

# 2. Honoring the AiW at 50

## From the IWSAW to the AiW: A Brief History of the Institute to Honor its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

by Gabriella Nassif

Throughout this special issue of *Al-Raida*, readers will learn about the pioneering work of the Institute across various sectors and areas of work. Since its creation in 1973, the Institute has served as a bridge between community-based work and academic research, all focused on women's rights in Lebanon, the Arab region, and beyond. While a detailed history of the Institute can be found in "The AiW 50th Anniversary" message from its current director, Mrs. Myriam Sfeir (Arab Institute for Women, 2023), this chapter aims to provide readers with a brief overview of the Institute's development and the contributions of the five women directors who have been at the helm of the organization since its inception.

### An Institute to Honor the Lebanese American University's History

In 1973, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, better known as IWSAW, first opened its doors on the campus of the Beirut University College (BUC), which would later become the Lebanese American University (LAU), in Beirut, Lebanon. Founded with financial support from the U.S.-based Ford Foundation, the Institute was created as part of a consortium of women's institutes across various countries, known as the Asian Women's Institute. This consortium was created by a group of nine Christian missionary-established universities (Khoury, 2012). The mandate of the Asian Women's Institute as a whole was to collect and document evidence on the status of women's and girls' rights in their respective regions and countries.

The Asian Women's Institute was considered a “non-governmental organization accredited to the Department of Public Information of the United Nations” and was granted consultative status within the UN (Ghurayyib, 1980).

However, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World had another important mandate in Lebanon: to “honor the heritage” of the BUC, which had been an all-girls school prior to the decision in 1970 to become a co-educational university with both men and women (Arab Institute for Women/AiW, 1998, 1999). At its onset, the Institute was small. So small, in fact, that the woman given the job to lead it—the first director, Julinda Nasr—questioned whether she would be able to achieve anything.

*And I want to remind you, when I was assigned to this job, I didn't have a secretary, and I didn't even have an office—I had to share an office with someone else! I had only a student assistant who came two hours a day. I was the Institute! So, I went one day to see the president, and I said, “Dr. Badre, if you say ‘The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World,’ such a big name, and they say ‘Where is this Institute,’ and I raise my hand and say ‘I am the Institute, and I have this chair in this office’! He started to laugh, and told me we would see what could be done. After that, we were provided an office in the faculty apartments. After that, we started growing in numbers. But I still had to raise the funds for all of this. The university paid my salary along with a secretary. But all the other activities, I had to raise funds on my own. If I had funds, I had work to do. But if I didn't have funds, I didn't have work to do. (Abu Nasr, 2018).*

But Dr. Abu Nasr was indefatigable. Once she had been assigned the task of leading the Institute, she quickly learned what needed to be done to ensure its sustainability and longevity.

*In 1975, we were just starting but at least we could see where it was going. We had a sense of direction. I had a five-year plan, I had set up a board, and I had all the support of the President...But I tried to include people [on the board] from AUB, Haigazian, Saint Joseph...I wanted other universities to be included because I wanted to promote the idea of research on women to other universities. (Abu Nasr, 2018)*

The early years of the Institute benefitted from Abu Nasr's meetings with women's organizations around the region and her attendance at international fora dedicated to women's rights worldwide. Based on data that she collected during these visits with these organizations and interactions with other women's rights activists, she focused on building the Institute into an organization grounded in actionable research. In other words, she wanted the Institute both to document and contribute to the body of evidence on women's discrimination, while also developing community and grassroots level programs and initiatives that turned this research into direct action for women and girls (Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World/IWSAW, 1977). Abu Nasr then organized the Institute's work around several key pillars: research, communications, documentation, and outreach, all with the aim of translating their research and publications into actionable programs benefitting marginalized communities. Additionally, the Institute prioritized promoting women's rights work and feminism on LAU's campus through programming directed at students, such as *Taht al-Mijhar* (“under the microscope”), a speaker series targeted towards students and the broader university community in Beirut (Ismail, 1996).

From the beginning, the Institute was designed to serve as a “bridge” between the worlds of academic research and action-oriented feminism and activism. As then-University President Riyad Nassar expressed, although the Institute was encouraged to stay true to its position as “more of an intellectual, academic, research, documentation institute than a lobbying place for women’s rights,” this “did not stop the Institute from working towards increasing people’s awareness on women’s and children’s issues,” in particular referencing Abu Nasr’s work establishing programs for illiterate women, her publications on women’s work in Lebanon, and the establishment of a mobile children’s library, among others.

