

SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the relation between a number of cultural constructs and the present situation of women in Arab countries. This chapter focuses on other components of the social context: embedded societal structures that have contributed to shaping the status of women.

As previous Reports have shown, through the focus on knowledge and freedom, the rise of women is a trend that straddles the moral and material dimensions of human development. It is important to take a holistic view of this subject as these dimensions have a direct impact on cultural constructs on one hand and human procreation on the other.

With both dimensions in mind, the Report now considers the contributions of traditional and present-day social institutions to the moral and material situation of women in the Arab countries.

TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES: THE ENSHRINING OF MALE DOMINANCE AND WOMEN'S FIRST STEPS TO ESCAPE

What is the nature of the relationship between the patriarchal order and Arab societal structures? What effects do the “Arab marriage”,¹ kinship relationships and the different social arrangements for human reproduction have on the relationship between the sexes? Do traditional societal structures protect patriarchy? Is it still the case that “tribal, clan or familial loyalties are among the most entrenched and influential of traditional loyalties in contemporary Arab

life?” Do societal structures determine cultural forms or are the two reciprocally related and thus intertwined? What are the features of continuity and rupture, of the constant and the variable, in Arab social structures, and how were they influenced by economic, cultural and political factors?

This chapter tries to deconstruct the elements of Arab social structures and their various components to identify their influence and roles in people's lives. It also explores continuities and discontinuities between social and other institutions that together make up the arsenal defending the patriarchal order.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE AGNATE

Historically, kinship relations in Arab society were founded on the agnate (al-‘asaba) or relative on the father's side. In the Arabic language and in Arab custom, the agnate is the principle of cohesion within the tribe. The agnate, according to the Bedouin and to Ibn Manzur's *Lisan al-‘Arab*, is based on *al-taraf* (paternity, filiation) and *al-janib* (fraternity, relationship to the paternal uncle). To resort to a mathematical expression, these are the horizontal and vertical axes closest to the supporting base (the man), the closest of his paternal male kin who are capable of fighting, providing reinforcement, conquering and defending (Ibn Manzur, in Arabic, 1982). A man is surrounded and protected by (and also responsible towards) a preceding generation (the father), a succeeding generation (the sons) and a coexisting generation (brothers and paternal male cousins).

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¹ Marriage that gives precedence to endogamy, and especially marriage to the paternal uncle's son, within the tribe, clan and extended family.

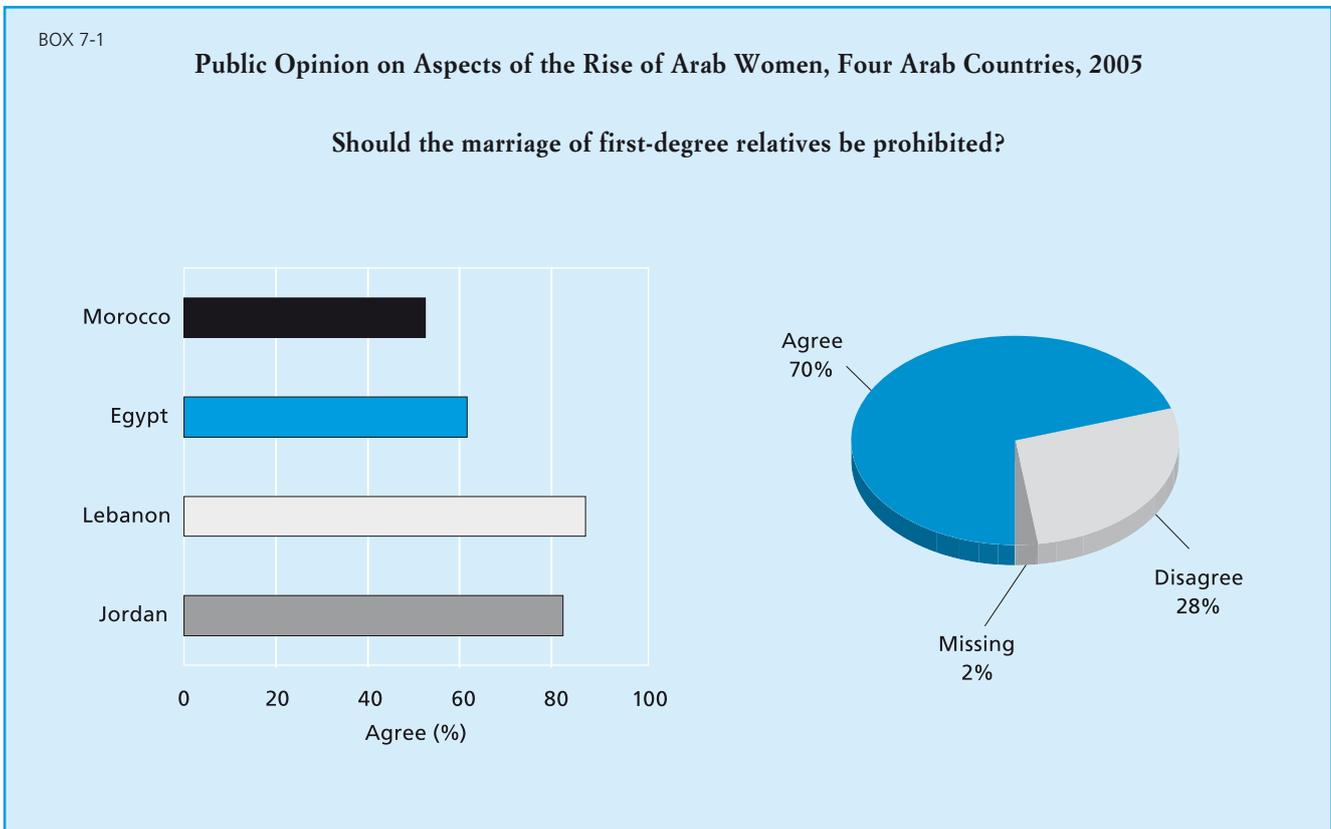
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its collective nature, was a result of arduous living conditions owing to the scarcity of natural resources and the competition for them as tribal populations grew. However, it provided the groundwork for what anthropologists refer to as the "Arab marriage", or, in other words, the keeping of assets within the clan in terms of human reproduction and means of subsistence. The salient features of this marriage persisted in urban conditions and were consolidated in one way or another by the emergence of a socio-political order that was to play an important role in the infrastructure of states and old forms of political power. While the agnate divests a man of his individual identity and obliges him to act in solidarity with blood loyalties, it also ensures that he obtains, in return, privileges within the same group. In the patriarchal order, women pay the highest price for this trade off by becoming the main instrument of reproduction in the tribe, with whatever special status this position may at times entail.

Arab tribal society was deeply aware of women's structural and functional importance to it. The tribe considered honour, respect and

protection as a unity linking each of its members with the whole and thus also the women with the whole. This made any denigration of the tribe's women a matter touching the very heart of their kinfolk's security and standing. Hence the exercise of power over women within the tribe was, in practice, a nuanced matter, flexible enough to allow women some room for manoeuvre within its otherwise rigid social structure. This limited space permitted women to participate in tribal life and explore their potential, on the one hand, and it also enabled society to redefine gender roles with each forward movement that it took.

