African immigrants by promoting female circumcision as evidence of persecution in the U.S. immigration process. (p. 71)

According to my explication de texte this means, (a) ‘female circumcision’ should not be construed as persecution; and (b) should not be (mis)used by women to gain asylum in the United States because (c) doing so counters Sembènes main purpose in Moolaadé, to (d) reveal through a chronotope that break-through need not be imposed from without but can emerge from within. This, in turn, is important, as (e) a “fresh alternative” for all of us activist outsiders in our “narratives that typically construe the practice as overdetermined [sic] by the vested interests of the elite and portray African women as monolithically condemned to slavish conformity” (Obiora, p. 70).

Now, I agree that Sembène wanted to show what Obiora saw – the positive deviant deploying indigenous options – but did not wish to exclude what she covers up. When she writes that he “referee[d] the struggles surrounding female circumcision” (p. 70) the reader automatically places him at neutral, as referees must of necessity be. At risk of redundancy, this is not so. The film and film-maker oppose FGM, even if the means to do so, as Stephen Bishop argues in *Empathy and Rage*, draw on an “oppositional narrative” that works from within the culture. For Obiora, the fact that an opponent is permitted to emerge at all – and, presumably, is merely thrashed, not killed – trumps all else. She extols “women ... act[ing] as change agents” (p. 70) in contrast to an asylum discourse that reduces them to passive victims. This activity, in turn, is what counts, making the object of protest – FGM – almost superfluous:

... the film best animates the possibilities for change that inhere in a culture and illustrates



the reality of indigenous transformative paradigms that often lie latent, even as arguably less efficient and effective reform aspirations are pursued. At once depicting culture as a surrogate for oppression and culture as a spontaneous zone of empowerment and resistance, the film extols knowledge as power, tracing how the culturally competent deploy the rich repertoire of cultural knowledge to fund radical change. (p. 70)

Now, in light of my discussion with Coulibaly, herself an activist who suffered from excision as did the character she played, I'm disinclined to limit the protagonist to one of the "culturally competent deploying the rich repertoire of [indigenous] knowledge" (p. 70), especially because the thematic shift in popular opinion, from women supporting to women opposing the 'rite', reaches fruition only once their catalyzing radios are ordered burned, and these had urged that excision be stopped. Thus, in language better suited to the cinema screen, what Collé does is fight FGM; reveal the disfigurement resulting from numerous crude C-sections occasioned by her genital wounds; nearly amputates her finger by biting it in pain following a symbolic superimposition of FGM on intercourse, and shows enormous courage in not succumbing to the lash. That Obiora defends these several scenes of torture – both by failing to censure them and by ennobling them under the mantle of culture – is, to say the least, ethically suspect.

A heavy charge, I know, given that, like most contributors to this volume, her aim is not only not to oppose FGM but to attack its critics who (a) perpetuate negative stereotypes of Africans, (b) supply "demonizing narratives" (p. 73), (c) present "circumcision-as-persecution," (d) "ratify" ... Orientalist discourses [that] ultimately subvert a paradigm of inclusion sensitive to multiculturalism and [(e)] reinforce reactionary gatekeeping [sic]" (p. 73). To my companion militants in the European Network and the IAC, I say: take heed!

Lest I give the impression that direct interaction with activists takes place nowhere in this text, that isn't the case either, but activism's possible successes are explained away. For example, when visiting the London Black Women's Health Action Project, Aud Talle spies FGM [female genital mutilation] is a worldwide issue, a pamphlet that provides the occasion to communicate her feelings about its terms:

[Because] the publication uses "FGM" in the title, [she] commented to Sarah that [she] preferred the more relativistic "circumcision" for the practice. Sarah turned against [her] and said, "But it is mutilation!" Her sharp answer surprised [Talle who] could do nothing but agree. (pp. 99-100)

This leads the author to consider the relationship between anthropologists' *Weltanschauung* and Sarah's concrete situation. Sarah, she notes, had been against FGM even before she left Somalia. In a British environment that values resistance, Sarah is assumed unable to comprehend a relativistic point of view. So, for the time being, Talle refrains from trying to convince her.