Abu Nasr’s commitment to the thematic pillars of the Institute also led to the creation of *Al-Raida*. First published in 1976, *Al-Raida* was, at the time, primarily used as a newsletter dedicated to the activities of the Institute. As Abu Nasr notes,

*The first newsletter [of Al-Raida] was done by hand, with a stencil, and it looked very funny. White paper and stencil. But we were encouraged that people accepted it as it is, and so we continued it as a newsletter. It was published in both English and Arabic and Rose Ghurayyib wrote both. (Abu Nasr, 2018)*

Under the leadership of Ghurayyib, *Al-Raida*’s first editor, and with the support of the Institute’s staff, the newsletter eventually expanded to include research papers and analyses on issues related to gender equality and women’s rights from professors at the LAU and other universities in Lebanon, as well as research produced about women across the Arab region. *Al-Raida* would become one of

the key components of the Institute’s identity as an organization working at the intersections of academia and activism. At the same time, Ghurayyib’s editorials throughout her time at the Institute served as critical documentation for the organization’s work during the tumultuous time of the civil war.

Although the Institute underwent periods of strict control and oversight by the university, a result of the ongoing civil war and political tensions, it continued, as noted by *Al-Raida* editor Lauri King, to “put the voices of women first” across its pages. “We were really the only ones at the time to put the stories of women—not analyses of these stories, and not ‘fancy’ versions of these stories, only the real thing—in the pages of our magazine. Their stories led our work” (King, 2023). Nicole Khoury’s article for this issue provides more details about the important role that *Al-Raida* played as a platform of engagement between local and international feminists and women’s rights discourse.

By 1998, the Institute had a new director, Mona Khalaf. An economist by training, Khalaf’s work at the Institute heavily emphasized women’s human rights and women’s participation in the labor force.

## Honoring the Institute at 25

In 1998, *Al-Raïda* published a special issue entitled Women's Lives in Lebanon to honor the 25th anniversary of the Institute. At 25, the Institute had already weathered far more than most feminist academic institutions: It had survived, as a newly formed institution, the brutal Lebanese civil war, all while continuing to publish and report on the disparities and discrimination facing women and girls in Lebanon and the Arab region more broadly. More importantly, as Khalaf notes, the nearly complete collapse of Lebanese society during the civil war did not spell the end or the limiting of Institute programming. Rather,

*In this context [of the civil war], the Institute felt that it could not limit its activities to academic ones. It undertook outreach programs to help women in the lowest social strata who desperately needed this help to survive. Thus, along with pursuing academic endeavors, the Institute developed action programs for the community.*  
(AiW, 1998-1999)

*Al-Raïda* was there to document all of the work of the Institute and its quick transition from being a primarily academic organization to one that worked in the very communities it wrote about and aimed to support. As Irene Lorffing, a researcher working with the Institute at the time that the 25th anniversary issue of *Al-Raïda* was published, noted:

*The war was raging, but we always managed to find a boat, a plane or a car that would take us to our destination. It was important to communicate our findings and experiences, make our voice heard and reinforce our networking. Nothing seemed to stop us.*

*I believe that the legitimacy and urgency of the task we had decided to initiate and undertake kept us going. As a pioneer Lebanese institution in the Arab world, we had to succeed, and I think we did.* (AiW, 1998-1999)

Despite the raging civil war, the Institute had, by its 25th anniversary, established itself as a “reputable” organization devoted to issues of women's rights (AiW, 1998-1999, 83). Its research had already produced several monographs, including two on the subject of women's rights and work, the realities of sex stereotyping in schools and textbooks, tasks of women in Lebanese industry, research on women headed households, Lebanese women's economic productivity and contributions, and “comparative studies to assess Arab women's situation in the family and society” around the region (AiW, 84). The Institute had also established itself as a key partner for international organizations, including different UN agencies, and had supported and helped plan and host several regional conferences on women's rights issues. More importantly, through these activities and the establishment of its documentation center, the Institute had managed to successfully position itself as a space for researchers, activists, the public, and students to turn to for information about women and gender issues.

At the same time, the Institute's work continued to bridge the gap between international feminist discourse and feminist work on the ground in Lebanon and the Arab region. Alongside its outreach programming, the Institute used *Al-Raïda* as a platform for

documenting the testimonials and stories of women pioneers and feminist organizers from around the region. To honor this 25-year legacy, the staff of *Al-Raida* and the Institute produced a special issue of the journal dedicated to the lives of women in Lebanon. The issue would be the Institute's "first attempt," according to Rosemary Sayigh, the editor of *Al-Raida* at the time, to produce an entire issue of the journal based on the oral histories of women. The decision to use oral histories, Sayigh notes, was fraught: Up until the time of this issue, the "personal and the subjective" as topics of feminist research had been "dominated" primarily by non-Arab writers and researchers, even though "oral life story recordings with women would enrich not only 'women's studies,' but also our understanding of history" (Sayigh, 1998-1999). For that reason, the editorial committee decided to move ahead with its decision to produce a special issue of *Al-Raida* based entirely on the personal testimonies and life stories collected from women in Lebanon.