It is important to point out here that many of the features of the "Arab marriage" in its traditional anthropological sense are today the subjects of social criticism. Nor is this criticism exclusively civil and political; multiple forms of objection to the traditional concepts of blood money and honour crimes are now quite common. Furthermore, the survey shows that the Arab public today is inclined to prohibit the marriage of first-degree relatives, especially in Lebanon and Jordan (Box 7-1).



THE ARAB TRIBE AND ISLAM

Islam brought with it the concept of the umma (the Islamic community) as an expression of collective identity to replace that of the tribe. However, the Arab tribes, primarily the Bedouin but also the urban-rural tribes, preserved their authoritarian structures unchanged. This is evident in the manner in which the tribes came to meet the Prophet Muhammad and in their pledge of allegiance to him, in their later apostasy and in their subsequent return to Islam.

As the Arab armies sallied forth beyond the Arabian Peninsula, the tribes that went to war advanced on other countries together with their women and children, there to set up their camps and residences according to their tribal divisions. In the army administration, their contribution and their combat were organised according to lineage. The chief of the tribe acted as the intermediary of the Caliphate with his tribe, as the guardian in charge of matters pertaining to his people who was responsible for their actions. In most of the armies of the early conquests, the banners of different tribes accompanied the banner of the army leadership, which comprised a general commander and local commanders representing each of the kinship groups involved in the fighting (al-Duri, in Arabic, 1978, 18-21). Hence, the army appeared to be a quasi-tribal, quasi-regional alliance with one single leadership appointed by the Caliphate and several group leaders determined by the balance of power among those groups.

Although Islam established the notion of individual responsibility for both men and women, as well as emphasising respect for both sexes and their rights, the socio-cultural and economic-political formation of the conquests imposed limits on these broad vistas that the new religion had opened for women.

Mudawi al-Rashid considers that the rights that Islam had granted women, such as the right to inherit, were a threat to the economic unity of tribal society in both desert-nomadic and urban settings. Consequently, the Arab tribes, and especially the pastoral Bedouin or those that settled after Islam, adopted two measures to ensure the sustained economic

vitality of the group. These tribes in practice forbade their women from inheriting, despite their legal right to do so, and they continued to apply their law forcing a woman to marry her paternal uncle's son (her first cousin on that side of the family) or relative. Thus, the tribe guaranteed that there would be no dispersal of its economy or its resources such as land and herds (Al-Rasheed, background paper for the Report). In addition, the successive wars on which the Arab-Islamic empire and its civilisation were built led to the system of segregating the sexes as well as polygamy, including with women slaves.

Arguably, only during two periods in history was this structure ever radically shaken in such a way as to change its constituents and functions and the nature of human relationships.

The first occurred along with enhancement of the state's capital towards the end of the Umayyad Caliphate and throughout the Abbasid Caliphate (eighth century C.E. onwards). This was when Arab urban societies evolved, bustling with civic activities and marked by the rise of loyalties based on profession, class and region. This period saw the spread of exogamy and the political economy of women slaves at the expense of the family and the tribe. However, the fall of Baghdad in 10 February 1258 and the decline of Arab-Islamic civilisation curbed these changes, which had yielded an Arab urban society whose backbone, according to the Sufis, was "the perfect man" (in today's parlance, a society based on civic concord that guarantees basic human rights).

The second time was with the penetration of Western capitalism, starting from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Along with this came the stifling of pre-capitalist socio-economic order and the emergence of new institutions and social forces. The latter dealt several blows to tribal units based on patriarchal family labour, as did the consequent adoption by women of new professions – in education, journalism, factories, government administration and free enterprise – side by side with men.

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AUTHORITARIANISM AND TRIBAL SOLIDARITY

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The systematic elimination of nascent civil society – which had begun to take root in the Arab world at the beginning of the twentieth century – by restricting its freedom to organise, mobilise, marshal solidarity and support, and express a selfhood independent of political authority led individuals and groups to revert to pre-urban, tribal solidarities.

The emergence of the modern authoritarian system played a large role in curtailing the growth of civil institutions. Though European capitalism brought with it new values relating to the state, politics and society, these did not originate in local conditions. Hence the cycle through which the foundations of a law-based state and an independent civil society resistant to oppression might have been established was never completed. Thus, the nation-state faced little difficulty in compromising the foundations of citizenship and civil relations, especially in the name of overcoming its economic dependency and catching up with developed countries. The blow dealt to basic freedoms left its mark on the nascent civil society, which found no public space for itself. In the absence of a viable civil society that could protect citizens' interests, exposed individuals turned their backs on the institutions of civil society and sought the rude shelter of the tribal and clan system, with its feudal and organic bonds. Tribal and clan systems continue to command the devoted allegiance of individuals in such groups through just and unjust causes alike because they are a last recourse for identity, solidarity, security and self-defence. They represent the sole viable definition of an "us".

As Hisham Sharabi puts it, "Tribal loyalty is not an expression of creed; rather, it arises from essential needs. The survival of clannish bonds or denominational loyalties in neo-patriarchal society points to the firm association between modern patriarchy and primitive forms. Neither the city, the society nor the state succeeded in developing social formations capable of producing authentic alternative structures" (Sharabi, in Arabic, 1993, 48). The relevance of this point today can better be appreciated when one sees the stubborn impediments to the launching of a real civil society capable of filling the vacuum in the role of the state in protecting the rights of people and in guaranteeing public participation. This leads to two hypotheses. The first maintains that the structure of the Arab city, with its marked rural complexion, cannot support the type of civil society that grew up and thrived

in the embrace of European cities (Al-Falih, in Arabic, 2002, 34). The second hypothesis is that the ruling authorities' expropriation of civic initiatives is chiefly responsible for the persistence of tribal and clan relationships in modern city life. In other words, tribal systems, values and customs have been perpetuated under the auspices of the non-democratic state that annulled alternative forms of mediation between the individual and the state (Haytham Manna', in Arabic, 1986, 12ff).

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There is no doubt that, initially, the all-encompassing Arab state contributed to a greater participation by women in the public sphere, professional fields and social services as well as to the relative protection of motherhood and childhood. In the end, however, bureaucratic rigidity, the expropriation of different social and civic initiatives and the sponsoring of the system of the local dignitary (a man, of course) as the sole intermediary between authority and society held women's rights hostage to the nature and vicissitudes of power. The mutually supportive relationship between state authority and patriarchy saw to it that these early achievements soon became opportunities for personal (male) gain, and the position of women continued to deteriorate in the absence of defenders in civil society, which remained hobbled.

It follows that confrontation between authority and the nuclei of civil society, in which the former suppressed the latter, prompted a greater regression towards kinship structures, which took on new forms as the arrangements for human reproduction intermingled with those for producing a new material and cultural basis of life. As Halim Barakat puts it, "The solidarity of the extended family arises from the necessities of cooperation" (Barakat, in Arabic, 1985, 82).

THE AGNATE AND WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

The Arab agnate and the Arab marriage are not a given, nor do they remain in the pristine Bedouin condition that delineated their historical features. Nor is clannism limited to Arabs, either in the racial or the national sense, as some of its features can be seen in the Amazight and Kurdish societies. Nevertheless, the clan and the tribe as essential refuges in political authoritarian structures, both historical and contemporary, continue to make their presence felt in relationships between the sexes. They also continue to place women in a complex construct that combines the social, religious and legal and that determines women's role and fate. Their features are conspicuous in the Arabian Peninsula, in the countryside in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, in North Africa, Somalia and Mauritania.

