ARAB WOMEN

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– *The Economist*

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- To help prevent, through publicity about violations of human rights, such problems from developing into dangerous and destructive conflicts which, when polarised, are very difficult to resolve; and

- To foster, by its research findings, international understanding of the factors which create prejudiced treatment and group tensions, thus helping to promote the growth of a world conscience regarding human rights.

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ARAB WOMEN

Edited by Ann Dearden

Contents

THE UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from any fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if a man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore,

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
proclaims

THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8. Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11. (1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.

(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.

Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14. (1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.

(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15. (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 16. (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17. (1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.

(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20. (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

(2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21. (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.

(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22. Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23. (1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interest.

Article 24. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25. (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26. (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Article 27. (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

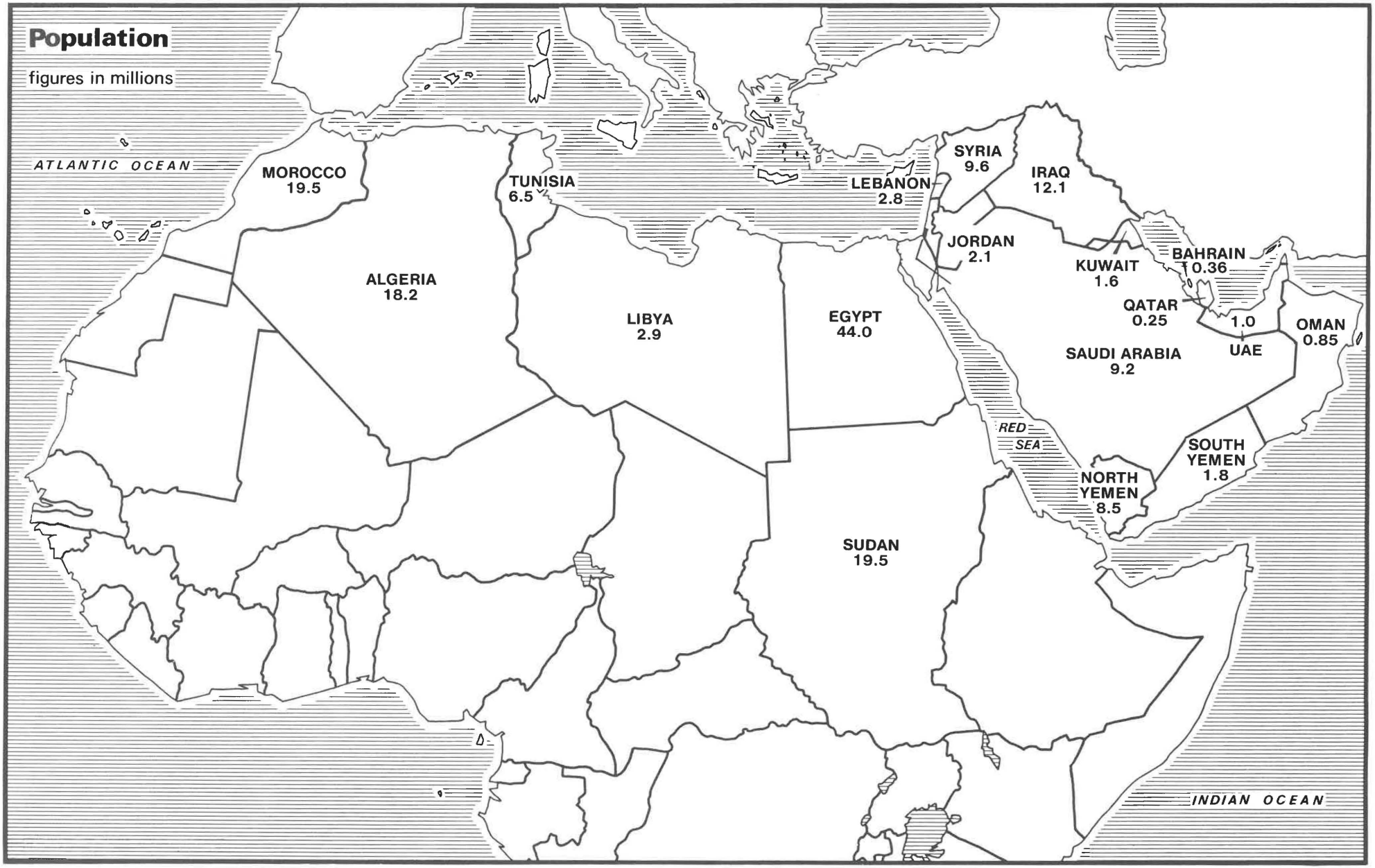
Article 28. Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.

Article 29. (1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 30. Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.


Population
figures in millions
ATLANTIC OCEAN
MOROCCO
19.5
ALGERIA
18.2
TUNISIA
6.5
LIBYA
2.9
EGYPT
44.0
LEBANON
2.8
SYRIA
9.6
IRAQ
12.1
JORDAN
2.1
KUWAIT
1.6
BAHRAIN
0.36
QATAR
0.25
1.0
UAE
OMAN
0.85
SAUDI ARABIA
9.2
RED
SEA
SOUTH
YEMEN
1.8
NORTH
YEMEN
8.5
SUDAN
19.5
INDIAN OCEAN

INTRODUCTION
by Ann Dearden

Arab women make up nearly half of the Arab world's population of some 135 million[1]. Among all the world's Muslim women they form a distinctive group. But their status cannot be given a single classification. It varies greatly according to the country they live in and section of society to which they belong.

In Saudi Arabia today women, with few exceptions, still wear the veil and may not meet men other than their nearest relations. The more modernized countries, such as Egypt, Lebanon and Tunisia, offer a different picture. There the women of better-off families have a life style broadly comparable with women in Europe. Many are outstanding in public or professional work. In proportion to men there are more women members of parliament in Sudan than in Britain[2]. Egypt has over 1,000 women doctors and a woman is its senior flying instructor. There are women judges in Lebanon and Algeria. Syrian women engineers worked on the Euphrates dam.

Educated women are still only a small elite but their numbers are continually rising as more girls from diverse environments push through to higher education. Of the 400,000 students in Arab universities at least a quarter are women[3]. When these are the daughters of educated parents they encounter few problems. It is the girls thrusting up from poorer, more traditional backgrounds who are caught in a painful conflict between the new opportunities their state education offers them and the ideas their families have for them. Emancipation is everywhere an extremely uneven process. Where social constraints bear most heavily is in small towns and villages, far removed from the modern developments in capital cities, and even in the poorer quarters of the capitals themselves. Poverty and ignorance, still widespread in the Arab world, put the main brake on women's advancement (as they do on men's). A distinction should however be drawn between the commonplace grind of poverty that crushes women through unremitting drudgery and childbearing and the restrictions imposed by the prevailing patriarchal system. What is singular in Middle Eastern tradition is the fostering of separate societies for men and women – a system that outlaws women from public and community activities and consigns them to a sealed-off role in the home.

Within her domestic province, a woman in traditional society may exercise considerable authority. An Arab man's strongest attachment is often to his mother and as likely as not he will bow to her advice. His young wife comes under his mother's supervision but this wife, as her children grow up, will gradually command the respect that is paid to older women and herself become a forceful mother-in-law. On marrying she will probably live within an extended family, headed by her husband's father and including all his sons with their wives and children and any unmarried daughters. Even so, her strongest links may well remain with her own family, whose name she retains and to whom she will return if her marriage breaks up. The cult of separate development has its root in the inordinate importance attached to women's chastity – especially pre-marital virginity – and the man's time-honoured duty to guard it at any price. An extreme example of this is the 'honour murder' in which a girl may be killed by her father or brother if she sins against the strict sex conventions. In the more conservative areas of many Arab countries an unmarried girl who is pregnant may be doomed. The method of killing is usually by burning so that the death may appear to be an accident or suicide.

Islamic legislation for women

Arab feminists often point out that the vulnerable position of women is not attributable to Islam but to social traditions that are alien to Islamic precepts. It may therefore be useful to consider what rulings Islam made for women and the scriptural teachings that inspired them in the 7th century.

Pre-Islamic pagan Arab men regarded women as possessions, to be bought, sold or inherited. They buried unwanted infant daughters alive. Islam abolished this and gave women a legal status as independent human beings with special emphasis on their economic rights. Today the personal status of Arab women is still governed by Islamic (Shariah) laws, most of them evolved directly from the Koran. Each Arab country has its own variation of these laws, but the basic Islamic provisions about marriage, divorce, inheritance and property are nearly everywhere in force.

[1]For footnotes see page 15

In marriage the contract is valid only when the man has covenanted to make over a dowry to his wife. This can be paid in any negotiable form – cash, jewellery or land. It belongs to the wife, not her father, though the sum will be settled by hard bargaining male relations.[4] It can be handed over at the time of marriage but part of it is usually deferred, to be paid up in full if the husband dies or divorces his wife.

This is an important safeguard for the wife since divorce laws are otherwise weighted against her. A man may divorce his wife by repudiation, that is by saying 'I divorce you' three times before witnesses. No reason need be assigned. (While the Koran explicitly permits such instant divorce the Prophet Muhammad is recorded as having himself declared that 'divorce is the most hateful to God of the lawful things'.) A woman who wants a divorce must go to court and prove serious misconduct by her husband. This is difficult to do and in many countries it is almost impossible for a woman to initiate proceedings. The problem may be overcome if the wife has her right to divorce written into her marriage contract but most women shrink from doing so for fear of offending their husbands to be. After divorce or separation a woman may look after her sons until they are seven or nine and her daughters until nine or eleven. The sons then go to the father and sometimes the daughters too. A man must make reasonable provision for his widow and a daughter inherits from her father half as much as a son.

Polygamy is still legally permitted in most countries but practised little. When the Koran laid down that a man could have up to four wives the object was to put some restraint on the Arabians' extravagant marrying habits but also to give marital protection to surplus women when tribal warfare had inflicted heavy casualties on men. The sanctioning verses of the Koran refer to girls who have lost their fathers: 'If you feel you will not be fair in dealing with the orphans then marry of women as many as may be agreeable to you, two or three or four: and if you feel you will not deal justly with them, then marry only one . . .' (*Sura 4, V 3, 4*). These verses are sometimes seen as virtually prohibiting polygamy since to 'deal justly' means that all wives must be treated alike. Once again, as with instant divorce, the Islamic precept points to the ideal but permits the less than ideal in recognition of human imperfection: the rough Arabian tribesmen could not be pushed too far. When laws were evolved from the scriptures they tended to disregard this scriptural flexibility and to base themselves on the letter of permissiveness for men.

The prize among women's rights granted by Islam is that which enables a woman to control or dispose of her own money or property without reference to her husband or father. Such a right was not obtained by Englishwomen until the end of the nineteenth century when the Married Women's Property Acts finally abolished the rule by which a woman's property passed, on marriage, into her husband's hands . . . Up to that time an English married woman had no better status in law than an idiot or a minor. She could not even possess her own earnings. By contrast, Islam has always allowed a married woman to run a business of her own without consulting her husband and with no obligation to contribute to the household expenses. This again was originally a measure to ensure her a nest-egg in the event of instant divorce. It also explains why a daughter inherits less than a son.

Through thirteen centuries

The Islamic charter for women served them well through the period of the early Arab conquests. They won men's respect and even led troops into battle. Some were renowned as saints and others as scholars, whose opinions were sought about politics and law. On social occasions their wit and musical talents were admired.[5] But gradually the powerful ruling families took to secluding their women as a sign of their greatness and distance from common people – a practice that was subsequently copied by the rising and increasingly prosperous middle class. Women became more ornamental and were treated more generally as sex objects. They wore veils to distinguish themselves from unveiled slaves and the system of purdah or absolute segregation from men was enforced.