Talle continues, however, trying to convince herself that relative values remain valid. One informant, for instance, proud of the courage she showed as a girl, now admits that the *schmerz* "came afterward, when she married and had children. 'This was an experience of agony', she added" (p. 101). And goes on

without bitterness that she had suffered "in vain," while she pointed to her four-year-old daughter, noting that she "at least" should be spared from being "sewn." This woman

had an unusual clarity when she spoke; it was as if she had been exposed to a sudden revelation – as if her present resistance had just waited to be awakened. (p. 101)

Had Talle read Nura Abdi, she would not have been taken by surprise. This type of epiphany does indeed take place.

In Abdi's chapter called "Am I even a woman?" the Somali has asked for asylum in Germany and spends the first few weeks sharing housing with other refugees where "nothing" in the experience "rocked [her] as much as learning that not all women in the world are circumcised" (p. 260). The discovery, to be sure, is far from amusing. A rumor having been set in motion that Nura "was the only one who wouldn't sleep around," an Ethiopian friend challenges her:

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you have a boyfriend?" Hanna wanted to know. ... Then she looked at me as though a light had turned on and said, "Oh, right, you're Somali." I was taken aback. "What do you mean by that?" "You're circumcised," she said. An awful premonition shook me. "And you're not?" I asked, doubt in my voice. ... So out it came.

And I learned that there are two kinds of women. (p. 260)

Soon the asylum colony, composed of pre-fabricated 'containers' housing newly-arrived Afghans, Africans from East and West, Balkan refugees and Iraqis, was, despite the language barrier, abuzz with the news.

And from all sides I was met by shocked, disbelieving, pitying glances. Above all the Yugoslavian women couldn't contain themselves. "How can anyone do a thing like that to such a pretty girl?" they wailed, shook their heads and felt obliged to offer comfort. As for me, I'd fallen into a nightmare. It appeared that not even the Afghan women had been circumcised! O.K., Ethiopians are Christian, I thought, so that might be [why]. But Afghans are Moslems like me, and they don't do it? I felt myself hurled into hell.

But the worst of it was, they appeared to consider me a cripple, half a woman incapable of any feeling. They behaved as though I had been the victim of a crime, as though it were shameful to be circumcised – whereas I had always believed, circumcision made me clean!

I wasn't going to stand for that. It came to verbal blows between Hanna and me. "You're running around with all your filth," I hammered into her, "and proud of it?! Maybe you think it's better to stink like the uncircumcised? At least ... I don't smell!" I was angry. "Aren't you ashamed to be like a whore down there?" And Hanna, scornfully: "You're as smooth as a wall between your legs. They killed your sensitivity. They've destroyed you." I was shaking with rage. "Look at me!" I screamed. "I'm every bit as much a Mensch as you are! I have feelings just like you! And I'll bet I can love even better than you can!" ... Didn't I have to defend myself?

But to tell the truth, I didn't know what I was talking about. As a matter of fact, I knew nothing at all. Nothing about my body and nothing about sex. I'd wound up in a situation [unimaginable even] in my worst nightmare. In Somalia you talked about *gudniin* in lovely language, as you would about good fortune. Yet here I was, surrounded by people who reacted to it with horror. But putting two and two together, I drew the same conclusion as everybody else: There was something wrong with me. I became foreign to myself. (pp. 260-263)

Like Fadumo Korn in *Born in the Big Rains. A Memoir of Somalia and Survival*, Nura brings to exile her pride in purity, only to discover that what she prized was scorned, and what she scorned is praised – the canonical experience of the ‘circumcised’ woman in the Diaspora. Fortunate to meet a gynecologist sensitive to the infibulated woman’s needs, she begins to explore her body, and when her mentor tells her, “What you’ve suffered affects not only your body, but also your soul” (p. 299) she accepts his counsel. After long delays, she seeks defibulation, recovers a kind of wholeness, and concludes: “Circumcision is barbarity, mutilation without anesthesia, and we should put an end to it. Of course not in my wildest dreams did I ever think I’d write a book about it. But I often thought I’d someday want to help other women [prey to the practice]” (p. 347).