The kinship group that those living in the Arab world coexist with to this day is a human group whose patriarchal authority enshrines the hereditary nature of the economic structure and positions of leadership and sovereignty at the expense of women, who are marginalised, surviving in forms adapted to contemporary capitalism. The relationships of human reproduction in Arab societies enshrine, for women, endogamous marriage and marriage to the paternal uncle's son from the tribe while retaining for males the freedom to choose either endogamous or exogamous marriage. Kinship groups established this mode of marriage in the first place as a man's right and a form of compulsion for woman in order to ensure the cohesiveness of agnates through blood relations. As noted earlier, this absolute "right" of the paternal uncle's son is associated

BOX 7-2

Su'ad Joseph: Patriarchy and Development in the Arab world

Most writers in the Arab world agree that the ties and values of kinship are the cornerstone of Arab societies. They preserve and strengthen the individual's sense of self and identity and shape his social situation. They are also the primary source of economic security. Kinship

determines political membership and weaves a web of essential political resources. It also determines religious identities. The centrality of kinship has an impact on patriarchy: kinship transfers patriarchy to all social aspects of life.

Source: Joseph, in Arabic, 2005.

with a system of values and relationships that seek to exercise full control over the reproductive capacity of the tribe's women in order to preserve inherited economic assets and social power. It consequently confines a woman and deprives her of her right to choose her partner.

In some academic circles, this social mode is considered an important factor in, and an inseparable part of, the social heritage that contributes to male domination and woman's deprivation of her most basic rights. This heritage, moreover, is an important factor in the social oppression of women whereby the process of domination and punishment becomes a collective one exercised by the kin, as a "group," against the individual, the "woman". Nor is this confined to marriage choices; it also extends to blood money, honour crimes and the absence of a clear dividing line between the personal and the familial.

A number of Arab sociologists consider that, despite the fact that the tribe is nowadays a thing of the past, its values and concepts remain in place in the Arab consciousness as does its approach to women's issues, even in the absence of a pastoral economy and Bedouinism. Others, by contrast, register changes in kinship relationships as socio-economic units following the expansion in the system of services, state control over the facilities of life and the widening of the scope of bureaucratic employment (Barakat, in Arabic, 1985, 178).

It is no secret that Arab women remain subject to domination, both spiritual and material, directly and indirectly. The degree and strength of this domination vary from one environment to the other depending on the stage of life through which the woman is passing. Hence, any analysis of domination must take

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into account what is referred to as a woman's life cycle. The young girl may suffer from more domination than her married or elderly sister. Likewise, a woman who is both married and a mother may be exposed to forms of domination that differ from those to which an elderly woman, divorcee, spinster or widow is exposed. Thus, domination is not an absolute condition suffered by all women to the same degree and in the same strength and form. Rather, it is a condition that varies depending on age, social status, economic circumstances, the political standing of the family and the prevailing socio-political system, among other factors that affect a woman's experience in society.

Relations within the family have continued to be governed by the father's authority over his children and the husband's over his wife, under the sway of the patriarchal order. Those changes to which the framework of the family has been subjected, including the reaffirmation of the nuclear at the expense of the extended family and the decline in the percentage of marriage to kin, cannot be considered far-reaching. Nor can it be claimed that they have affected the functional nature of the relationship between the sexes in any profound way. While they have mitigated some forms of discrimination between men and women, they have not effected a qualitative change in the nature of the relationships between them except in limited circles.

In many of its aspects, progress in relationships between the sexes has been to the benefit of men, for whom new possibilities opened and who obtained personal freedoms not granted to women, which in turn entrenched male control at the economic, social, cultural, legal and political levels. Simultaneously, women did not have access to the education and professional employment necessary to alter the balance of power in a manner that would make for more compatibility. Even when a woman, driven by economic necessity, succeeds in obtaining a wage-paying job, she, in many cases, receives no real, substantial assistance from the man with housework. Nor does her employment allow her to fulfil herself in that it is meant only to help raise the family's standard of living. This is much less true, however, of the economically empowered female cadre, where there has been a

marked spread of domestic service in households. Unlike the situation in developed countries, wage labour in the poor socio-economic sectors does not allow for the individualisation of women or vulnerable groups. This is owing to the weakness of individualisation in general and its complete absence when it comes to the weakest element of society, meaning women, who do not enjoy rights as individuals per se. Indeed, only in the dominant value system can a woman enjoy any rights – through her role in the group and/or the home.

An economic crisis in the region occurred as a result of the collapse of production patterns that were unable to adapt to global conditions without alternative infrastructures. The crisis was exacerbated by the generalisation of wage labour at the expense of traditional social arrangements that guaranteed a certain social and economic protection and the economic ascendance of the global centre over local or regional networks of exchange. This crisis was manifested in the export of "industrial garbage" in environmental, social and economic terms to the countries of the South. New financial elites were created many of which were characterised by corruption and tyranny within a global system that harvested the greater part of countries' assets. This has resulted in the escalating impoverishment of the middle classes and the marginalisation of the intermediary sectors that provide temporary occupations in many Arab countries. The situation poses a real dilemma for male graduates, especially those with higher and specialised qualifications, who are forced to compete with women for whatever jobs exist in the crisis-ridden employment market of many Arab countries.

FROM THE HOME TO SOCIETY

Quite a few Arab women are no longer prisoners of the house. Educational and professional opportunities have afforded them greater participation in public life although some parents still view these opportunities as a means to improve a woman's chances of making a good marriage and enhancing her ability to take care of her husband and children. In addition, some still believe it necessary to control a woman's freedoms to protect family

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honour, justifying segregation of the sexes in schools and society and insisting that women should wear the hijab (veil).

The public opinion survey, however, places the wearing of the hijab squarely in the “respect for individual freedoms” bracket (Box 7-3). Moreover, it supports the mingling of the sexes at work and indeed in society as a whole even though co-education at all stages is widely unfavoured, especially in Jordan and Egypt (Box 7-4).