Neither the veiling of the face nor such strict seclusion were enjoined on women by Islam. They were customs picked up from the Persian and Byzantine people the Arabs conquered. (When the Arabs overran Syria they found upper class Christian women wearing veils; Armenian women still wore them in the ninteenth century). But the greatest deprivation of all was that henceforward

women were denied education and, cooped up in their women's quarters, could not talk to educated people other than their husbands, fathers or brothers. They were physically and mentally in thrall to their little circle of menfolk. When, later, Arab lands were conquered by the Ottoman Turks, the Turks were converted to the ways of their new subject people and enforced the seclusion of women with exceptional zeal. At length Arab women came to connect their servitude to men with the social decline of the Arabs under foreign domination. Thus the cause of women's liberation was closely allied to the twentieth century struggle for Arab independence, first against Turkey and then against Britain and France.

In both movements men and women worked together. One of the earliest champions of women's rights was the Egyptian nationalist, Qasim Amin. In his two influential books, *Tahrir el Mar'a (Women's Emancipation)* and *Al Mar'a al Jadida (The New Woman)*, written in 1900 and 1902, he argued that there could be no regenerated Arab society without the liberation and education of women. In particular he called for the restoration to women of the rights conferred on them by Islam but which had become so debased. Soon Egyptian, Syrian and Lebanese women, many of them Christian,[6] were campaigning for political rights and compulsory education for girls. Women's organizations proliferated.

At the same time the feminists were active in the Arab nationalist cause. From 1919, when veiled women marched through the streets of Cairo in protest against the British occupation, women regularly took part in all liberation movements from Lebanon and Palestine to North Africa and Aden. The most notable contribution was that of the Algerian women who fought and were imprisoned and tortured in Algeria's long war for independence (1954-1962). By the time that all Arab countries had won their independence –during the quarter century after the Second World War– a vanguard of educated women was established in the Arab world and crusading for a better status for all Arab women. Among these crusaders, the women whose native land – Palestine – did not get its own independence have been outstanding. Palestinian women in exile, many of them working as teachers, have exerted a strong liberating influence on the less advanced women of Arabia and the Gulf.

All Arab governments recognize today that full social and economic progress cannot be realized unless women play a stronger role in public life, as a work force or as intelligent wives and mothers. Many governments have not been grudging in granting political rights. The principle of sex equality is written into the constitution of a number of Arab countries and women vote at public elections on equal terms with men in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and South Yemen. All Arab governments have encouraged the spread of girls' education, including Saudi Arabia, where the late King Faisal himself was the innovator. His wife and daughters opened the first school for girls in the country in 1955. But most governments are cautious about introducing measures that directly challenge the traditional restrictions on women which, whatever their origin, have, over the centuries, gathered religious approval. Some governments have been bolder than others as the following reports from separate Arab countries will show. (Where these reports are unsigned they either contain information provided by several contributors or else are contributed by observers who prefer to remain anonymous but have recently studied the countries concerned. Preliminary consultations in Beirut were carried out by Somaya Damluji and I am much indebted to Nadia Hijab, editor of *The Middle East* for some of the more recent information. Statistics are taken from the relevant government abstracts except where otherwise stated. Regrettably it has not been possible to obtain uniform sets of figures since statistics about women are differently compiled in each country and sometimes not available at all.)

EGYPT
from Irene Beeson

'Women must enjoy equal rights with men. The remaining shackles that hamper their freedom of action must be removed so that they can participate constructively and profoundly, in shaping the life of the country.'

In this paragraph of the 1962 National Charter, the late President Gamal Abdel Nasser laid down the principle of Egyptian woman's equality with man.

Six years earlier, the man who had led the 1952 revolution, had taken the bold step of giving Egyptian women the right to vote, a right that had been withheld from them despite several decades of campaigning. Soon afterwards women were enabled to stand for election to the National Assembly and to membership of Egypt's political organization, the Arab Socialist Union. In 1962, a woman, Hakmet Abu Zeid, was nominated to a cabinet post as Minister of Social Affairs and, for the first time since it was established more than a thousand years ago, the Al Azhar University[7] extended its instruction to girl students. But women continued to be deprived of many basic human rights: the Charter reflected Nasser's determination to break down the persisting social prejudices that kept so many of them, still, on the fringe of society.

In 1975, International Woman's Year, Egyptian women made a survey of the ground covered since the movement for woman's emancipation started, early this century. Women from many international organizations joined them, to compare notes with what is happening elsewhere in the world and exchange ideas. The picture that has emerged is a tribute to the Egyptian woman's courageous struggle for equality during the first half of the century and to the ease with which she adapted to the dramatic change in her prospects after 1952. The last twenty years have witnessed a veritable invasion by girls and women of male strongholds – universities, the administration, professions, industry, the business world. After 1952, all stages of education were opened to women, free of charge. In that year there were 3,490 girls in university colleges against 37,821 boys. According to the latest available figures, those for 1970-71, 43,255 girls and 109,027 boys were by then attending universities. The girls' proportion of the total number of students had thus increased from roughly 8% to over 28% eighteen years later.

The urban Egyptian man is reconciled to the presence of women in nearly all his places of work, from offices and factories to hospitals, laboratories and law courts. Rural man has also revised his views. Country women have always worked with their menfolk. The problem in rural areas was to overcome male objections to daughters attending school (and university) and training for work other than handicrafts or helping in the fields. There too, there was a breakthrough after 1952. But, if Egyptian man has bowed to the granting to woman of the right to study and work, he is still holding out stubbornly against recognizing the personal and social rights that are hers by virtue of Islam and the country's constitution. Masculine prejudices are still stronger than rulers and legislators, even than the revealed word.

According to Mrs. Seza Nabarawi, one of the leaders of the feminist movement in Egypt, it was in 1908 that women began to act collectively for their emancipation: a group of them, appalled by the alarmingly high rate of infant mortality, founded the first free women's welfare organization – the Muhammed Ali clinic. In 1910 a woman, Malika Hefni Nassif, submitted to the National Congress the first written demand for women's rights. It was, however, the 1919 revolt against British rule that gave real impetus to the feminists. Led by Huda Shaarawi, who later (in 1923) established the Women's Union, girls and women appeared on political platforms as well as joining the men in street demonstrations. They came to Cairo from all over the country and from all classes. Some died or were wounded in clashes with the security forces.

Public opinion was amazed and wildly enthusiastic about these regiments of women patriots who, overnight, broke free from centuries-old inhibitions to struggle for the liberation of Egypt. Yet, a few years later, in 1926, an intensive press campaign by the *ulema* (religious pundits) thwarted the Egyptian woman's attempts to secure reforms of Islamic law governing her personal status.

The proposed reforms, submitted to the government, were: (i) that polygamy be allowed only in special cases, such as the wife's sterility or incurable sickness; (ii) that divorce should be made more difficult and all divorce cases be heard in court in the presence of two relatives, trying to reconcile the couple; (iii) that the period during which a divorced woman has custody of her children should be extended up to the time of a daughter's marriage or a son's puberty; (iv) that the *Bait el Ta'a* (House of Obedience) regulation should be abolished. This regulation, intensely humiliating to women, empowers a husband to compel his estranged or runaway wife to return home and cohabit with him, resorting, if necessary, to the police to drag her back by force.

In 1929, Mrs. Nabarawi recalls, 'woman was granted a small consolation' – the right to ask for divorce on grounds of ill-treatment by the husband. On the other hand his obligation to pay alimony was reduced from three years to one. Little progress has since been made with regard to woman's personal rights and status. Mrs. Aziza Hussein,

who is chairman of the Cairo Family Planning Association and who has represented Egypt for many years on the United Nations Status of Women Commission, attributes this primarily to the fact that industrialization and economic development have been given precedence over social reforms. Mrs. Amina Said, the dynamic chief editor of a leading Cairo women's magazine and the first woman director of the Press Syndicate Board, blames the fact that the personal status law reforms are still blocked, after years of discussion, on 'reactionary groups fighting progress'.

In 1974, students and members of the staff of Al Azhar marched through Cairo to the People's Assembly waving religious banners and posters and shouting 'No to Socialism, no to Nasserism, yes to Islam'. The demonstration was not, as the slogans suggested, against an ideological trend in the country, but in protest against the long-debated reforms to grant women greater security and dignity in marriage. Three representatives of Al Azhar, who had approved the reforms during debate took part in the demonstration. 'This could never have happened in the days of Nasser', Mrs. Amina Said commented. One of the arguments used by those who oppose the restoration of woman's rights is, she explained, that woman's emancipation 'opens the door to communism, socialism and foreign ideologies'.

When I met Mrs. Amina recently, she had just written an angry reply for publication in her magazine, to an article in *Al Ahram*, the leading Cairo daily, in which the Sheikh of Al Azhar condemned family planning, stating that it was forbidden by Islam. Such a statement by the highest religious authority in the country could, by a stroke of the pen, wreck years of uphill work by women's organizations and the official Family Planning Association. When the government launched the family planning campaign in the mid-sixties, the previous Sheikh of Al Azhar helped to overcome misgivings by affirming that Islam did not oppose birth control but even advocated it when it was a question of saving a woman's life or health, and ensuring the happiness and welfare of the couple and family. Family planning has already had some impact on the birthrate[8] and in releasing women for work outside the home. Women today make up over 48% of a total work force of about 11,500,000.[9] Women in the feminist movement argue with apprehension that regression in family planning would mean regression in all fields. The proliferation in Egypt, in the past few years, of extremist groups advocating the reimposition of what progressive Muslims view as erroneous interpretations of Islam is causing grave concern. Emancipated women are arguing that it is not a feminist movement that is needed so much as a movement for the liberation of man from the complexes and false values that distort his judgment. Women, they say, prove every day and everywhere that they are equal to men. It is men who have to be made to see.

LEBANON
from Roberta Jamjoom

Lebanon's strategic position as a gateway between East and West has been crucial in the development of a distinctive national character. It has absorbed layer upon layer of civilization: Phoenician, Roman, Arab, Crusader, Turkish and French. Its resultant ethnic identity is hard to define – more truly 'Lebanese' than 'Arab'. Culturally this heritage is just as complex. There are seventeen different religious denominations. Christians and Muslims exist in numbers so nearly equal that a count is never published. Both play a vital part in the affairs of state. Modern Lebanon is in many respects the product of French influence. Its high literacy rate,[10] the highest in the Middle East, owes much to the French legacy of 19th century missionary schools. French influence during the mandatory period after the First World War was also paramount in shaping Lebanon's legal system but those laws which cover personal status fall within the jurisdiction of the seventeen religious courts.

The Lebanese woman is as multi-facetted as her background: no one formula will cover the Beirut socialite, the Armenian or Palestinian refugee, the mountain peasant or university intellectual. Prior to the current disturbances, the stereotype used to be the elegantly lean Beiruti who haunted the fashionable boutiques of Rue Hamra, equally at home in English, French or Arabic. Yet she too was a paradox. To the Westerner she appeared to be dominated by her family, her good looks and flair for fashion vaguely suspect – indicative perhaps of a less than serious approach to life. To the women of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf she had reached the rainbow's end, the epitome of all that is cool, educated and unbelievably free. These attitudes are understandably culture bound. In so far as there is a 'typical' Lebanese woman, she was the product of that unique synthesis of East and West that has characterized Lebanese life for so long. Family ties, religion and long established social traditions still play a significant part in her life, but she is no longer limited to being a wife and mother. She can compete with men in most spheres of activity and enjoys more personal freedom than the majority of other Arab women.

The key to these changes lies in education, which for women began with the founding in 1834 of the American Missionary School for Girls in Beirut. Other missionary schools soon followed and in 1908 the American University of Beirut broke new ground when it established its Women's School of Nursing. In 1921 the first female student, heavily veiled and accompanied by her husband, was admitted to the university proper, the start of a process which came full circle when that traditional bastion of male supremacy – the Engineering Department – was finally stormed in the mid sixties. Today women's education in the Lebanon is a 'fait accompli'. There are government schools in most towns and villages, vocational centres everywhere and more private schools for girls than in any other country in the Middle East.