What is my point in offering this lengthy excerpt? To refute charges against us activists. Contrary to Hernlund and Shell-Duncan’s viewpoint, advocacy rarely lacks context nor deals in stereotype. Nor does it fail to acknowledge that, indeed, facing up to the loss of both genitalia and value is a trial of considerable magnitude. As the Bamako Declaration regrets, at least one generation – those cut and then displaced, literally or ideologically – will have it hard, as Abdi and Korn, among others, do. Yet their voices, though rare, are also representative. They do not, in sum, fit the description of campaigners readers find again and again in *Transcultural Bodies* portrayed as creators of “hegemonic FGM discourse” (Talle, p. 101), fomenters of “moral panic” (Johnsdotter, p. 20), authors of “traveling narrative [that] is thoroughly fetishized, in both Marxian and Freudian senses of that term” (Piot, p. 164), “borrow[ing] racist, imperialist and missionary images of Africa that are centuries old” (Piot 164), or – by far the most serious charge – not only ineffective in ending the practice but responsible for slowing its demise by raising the issue in public at all. Why all the fuss, some contributors ask, if the ‘rite’, at least in Europe, is dying of its own accord? Talle and Johnsdotter, among others, hold this view.

The answer is simple: too little research shows this to be so. It wasn’t until September 2007 that primary investigator Efua Dorkenoo released, at a ceremonial occasion in the House of Lords, the very first epidemiological study of FGM in England and Wales. Similar studies in other European countries are rare, with figures generally extrapolations based on estimated numbers of migrant daughters from excising cultures. And just as France proves with *Exciseuses* that operators have either been flown in or are resident in Europe, a German hidden camera in 1999 (Schlaglicht) showed an Egyptian physician’s willingness to perform a clitoridectomy. The doctor, disbarred but never prosecuted (as no crime took place), admitted he knew it would have been against the law but, among us, you know, we’ll keep it all hush-hush. Waris Dirie, in *Desert Children*, a book all about the mutilation of African girls in Europe, also sees mutilation going on, as does the EuroNet.

Hernlund and Shell-Duncan, however, and, above all, Johnsdotter, a major proponent of the self-vanishing school, claim to have more reliable sources to argue that not only is the number of affected girls diminishing – in spite of FGM advocacy – but will likely continue to do so without any public attention at all. Just look at Israel, Johnsdotter points out. The Beta Israel have stopped. Indeed they have, but theirs is a very special case based on immigrants’ desire to be Israeli and specifically not to preserve but to shed the ‘culture’ of their homeland in which their very name – Falasha, or stranger – meant they did not belong. This motivation is decisive and not shared by other migrant groups who have unwillingly left.

Unwilling migrants do indeed tend to honor aspects of culture that preserve rather than dilute identity, and FGM is indisputably one of those practices. Yet Johnsdotter, in one of

the contributions which, I admit, angers me most, generalizes from her dissertation based on interviews conducted with an interpreter among fewer than 100 Somali immigrants in Malmo that the practice has as good as disappeared. The implication is, therefore, that national governments, the EU, NGOs and private donors are wasting their money funding advocacy groups to fight a phantom. How does she know it’s an apparition, FGM performed in the EU? Because Sweden, as well as most other nations, has yet to prosecute even a minimal number of charges.