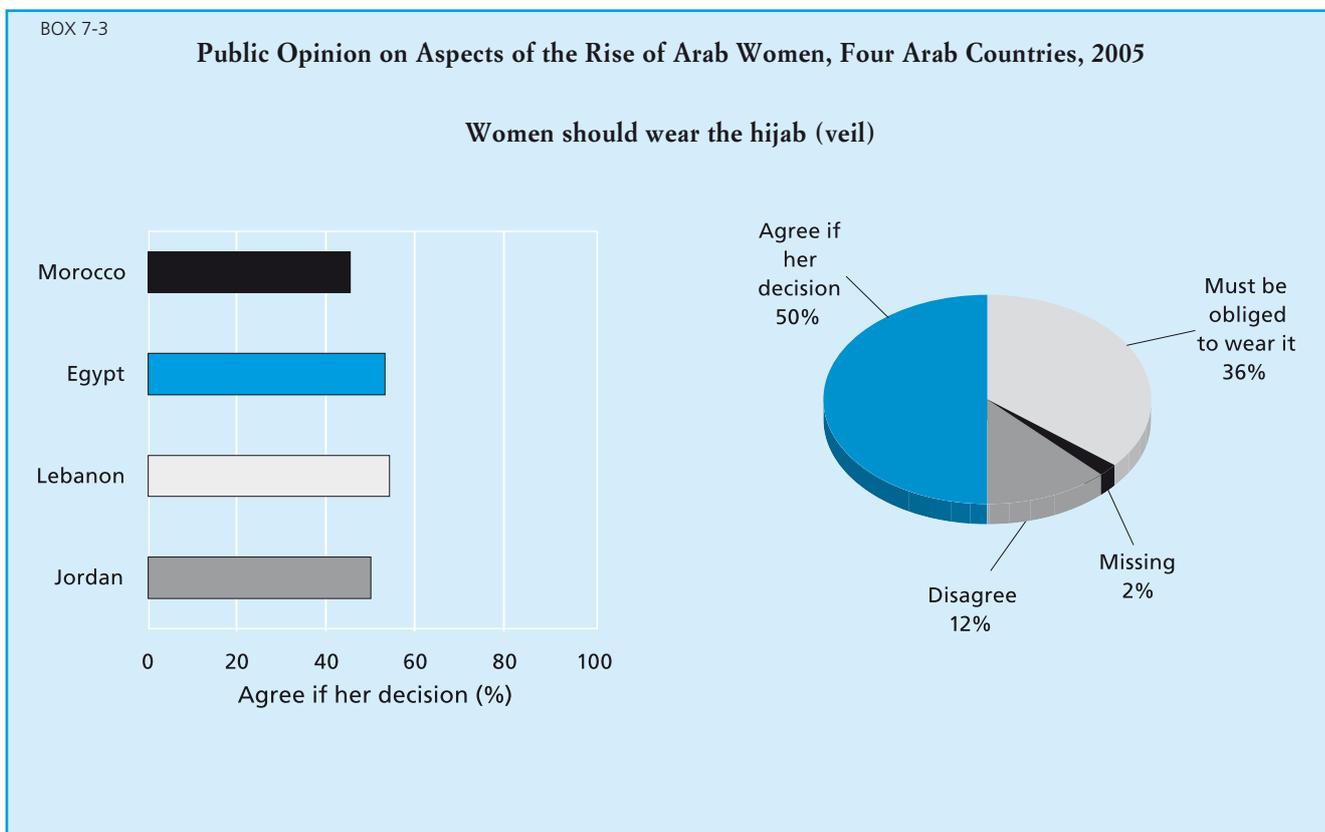
The belief in the subordination of women remains, of course, subject to variation across different countries, social classes, standards of living and general consciousness. It manifests itself particularly in the poorer social strata whose social role and status are marginal and hence who enjoy less legal and social protection and are more influenced by the dominant patriarchal culture. The Arab desert and rural areas continue to be subject to family clan practices, kinship, loyalty to tribal authority and the dominance of customs, traditions and rituals that reflect a semi-self-sufficient economy resting on land, cattle, climate and simple craft industries (Al-Rasheed, background paper for the Report). The absence of free time and multiplication of

the tasks assigned to women also play a role. In these contexts, women live under patriarchal relationships that prohibit their participation in most public activities and that confine their roles to reproduction, domestic chores and pastoral and agricultural work for survival.

Studies of the Arab world point out that Arab women are largely absent from the political domain, only thinly present in the social welfare sector, shadowy in the civil and cultural spheres, insignificant in the economic domain, and almost completely missing from the official religious domain. Authoritarian structures have not, however, excluded women from journalism, the legal profession, pharmacology, engineering, medicine, modern technology and the institutions of the communications revolution.

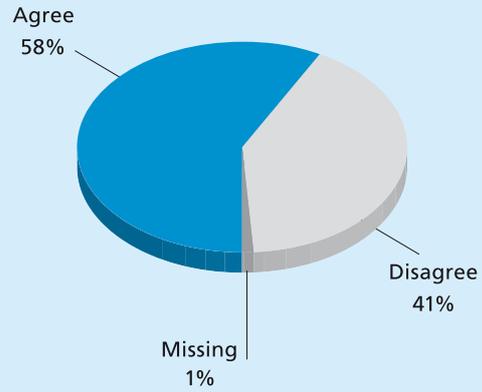
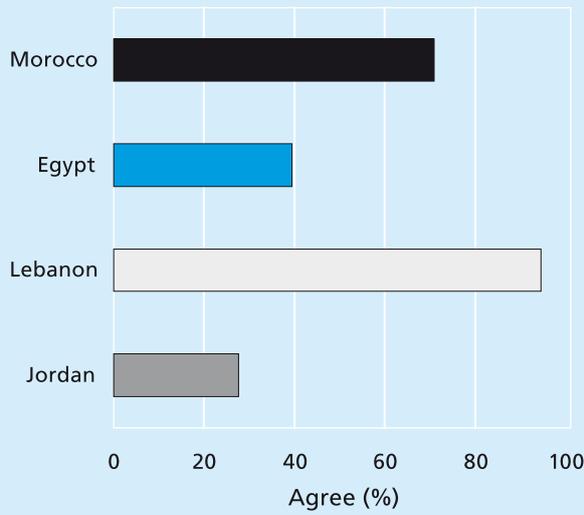
Whatever such social progress meant to preceding generations, today Arab societies face a situation of social conflict. This is the clash between a large segment that entered the labour market and public life when these constituted a continuation of the traditional social order and another segment whose entry into the free-enterprise labour market indicates its embarkation on a new vision of personal

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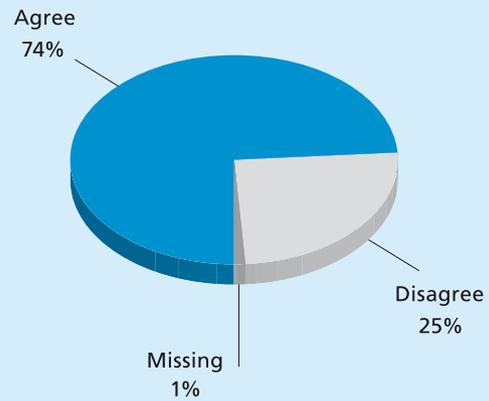
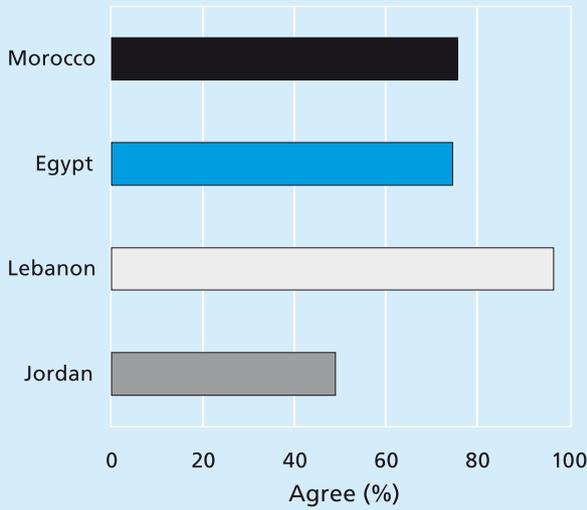