As one would expect, the outcome of all this educational ferment has been the emergence of a professional elite in the fields of medicine, law, higher education and the arts, backed by a solid body of secretaries, teachers, nurses and business women. Names that stand out are those of the pioneering Dr. Edma Abouchdid who in 1931 became not only the first woman to graduate in medicine but also the first to open her own clinic and Mrs. Georgette Chidiac who was appointed Lebanon's first woman judge in 1969. Despite a tradition of political activism no woman has yet been elected to high government office in Lebanon,[11] a fact which is perhaps partially offset by the growing influence of women in the business affairs of the country. Nadia al Khoury, for example, is vice president of a bank, board member of Middle East Airlines, director of a contracting firm, owner of one of Beirut's most luxurious hotels – and in her spare time chairman of the Byblos cultural committee.

But what of the greater mass of Lebanese women, those who come from the smaller towns and villages? They have the vote, access to a free education and the right to work outside the home but basically their goal in life is still marriage. Although arranged marriages remain fairly common, women in Lebanon marry later than in most other Arab countries – the average age being twenty three.[12] The percentage who choose to remain single is also high when compared to the rest of the Arab world, despite the fact that even in permissive Beirut non marital sex is almost unheard of and casual dating is by no means the norm. Abortion is punishable with imprisonment and although contraception is socially acceptable among the middle class it remains forbidden by law, a rather lamentable situation in a country whose density of population is higher than that of any other area of South West Asia.

Of the total Lebanese work force 17.5% are women, 60 to 70% of whom are Christian. Muslim women tend to lead more reserved lives within the family circle and are under little pressure to pursue professional careers. Ultimately the position of women in Lebanon, as in any country, hinges on their rights under the law. Lebanese law, particularly when it concerns the personal status of the individual is so complicated that in the past it has proved too baffling for the majority of women to understand, let alone challenge. Today however Laure Moghaizal, lawyer and militant feminist, is battling not only to clarify women's legal rights but to amend all laws which discriminate against them. The advent of International Women's Year gave added stimulus and publicity to her crusade and if her long term aim – the bringing of all laws concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody under a single civil code – is realized, the last barrier to women's liberation in Lebanon will have fallen.

SYRIA

Syria's women are noted for their strong social conscience. One of its earliest feminists, Mrs. Adela Beiham al-Jazairi, who started a girls' school (still flourishing) in 1927 and later represented Syrian women at many international conferences, founded her first

women's organization when she was only thirteen years old. Its impeccable aim was to educate women to become self-supporting and awaken their national consciousness. That was in 1915. Between then and 1963 Syrian women established a network of voluntary societies, 15 at least in Damascus and nine in Aleppo, some with country-wide branches, not only to assist the needy but to combat illiteracy. Today the literacy rate of 25% of all women is higher than that in Egypt, Iraq or Jordan. Among career women are some distinguished lawyers and civil engineers. In recent years military training has given girls greater self confidence. But social life in this socialist country is still extremely conservative. The following comments come from Tabitha Petran (see notes on contributors):

'Syria's 1973 Permanent Constitution pledges the state to eliminate all obstacles blocking women's development and share in building up socialist Arab society. The obstacles remain formidable. For in 12 years Baath-military rule has not ventured to intervene in the traditional fabric of social relations woven around the concept of male guardianship of women. The concept still dominates attitudes towards women and often women's perception of themselves. A leader of the General Women's Federation on her way to an international conference was stopped at Damascus Airport recently because she did not have written permission from her husband to leave the country. Stifling restraints govern women's, especially single women's social life. Defiance brings social opprobrium. The Moral Intelligence Department, a part of the state's internal security apparatus, investigates – mainly by collecting neighbourhood gossip – every woman seeking government employment. The 1953 Personal Status Law maintains the Shariah's discrimination against women. Social and family pressures and fear of losing their children combine to restrain women from exercising such rights to divorce as they have.

The General Women's Federation, established in 1967, is mainly concerned with teaching women to perform traditional duties more effectively and promoting the Baath party. It has established 25 Vocational Centres teaching handicrafts, dressmaking, typing, etc., and a few nurseries for working women's children. Tightly controlled by the Baath, the Federation is incapable of independent initiatives; its leaders prefer, so they say, "not to shock people".

Only 11%[13] of working-age women are economically active. Of these about 80% work in agriculture. Among the remainder 1% or less hold administrative or managerial posts. The number of girls in schools has greatly increased however, even though as a proportion of the total number of pupils they still lag behind. In secondary schools the percentage of girl pupils rose from 20 in 1956 to 26 in 1973; in university from 15 to 19. Of 897 women university graduates in 1973 more than half specialized in letters, 10% in social sciences and 8% in sciences, with the rest spread thinly in pharmacy, medicine, commerce, law, engineering and economics. In token numbers women are slowly penetrating the professions. Five women serve in the 186-member People's Assembly. Yet Syrian women are still far from achieving independent status as working and productive members of society.'

IRAQ

Modern Iraq has always been a country where the exceptional woman could rise to the top. After the Second World War it was the first Arab country to send women delegates to the United Nations. In its tribal areas there were two famous women judges. Before the 1958 revolution education for girls in schools, universities and a number of training colleges was already firmly established and all education was free for boys and girls alike. Facilities for girls were again expanded after the revolution. The Arab Baath Socialist government – in power now since 1963 – expressed its intention of further improving the position of women in its National Action Charter of November 1971. This provided for 'the liberation of women from feudalist and bourgeois concepts and from the conditions and bondage that had rendered her a mere means of entertainment or second-class citizen'.

For the purpose of this report Dr. Al Attia Fawzia, head of the department of sociology at Baghdad University, was asked what progress women had made. She replied that during the past ten years they had made great advances, not only in their 'political and economic organization but in social relationships, particularly those between men and women'. She provided much of the following information:

The most striking evidence of women's emancipation is in their wide range of employment. They form 30% of the country's doctors and pharmacists, 33% of its teachers and university lecturers, 33% of the staff of government departments, 26% of workers in industry and 45% of those on farms.[14] Equal pay in government service is normal. Married women get the same pay as single men and are allowed 40 days maternity leave before delivery, 43 days after, and can then, at once, have their infants cared for in creches until they are three years old. Of course there is much to be done before reforms make their mark on rural areas. An Indian observer who recently toured some villages found them much like Indian villages, the women 'backward, uneducated and lethargic'.[15] On government farms, however, women work as tractor drivers, mechanical engineers and agricultural technicians. Some of the modern farms are run entirely by women. As in Egypt and Syria, veiling is rare either in town or country but in Iraq the abaya (black cloak) is customary among less educated women and outside Baghdad is thrown on even by women teachers when they come out of school. An important development in the breaking down of sex barriers is the government's encouragement of many more mixed schools and colleges. This is of special value in primary schools, where most children were formerly segregated and so, at an early age, received an enduring impression that boys and girls were ordained to exist apart. At universities and other institutes of higher education women make up 24% of the total number of 45,910 students.

The legal status of women seems likely to be improved through the work of a special committee, recently set up by the government with the object of bringing women nearer to equality with men. It hopes to abolish polygamy and strengthen women's divorce and inheritance rights. Dr. Fawzia maintains that the only outstanding distinction between men and women is the exceptional importance attached to a woman's pre-marital virginity. In this respect, she says, social attitudes have not changed at all. To quote her own words:

'Therefore men enjoy many more privileges than women in every section of society. Frankly speaking, the emancipation of women is limited and women in our country are still subject to discrimination. Such discrimininations differs from one society to another.'

TUNISIA
from Anthony McDermott

Advanced legislation, considerable investment in education, and President Bourguiba's drive – from the earliest days of independence – have brought Tunisia to the position of having one of the more enlightened approaches in the Arab world towards women's rights. Over 25 years since the promulgation of the seminal Personal Status Code of 1956, the results can be seen in the streets of Tunis. There almost as many women throng as men. The veil is a rarity except in the poorer and older parts of the city. Chic, western-dressed women can be seen in shops, offices, buses, and behind the wheels of cars. In the country's newspapers and magazines there are lively debates about women's rights and responsibilities and such subjects as the merits of sex instruction in schools.

The 1956 law replaced the Koranic law with a unified legal system for all Tunisians (Moslems, Christians and Jews), and placed them under the jurisdiction of the common law courts. It forbade polygamy and repudiation. It gave women equal rights in asking for divorce and the right to choose their spouses rather than accept the family's choice. The law was ambiguous on the question of Tunisian women marrying non-Muslims. In theory a Muslim woman was allowed to marry outside her religion, but it was left to a judge to decide whether the difference in religion was an impediment. In practice, the judge often ruled that it was. The law laid down that women could not be married before the age of 15, and put to work before 17. Since then Tunisian women have had the age of marriage raised officially to 17. In practice, however, girls do still get married before this age. According to the law, men and women must receive equal pay for equal work and any man or woman convicted of adultery is liable to 5 years in prison.

The law has, of course, only created an atmosphere, and not yet brought about deep country-wide changes. This is particularly so because it was far ahead of entrenched male attitudes.

There are also two Tunisias. The division lies between Tunis and the rest of the country, with the one qualification that the coastal areas are less conservative than the interior. The relatively prosperous Tunis wife has 3 to 4 children. By contrast, her rural sister, with 5 to 6 children, finds life rough and hard. Medical care in

the countryside is sparse and housing often grim. In visual terms, the streets and cafes of the villages are male preserves (as they are in the older parts of Tunis). Inevitably the programmes of education and family planning have made less impact in the villages. The concept dies hard that there are more working hands available and greater security in having many children. More sacrifices are made for boys than for girls.

Some progress has been achieved, but Tunisian women feel that not enough is being done. Statistics show that for every five jobs created for males, only one is created for women. Currently there are only four women members of the national assembly, and no ministers. In 1973, of 4,325 directors or senior engineers in government projects 182 were women; at university 2,514 out of 10,992 were women; at primary level 326,000 out of 935,000 children. A survey of 340,000 women in jobs showed that 73.5% were in agriculture, 12% in textiles and leather work, 3.5% in administration, 2.3% in business, and 8.7% in other jobs. Experience has shown that equal pay is observed in the breach when recruiting is done for women, often not observed on the factory floor, and hardly at all in the countryside.

The active Union Nationale des Femmes Tunisiennes (UNFT) which has played a major role both in forwarding women's rights and also family planning education, makes the point that the statutory one month's pregnancy leave is a medical minimum, and that while family planning is welcomed its application has to be careful as well as practical. One set of figures shows the uneven way in which some methods are applied. In Tunis the proportion of abortions to the irrevocable tying up of the Fallopian tubes was 110 to 31, while in Jendouba it was 6 to 38, and in Kairouan 6 to 25. The family planning programme has been conducted vigorously in the press and on radio and television. Since 1964 it has received a credit of $4.8 million from the International Development Association as well as assistance from East European countries. The IDA credit provides the foreign currency for the whole $7.7 million programme. This included, apart from raising the level of technical instruction, the building of maternity hospitals at Bizerta, Tunis, Sousse and Sfax, and many centres for mother and child care.

In Tunis itself, the sexes mingle easily inside and outside their places of education, but open dating in pairs is still frowned on. Parental selection of the spouse is prevalent. The public debate in Tunisia about women's rights shows that the question is being handled on a sophisticated level. Some inroads are being made in the distant governorates, where women are becoming head mistresses, professors, teachers and doctors. But for further advances, more economic development – as well as improvement in educational and medical facilities – is needed, particularly in the countryside. Tunisia has made a creditable start on the core of the problem of women having equal rights in a Muslim society, but practice has yet to catch up with the theory for which legislation has been made.