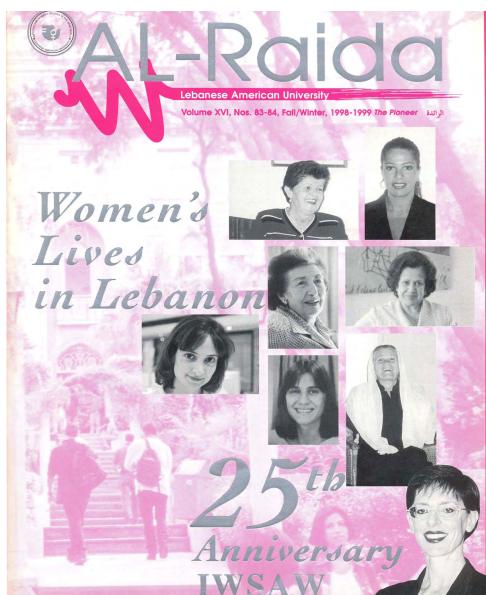


Figure 1. The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue of *Al-Raida*

The editorial decisions regarding what and who to include in this issue were just as difficult as the initial decision to base an entire issue of *Al-Raida* on oral history. "The problem that first faced us was choice of topic," writes Sayigh, "what particular subject would be both appropriate for the special issue, and certain to be illuminated by using oral history methods?" The editorial team deliberated: should they include "pioneer Lebanese women"? Women leading the women's movement? Women leading the debates on gender and culture? Eventually, the team decided to "shift the focus from 'Lebanese women' to 'women living in Lebanon'" in order to "underline the pluralism and mobility of the people who live in this geo-political space" (Sayigh, p. 3). She continues:

*At Al-Raida, we decided to opt for the maximum number of speakers, based on our perception of Lebanon as terrain for a very heterogeneous population, whether in terms of origin, class, sect, residence, occupation, or relationship to the state. We adopted the principle that choice of speakers should be based on categories of women that we—the research team—could identify from our own everyday knowledge. Hence our care to include noncitizens, recent citizens, foreign wives, and disadvantaged citizens; peripheral regions such as the Beqa' and the Israeli-occupied South as well as Greater Beirut; and 'ordinary' housewives as well as the professionals and self-employed workers to be found in such abundance. (Sayigh, 3)*

The issue included the profiles of women of various ages working in different sectors in Beirut and outside of Beirut, encompassing both Lebanese and non-Lebanese. It allowed these women to narrate their own lives, giving them agency over what they shared with *Al-Raida* and what they chose to withhold. As Sayigh eloquently summarizes in her editorial,

*Even life stories that do not directly speak to particular questions always tell us something important, as much through what is suppressed or 'forgotten' as what is voiced. Though the autonomy they give the speaker is never total, yet it is certainly greater than the question-and-answer format allows, however 'unstructured.' Its orality makes the life story closer to popular culture than more constrained kinds of social data. Further, the oral life story has value through the way it tends to express collective, historically transmitted character stereotypes. (3)*

The final issue was powerful, evoking the organization's mandate to collect and honor the stories of women pioneers. Across the stories included in the issue emerges an image of women as powerful community advocates focused on improving the lives of those around them. Even as the war continued to wreak devastation on Lebanese society, these women, and arguably, the many thousands of others living in Lebanon, continued to do what was necessary to survive. Pushing back against the patriarchal focus of history and academic research more generally, the issue effectively demonstrates the importance of including women's personal life experiences as part of the historical doctrine. As Sayigh highlights in her editorial, the inclusion of such testimonials as a part of history proper helps feminists to continue challenging the arbitrary divide between the public and the private. "The end of the boundary between 'public' and 'private,'" she writes, marked the important next stage of feminist work to bring women out of the shadows and into the spotlight, as powerful contributors within their families, communities, and societies writ large.