Public Opinion on Aspects of the Rise of Arab Women, Four Arab Countries, 2005

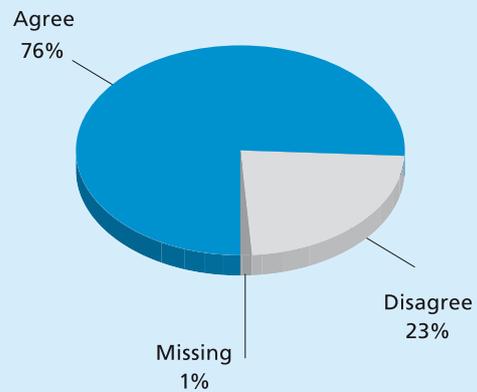
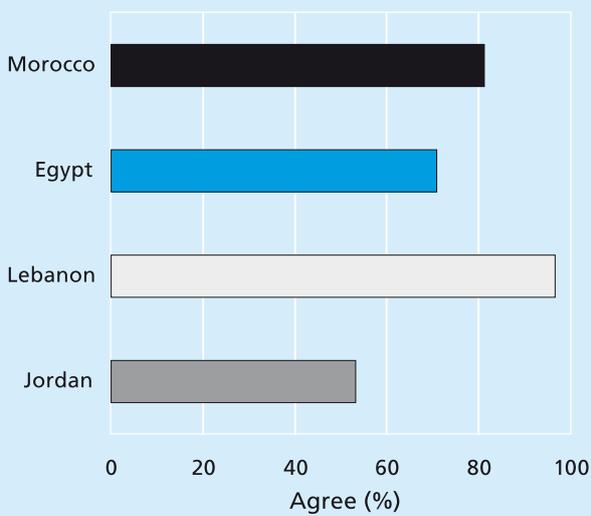
Co-education at all stages is good



Men and women should intermingle at work



Men and women should intermingle in society in general



The Self-reliance of Bedouin Women

'Amasha al-Husayn, from Badiyah al-Shamiyya, is in her fifties. She herds and milks cattle, collects firewood, kneads and bakes on bread tins and washes clothes by hand. Her husband is disabled, and although she lives in a woollen tent at a distance from the other tents, she has no time to feel lonely because she is always busy spinning wool on her hand

Source: 'Abd al-Hamid, in Arabic, 1990.

spindle. She does not hide her smile as she shakes her head and says, "Our life is tough. It's all about seasons. And if we don't do things for ourselves, no one will do them for us. Those who offer us favours ask for much more in return, and some demand that we provide them with ghee and cheese for free – we get nothing from them but trouble".

relations. This latter segment espouses the nuclear family, individualisation and financial independence and finds roles different from those ordained by horizontal social relations. Women, however, pay a high price under the rules of the new market, which provide them with insecure temporary work contracts and humiliating work conditions in free economic zones. Such conditions often represent no real gain for women despite the fact that these very changes (flexible working hours; opportunities to work from home) could, in principle, facilitate a reconciliation of wage labour with family-building. The absence of social policies that protect women and the limited services that the government provides play a role in making women victims rather than beneficiaries of flexible work opportunities.

REBELLION PRODUCES INTERMEDIATE FORMS OF FREEDOM

The very strength of social structures based on traditional tribal values should not conceal the strong and violent reactions expressing rebellion and revolution. Rebellion against restrictive and undemocratic family relations does not, however, lay the foundations of a culture based on equal rights and obligations. Individual revolt does not produce a culture with a human rights structure that considers woman's rights an indivisible part of its identity and content.

It is important to note that submission to, or rebellion against, kinship bonds does not necessarily flow from religious considerations, given that, on both sides, one can find veiled women or women who participate in public work through educational or charitable religious institutions. Likewise, because of the

restrictions placed on the freedom to congregate and organise in most Arab countries, one cannot construe the many social gatherings, diwaniyyas (literary salons, in the Gulf States), cliques, zajal evenings, holiday and Ramadan celebrations and get-togethers by religious communities as simply a return to traditional lifestyles. Many of these can be ascribed to the natural human need to congregate and communicate that authoritarian laws have frustrated, which in turn has produced intermediate customs that represent a grey zone between kinship and civic forms of free assembly.

In the absence of political freedoms, women often use social conditions and traditional practices to defend their rights by establishing charitable, medical or literary women's or family organisations or they form delegations to demand their rights, benefiting from the social space that is allowed in some countries that nevertheless restrict their ideological space. In certain countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, tribal structures internalised by the state nevertheless permit women a margin of protection and participation. Some resourceful women have taken advantage of this narrow latitude to establish civil society groups for women's rights. Ironically, the latter represent agents of social change born from the very structures and practices that have given the authoritarian state its restraining presence.

At the same time, the negative dimensions of such organic relations intensify whenever the margin of freedom to congregate or to conduct public activity independent of the state is narrowed. Rebellion against clan structures or tribalism is not confined to the non-religious milieu just as it is not restricted to a specific social class. However, traditional organic forms of solidarity are more pronounced in rural areas, shantytowns and urban migrants' quarters, i.e.,

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the poorer sectors, where many residents feel the need for the protection against misery offered by traditional, patriarchal bonds of loyalty.

The interaction of the political with the economic, and the national with the international, exerts an influence on the forms of relationships between women and men. The reduction of the economic rights of the majority, the erosion of state sovereignty under new forms of interference in the Arab region and the resulting increase in popular discontent have made it easier for conservative ideologues to penetrate the social discourse. Some have succeeded in persuading the public to link the defence of social identity to national sovereignty and to a limited definition of identity that confines the role of women and considers their rise to be a patent foreign product.

Nevertheless, in some societies, the qualitative accumulation of small victories by woman has caused patriarchal hegemony to retreat to varying degrees. Notwithstanding the enormous burden of heritage and custom and the difficult hurdles that they present to women, today's woman is different from her mother or her grandmother. Thanks to her awareness, her education, her entry into work, the cultural achievements of twentieth-century liberationist thought and victories in the field of human rights, the modern Arab woman has far more options. In addition, women often rise to the challenge of coping with harsh changes and have proven to be the protectors of social existence in exceptionally tough situations as is the case with women under siege and sanctions in Iraq, and under the multifaceted violence afflicting Iraq, Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory and the Sudan. In this sense, social structures have not prevented women from becoming active players, in different degrees and forms, in the transition that some Arab countries are undergoing.

In another context, while the growing closeness between the sexes has not put an end to discrimination, it has led to less conflicted relationships in many places and has caused the parental relationship to steer a course closer to democracy than to authoritarianism. Children therefore have developed more confidence in themselves and in those whom they uphold as role models for the building of character and

achievement of success, especially given that the mother's image and their status in her eyes are an essential element in the formation of their positive self-image.

Evidently, Arab society must find a new equilibrium for men and women based on nominal equality. To achieve this will require making provisions for basic freedoms and constructing a civil society in the broader sense of the term. This would constitute a capacious network of forms of congregation that lie between the individual and the state; it would occupy the public space that government cannot fill since the latter cannot represent all people on all issues. A political and civic programme of this kind would have to be tied to a guarantee of (one would like to say, a right to) the minimum economic and social necessities for a humanly acceptable life. Otherwise, a confrontation between the state and tribal-based structures will simply entail relocating the latter's victims from a miserable hut to a state of homelessness. Such a civic covenant between society and the state to guarantee the rights of individuals, both men and women, would meet three pressing needs. It would constitute the foundation of citizens' basic security in self and body, provide a public assurance that both sexes have roles to play in the home and in society, and acknowledge all citizens' right to education and medical treatment.