ALGERIA

When Algeria became independent a group of Algerian heroines of the resistance made a tour of the Arab capitals and were feted everywhere. On arriving at Kuwait and smilingly descending from their aircraft, they found themselves greeted by a row of expressionless faces. The Kuwaiti women, lined up at the airport to welcome them, were blacked out by heavy veils. At the close of their visit a transformation scene took place. The same Kuwaiti women, before driving to the airport to see off their Algerian guests, received instructions from their government to go unveiled. Since then no young educated Kuwaiti woman has worn a veil. Thus the women of Algeria, who by their exertions did so much to liberate their country, helped their Kuwaiti sisters by their example. The twist in the tail of this story is that visitors to Algeria today are always struck by the extent to which the veil is retained there, outside the small educated class.

Under French rule women clung to the veil in defiance of French attempts to westernize them. Many families still encourage its wear as a mark of the Algerians' intention to develop along their own non-western lines. The chosen lines are socialist and Islamic, but whereas socialist Algeria, with its planning of heavy industry and admirable social services, is essentially forward-looking, Islamic Algeria looks backwards to reinforce Arab traditions. It is women who suffer the brunt of this; but hope for their future lies in Algeria's steadily expanding educational programmes. In 1962-63 there were 14,346 girls in secondary schools compared with 36,868 boys. By 1970-71 the numbers had increased to 66,370 girls and 236,884 boys. In 1962-63 only 579 girls went on to higher education as against 2,230 boys. By 1970-71 the numbers had risen to 4,838 girls and 19,213 boys. If girls have not increased their proportion of places, it is because, under France, the boys themselves were so exceptionally deprived. At university level women students make a fair showing with 20% of the total number of places.[16] In the medical schools they are over 35%.

Algeria has its quota of highly qualified women. They are prominent in medicine, law and academic life. Women lawyers are so noted for their eloquence that, in court, their men adversaries are said to be struck, almost literally dumb. But, apart from a demand for women as typists, domestic servants and in the lowest paid factory and farm work, jobs for women are limited by the fact that so many men are jobless and are therefore – understandably – given priority. (In the towns roughly one out of every four men is unemployed.) The National Union of Algerian Women is in the forefront of literacy and hygiene campaigns in rural areas and represents women's interests generally. Women are also represented in local government and quite strongly in the General Union of Algerian Workers. Even so, they have made little headway as yet in improving their status. The educated young, for example, find it hard to reconcile their friendly relationships with boys at university with the puritanical restrictions that catch up with them afterwards. Going home from college to perhaps poorly educated parents, a girl may be forced into veiling again and an arranged marriage. Girls have been known to commit suicide rather than to submit to such marriages.[17] Algerian women are forbidden to marry foreigners (non-Muslims) and birth control is discouraged (but not, as in Lebanon, prohibited) since Algeria hopes to support a population much larger than its present 15 million when its economic plans mature.

The lot of the vast majority of Algerian women – those in rural or poor urban areas – has recently been described by an Algerian sociologist, writing under the pseudonym 'Mal' in *People*, the organ of the International Planned Parenthood Association (Volume 2, Number 1, 1975):

'Their fathers, brothers, or paternal uncles, and later their husbands and sons, decide everything for them and manage their property. If the man abuses his authority, the woman will become his slave, in the strictest economic sense of the word . . . If he is good, she will have to give thanks every day of her life for the good fortune that has placed her in the hands of such a good master. For it is from her master that she derives her social legitimacy. A woman alone – a widow or a single woman without male relatives – finds it almost impossible to obtain recognition from ubiquitous authority, for example in getting a flat through the state bureaucracy. . . . Many such women lost their men in the liberation struggle but others are similarly placed as a result of repudiation, which allows a man to send his wife away without giving her freedom to remarry and thereby regain legitimacy by means of a legal divorce . . .'

This description might have been written about the backward areas of some other Arab countries except that it is not common Islamic practice for a man to repudiate his wife without setting her free. In Algeria confusion has existed because a law, new in 1959 and which should have been helpful to women, required that all divorces be decided in court. Repudiation, however, was such a deep-rooted custom that men went on with it, regardless, since legal procedures are so irksome, particularly to the illiterate (70% of Algerian men are illiterate and 91% of women)[18]. Thus women, unaware of their rights, were always getting cast into limbo. In recent years, however, divorce cases, including suits brought by women, have vastly increased in number and it looks as if the divorce laws are at last taking proper effect. A new family code that would further improve women's rights in marriage has been under debate for some years but runs into opposition from the ulema and indifference in high places. The men who underpin the Algerian regime, whether as technocrats, soldiers or party leaders, have many of them, risen from peasant or worker backgrounds, where men and women alike take the subservience of women for granted. Older women are as tough as the men in wanting to keep women in their place.

Today's young educated women describe themselves as the 'sacrifice generation' because they have gained so little personal liberty from Algeria's own liberation but hope that their daughters may reap fuller benefits.

SAUDI ARABIA

In Saudi Arabia women's place is in the home and their life is more circumscribed than in any other Arab country. This is the heartland and bastion of Islam, the centre from which the great Arab expansion originated. It was the home of the Prophet Muhammad and is the custodian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Perhaps even more relevant from the point of view of social life today, it was the homeland two centuries ago of the puritanical reformer, Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, who found his most enthusiastic followers among the Bedouin of Nejd and the Saud family. When their descendant, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, conquered the Hejaz half a century ago his followers brought their fanatical religious views to the west coast as well. They have not taken such deep root there however, and society in Jeddah is more permissive than in Riyadh.

Social life is completely regulated by Shariah law and the strict Saudi interpretation of it ensures that women's life is secluded and lived largely within the family. Most marriages are arranged by the family, and a first cousin on the father's side is the preferred match. As one educated young woman, happily married to her own first cousin, said: 'If there is a nice cousin, why bother to look farther afield. The family will be happy too, since such a marriage keeps the inheritance intact.' The prevalence of cousin marriages might be expected to produce an undue proportion of handicapped children. Educated Saudi girls seem aware of this, but remark that it is second and third cousin marriages which are dangerous; first cousin marriages, the preferred match, are considered safe.

Polygamy is not likely to disturb the marriages of the educated young today. It was common among the older generations, particularly in the royal family. Both King Abdul Aziz and King Saud produced dozens of sons, the offspring of many wives, but this was probably as much for political as uxorious reasons. Among the ordinary people today the desire for consumer goods and a comfortable home, and to some extent the influence of the west, have made polygamous marriages rare. Where they do occur in unsophisticated society they can be happy in a way which is quite incomprehensible to western minds. 'Of course my neighbour and I are close friends' one middle-aged woman remarked, 'our daughters had the same father' (who incidentally divorced both mothers afterwards). Another pair of young wives lived inseparably as sisters, cared for each other and each other's children, and were openly gleeful when their lorry driver husband went off on one of his long trips, leaving them in peace together.

Women go out little unless accompanied by their husbands, and their company consists of women and children. In the shops most purchases are made by men, and it is absolutely usual in the towns to see not a single woman in the street. When women do go out they are always veiled to some extent. Among the most evoluée this may be just a token bit of black material thrown over the hair. But for the majority veiling consists of a long black gown, the abaya, which covers them from head to foot, and over the face a black veil whose thickness depends on their husband's strictness. Some veils are now so diaphanous as to hide nothing; and an increasing number of women are abandoning face veils all together. In the south eastern desert, bordering the United Arab Emirates, the nomad women still wear face masks, hung in some districts with silver coins. The discomfort of wearing them in the great heat is considerable.

Though home life is still secluded, and in the larger houses the women live mostly upstairs and do not even seem to have the run of their homes and garden, it has acquired several added pleasures in the past few years. Among these are television and the telephone. The latter is an extraordinary boon to the better off Saudi woman who can thus chat for hours with the friends whom they cannot often see because they are forbidden to drive cars (though many hold international driving licences), or to go about much alone.

The birth rate is still high but family size has for some time now been widely limited by all classes who have grasped the boon of family planning. The government's ban, in 1975, on the import of contraceptives because of the recent low census returns has been greeted with dismay.

Outside the close social circle few pastimes are available. Some women's societies were opened a dozen years ago, two in Jeddah and one in Riyadh. They provide a little social life on a strictly segregated basis but much enjoyed for all that, they do some welfare work with orphans and poor families, but their main task is educational, offering classes to women and girls over school age.

Indeed since female education was introduced it has become the main outlet for the women of Arabia, in the towns at any rate. Starting from scratch 15 years ago,[19] and in the face of considerable opposition (King Faisal had to bring out the troops to open a girls' school in Buraida), schooling for girls now seems totally accepted. There are currently school places for about half as many girls as boys (264,000 girls to 527,000 boys in all), but the proportion of girls drops sharply after primary level. In secondary schools there are 27,000 girls to 78,000 boys and at university level there are only 1,000 girls to 13,500 boys. The quality of girls' higher education is lower than that for boys. The university in Jeddah has a separate, smaller library for girls; that in Riyadh offers no library access to girls and books are brought out to them. Many of the girls' classes in Riyadh are given by television for lack of suitable women teachers; in Jeddah no first year students were admitted last year because the women's university was under threat of closure. But girls do take the same exams as the boys so their final degree is completely valid.

The labour market was virtually closed to women up to a decade ago, except for some domestic servants who were born slaves and stayed on contentedly in the families in which they were brought up. For indigenous Saudi women the scope was non-existent, and it is still severely limited. Only 1% of women now work outside the home (surely the lowest participation rate in the world, but double the figure of 5 years ago). Labour regulations prohibit women from working in close proximity with men. But the government now encourages girls to work as teachers in girls' schools, nurses in women's hospitals, and doctors and social workers caring for women and children. Currently some 50% of primary teachers are Saudi women, but only five teach at university level.

Work in offices has been frowned on and in 1973 companies were asked to dismiss their women staff and employ men instead. Several Saudi girls lost their jobs with foreign firms at that time, but with remarkable persistence have quietly found similar jobs since. There are now an increasing number of girls working unobtrusively in offices. A senior official in the Labour Department recently commented that soon there would be thousands of educated Saudi girls and that it would be better from the economic point of view to consider utilizing 'this portion of the labour force through ideal methods and in accordance with the traditions, customs and labour laws, instead of resorting to recruitment from abroad'. If his words are heeded they should herald a breakthrough for Saudi women.

Women who do work are free of one of the major handicaps of working women in the west. They have no problem of reconciling a family with a career. Living in the extended family system and in a country still well endowed with domestic servants, the working mother can go out with no worries about the children. And pregnancy is taken as such a normal state that it causes no disturbance to a career.

Socially, restrictions have eased noticeably over the past three years. One can point to more mixed social life in the wealthier classes, less veiling, less chaperoning of schoolgirls, and a rapid spread of education. Freedom is still in the gift of father or husband but as men too are becoming better educated there are brighter prospects for wives in the future. At the moment Saudi women show little aggression in the pursuit of their rights, but the handful currently in office and professional jobs have a courage and tenacity which cannot be easily extinguished.

THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF YEMEN (SOUTH YEMEN)
from Tabitha Petran

Since their country became independent under the leadership of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in 1967, South Yemeni women have come to the forefront of the Arab women's emancipation movement. They have already achieved the most advanced family status law in the Arab world. The Marxist NLF is committed to women's emancipation because it believes development and use of this latent resource essential to construct a socialist society. The Women's Union, founded in 1968, shares the task of women's political education with the Student and Youth Unions, encourages

women to become literate, to participate in campaigns for women's rights and helps with marriage and divorce problems. Although under-represented in higher NLF and government councils, women's leaders have proved to be militant and independent fighters for more radical advance.

Preparation of the Family Law of 5 January 1974 shows the NLF's manner of winning popular participation in, and acceptance of, radical change. The Women's Union, trade unions and NLF cadres first discussed, amended and applied to themselves the provisions of a draft family law – later rejected by the People's Supreme Council as too timid. The government meantime reorganized the courts dealing with family status, replaced traditionalist judges with modern younger men and limited the husband's right to unilateral divorce by ordering all divorce cases to be adjudicated by the Women's Union. Experience gained in handling such cases contributed to members' political education, increased their self-confidence and helped to create a climate favourable to reform. In rural areas, women – encouraged by NLF cadres – began to demonstrate against polygamy and compulsory marriage and publicly to burn their veils. Their activities soon coalesced with the peasants' class struggle against the feudalists and the drive to implement the land reform.