## From 25 to 50: The Institute in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

By 2005, Dima Dabbous assumed the role of the third director of the Institute. During her tenure, the Institute would see a few major changes, including shifts in the publishing format of *Al-Raidā* to align it more closely with academic standards. Dabbous, like her predecessors, remained committed to producing high-level research reports and projects that emphasized the Institute's positionality as both an academic and an activist organization. In her own words, Dabbous (2023) stated:

*Wanted to see research—including the research that the Institute had done before my time—published into something useful, something that could be used by the communities we wanted to engage with. I did not want to see research sitting on the shelf anymore.*

Dabbous continued to expand the Institute's portfolio as a direct-action oriented organization by publishing a guide on working with women prisoners, highlighting the Institute's long history of working in prisons starting in 2001 (LAU News, 2012b). Over the course of a decade, the Institute was able to build targeted empowerment and support programming for women prisoners; the lessons learned and best practices from this work were compiled into a guide booklet published during Dabbous' time as director (LAU News, 2012a). Similar work produced by the Institute under Dabbous' direction included the development of an awareness-raising booklet targeting migrant domestic

workers (MDWs) in Lebanon. This booklet empowered these women workers to know their rights, enabling them to claim them and protect themselves during their time in Lebanon (IWSAW, 2010-2011).

As an academic herself, Dabbous also pushed the Institute to expand its work as a feminist research organization. During this time, the Institute supported the establishment of a Women's Studies Master's Degree program at LAU, the first of its kind in the region. Dabbous became one of the first instructors for this new MA program (LAU News, 2012c). She also led *Al-Raida* as its Editor in Chief during her time as director of the Institute. In this role, she helped transform *Al-Raida* into an international, peer-reviewed journal, attracting article submissions from feminist academics and practitioners around the world. As part of this transition, the journal's design was updated, a design still used by *Al-Raida*.

Following Dabbous, Samira Aghacy, a professor of literature, became the Interim Director of the Institute (2013-2015). During her time, Aghacy ensured that the Institute continued to produce its foundational products, including *Al-Raida*, and carried forward its core programming, such as its empowerment and literary programming for women. Aghacy also oversaw the release of several important research publications completed by the Institute. Notably, this included the report Protection of Minors from Early Marriage, a legal study written in coordination with the National Commission of Lebanese Women (NCLW) as part of a national campaign to protect minors from early, child, and forced marriage in Lebanon.

Aghacy also supported the Institute's publication of several critical issues of *Al-Raida*, such as the two thematic issues dedicated to exploring gender and women's legal equality in the wake of the Arab Spring. These issues emerged from a high-level conference organized by the Institute and its partners at LAU in 2014, which brought together feminist scholars, activists, legal specialists, and UN representatives. The conference was held in partnership with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Rule of Law Program MENA Region, the Danish Centre for Information on Gender, Equality and Diversity KVINFO, and the Women and Memory Forum in Egypt. The conference focused on how the ongoing popular revolutions had affected women's rights, their claims to human rights, and their participation on the frontlines of the revolutions around the region. In her editorial for the special issue, Aghacy wrote that it was the "large number of insightful, germane, and timely presentations" that prompted the Institute to "compile these papers in two successive issues of *Al-Raida*." The first, she continued, presented theoretical analyses of women's current status in the region, while the second issue offered direct testimonials from those on the ground who had witnessed the major human rights abuses suffered by protesters at the hands of the various autocratic regimes desperate to hold onto power amidst the growing revolution (Aghacy, 2013-2014). The conference and, later, the special issues of *Al-Raida*, featured the work of several prominent Arab feminist academics, including Suad Joseph, Valentine Moghadam, and Hoda Elsadda, among others. This was a testament to the Institute's respected

In 2018-2019, the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was renamed the Arab Institute for Women, or the AiW. Following several years of consultations with feminists and women's rights actors in Lebanon and the region, international gender experts, and feminist researchers and academics, as well as discussions with the previous directors and staff of the Institute, a new name was selected to reflect the full mandate of the Institute's work. Originally named a "Women's Studies institute," implying a primarily academic focus, the Institute's history clearly shows its commitment and dedication to direct-action and community-based feminist work. The Institute's positionality as a "translator" of global and local feminist discourses for its audiences, primarily through *Al-Raidā*; its focus on improving the material status of women in Lebanon through social empowerment and literacy programs; its support of students and its work to build the capacity of youth gender activists in the region; and its overall commitment to serving as a bridge between academic and activist work on gender equality and women's rights, all deserved to be recognized and honored by the Institute's name and logo. The Institute's new name, the Arab Institute for Women (AiW), does just that.



Figure 2. The Arab Institute for Women's (AiW) Logo

reputation as a leader on women's rights discourse in the Arab region.