The natural right to build free and independent associations is a key element in the transition from the individual to the citizen-individual. The more self-evident the importance of civic groups becomes to people, the more feasible it becomes to move from focusing on the private condition of some women to addressing the general condition of all women through new forms of cooperation, mutual assistance and civic participation. With the principle of equality established by overwhelming societal demand and in law, civic culture could challenge the culture of discrimination from a position of strength, armed with the material resources to replace those offered by clan ties and not solely with an intellectual critique of their shortcomings. In order to face the submission and subordination that the spirit of tribal solidarity imposes, it is necessary to instil the human and legal

prerequisites for the independence of persons of both sexes, to refuse all forms of discrimination and to fulfil the objective conditions for daring to think and overcome.

THE FAMILY AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The family continues to be the first institution that reproduces patriarchal relationships and values through gender discrimination. The family carries out the processes of socialisation and instilling obedience in an atmosphere charged with contradictions and with stifling structural problems and as part of mechanisms of censorship and coercion. The woman thus becomes the creature rather than the creator of her destiny or, in other words, as just noted, a participant in reproducing the system that governs her.

In spite of woman's entry into education and professional life, the question of sex, good repute and honour has barely been affected by the major structural transformations that took place in the past century. In patriarchal societies where men hold sway over all aspects of life, whether social, cultural, political or economic, a woman's right to personal and bodily safety is still the object of an abuse accepted under prevailing values. This is because the denial of the individual in a woman brings with it the denial of her individual private rights in conflict with the definition of private life and the foundations of personhood as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the same time, this abuse itself confronts society with an important contradiction wherever organic and civil relationships coexist: even if weak individualisation has prevented women's access to certain rights whose defence the community (tribe, clan, extended family) has failed to assure, that same community has been the source and intermediary for other guarantees and rights. This implies the need to search in certain Arab societies for new forms and means for the rise of women that do not exclude the mediation of the organic community.

Pressures on women increase in violence at times of crisis when a woman becomes subject to surveillance. The man's right of disposal over her body, his watch over it, his use of it,

his concealment, denial and punishment of it all become more blatant. This violence in turn comes into play to intensify the feminisation of human poverty, political misery, dependency, domination and alienation.

To the present day, personal status laws constitute the most symbolic and profound embodiment of this problem. Matrimony is the first and foremost form of the relationship between women and men whether in the conscious or unconscious mind, in religion or society, in terms of the permissible or prohibited and the sacred or the desecrated. These laws may well represent the most pronounced embodiment of the relationship between Arab patriarchy and the forbidden and the taboo. The most important laws that relate to gender discrimination find refuge in it, allowing family laws to become the lair protecting culture, traditions and customs, whether religious or popular. Observing the debates and events in the course of drafting and promulgating personal status laws in Algeria, Lebanon, Morocco and Syria, it is impossible not to conclude that nationalising or privatising half a country's economy may be easier than issuing one civil, elective personal status law in an Islamic country.

A woman's body, as Lama Abu 'Awda says, moves within a social sphere the boundaries of which are clearly defined and demarcated. Each of these boundaries is guarded by a collection of regulatory laws and restraining prohibitions that women are supposed not to breach, which explains provisions in Arab laws that absolve or reduce punishment for those who commit honour crimes. Hence the importance of introducing human rights legislation to punish the latter crimes. In a questionnaire put to a number of girls who took refuge in shelters in Switzerland, the sentence repeated by most of them was, "Murdering me costs the murderer nothing". The sentiments expressed in the statement "Stop Killing Women", signed by tens of thousands of people inside and outside Syria, give an idea of the size and significance of this social and legal cancer: "Always, and in different forms and under different pretexts, provision 548 of the criminal code, and provisions 239 and 242 of that same law, arrive to free the killer from his punishment,

A woman's right to personal and bodily safety is still the object of an abuse accepted under prevailing values.

A woman's body moves within a social sphere, the boundaries of which are clearly defined and demarcated.

Early marriage is not simply a social custom: it has been transformed into a social problem with many causes and dimensions.

There are among the ranks of those who support the rise of women today a large number of male human rights activists.

usually in a matter of months not more than the number of fingers of one hand.

Once it is honour, another a bolt of anger or religious sensitivity! Nonetheless it is the blood of female youth that is being squandered by murderers who deserve no less than the fate of their likes". (18/9/2005).

Elements of modernity intertwined in Arab traditional culture, within and across countries, cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, large social sectors still remain closer to tradition than to innovation. A girl pays a heavy price for asserting her independence in milieus where individualisation in both the human rights and economic senses is weak. Therefore, from an early age, marriage becomes her persistent goal so that she may fulfil her needs without a sense of sin, guilt or self-loathing and also in order to gain acceptance and respect from her mother, family and society as a married woman. It is likely that the first man she meets will be the one to whom she will become committed, especially in conservative societies. Of course, that is true only if her parents do not make the decision for her, without her having prior or sufficient acquaintance with the man. Early marriage is not simply a social custom; it has been transformed into a social problem with many causes and dimensions.

A study undertaken in the United Arab Emirates reveals that the strong social pressures on girls and their loss of love and understanding from their families through quarrels often bring out in them violent patterns of behaviour. There are three times as many incidents of suicide among girls as there are among young men² (Daguerre, background paper for the Report).

THE EQUIVOCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN ARAB SOCIETIES: SYNERGY AND CONFLICT

Some feminist literature places women and men in diametrically opposed positions. This portrayal, notwithstanding the widespread discrimination against women in Arab countries, is a simplification that contradicts

the nature of this basic relationship within Arab societies.

One can refer, for example, to the first supporters of women's rights – men such as Butrus Al-Bustani, who wrote about the importance of educating girls; Qasim Amin, who called for the liberation of women; Al-Tahir al-Haddad, Abdul Rahman al-Kawakibi and so on. These men considered women's issues to be an integral part of a wider issue, namely, the modernisation and progress of society. In the same way, there are among the ranks of those who support the rise of women today a large number of male human rights activists, who base their position on the conviction that the liberation of women is central to the cause of human rights.

Alternative images of fatherhood

Generalising the figure of the father as a tyrant and a symbol of oppression results in the submission of family members to his will and their surrender to his oppression. It is a trend that lays the foundation for the rejection of change within society and excludes the formation of the questioning, critical and independent individual while popularising images of fixity, stagnation and surrender to prevailing ideas. These images do not exactly reflect the reality of Arab societies, and if one thinks about daily life, one can identify differing forms of fatherhood in its interaction with women, whether wives or daughters.

Consider, for example, the participation of Arab women in all forms of resistance, especially in the occupied Palestinian territory. Here, one sees other faces of fatherhood, the kind that encouraged women to express their political views and take action accordingly even though the representation of women was not commensurate, which is a separate issue.

Compare three consecutive generations of women in any Arab country and one can trace the sequence of development between generations as well as real qualitative advances by women in specialised academic knowledge, in employment and its various spheres and in participation in public affairs. To these may be added women's management of reproduction, their development of psychological maturity and self-confidence,

² The study covered 82 cases of attempted suicide [by girls] whose ages ranged from 15 to 24 years. Most were unmarried, and this was not the first attempt for about one quarter of the cases.

and the use of modern technology, which has helped even women of limited education to interact with global cultures.