By 1973 the social climate for nationwide discussion of a new draft family law had been created. Over a four-month period a committee of judges, officials and religious and Islamic learned men discussed the draft in open meetings, attended by hundreds, sometimes thousands, in almost every district of each governorate. Popular demands radicalized the law: most notably in establishing a women's right to marry the man of her choice and so also the man's since traditionally the father often selected his son's bride.

Among other important provisions the law forbids parents to betrothe a daughter without her consent, limits exchanges of pre-marital presents and the dower paid by the bridegroom to prevent 'buying' of daughters of the poor, outlaws child marriages and unilateral divorce, underlines 'equal rights and obligations' in marriage and gives both partners the right to divorce on grounds of incompatibility, desertion and cruelty among others. The law did not respond to the many demands from both men and women to outlaw polygamy but did make taking a second wife impossible except in extreme cases. In matters of custody the mother is favoured even if she remarries; the court retains absolute discretion at all times to determine custody in the child's best interests.

Between 1967 and 1973 the number of girls attending primary school increased almost fivefold. Completion of the Five Year Plan (1974/5 to 1978/9) should increase the number of girls at all levels from primary through university from 24% of all students to 31%. The official Anti-Illiteracy Movement (including numeracy, general and political education) involved almost 53,000 people, of whom more than half were women, in 1973/4, far exceeding plan projections. Trade unions, the mass organizations, cooperatives, government departments, public corporations and projects wage their own anti-illiteracy campaigns. The plan aims to eliminate illiteracy by 1978/9.

In the past working women were mainly unpaid agricultural labourers or servants. Agrarian reform, organization of fishery and agricultural cooperatives and state farms are altering this division of labour. To speed this process a school accommodating 3000 girls (500 from each governorate, hence a majority from the country-side) started this year to teach women to drive and repair tractors, trucks, fishing boats, etc. and to learn carpentry, masonry, building, mechanical and other skills. Women are also encouraged to work in light industries, serve in the police and women's militia. Although in government departments most work as secretaries, women, when qualified, secure higher posts, some even as department heads.

Social transformation, hampered especially in the educational field by the country's extreme poverty is still in its initial stages. But the commitment to the human worth of women suggests the momentum of change will be maintained.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
from Frauke Heard-Bey

The population of the United Arab Emirates[20] has grown from 180,226 in the 1969 census to an estimated 360,000 in 1975. The increase is due to the influx of foreign labourers and specialists who make up as much as 2/3rds of the population in the towns of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Only a few bring their families. This accounts for the imbalanced population structure in the UAE, where males outnumber females by almost 3 to 1. This article is concerned only with the locally born women.

Until the impact of oil was felt in the very different parts of the UAE, the situation of the local female was remarkably uniform throughout the region and all strata of society. For most women the essence of their way of life is still unchanged although there are many material innovations. Every woman's daily life is governed by the fundamental rule that the local household has two sections. The *harem* (sacrosanct) is reserved for the head of the household, his womenfolk, including mother, sisters, aunts and the children. Only the closest male relatives are allowed to cross the threshold of this part of the family compound.

The majority of local women wear a mask of canvas dyed purple, covering part of the forehead and reaching just below the mouth. The *burqa* is taken off only for prayer performed at home, since women do not go to the mosque,[21] and in the harem. But the custom is dying out – in most families now girls reaching puberty are no longer expected to don the mask.

The age of marriage for girls – 12 years upwards – is being postponed, because the majority of girls are enrolled in school. The bride-price – consisting of a sum paid to the girl's father, money to buy jewellery and clothes and a fixed sum which the woman receives if she is divorced – is limited by a new law to £1,100. But for reasons of prestige most families will still not give their daughters away unless gifts and wedding festivities costing much more have been arranged. The less well-to-do and the elderly look for wives among poor girls from India and Egypt. The educated young men, too, often find a girl from a northern Arab country a more congenial partner. Thus for reasons of either price or the lack of formal education a great number of the local girls remain at present unmarried.

With the exception of some members of the ruling or the merchant families, little use was ever made of the provision in Islamic law for a man to have as many as four wives at a time. Most men could not afford to maintain more than one family. The common reason for having a second wife was if the first one was infertile. Most local men now favour monogamy as a matter of principle and a part of life portrayed as 'modern'. There are some who use their newly found wealth to establish and maintain several families – often in different towns. The few cases where girls of former slave origin are taken as concubines are vanishing.

Divorce rather than a further marriage has in the past been the usual way out of childlessness or incompatible marriage. The girl returned to her parents and no stigma was attached. Hardship only arose if the women had no family to go to, or if through age or illness she was unlikely to marry again and became a burden to her family. Divorce is practised less readily by the educated and is discouraged by the religious authorities. Legally, only a husband can seek divorce, but there are instances in which young women dissatisfied with their arranged marriages, often wanting to continue at school, have deliberately driven their husbands to seek divorce.

No woman can be compelled by her father or guardian to enter into a marriage contract without her consent. However, out of shyness, ignorance and deference, young girls rarely oppose arrangements made by their fathers with the prospective husband whom she may never have seen before. It would mean an intolerable loss of security for the girl to risk cutting the closest ties she has in life – those with her own family.

The present generation of girls will experience fundamental changes in their lives as women and in the upbringing of their own families. While previously only a few girls learnt to read and recite the Koran, most girls now go at least through primary education, even in remote desert and mountain areas. Because the first girls' school opened (in Sharjah) only in the 1950s, there are still very few females who have completed secondary education or a professional training. At present there are local girl students at Arab and European universities. Only in Dubai and Sharjah is it acceptable for veiled women to drive cars.

In the process of social change the original uniformity of social standards has given way to regional differences in the adaptation of new and alien standards. Among the merchant communities there

are more families in which some fundamental changes in the lives of women have already accompanied the material ones. Efforts are being made through women's societies, television, evening schools and mothers' councils in schools to bring the older generation into contact with the changing environment which their children are experiencing. A small percentage attend courses offered in literacy and domestic sciences. In the new towns and villages women no longer need to fetch water and firewood or tend gardens and animals. They are separated from their relatives and tribal neighbours by communities of expatriates in blocks of flats and by streets full of foreign men. Therefore many women confine themselves more to their own houses than before.

Previously women were fully aware of all the facets of the family's economic activities and its place in society. In this transitional period women are no longer in tune with the world in which their male and their young relatives live. But few women are even aware of this predicament. Their daughters will have to cope with the full range of changes such as reducing the number of family members living together and adjusting to women's role in professions and in public.

OMAN
from Doreen Ingrams

Every morning – except Friday – groups of young girls, laughing and chattering, can be seen making their way to school in the towns and villages of Oman. They wear long trousers, tight at the ankles, a tunic and a veil thrown loosely over their heads and shoulders. Some of the older girls wear the abaya. Each girl carries a brief case, either in her hand or on her head. All books have to be carried to and from school as owing to lack of staff and buildings there are at least two shifts every day. Many school buildings are brand new with up-to-date equipment, but in rural areas tents may provide temporary accommodation. Considering that in 1970 there were only three primary schools, attended by 900 boys, and by the end of 1974 there were 110 schools with some 35,000 pupils, of whom nearly 8,000 are girls, development has been amazingly rapid.

The only education available for girls prior to 1970 was in a Mission school in Muscat, or privately. When the first government girls' schools opened the demand for places was so great that first-year classes consisted of girls from six to sixteen, and the impact of educating girls soon had its effect on the women, some of whom began attending evening classes in order to keep up with their daughters. For the most part, however, Omani women have had no formal education at all. Unlike other countries of the Arabian peninsula many of them do not veil, but they maintain the traditional custom of seclusion. In spite of this the women have been quick to take advantage of the excellent free health services, which have expanded as rapidly as the education services. They have their children in hospital and confidently take their sick children to be treated as in-patients. Mothers are allowed to stay with their children and the hospital provides their food.

Television only came to Oman in November 1974, but already aerials have sprung up all over Muscat and neighbouring towns, not only on villas and modern blocks of flats, but on the small stone-built houses of the poorer families, and even on the *barastis*, the palm-frond huts. It is too soon yet to know what influence western films and international news pictures will have on the women who hitherto have been shielded from the outside world.

Not all Omani women are secluded, however. There are many who are playing a prominent role in public life, in government offices, in the business world, or in the medical and educational services. These are the Omanis from Zanzibar who lost their homes after the revolution in that island and who returned to their original homeland. They have had a different background to the women brought up in Oman. They have never been secluded. Many of them have had a good education, although some have only a smattering of Arabic as Swahili was their mother tongue. Whether as matron of a large hospital, an inspector of schools, a policewoman in the Immigration department, or a secretary, the Zanzibar Omani woman is a great asset to this rapidly developing country.

Expatriate women – Egyptians, Jordanians, Indians, Pakistanis, are also prominent in the expanding social services as teachers, doctors or nurses. Oman has always absorbed people of other races and it may be this which gives it a relaxed air of tolerance. The fact that so few women are veiled is proof of that, and it will be surprising if, when the first generation of educated Omani girls leave school, they do not begin the change which eventually will lead to all the women taking a fuller part in Omani life.

OTHER COUNTRIES

Among the remaining Arab countries SUDAN is outstanding – like Egypt and Iraq – for having brought women into nearly all spheres of work. A strong educational infrastructure, including technical colleges, has existed for several decades. In recent years President Nimeiry has given women many new opportunities. In the People's Assembly a woman is Chairman of the Members' Committee, a post that combines many of the functions, in Britain, of Speaker in the House of Commons and a Chief Whip. There is a woman deputy minister of Social Affairs. But some 80% of girls are still subjected to 'female circumcision', in spite of attempts to prohibit the practice by law. The Sudanese method is the drastic one of excising the external genitalia and then stitching together the two sides of the vulva, leaving only a miniscule opening for the passage of urine or menstrual blood. The operation carries grave and frequently fatal risks of complications. It is carried out with the object of ensuring the girls' virginity until her marriage (when the husband re-opens the vulva with a knife). The custom is deeply rooted in central African tradition. It is also widely observed in Egypt, Oman, South Yemen and the Arab Emirates, though in these countries usually without stitching. It is not observed elsewhere in the Arab world. The problem is fully reviewed in MRG Report No 47: *Female Circumcision, Excision and Infibulation: The Facts and Proposals for Change.*[22]

LIBYA (the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), like Algeria, practises Islamic socialism but the Islamic impact on women is cushioned by the country's exceptional oil riches. These ensure well-paid work for men and social security provisions on a generous scale. For example, in 1973 President Qaddafi raised widows pensions from 4 to 20 dinars (about £35) a month.[23] Not many women of the poorer class need to work but work exists for them, making cigarettes in Tripoli, or textiles and rugs in Benghazi. The arranged marriage, more or less de rigeur, tends to be stable, again because financial sufficiency makes for domestic peace. Few women are seen in public. Those who must go out to work or shop are wrapped in the all-enveloping *baracan*, covering all but one eye. Richer women move about by car and young educated women are beginning to drive themselves. The one area where the rules against women meeting men are lifted is the university, where the sexes mix. The number of girls at university rose from 222 in 1967 to 948 in 1972.[24] Most women graduates hope to stay on for postgraduate studies, partly because their student days have been so happy and partly because there are few outlets yet for their talents outside academic life. There are a handful of women doctors, some women lawyers working for the government and various university lecturers and headmistresses. Women are also working in quite large numbers as nurses, radio and television announcers, secretaries, telephonists and receptionists, sometimes replacing Palestinians or Egyptians who used to do all these jobs. But the average Libyan woman, marrying at 16 and having a lot of children (the government encourages large families since Libya is underpopulated) is still content with her role. If anything it is a small minority of sophisticated travelled young men who are beginning to turn against the traditional type of marriage, with a home always cluttered with visiting female relatives, and opting for a more private life with a wife from Egypt or Palestine, or, sometimes, from Europe.