In 2015, Lina Abirafeh became the fifth Director of the Institute. Abirafeh's work at the Institute reflected her own lifelong dedication as a humanitarian aid worker focused on gender-based violence and an activist for women's and girls' rights. Abirafeh helped the Institute to reach out to the younger generation of feminists on the campuses of LAU and around the region by bringing powerful

feminist speakers to meet with students and including the Institute in worldwide networks of gender youth activists, such as the organization She Decides. During this time, the Institute also led the campus-wide effort to establish a Title IX office. Title IX is a 1972 education amendment to the American Civil Rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity (Title IX). As a U.S.-registered university, the LAU is required to abide by Title IX. Abirafeh helped to establish a committee of experts from LAU and other universities, as well as activists and other practitioners, that led the foundation of the Title IX office on LAU's campuses.

Under Abirafeh's direction, the Institute's focus on youth gender activism extended beyond the LAU campus. This included activities such as the annual 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence arts

competition for youth in the Arab region (see the Arts section in this issue for more information). Other initiatives included creating awareness-raising song *Bi 'Ideh* (In My Hand), an animated song written and performed in Arabic that empowers youth activists to challenge gender norms and take matters “into their own hands” by demanding change through voting and other political activities (In My Hand - بنيدي, 2016).

Under Abirafeh's leadership, the Institute continued to strengthen its core programming, including the MA program originally developed by Dr. Dabbous (now called the MA in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies), and oversaw the development of a new educational product entitled the Gender in Development and Humanitarian Assistance (GDHA) certificate. This certificate was designed for entry and mid-level professionals to learn about gender issues. Several other important academic activities defined Abirafeh's time at the Institute, including the complete digitization of *Al-Raida*, which today is hosted on an independent website and is free to access. Additionally, Abirafeh helped establish the Julinda Abu Nasr Women and Gender special collection at the LAU Riyad Nassar Library on the university's Beirut campus in honor of the Institute's founding director (LAU News, 2017).

In 2023, the Institute marked its 50th anniversary with a year-long series of events dedicated to commemorating this milestone and acknowledging the incredible achievements made throughout its existence. Under the leadership of its newest director Myriam Sfeir, the organization continues to produce pertinent research on gender

equality and women's rights issues in Lebanon and across the region. Many of these research findings are discussed in more detail throughout this issue of *Al-Raida*. Among Sfeir's major achievements during her tenure as director thus far include spearheading a national campaign in Lebanon advocating for robust parental leave policies. Additionally, the institute under her leadership has published a report and produced two video documentaries about the women activists and pioneers of the Lebanese civil war and the 2019 uprising in Lebanon. Information about the Institute's most recent work over the past three years is provided in more detail throughout the different sections of this issue.

Despite the worsening conditions in Lebanon and across the Arab region today, the Institute continues to drive itself forward. Committed to gender equality and women's rights, the Institute is not slowing down at all, but is, rather, increasing its work productivity this year in honor of its anniversary and the many great directors, staff, and friends, both within and outside of LAU, who have contributed to its success over the past 50 years. “To get this far,” notes Dr. Abirafeh, “to be able to reflect on 50 years of work, is already something to be proud of. But what's more exciting is the idea of working for another 50 years to secure the Institute as one of the leading women's rights organizations in Lebanon and in the Arab region.”

## Emergence of *Al-Raida* (Pioneer) Journal: Writing Lebanese Feminist History

by Nicole Khoury

*Al-Raida* is a rich archival site for the discourses on gender equality in Lebanon. Historical accounts of women's participation and involvement in feminist movements in Lebanon can be found within its archives. The journal published its first issue in 1976—one year after the Lebanese civil war began, with the initial support of a Ford Foundation grant. It was introduced as a forum for the publication of studies about women in the Arab region within higher education, aligning with the objectives of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) and the United Nations' call for information. The journal covered a wide array of topics, including the role of women in national development, development, labor, legal status, living conditions, education and vocational training, illiteracy, social taboos, population growth and family planning, as well as health and nutrition (Ghurayyib, 1980). While the journal today has evolved into a peer-reviewed academic journal focusing on issues of gender in the Arab region, its original purpose was to serve as a newsletter informing readers about the progress and achievements of the institute. *Al-Raida*, an integral part of Lebanese women's history, illustrates how gender issues have been addressed in Lebanon and the Arab region.