These fleeting images reveal positive changes in the Arab family, which have led to limited improvements in some forms of conduct among youth and to a change in the system of prohibitions. It should be remembered that the difference in the liberalism of fathers and how they use their authority depends on their educational and economic levels and social environment. In addition, the fact must not be overlooked that these changes are taking place at a social, a national and a global level and are linked to political and economic stages of development.

Fathers, particularly the educated, support the education of their daughters and wives, encourage them to advance in their professions and provide them with the means to do so. The evidence is apparent in the increased number of women at universities, the prominence of females in some faculties and professions, and females' high levels of achievement as students. Some fathers even defend their daughters' right to choose how they dress, against the dictates of hard-line religious movements.

There are numerous aspects of a man's relationship with his wife and children, and these are too complex to characterise as repressive, harsh and tyrannical. How is one to deal with love and solidarity between father and daughter, with the individual female whose self-confidence is due to her father's support (and here it should be noted that women who are successful in their family and professional lives have strong relationships with their fathers) and with the protection and support that the father may provide?

The Arab family is too complex a unit to be summed up in one generalised, absolute characterisation nor is it possible to be content with a negative stereotype of fatherhood.³ Such one-sided images will lead to surrender to authority figures and give credence to the notion that rebelling against authoritarianism or changing the status quo is impossible. Additionally, to think that all women are simply repressed

diminishes the value of their lives, implying that these are wasted. Under the shadow of any harsh environment, a woman can yet take possession of her freedom by taking decisions that will give her unexpected happiness. This freedom is the source of the inspiration for change (Bayoumi, background paper for the Report).

It is not possible to be content with a negative stereotype of fatherhood.

BOX 7-6

A Father Supportive of His Daughter

I do not know how, during the sixties of the last century, my father Rafiq, who had not attended university and had never travelled, conceived an enthusiasm for the idea of sending me, when I was still in my twenties, to complete my studies in Paris.

Neither my mother's misgivings nor the warnings of my relatives and the family's fear for their daughter in "Paris, the City of Sin" reduced his determination, which, I confess, surpassed my own courage. I knew Paris only from picture postcards of the Eiffel Tower and the names of some French authors, the Sorbonne, and the Latin Quarter.

I grew up in a large family. Nine children filled the chairs, windows and beds of the house, six girls and three boys who competed equally at school and university while transforming the home into a large study which our father supplied with more books than he did loaves of bread.

My father would be filled with joy during the successive exam periods, when the home was transformed into books, pens and revision lessons, while he mocked the neighbours who wondered "why he bothered with educating the girls" (especially when they were going to be not his in the end but their husbands'). He maintained his pioneering stance at a time and in a village where a girl's attendance at school (close to home, of course) was effectively a matter of sitting in a waiting room passing the time till the groom should come.

We were six girls and people used to say of Rafiq that he loved his girls so much that God had rewarded him by granting his prayers in abundance. But to my father, who had read a lot and was influenced by the authors of the Arab Renaissance and their calls for liberation, each one of us was a creative project. Through us, he could revive the example of my educated, cultured and daring mother, distinguished amongst the women of her generation, by betting on his faith in the importance of women through the education of his daughters.

When the whole village went to Beirut Airport on my departure for Paris

to bid me farewell with tears, yearning and counsel, my father did not burden my happiness with any traditional advice. He did, however, weave an invisible conspiracy between us and bestow upon me the burden and sweetness of being a pioneer. I felt like the heroines of the plays we acted at school: I would either stumble and be struck down by the gods or succeed and blaze a trail for all the girls of my generation.

A deep obsession came over me with the idea that I should be perfect, as repayment for my father's generosity, without letting my eye be destroyed by all the new things that I would see, or my heart, eager as it was to meet every desire and joy.

But my father, who waited for my letters so that he could read the exciting parts out loud to neighbours and visitors, was my constant ally during my periods of calm and of excitement, of faltering and of radiance. He asked for no reward other than that I should succeed, and experience the feeling of natural equality and savour every brilliant flash of this life that had been given to me. This was the secret pact which linked his daring to my responsiveness, feeding his ambition that he relived through me and my ancient desire to explore the magic of the unknown to the limit.

Instead of the father rewarding his daughter, I became the daughter trying through her success to reward her father.

When I look at myself today, after storing up all those human and intellectual experiences which my father granted me through my adventurous journey—albeit in a bag that contained nothing but yearning, amazement and challenge—and I look at the girls in my village, exactly half a century after all that, I find that every girl refers, even today, to my father's example and the course of my life. They do so to convince their fathers that educating girls and allowing them to travel in order to study are the recipe for success, the model and the path for the future of the women of this century.

Ilham Kallab, Beirut. 19/July/2005.

³ See (Bayoumi, in Arabic, 1998, 260). The field study underlines the father's positive role in encouraging his daughters to become aware of public affairs and practice political criticism. This contributes to strengthening their personalities and to their confidence and boldness. It confirms the importance to women of having a positive paternal authority since this is reflected in their marriage and their choice of a partner who holds similar political views regardless of his class or sectarian affiliation. It subsequently influences the upbringing of their children in terms of forming their personalities and providing opportunities for them to make their own choices (272).

SOCIALISATION AND EDUCATION (CURRICULA AND METHODS OF PEDAGOGY AND EVALUATION)

A transition from conformity to creativity in socialisation and education requires “a spiritual and cultural maturity in the family” that does not distinguish between female and male.

Socialisation and education are subjects that bring people face to face with the complex, multi-faceted character of the relationship between the sexes in the Arab world that makes it difficult to borrow models or copy solutions or even benefit fully from generalised experience-sharing. In its broad lines, the issues of socialisation and education are like two walls that sometimes face each other and sometimes intersect.

The first wall is that of traditional upbringing. This may be, at least apparently, the more solid and profound of the two in that it is the product of a long historical process and in so far as modern advances have not found another wall to replace it. This wall is built out of the historical, religious and popular elements of culture. In some places, the “structure” Islamises customs and traditions; in others, it imposes on religion more than it can take. On the whole, however, conservative forces have rarely had reason to complain about its overall reinforcement of tradition, including gender roles.

BOX 7-7:

Mohamad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri: Teach Her!

Teach her! Disgrace enough it is for you and for her that you should consider knowledge a shame And backwardness enough it is for us that we have not taken care of small matters. Teach her! Provide her with enough refinement to make her spirit great. To improve the management of a people, prove that you can manage a house. By your contempt for women today you have made men more contemptible.

In school curricula, the gap between women’s progress and stereotyped images of women remains enormous.

The second wall is the West, as the most imposing source of ideas of liberation and equality, including gender equality, in our times. In this sense, Western culture and the Western lifestyle represented the main source of inspiration for most advocates of woman’s liberation and equality between the sexes for over a century. In most cases, the “Western exemplar” was seen as a new Mecca. In other words, it was approached in a spirit of imitation and discipleship. The Report team concurs with the Egyptian poet, Georges Henein, when he says that such was the extent of intellectual mimicry among some people that it arrogated in advance the authority to manipulate and

assimilate minds and dispositions. To refer to Ahmed Chabchoub, one can speak of an “imposed modernity” and then a “desired modernity” (Chabchoub, in French, 2000:64) before moving to innovative modernity. It was only the latter stage that saw a transition from conformity (to history and to the West) to creativity in the field of socialisation and education. This transition, however, requires what Munir Bashshur calls “a spiritual and cultural maturity in the family that no longer distinguishes between female and male in education or anything else, just as it requires that the other various institutions of the society, including the school, be in tune with, strengthen and support this maturity. But from where will this maturity come, if not from the educational institutions, including the school, which thus become both the means to, and the object of reform?” (Bashshur, background paper for the Report).