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KUWAIT has a small group of women of singular intellectual distinction but in such a small country it is hard to find posts for its gifted women to fill. Some work in television and radio and administrative government positions and there are excellent women physiotherapists. One of these, who trained in England, has opened a first class hospital physiotherapy department and set up a school for handicapped children. Few girls work as nurses or secretaries (these positions are mostly filled by Indians, Egyptians and Palestinians), and no Kuwaiti woman does menial work. Since 90% of Kuwait's men work for the government and social security looks after every contingency – even giving a monthly pension to

any girl who, at eighteen, is still unfortunate enough not to have found a husband[25] – everybody lives comfortably: the minimum wage is the equivalent of £3,500. In such a contented atmosphere a small 'women's lib' group that seeks to reform the Shariah laws and give women the vote and more opportunities at work, makes only a little headway, but may gather more support as more girls with good education find time hanging heavy on their hands. Education is compulsory for all children and at Kuwait university 60% of the students are women. Kuwait's special contribution to women's emancipation is in all the schools and universities it has paid for in poorer countries and the extent to which girls in those countries have benefited.

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BAHRAIN – with less money, but enough – has been able to give a fuller life to a greater number of its women. Many are doing the jobs that are done in Kuwait by foreigners. There are 39 women government officials, 718 teachers, and 197 nurses and girls are pouring into secretarial work as the need for their services arises in government departments, the oil industry, and new industrial projects. A considerable step towards breaking down social sex barriers was taken in the 1960s when several mixed social clubs were founded. There has never been a Bahraini feminist movement. Emancipation has been coming about gradually in response to economic requirements and thanks to a steady educational process that began much earlier than Kuwait's – that is, when oil was first found forty years ago. Dr. Ali Hassan Taki, from whose monograph, published in 1975, *The Changing Status of Bahraini Women*, much of this information has been taken, also mentions the attitude of Bahraini men as 'quite flexible and tolerant'. Less privileged women still lead the traditional life and, unlike the others, are veiled. The regular Shariah laws remain in force but the new facts of life are changing their impact. The marriage dowry, still obligatory, now places such a burden on men that the age of marriage has advanced for both sexes. Many women do not marry until they are over 20. A man university graduate earns, initially, only the equivalent of £1,140 a year and the cost of living is only a little lower than in Britain. He therefore often chooses a wife who herself is earning. In such cases, as elsewhere in the Arab world, the woman waives her Islamic right to keep her earnings to herself and contributes to the family budget. Thus the idea of equal partnership in marriage is gathering strength.

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Conditions for women in QATAR are much the same as in Saudi Arabia, since Qatar also belongs to the Wahhabi sect of Islam. Nearly all women are veiled and have their separate quarters in the household. Education for girls is, however, coming on apace: in 1974 there were 10,000 girls at schools compared with 12,000 boys. Girls will be able to attend the university that is now being built in Doha. Instruction will be separate but the sexes will mix in the library, common rooms and canteen. (The same system prevails in Kuwait.) Few women are working as yet but the Emir of Qatar has recently expressed himself 'confident that women will be able to play their full part without our social customs being in any way affected'. *Cable and Wireless Magazine, No.9, 1975*, which reported this statement, also tells of a revolutionary breakthrough having come with television: 'For the past 18 months or so Qataris have been treated to the nightly sight of Qatari girl announcers, unveiled and wearing western dress and make-up, on the small screen.' After an initial shock, Qatari viewers accepted this new dispensation with equanimity – 'Oh, that is just television' they say.

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Because of its poverty the YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC (NORTH YEMEN) is one of the world's least developed countries. It is only in the last five years – since its civil war petered out – that it has been able to think about social reform. School education for girls is still in a pilot stage. A nursing college has been set up and girls, when up to it, will be able to attend the new university, which already has some women students. A number of these are refugees from South Yemen, who are comparatively emancipated. Women's work is mainly on farms. Some have learned to handle textile machinery at the Chinese built factory in Sanaa. Girls at university tend not to think of careers but, rather, of improving their chances to marry well. For the most part North Yemeni women are submerged in deepest tradition. Townswomen are swathed from head to foot in cumbersome drab coloured wrappings; thick black or dark blue veils hang down from the tops of their heads, thus covering the whole face. Islamic law retains some archaic provisions, abandoned in most other countries, such as stoning a woman for adultery. However, Yemenis say that, on the rare occasions when this takes place, the woman is not physically injured, only publicly disgraced. For the judge passing sentence invariably rules that the stones shall be very small and be thrown from such a great distance that, in the event, they do not reach their target. It is much more common now for a woman convicted of adultery to be sent to prison. In cases where a man is found to have been living on his wife's immoral earnings, the couple are obliged to divorce and both go to prison.

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Women in MOROCCO hold many high positions in business and the professions and abound at the secretarial level. They shine in diplomacy. King Hassan's sister, Princess Lalla Aisha was ambassador to London from 1965 to 1969 and had on her staff a most gifted woman cultural attachée. Social changes have come very rapidly since independence, for which women fought alongside men. The same generation gap as exists in Algeria is felt between the neat, trouser-suited modern Moroccan girl and her conservative parents. But Moroccan restrictiveness is less harsh than Algeria's. Most middle class families disapprove of night clubs and night entertainment generally but Saturday afternoon parties of unchaperoned young men and women are much in fashion. In all classes girls are urged into an arranged marriage only if property interests are at stake. (But the same might be said of Christian Italy or Spain.) The strong Berber strain in Morocco's ethnic make-up produces unusual nuances in local customs. An exceptionally tentative attitude towards marriage among simple people is described in Vanessa Maher's study of life in the Middle Atlas, *Women and Property in Morocco* (Cambridge University Press, 1975). 'In rural areas', she writes, 'marriage for the girl is merely one of a series of temporary unions.' The main object of marriage is to procreate legitimate children; the woman's commitment to her husband is much slighter than that to her own family, to whom she returns when divorced. 'The matter of importance is not that a girl should remain married but that she should have married status, thus safeguarding the family *nif* (honour) . . .' In the rural hinterland women marry as often as six times. In more prosperous urban areas, however, marriage is more stable – because a man can give his wife greater economic security and, in return, has stronger claims on her – and divorce, though it happens, is deplored.

Mme Halima Embarek Warzazi, who has served her country with great distinction at the United Nations, makes the point that while emancipation is not discouraged by men in Morocco, they do not help to promote it; and if women are to end the everyday discriminatory customs that depress their personal status, it is up to them to make their own stand for a full and firmly drafted reform of family law.

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In JORDAN educational standards for women are high and women make up more than 30% of the country's work force. They are prominent in all the professions and have responsible posts in various branches of government including the police. King Hussein's modern style of life is reflected in urban society generally. Since the formation of a women's army corps for non-combatant military duties, women in army uniform are a common sight. While the country is producing great numbers of qualified men and skilled technicians, many are drawn to work in the wealthy Gulf oil states the better to support their families living in Jordan. There is therefore a shortage of skilled man power and it is men, rather than women who are taking the lead in encouraging women to make good the loss. In 1976 a symposium on the 'Role of Women' was organized in Amman by the Ministry of Labour under the chairmanship of Crown Prince Hassan. Its purpose was to formulate schemes by which all Jordanian women could contribute more directly to Jordan's steadily expanding economy and improve their own quality of life. Penelope Turing, writing in *Middle East International* of June 1976 shows how all-embracing the projects are. Basic necessities like family planning and combating illiteracy have been emphasized. For poorer women in the more conservative areas there are incentives to partake in adult education and promises of loans for cottage industries and crafts. At the other end of the scale there is not only provision for educated girls to have many kinds of specialized training but also for women to take part in administrative planning at the highest levels through being repre-

sented in such institutions as the National Planning Council and their Board of Trustees of universities. With the opening of the new university of Yarmuk (Irbid) more places will be available to girls, who already constitute one third of the 5000 students at the Jordan University in Amman. Since Prince Hassan is acknowledged as the guiding spirit of all Jordan's largely successful economic policies, his close association with this drive to up-grade women may be taken as auguring well.

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Mention has already been made of PALESTINIAN women as torchbearers for women's emancipation. Scores of thousands are citizens of Jordan and thousands more are dispersed all over the Arab world. The fathers of better-off families who went into exile after the creation of Israel no longer put all their savings into land and property but paid out much more than before on educating their daughters – as they had always educated their sons. To poorer refugee girls the schools provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency have given a sound education and high standards of proficiency are attained in UNRWA vocational training schools. So everywhere in the Middle East Palestinian women are serving as doctors, headmistresses, school and university teachers, administrators, nurses, secretaries and in the less advanced countries are providing a living example of how, in a Muslim society, women may lead useful outgoing lives without loss of dignity or principle. In the Israeli occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian middle class women have been outstanding in establishing homes for impoverished and handicapped children and training the many poorer women who have lost their husbands to earn their livings.

In Lebanon the Palestine Liberation Organization has its own Women's Association which has set up an intrepid network of clinics, workshops and nurseries. Although there have been some 'heroines of the resistance' and women have suffered torture in Israeli prisons, they have not operated with the Palestinian guerillas to the same extent as did Algerian women with their guerillas in the Algerian fight for independence. Yet history may well record that the simple women in the huge refugee camps in the occupied territories and Lebanon have done more to sustain the concept of a Palestinian homeland than all the guerillas put together. With all able-bodied men going out everyday to work or, in Lebanon, to their guerilla bases, it has been left to the women to maintain the morale and lifestyle of the camps. The style is as near as they can make it, in degraded slum conditions, to that of their lost Palestinian villages. It is mainly the women who have preserved the culture and memories of Palestine as it was before 1948. But their exhaustion in bringing up children in overcrowded, unhealthy camps (targets also, in Lebanon, of devastating Israeli bombing), has been so great that, in contrast to the mortality trend in most other societies, men over the age of 40 outlive women.[26] Whereas before 1948 such Palestinian women were freer than nearly all other Arab village women, their men now subject them to extra strict supervision, sometimes forbidding their wives even to attend literacy classes. Men seem to have become fanatical about the 'honour' of their women as though, having lost everything that gave life meaning, that honour is all they have left to take pride in.

Some younger women – those under 30 – who have benefited from education may enjoy greater freedom because they are often the only breadwinners their families have. But many young camp women regret that the Palestine liberation movement has not brought about a parallel liberation for themselves. The thousands of highly educated Palestinian women who are holding important jobs throughout the Middle East were 'liberated' by force of circumstance – the loss of their homes to Israel and the sheer necessity of going out to earn.

THE POSITION IN 1983

The past seven years, since the last edition of this Report, have seen some notable developments. In EGYPT, in 1979, women won their long campaign for reform of the Islamic laws governing marriage and divorce. The late President Sadat, at the urging of his wife, Jehan, decreed a new liberal law when parliament was not sitting – but just a few hours before a new parliament was convened. Under the constitution such a decree may be accepted or rejected but may not be amended. An acrimonious debate was thus avoided and the new law was adopted. It had the support of the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar and the Grand Mufti. But other prominent ulema were deeply hostile and persist in their opposition. In 1981 parliament made a concession to their sentiments in changing the wording of the constitution so that the Shariah would no longer be an 'essential source' but the 'principal source' of the nation's legislation. Women feared that this change might herald some whittling down of their gains. But the new law has so far prevailed and, since its adoption, some 5000 women have got some satisfaction or other in the courts.[27]

This new Personal Status law grants a divorced wife the custody of her sons until they are fifteen and of her daughters until they marry. So long as her children are with her she may stay in the home she had when she was married. Her right to alimony is extended from one to three years and is calculated at 40% of her husband's salary. If she was married for more than fifteen years she can claim maintenance for life, or until she remarries. Polygamy is not forbidden but is made more difficult since the husband must now get his first wife's consent before marrying another.