In a few [trials] there was a possibility that illegal female circumcision had been performed but no way to prove it. The large share of unfounded suspected cases shows that the level of alertness is high in Sweden. It is unlikely that there is a substantial, but hidden, incidence of female circumcision, since most cases handled by the authorities turn out to be groundless. (p. 132)

Here the abyss between academics and advocates appears at its most chilling. Activists know why this is so, because the problem lies at the very heart of advocacy work. Not because the charges are unfounded do cases escape the purview of the law, but because we NGOs wring our hands, clutch our hearts, and tax our minds when faced with the two untenable options: denounce parents and alienate communities – but go to court, or plod along in educational efforts that strive to include, not alienate, immigrant communities while at the same time risking girls’ health and ourselves being charged with facilitating mutilators. In meetings lasting hours and hours, activists dissect these options to reach what is anything but a globalized, hegemonic response and, I admit, I resent the presumed superiority of ivory tower ideologues who research and report but far less often ACT.

As you can see, this anthology has, to risk being unacademic about it, gotten my goat, and the screed you have just read is, in fact, the first negative review I’ve ever written, preferring in most cases to let unhelpful books simmer in silence. But here I felt the gauntlet had been too clearly and insistently hurled, and, if anything, I regret not having penned this sooner. For Martha Nussbaum is right:

We should keep FGM on the list of unacceptable practices that violate women’s human rights, and we should be ashamed of ourselves if we do not use whatever privilege and power that has come our way to make it disappear forever. (qtd in Hernlund & Shell-Duncan, p. 26).

By this time you know what Hernlund and Shell-Duncan have to say about this. They ask, “Who exactly is ‘we?’” Quite! We are dedicated activists. They are not. Instead, they denounce “denunciations of foreign traditions as morally retrograde,” (p. 26) a quality that the traditions, in turn, are obviously not. Or are they? You decide.

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# News

## Lecture on “Political Progress of Women: Breaking Traditional Barriers”

The Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University (IWSAW-LAU) in cooperation with the Embassy of the United States of America hosted on Tuesday, December 1, 2009, H.E. Ambassador Swanee Hunt who gave a lecture titled “Political Progress of Women: Breaking Traditional Barriers”.

The talk focused on the participation of women in politics in different countries around the world and in the United States, highlighting similarities and differences. Hunt underscored the fact that to this day women are still underrepresented in governments worldwide. Hunt explained that the need to have more women as politicians stems from the fact that, when in politics, women bring significant changes to women’s rights. In addition, she emphasized that research has shown that countries where women are present in politics experience lower levels of corruption and bribery, as well as economic welfare due to renewed public trust in the government. According to her, the main reason why women lag behind in politics is that women themselves are reluctant to run for office because they view politics as a “dirty game” and women tend to often undermine their leadership capacities. At the same time, the many roles society expects women to play, the stereotypes, political party gatekeepers, and lack of resources, are among the other barriers that continue to block women’s attempts to become political leaders.

## Seminar on: “Literary Readings in the Holy Bible and the Qur’an”

On the occasion of ‘Beirut’s designation as the World Book Capital for 2009’, the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World at the Lebanese American University, and the Association of Lebanese Researchers, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, organized a seminar on December 3, 2009 entitled: “Literary Readings in the Holy Bible and the Qur’an”.

The opening ceremony was under the patronage and presence of H.E. Salim Wardeh, Minister of Culture. Researchers and experts in the field of religious and cultural studies, affiliated to prominent local universities and institutions, participated in the seminar.



From left to right: Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, IWSAW Director, H.E. Salim Wardeh, Minister of Culture, Dr. Joseph Jabbra, LAU president, & Dr. Hosn Abboud.

## International Women’s Day: Signing the Memorandum of Understanding & Launching the “Who Is She” online Database

On the occasion of the International Women’s Day, the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW-LAU) held a ceremony on March 2, 2010 to launch the “Who Is She” in Lebanon online database. The database is a collaborative project between IWSAW and the Danish Centre for Information on Women and Gender (KVINFO).

The ceremony also included the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between LAU and the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW).

The evening ended with a short film of young Lebanese citizens being asked about some of Lebanon’s most influential women. Although the short film was light-hearted, the message was serious: Lebanon’s pioneering women are absent from the country’s consciousness.

The First Lady of the Lebanese Republic, Mrs. Wafa Michel Suleiman, was the guest of honor for this year and she was offered an LAU shield by Dr. Joseph Jabbra, LAU president, in recognition of her efforts to empower women in Lebanon.