If educational institutions are to become effective tools for attaining the required spiritual and social level, their components and elements and what they do must be examined as well as how they work and the dynamics that govern them in order to make some modifications.

Schools and public institutions that oversee child pedagogy – where these exist – complement the role of the family in shaping the mindset and values of the child. The school, which is a product of its time and place, can be no better than the society around it; and, in the Arab world, the influence of societies lacking institutions of just rule and civic relations is quite clear. The school comes in, after the parents, with a pedagogy that reproduces and instils the dominant social model of obedience, obscurantism and violence. School systems under authoritarian rule rarely give sufficient encouragement to initiative, discovery or the development of creative and critical faculties or personal aptitudes.

Despite the inroads that Arab women have made in political, social and economic fields, in school curricula the gap between such progress and stereotyped images of women remains enormous. These images invariably confine a woman to the roles of mother, homemaker and housekeeper. Most set texts in Arab schools

delimit women to a specific context, usually domestic. The illustrations used in school curricula reveal this bias graphically. Rarely do the textbooks of the Ministry of Pedagogy and Education show a female reading a book or sitting in a library; the only place where she needs to be, in these books, is in the kitchen or the fields.

A study conducted by the Sociology Department of Damascus University discovered that public opinion favoured assigning women new roles but that educational curricula continue to consolidate the traditional view that a woman's place is at home. The study analysed pictures in a fourth-grade reading book and showed that educational curricula perpetuated the stereotypical view of the Arab woman as a figure behind, and not beside, the man. Seventy-five per cent of the pictures gave men a social advantage over women, who were usually dumped in the kitchen. There were no pictures of women in the workplace, the monopoly of men.

In a study entitled "The Upbringing of Female Children in Egypt", the researcher, Zaynab Shahin, writes: "a clear sexual bias against girls exists in all Egyptian publications". She points to the complete absence of girls' names from the covers of children's magazines, all of which bear male names such as "Micky", "Samir", "Ala' al-Din" and "Bulbul". Her analysis of the content of these magazines shows that they attribute most of the positive characteristics and roles to males, girls being cast in roles characterised by weakness and lack of independent opinions or decision-making ability. These distortions become ingrained in the minds of young people from the first stages of education.

Palestinian schools are little different in this respect. The curriculum in schools in the West Bank and Gaza reinforces the traditional perception of women as inferior and simply ignores the changes in their situation since the 1920s. Women's image in school textbooks through all grades is "the mother who cooks while the father works; the mother who irons while daughter, Rabab, helps her in the kitchen; the father who reads the newspaper while son, Basim, plays in the yard". In a study by Aliya Al-'Asali on the portrayal of women in civics

textbooks from first to sixth grades, it emerges that women were not represented in any well-defined, methodical or fair way. When it came to professions, women were presented in a few confined occupations; they were not, as was the case with men, seen in a variety of professional roles. They were not represented as decision-makers, as men often were, or as mayors, judges, lawyers, association presidents, union presidents, school heads or directors of refugee camps, among the many imagined occupations that were entirely reserved for men. To date, Tunisia alone departs from this pattern and has made important changes to educational curricula.

Sociologists emphasise the crucial role of illustrations and pictures at the elementary school stage and the formative impressions that they leave on young minds, which are hard to alter later. A conspicuous feature of many Arab textbooks is their neglect of women's real capabilities, achievements and changing social horizons. The child is presented instead with images of a passive, marginalised creature without a will of her own, someone incapable of participating with a man in taking important decisions about her family or the course of her life. Appalled by these trivialising images, sociologists have demanded that some curricula be modified or withdrawn and that new guidelines and concepts be formulated for more substantial and truthful content reflecting Arab women's achievements by attaining high positions and succeeding in domains monopolised by men.

Pedagogy specialists have recommended injecting into school curricula the social, political and legal rights of the girl as well as her right to work, express her opinion and make choices. They have also called on Arab women to participate in drawing up educational policies, a task from which they have been almost completely excluded. Female participation in the setting of school syllabi was estimated at less than 8 per cent in a random sample of Arab educational curricula (Arab Commission for Human Rights, in Arabic, 2002).

Some Arab countries have moved to begin changing school curricula to make them compatible with recent social developments,

Seventy-five per cent of (4th-grade reading book) pictures gave men a social advantage over women, who were usually dumped in the kitchen.

A conspicuous feature of many Arab textbooks is their neglect of women's real capabilities, achievements and changing social horizons.

but it will take time for this new awareness to translate, through the pedagogical process, into sound patterns of behaviour. It is also imperative that the new cultural output and related practical measures seek to endow the pupil and the teacher with a new, more critical approach to values and principles, one stressing interpretation and deduction rather than simply inculcating the new as an alternative ideology.

It is not possible to talk of a “one-size-fits-all” educational model or recipe. The limited experience of people in the Arab world and elsewhere in the countries of the South has taught human society that it must avoid resorting to ideological discourse. Even when the teaching of human and women’s rights is introduced into the academic repertoire, it must remain under the critical eye of the defenders of those rights. Raising the level of spiritual and cultural

maturity goes beyond figures and percentages, just as it also transcends reorganisation or redistribution according to educational level and sex. It is a question of the spiritual and cultural sustenance available in the various circles of society, including the school. It is, in short, a more profound and difficult question and one that requires a stricter commitment, larger effort, and steadfast follow-through.

Education will be effective when it is permanent and comprehensive. It must embrace the school and the university. The family certainly has an important role to play, as do the audio-visual and written means of communication. The battle for the rise of Arab women will be won only if the creative potential of society, in the form of artists, writers, poets, journalists and union members, is set to work on its behalf.

SUMMARY

This chapter has tried to illuminate the complex and multisided nature of sexual discrimination in Arab societies. It shows the difficulty of treating the issue of women, starting with preconceptions and abstract data. Like all international treaties, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights uphold broad human principles agreed to be universally true. Such normative texts, by their nature, cannot represent the particularity of local struggles on the ground or all civic demands on the international front. However idealistic and positive these conventions may be, unless their principles can be adapted and internalised, they will remain an assortment of texts imposed from on high on very different individuals and groups in highly diverse cultures, social conditions, living situations and life styles. It is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to incorporate these broad principles in any automatic or compulsory way into local value systems or to impose them wholesale on social groups, rural or urban, authoritarian or democratic, secular or religious.

It follows that the fundamental challenge for the supporters of the rise of women, whether male or female, is to discover the most successful means for the adoption of the concept of complete equality between the sexes by a highly heterogeneous public. How can meaning be given to texts that contradict local customs, using the cultural, social or political values specific to the rise of women? It is not easy to confront traditional beliefs or the prevailing socio-political system with an abbreviated reading of an external text extracted from the experiences of others. It is also not easy to forge a humane awareness of women’s rights that would galvanise both the victims and their milieu without being able to interact directly with the personal beliefs and awareness of the parties to the relationship. The foregoing discussion has raised many of these questions, which chapter 10 attempts to address in detail.