In TUNISIA, in 1981, the country's already enlightened family law was further amended in favour of women. A man must pay his divorced wife adequate alimony so long as she does not remarry or earn an adequate income. As in Egypt, she is now entitled to stay with her children in the marital home.

From ALGERIA comes a very different story.[28] In 1982 the government appointed a small group of men, said to be learned in Islam, to draft a new family law. They included the Attorney General and the Minister for Religious Affairs and worked in secret. No women's organization was consulted. The intention seemed to be to give the present blend of Islamic and French legislation a more purely Islamic character. The draft they produced caused an uproar. It would have deprived a woman of her present right to seek a divorce: that right would be exclusively the husband's. Even an adult woman would have been forbidden to marry except with the consent of a male 'guardian' – an uncle, brother or cousin, should her father be dead. Her duty to obey her husband and his family would have been enshrined in the code.

When the draft was presented to parliament it was hotly contested by the nine women members, who rallied considerable support. Outside parliament women poured into the streets in protest. The daily *El-Moudjahid* denounced the proposals as retrograde and even within the country's single party, the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*) opinion was sharply divided. The government, taken aback, withdrew the draft for revision and set afoot a nationwide debate on women's rights. As a further conciliatory gesture it nominated a woman – Z'hor Ounissi – as a cabinet minister.

In Marxist SOUTH YEMEN the authorities have had to bend in an opposite direction. Their original determined efforts to jack-up the status of women have given way to a more cautious approach. In spite of the fact that they give allowances to girls going on to secondary school, all too few take advantage. But no girl is forced to go. Those who do go to school insist on being in separate classes from boys and are veiled. Some wives of young educated men, who do not want them to veil, continue to do so for fear of offending their fathers – to whom they might have to return should they be divorced. The government is now taking care not to clash with Islamic teaching, even claiming that South Yemen's scientific socialism is more true to the early ideals of Islam than is the manner of life in many other Arab states.

These events, touching women's rights, have been taking place at a time when the movement for Islamic revival has been gathering strength all over the Middle East. Since this movement is essentially one against 'alien western values' its outward signs are most marked in the countries that have been most exposed to western influence. In Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia a minority of educated women have abandoned their western attire in favour of long dresses and headscarves. In some universities women students, who formerly mixed unselfconsciously with men, are now insisting on sitting separately from them at lectures. In sophisticated areas of Cairo the fundamentalist 'cover-up' has been adapted by fashion designers as an elegant new *mode Islamique.*

For many young women this sartorial trend is no more than a way of establishing their cultural identity by 'going ethnic'. But others believe, as do most men fundamentalists, that a strict code of conduct for women in a firm patriarchal framework is a basic remedy for most social and economic ills. Older women who

pioneered the cause of women's emancipation have begun to wonder whether their considerable achievement is being undermined.

Dr. Muhammad Shaalan,[29] head of psychiatry at Al Azhar university in Cairo, thinks it is not. He believes that Egyptians have learned a salutary lesson from the revolution in Iran. Arab women, almost everywhere, found inspiration in the decisive role played by their Iranian Muslim sisters in overthrowing the despotic and heavily westernized Shah. But disillusion soon set in when they saw these same women subjected to humiliating restrictions and stripped of such legal rights as they had. Divorce has been made easier for men and more difficult for women and a divorced woman has less chance of retaining her children. The age of marriage for girls has been reduced from 18 to 13. Restraints to discourage polygamy have been withdrawn. Women are obliged to wear heavy headscarves and long figure concealing dresses, if not the traditional *chador*, an all-enveloping black garment. According to Farah Azari, editor of *Women in Iran* (Ithaca Press, 1983), the enforcement of this dress restriction was carried out in 1980 by self-appointed groups of men whose systematic assaults on women in city streets ranged from throwing stones and acids to stabbings and beatings. Of the hundreds of women executed at that period as opponents of the regime, many were simple prostitutes or girls not yet in their teens. Women political prisoners are often raped by their guards. Scores of thousands of women have been sacked from their jobs. A policy of sexual segregation in all walks of life is being strenuously pursued. Unrelated men and women mingling socially are liable to be flogged. It has been more difficult to separate the sexes in their work places but where women are in a minority they are dismissed. Today segregation at all stages of education has been accomplished. Text books, different from those for boys, are being prepared for girls to emphasize their 'female role'. Girls are being givn financial incentives to marry as early as possible and after marrying are forbidden to continue their education. Women are banned from studying law and may also be banned from mathematics and engineering.

Dr. Shaalan names not only Iran as a warning of what Islamic extremism can lead to: he points also to Saudi Arabia as a professedly Islamic state whose social example can hardly commend itself to Egyptians. Yet fundamentalism remains a considerable latent force. Some of its most ardent supporters are in the urban lower middle classes – small shopkeepers, clerks and the like. It also finds favour among industrial workers and the unemployed. Some Arabs believe that, in part, it is a reaction to the rapid pace of industrialization. Conservative country people, flocking in their thousands to look for work in the cities, cling fanatically to Islam as their single stabilizer in a new and daunting environment. The women among these migrants, cut off from their village friendships, find solace in religious observance no less than the men. The quality of their lives is often greatly diminished as they housekeep in isolation or – should their husbands fail to get work or desert them – get sucked into poorly paid menial jobs.

Yet, conversely, industrialization has been a great liberator in forcing the pace of education for girls and giving them the chance of earning a worthwhile independent living. For example there is probably no area in the world where girls' education has advanced so swiftly as in the Arabian Peninsula and this largely in relation to the need for women in the work force. In 1980, in Saudi Arabia, some 25,000 women were on the government's payroll – a number unimaginable only a few years previously. The same pattern on a much larger scale is reproduced in many of the Middle East's spawning cities. Jordan is an outstanding case. The bitter sufferings of Lebanon through civil strife and Israeli invasion and the collapse of Beirut as a great commercial centre has brought foreign business houses crowding into the Jordanian capital. Their demands for women staff are almost insatiable.

Women now account for 25% of doctors in Algeria and about 24% of engineers and other technical experts in Iraq. In the field of communications they comprise about 22% of the staff in Lebanon and nearly 50% in Egypt.[31] Among new fields of employment banking has come to the fore. It absorbs women clerks by the thousand and finds women in executive posts in Libya, Kuwait, Bahrain and also in London and New York. A useful development is the recent setting up of women's banks run by women in Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia. They offer the same services as men's banks, are comfortably furnished with arm chairs, serve tea and coffee and form a valuable social centre for women who otherwise rarely venture from their homes. There are now 13 Women's branches of the major banks in Saudi Arabia.

CONCLUSION

Arab women, carving out a career, meet little masculine opposition. They often rise to the top of their professions more rapidly than do their European counterparts. A reason for this is that when, after independence, their countries embarked on industrial and other modernizing programmes there were not enough qualified men to fill responsible posts. Except at the lowest levels of employment – where women are exploited and underpaid, as in the west – women at work are usually treated with respect. It is in matters involving their status as wives and mothers and daughters that they find themselves disadvantaged.

Wherever the Shariah laws run unamended, women of all classes are liable to have their marriages broken up at their husband's whim and, in consequence, to lose custody of their older children. Great difficulties, social and legal, are put in the way of instituting divorce proceedings themselves, and should they succeed in a suit, they still stand to lose their children. In poorer circles women are often repudiated for being ill or for some other reason unable to pull their weight. In some rural areas there is a high turn-over in wives, since a wife loses her value if she falls short at farm work. (Women account for some 60% of the Middle East's agricultural labour force and, except on Iraq's model farms and in parts of South Yemen, they work mostly as unpaid family hands.)

Only three countries, Egypt, Tunisia and South Yemen have reformed family status laws to give equal rights to women. The Egyptian and Tunisian provisions for a divorced wife to have alimony and a right to stay in the marital home compare with enlightened legislation anywhere. But they can take a grip only slowly in the face of entrenched male attitudes and are applicable only to women who are well informed enough to insist that their cases be brought to court. As in the west, their efficacy depends on the ability of the ex-husband to meet his financial responsibilities and that of the court to enforce its rulings. But they do constitute an important recognition of the human rights of a wife and mother and the fact that the economic conditions that underlay Shariah legislation no longer hold. The considerable marriage dowry that once ensured that a divorced woman would have money enough to go on with is now often reduced to a minimum except among the richest people. The Koranic concept of a woman having no obligation to contribute to the family budget from her private or earned income has gone by the board. Under the pressure of inflation many married women are working to help to support their families. It may be that such economic pressures will, in the long run, counterbalance fundamentalist urges to perpetuate out-dated laws that subordinate women to men.

The fundamentalist movement is seen by many Arabs as only an extreme expression of a widely felt wish to discard – or not to import – those aspects of western society that are alien to Islamic culture. Among these aspects one of the least acceptable is the sexual liberation of women now customary in the west. This is anathema to Islam, which sets such supreme importance on a girl's pre-marital virginity. But in this respect most Arab women are at one with men. Of the many who have been consulted in the preparation of this report, nearly all have acknowledged their debt to the west in having provided an example (more or less) of the independent status and equal partnership in marriage they wish to have. But one and all have said that they want to achieve this status without loss of their most precious traditions. Among these a strong family base and a certain Islamic decorum rank high. As far as sex is concerned, Islamic law includes penalties for adultery and fornication and these are retained, for example, in Tunisia's reformed legal system, but with prison sentences the same for men as for women. Legislation about such matters would not be acceptable in the west but may give Islamic society the safeguards it requires. In any event, it is impossible to conceive that the Arab people, who have imprinted their culture so indelibly on so many other races, could themselves suffer loss of identity in conceding to women the dignified personal status that many Islamic scholars believe was envisaged in the scriptures. Customs will change for all classes, as they have, in the main, for the privileged class, with fuller economic development and advances in education and family planning; but the psychology of equality cannot be established until women have equal rights before the law.

FOOTNOTES

[1] This total figure is taken from United Nations estimates for 1973. United Nations estimates of population by sex relate to various years from 1965 to 1976, according to when figures were available in each country and do not include Saudi Arabia, Morocco, North Yemen, Oman and Qatar. They show men to be slightly in excess of women in all countries except Algeria and South Yemen, where women slightly predominate.

[2] 14 out of 250 in Sudan's Popular Assembly and 27 out of 635 in Britain's House of Commons. (1975)

[3] Figures given by Shwikar Elwan, Director of Information, League of Arab States, in New York. There are also many girls, particularly from the richer oil-producing countries, who are studying in Europe and the United States.

[4] See Shwikar Elwan in 'The Status of Arab Women', *Women Speaking*, January to March 1975. Among less educated people, however, the bride's father often takes part of the dower for himself, thus partially thwarting the Shariah's good intentions towards the bride. See description of the 'bride price' in the section on the United Arab Emirates.

[5] *History of the Arabs* by Philip K. Hitti (Macmillan, first edition 1937, reprinted 1953).

[6] There are Christian minorities in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. In Lebanon they number rather less than half the population.

[7] The principal religious university of the Islamic world.

[8] The annual rate of increase in Egypt is 2.2 compared with 3.1 in Lebanon (where family planning is prohibited), 2.4 in Tunisia (where family planning is encouraged) and 3.2 in Algeria (where family planning is not encouraged). Compare also with France 0.9, UK 0.3, Spain 1.1 (1970-73 figures published by the International Planned Parenthood Federation).

[9] This is a high percentage by all international standards (the British rate is 35%) but includes multitudes of women working on family farms. If women in agriculture are excluded the percentage is about 23.

[10] Some comparative illiteracy rates are given in the diagram on page 16.

[11] Only one woman has ever been elected to Parliament.

[12] Figure quoted by the Lebanese Council of Women.

[13] The Syrian English language magazine *Flash of Damascus*, May 1975, says that 'women represent now little more than 10% of the labour force but the number is increasing very rapidly'.

[14] 1974 figures, published in the Iraqi Women's Association Journal.

[15] Ratna Roy Chodhury in the *Baghdad Observer*, 3 March 1975.