When the journal first began, its articles focused on providing readers with knowledge of international programs and supporting the documentation of research studies on Arab women. In the

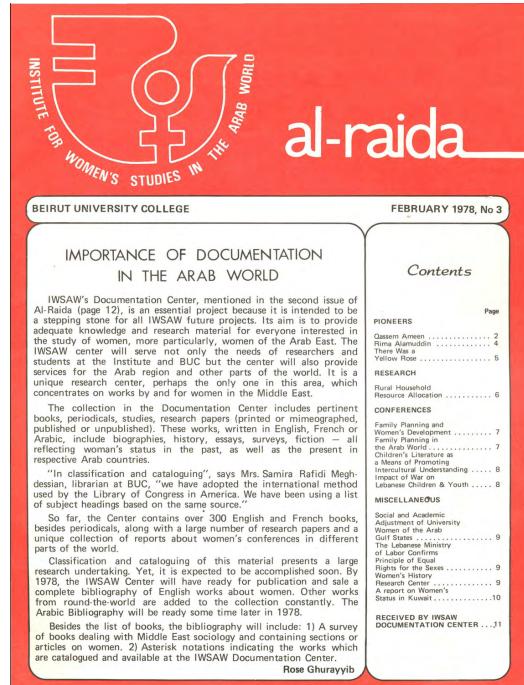


Figure 3. Cover pages of issue 3 of *Al-Raida*

later part of the first decade, the journal's articles reveal drastic shifts in efforts towards working within the Lebanese cultural and traditional framework to find viable solutions for issues facing women. This process was neither clear nor linear, as *Al-Raida* transitioned from an information-based style of reporting to a more collaborative space for conversations on issues concerning women's lives in the Middle East. The editorial commentaries serve as prime examples illustrating how the discourse on Lebanese women's issues has historically been shaped by international ideologies of feminism, particularly liberal feminist discourse originating from the West and postcolonial feminist discourse originating from the global South.

*Al-Raida*'s important contribution to Lebanese feminist history exemplifies

the need to locate and document narratives of women's experiences, presenting alternative "her-stories" to the dominant national narratives that have historically tended to erase women's involvement and participation in political movements altogether.

As the first editor of *Al-Raida* between 1976 and 1985, Rose Ghurayyib raised questions about women's issues in the Arab region, such as family planning, development, and illiteracy. Ghurayyib was free to make most of the editorial decisions. For the first few issues, she translated newspaper and magazine articles from Arabic and French to English, reporting on the current state of women's issues for both local and international readerships. The first journal issues also featured literary works by Arab women authors and biographies of Arab women, all published in English. This translation work enabled *Al-Raida* to (re-)construct histories of the past by locating and amplifying the narratives of women's experiences and the literary works of historically influential Arab women written in French and Arabic, which had largely been overlooked within mainstream historical literature and even within the broader Western feminist history. By contextualizing the conversations in the journal within the multilingual historical context, it becomes clear how the narrative of the journal documents previous conversations and histories that might have otherwise been lost, while simultaneously contributing to those conversations.

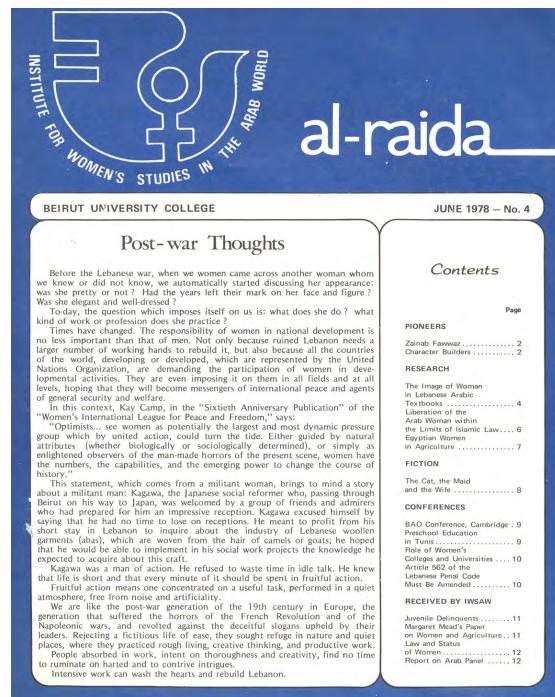


Figure 4. Cover pages of issue 4 of *Al-Raida*

## Mission Statement: Development Projects for the Modernization of the Nation State

In the first issue of *Al-Raida*, modernization is defined as moving away from the traditional family and social structure (Afshar, 1993; Hatem, 1999). While many of the early issues of the journal addressed modernization, the narrative became quite complex throughout the first decade. This article therefore discusses modernization projects of the nation as it pertains to the context in which *Al-Raida* was published and the discourse in which it is established. Issues of education and labor were explored during this period, including efforts to eradicate illiteracy, family planning projects in coordination with the Lebanese Family Planning

Association, and basic living skills projects in rural areas, as these projects were implemented by IWSAW. Most of this discourse is reflected throughout the journal's first decade as it serves the modernization of the state, with articles focusing on the limitations of traditional family values and social structures as obstacles to the development of the state.