Ministers, deputies, ambassadors, representatives from the Internal Security Forces and the Lebanese Army, prominent Lebanese women, as well as representatives from different NGO’s attended the ceremony.



Dr. Joseph Jabbra, LAU president and Dr. Dima Dabbous-Sensenig, IWSAW Director, handing the LAU shield to First Lady Mrs. Wafa Michel Suleiman.



Maitre Fadi Karam and Dr. Joseph Jabbra signing the Memorandum of Understanding between LAU and NCLW.





## About Who Is She in Lebanon Online Database

The Who Is She in Lebanon online database is a project that started in 2008 following a bilateral partnership between the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU), and the Danish Centre for Information on Women and Gender (KVINFO), a grant-maintained selfgoverning institution under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture in Denmark.

The aim behind this project is to establish a user-friendly online database that provides access to biographical information on leading and noteworthy contemporary Lebanese women from a range of areas of expertise, including opinion leaders, senior managers, politicians, professionals, artists, and researchers.

IWSAW aims to make the Who Is She in Lebanon online database as comprehensive as possible by being thoroughly representative of the achievements of women in Lebanon. At the same time, the database will be duly selective to reflect a high level of achievement by every woman listed, depending on her field of expertise.

## Accessing the Who Is She in Lebanon Online Database

The Who Is She in Lebanon online database can be accessed from anywhere in the world at: <http://whoisshe.lau.edu.lb>

## Using the Who Is She in Lebanon Online Database

You can browse the online database by typing the name of an expert in the search box, and then click on "search" to reveal a list of results. To view the profile of a listed expert, simply double click on her name.

The screenshot shows a web profile for Leila Serhan. At the top, there is a header with the title "Who Is She in Lebanon?" and logos for IWSAW and LAU. Below the header, there are navigation links: "View", "Edit", and "Translate". The profile is for "Leila Serhan" and includes a small portrait photo. The profile is organized into several sections:

- Personal Information:** Title: General Manager
- Contact information (work):** Organization/Institution: Microsoft Lebanon and Emerging Markets; Location: 961 1 953344 ext. 321 & 323; Fax: 961 1 953349; Mobile phone: 961 3 772201; Work email address: Leila.Serhan@microsoft.com
- Education:** Bachelor degree, Business Administration, 1996, American University of Beirut, Lebanon.
- Areas of Expertise:** Information and Communication Technologies; Gender; Corporate Social Responsibility
- Language:** French; English; ARABIC
- Work history:** General Manager, 2009 - present, Microsoft Lebanon and Emerging Markets; Regional Business Manager, 2007-2009, Microsoft North Africa, Eastern Mediterranean and Pakistan; Small & Medium Enterprises Manager, 2006 - 2007, Microsoft Eastern Mediterranean and Pakistan; Marketing Director, 2002 - 2006, Microsoft Eastern Mediterranean and Pakistan; Finance Manager, 1996 - 2002, LibanCell S.A.L.
- Honorary office and memberships:** Vice President of Women in IT, 2010 - present; Active Member in Women in IT, 2007 - 2010.

At the bottom, contact information is provided: Who Is She in Lebanon - IWSAW - LAU, P.O. Box: 13-0553, Chouran Beirut, 1102 2801, Lebanon. Tel.: 961 1 795455 or 961 3 791314; Fax: 961 1 791945; E-mail: [iwsaw@lau.edu.lb](mailto:iwsaw@lau.edu.lb)

Sample web profile from Who is She database.

If the search does not lead to any results, or to the information you want, you can proceed using one of three other alternative search modes:

1. Guided Search: To view the names of all the experts in the database.
2. Keyword Search: To search names in specific fields of expertise, professions, or organizations.
3. Alphabetic Search: To browse names of experts in alphabetical order.

## Staying informed: Browsing Recently Added Profiles

To the right side of the home page of the Who Is She in Lebanon online database, users can directly view and browse the most recently added profiles.