[16] For comparative statistics of women at universities see diagram on page 16.

[17] In her book, *La Femme Algérienne* (Maspero, 1969), Fadela M'Rabat recorded 175 such suicides (or attempted suicides) in 1964, the figure having been given by a doctor on Algiers radio as applying to cases brought into a single hospital in Algiers. The wave of suicides took place in the immediate aftermath of independence, when so many women were disappointed that the new Algeria could not offer them a better deal. It subsided after 1964. Fadela M'Rabet's book was ill received even by Algerian feminists who thought it painted too black a general picture but her specific documentation from press and radio is careful.

[18] Figure quoted from *Education and Modernization in the Middle East* by Joseph S. Szyliowiz, Cornell University Press, 1973. For comparative illiteracy rates see diagram on page 16.

[19] 1960 was the date when government education began; some private schools for girls had been opened five years earlier (see introduction).

[20] Federation formed in December 1971 by seven previously independent but British influenced sheikhdoms of very unequal size and economic strength: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharya, Ayman, Umm al Qaiwain, Ras al Khaima and Fujaira.

[21] In more sophisticated countries there are special hours for women in the mosque, a practice that many UAE women would welcome.

[22] See also *Women Why Do You Weep? Circumcision and its Consequences* by Dr Asma El Dareer, Zed Press, 1982.

[23] *The Times*, 28 January 1974.

[24] Figures quoted by Richard Mead and Alan George in 'The Women of Libya', *Middle East International*, July 1973.

[25] *The Times*, 28 January 1974.

[26] According to Mai Sayegh, President of the General Union of Palestinian Women, quoted in *Connections*, Autumn 1981.

[27] See Assem Abdul Mohsen in *The Middle East*, July 1981, pages 39-42.

[28] See Nadia Aggar in *The Middle East*, October 1982, pp 43-44.

[29] Dr Shaalan's views were quoted extensively by the Egyptian anthropologist, Nadia Atif, in a BBC2 programme, reported in *The Listener*, 29 July 1982.

[30] Figure given in *Middle East Journal*, Autumn 1982.

[31] Figures from International Labour Office, *Year Book of Labour Statistics* (Geneva, ILO, 1979).

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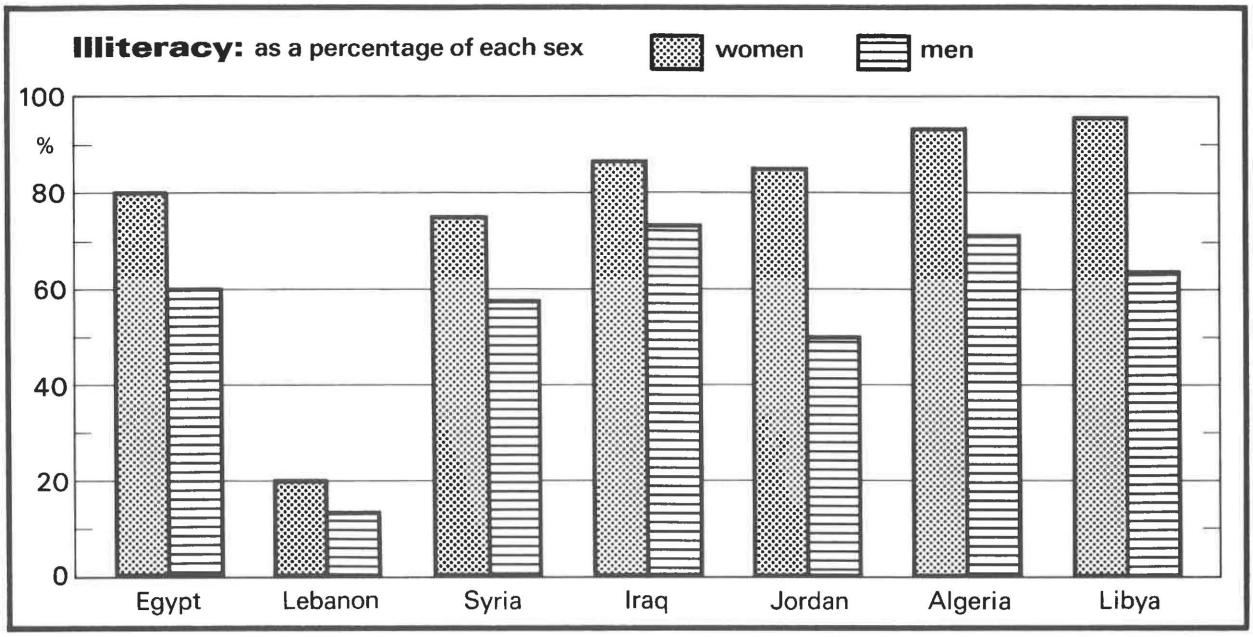
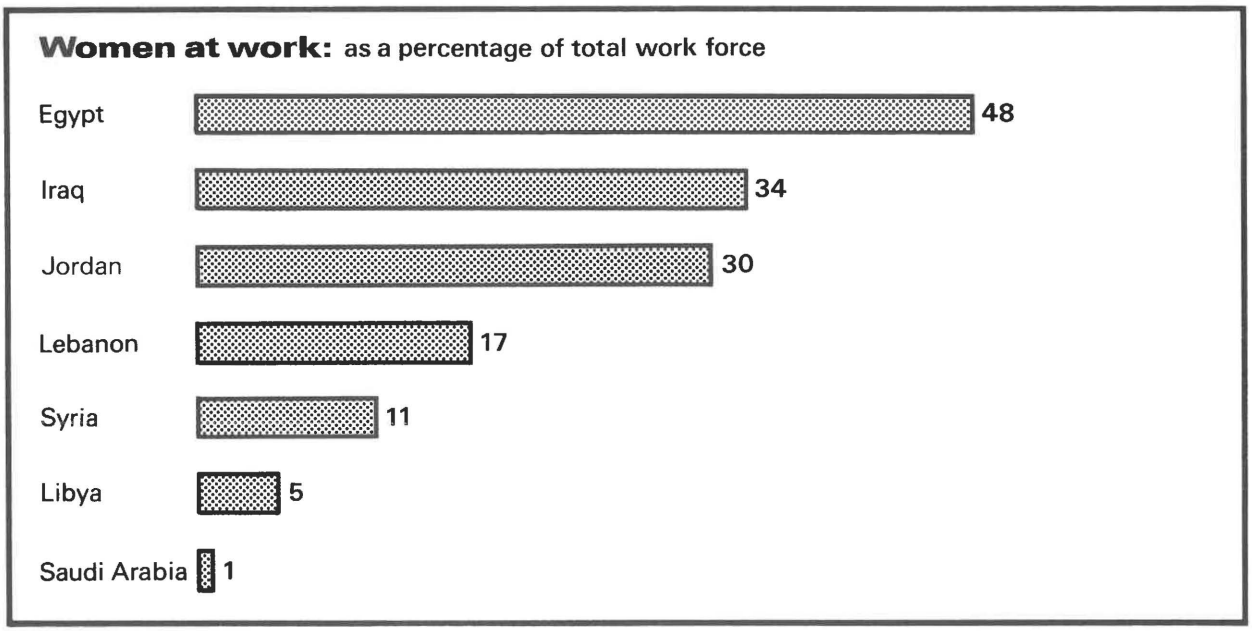
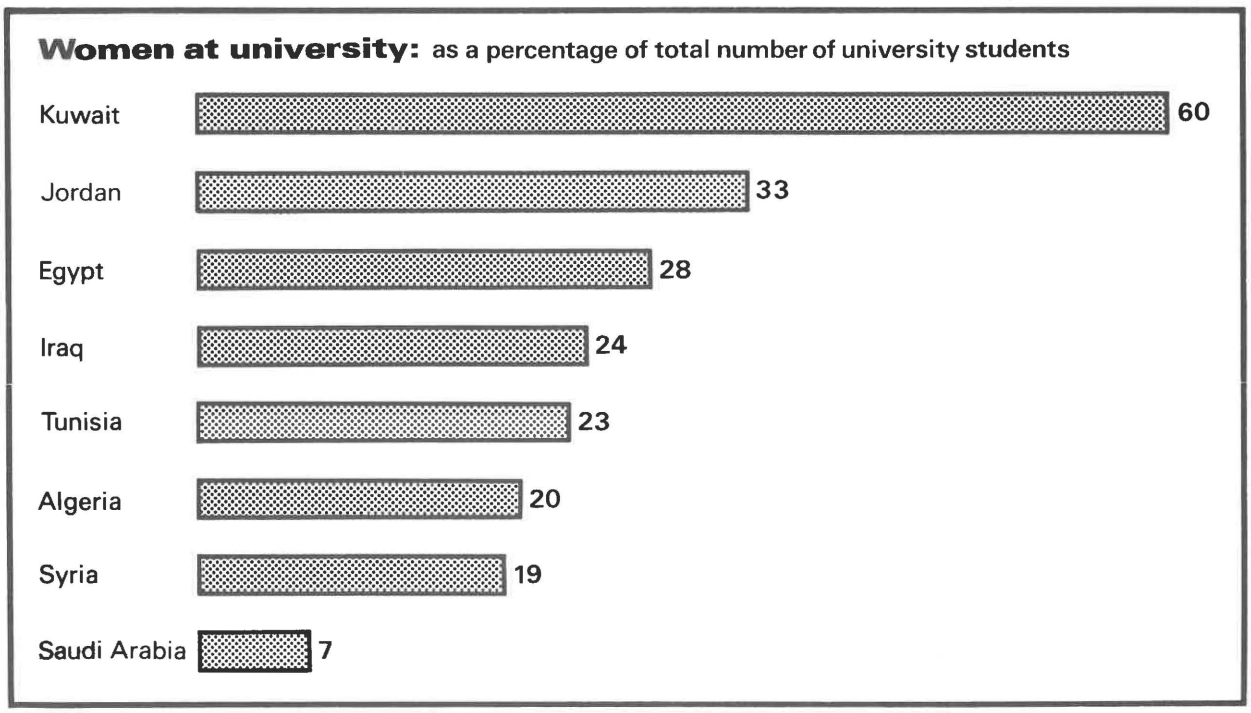
TABLE – Population by Sex

Country	(Year)	Total	Men	Women
Algeria	(1966)	11,821,679	5,817,145	6,004,534
Bahrain	(1971)	216,078	116,314	99,764
Egypt	(1976)	36,656,180	18,698,904	17,957,276
Iraq	(1965)	8,047,451	4,102,514	3,944,901
Jordan	(1961)	1,706,226	867,597	838,629
Kuwait	(1975)	994,837	543,768	451,069
Lebanon	(1970)	2,126,325	1,080,015	1,046,310
Libya	(1973)	2,257,037	1,200,246	1,056,791
South Yemen	(1973)	1,590,275	787,017	803,258
Sudan	(1973)	14,171,732	–	–
"	(1956)	10,262,536	5,186,126	5,076,410
Syria	(1970)	6,304,685	3,233,110	3,071,575
Tunisia	(1975)	5,588,209	2,840,918	2,747,296
U.A.E.	(1968)	179,126	110,806	68,320

Based on United Nations information from the latest census in each country. Women exceed men only in Algeria and South Yemen. No figures by sex are given for Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and North Yemen, or recently for Sudan.


Illiteracy: as a percentage of each sex
women
men
100
%
80
60
40
20
0
Egypt
Lebanon
Syria
Iraq
Jordan
Algeria
Libya


Women at work: as a percentage of total work force
Egypt
48
Iraq
34
Jordan
30
Lebanon
17
Syria
11
Libya
5
Saudi Arabia
1


Women at university: as a percentage of total number of university students
Kuwait
60
Jordan
33
Egypt
28
Iraq
24
Tunisia
23
Algeria
20
Syria
19
Saudi Arabia
7

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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The cover photograph, by courtesy of Oxfam/UNWRA, shows a young trained midwife instructing traditional midwives, or 'dayas', in modern hygiene.

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