According to Julinda Abu Nasr, the first director of IWSAW, the initial purpose of *Al-Raidā* was to raise awareness of women's rights in the Arab region. The newsletter sought to shift attitudes and address issues concerning women in the Arab region:

*[Women] have rights that their religion gives them, Islam and Christianity. [We focused on] things they should know about their body, how to raise children, laws from their government to protect them. And we wanted them to know about the women who came before them and how they reached this development.* (Abu Nasr, 2011)

The emphasis on rights discourse in the first issues of *Al-Raidā* is contextualized with reference to international feminist movements, as illustrated in the first editorial for the second issue:

*The increasing consciousness of the important role that women can play in world-development today, finds its expression in various ways, one of which is the Women's Liberation Movement that is successfully organizing its activities in strategic areas of the more developed countries.* (Ghurayyib, 1977)

A focus on rights and emancipation from patriarchal social structures intertwines with postcolonial and political concerns that dominate gender politics

in Lebanon. Addressed in *Al-Raidā*, these rights are initially framed within the larger discourse on human rights. This is evident in the editorial by Ghurayyib (1977, p. 1), where she highlights, "Another major influence is the growing interest of the United Nations Organization, promoting the education of women and encouraging their full participation in multiple and various women's program development." These two major forces, the Women's Liberation Movement and the United Nations Organization, initially shape rights discourse in *Al-Raidā*.

As a result of Ghurayyib's editorials, Abu Nasr recalls, the Institute faced opposition from conservative organizations who argued against calling for the rights of women in certain areas, such as labor rights. Some criticized what they perceived as the influence of Western feminist thought within *Al-Raidā* and Arab societies more generally. In other instances, some of the more conservative organizations wrote anonymous articles in newspapers or sent anonymous letters to the journal itself expressing their objections. Abu Nasr (2011) elaborates:

*We didn't want to harp on feminist issues in the West. People began to be suspicious that we represented 'free sex.' We were saying to women that you are individuals and have full rights to be educated, [to be] employed if you want to, it is your choice to be a mother, you have the potential and the ability.*

In addition to the work written on women's human rights, the archives of *Al-Raidā* reveal an effort to raise awareness about the literary tradition

of the first wave of Lebanese feminism. This movement, influenced by the Enlightenment movement in Europe, focused on educating women and improving their roles as mothers (Stephan, 2014). The writing of upper-class Syrian-Lebanese women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries explored themes of domestic emancipation, education, and waged work. As Malek Abi Saab points out, these writings emerged during the late Ottoman period and grappled with questions of nationalism, French colonial rule, and modernization. This resulted in an image of “the new woman,” who “upheld the ideals of the national political elites at the same time as she demanded a reconfiguration of her place in the domicile, the conjugal unit, and the public arena” (Abisaab, 2010, p. 35). However, as educated elites, they remained marginalized and unable to reach a broader female audience, failing to address larger postcolonial political contexts that shaped gender relations. Instead, they relied on liberal notions, with a focus on individualism, to challenge patriarchal norms in Arab nations.

## **Shifting Methodologies: Civil War Narratives, Testimonies, and Interviews**

Due to the prolonged civil war, Ghurayyib's editorials later reflected a more nuanced understanding of feminist issues in Lebanon. 1982 marked a shift in Ghurayyib's feminist ideology towards one that was more attuned to the hierarchical social structures, particularly class divisions, that shape the discourse on women's issues. 1982 is significant

in that it also marked a pivotal moment in the Lebanese civil war: the Israeli invasion of Beirut. The invasion triggered responses from various foreign powers such as France, the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, further complicating the multifaceted conflict in Lebanon.

As Ghurayyib's subsequent editorials suggest, the feminist movement in Lebanon was significantly shaped by this event in two ways. First, international feminist movements advocated for disarmament as a response to the invasion of Beirut, a call that resonated with the position the Lebanese women's movement espoused. Second, the movement realized that the foreign involvement revealed an underlying international and foreign complicity in the violence that ravaged Lebanon. This realization challenged the assumption that participants of the Women's Liberation Movement around the world, particularly in the global North, were self-aware, autonomous individuals to be emulated—notions that underpinned Ghurayyib's arguments for equality. Instead, it appeared that Western feminists might be complicit in the colonial and imperial actions and discourse that influenced Western geopolitics in the region.

The choice of writing selections that appear in the journal after this shift illustrate Ghurayyib's own transformation in her feminist politics. This shift involved taking a stronger stance against the imperialist and colonialist tendencies underlying much of Western feminists' writings and actions, whether explicitly or implicitly. For example, Nawal El Saadawi's writings appear frequently in *Al-Raida* in 1982, and her arguments during this period emphasize the need

for a radical upheaval of the colonial patriarchal capitalist system that dominates and oppresses the Arab region. This significantly influenced Ghurayyib's positions on the development of a feminist movement within a postcolonial context. She began formulating an understanding of how women are dominated, oppressed, and marginalized by patriarchal traditions and by Western imperialist forces, deeply influenced by the same postcolonial feminist ideology espoused by Saadawi. Ghurayyib's writings increasingly analyzed the distinctions between women from different geographical and cultural contexts, emphasizing the need for a rearticulation of Lebanese feminist issues within their local, historical, and cultural context. She articulated a feminist theory that encompassed a thorough understanding of the ways women are dominated, oppressed, and "othered," not only by patriarchal traditions but also by Western imperialist forces. Ghurayyib also highlighted how Lebanese men and women are similarly oppressed, as men share some of the same burdens as women within a larger geographical and political framework. Despite this evolving perspective, she continued to frame these issues using the human rights discourse, stating, "Respect for human dignity, recognition of the other person's rights, regardless of his appearance, color, age, sex, race or rank, is the primary requirement of civic education and the first mark of development" (Ghurayyib, 1981, p. 1).

The testimonials published in *Al-Raidā* during the civil war included interviews, ethnographies, and unpublished narratives, forming part of a larger literary movement at the time, particularly among Lebanese women writers, aimed

at documenting daily life during the war. Indeed, a school of women writers known as the Beirut Decentrist, a term coined by miriam cooke in War's Other Voices, were writing about the civil war between 1975 and 1982. The literary production of women's narratives arose from similar circumstances as the war narratives that were documented in *Al-Raidā* during the 1980s, that is from a need to document trauma and in so doing position themselves within the political conversation. The works featured in the 30th issue in 1984 included interviews with those who chose to stay in Lebanon as an act of resistance against the war, persisting in their efforts to promote peace-building activities. Additionally, this issue featured fiction, poetry, and literature centered around the war.

The narratives and testimonials in these issues served two rhetorical purposes. First, *Al-Raidā* positioned itself as a platform for publishing war narratives and interviews that might not have been documented elsewhere. The journal's shift in methodology, from one of providing quantitative information on the status of women in the Arab region to a qualitative approach that included interviews and testimonies, marked an important shift in Lebanese feminist consciousness. This shift mirrored the global feminist movement's trend toward privileging standpoint theory, which emphasizes that personal experience can provide just as much information, if not more, about the types of discrimination and inequality that a person faces in comparison to statistical or quantitative information.

Second, the decision to continue publishing in English positioned *Al-Raida* as a conduit between the local (Arab) context and the international (English-speaking) world. In doing so, *Al-Raida* maintained its ability to address both larger international and global organizations, such as the United Nations Organization, and international women's movements through these war-time narratives. This approach expanded the journal's research in global society and facilitated its active participation in the global system.

By providing women a space to document their traumas and share their experiences with the larger global audience, *Al-Raida* served as a strong voice advocating for peace on a global scale to a larger English-speaking audience, while simultaneously articulating a nationalism that emphasized staying put throughout the conflict as a patriotic act. As miriam cooke explains, "The women enforced passivity was thus transformed into identity formation. Those who stayed were the only ones who deserved to call themselves Lebanese; the only ones who deserved to share in the country's reconstruction" (cooke, 1996, p. 166). In its powerful, thematic issue on the civil war, *Al-Raida* featured the works of countless women literary figures as well as Arab and Lebanese feminists, including testimonial narratives by Iman Khalifeh, Ilham Kallab, Juliette Haddad, Nazik Saba Yared, and Nuha Salib Salibi. Literary contributions included poems and essays by Etel Adnan, Rose Ghurayyib, Evelyn Accad, Azizah al-Hibri, Maha El Khalil, and Julinda Abu Nasr.

The testimonies, interviews and literary works in this issue contributed to a

discourse on the war that shaped a new national identity. The testimonials served to remind us that remaining in Lebanon during the civil war was a form of resistance in and of itself. As cooke (1996, p. 166) noted, "Their quiet determination to stay when staying was its own poor reward was the first murmuring of patriotism." In 1984 Wafa' Stephan joined the editorial staff and wrote the editorial for the issue "Women and War," stating the goal of the issue was to explore and raise awareness for the role women played in the Lebanese war. She summarized the activities of Lebanese women during the war and their efforts to establish peace. Women, she claimed, did not participate in the war, "neither in its decision-making process nor in its efforts to achieve reconciliation" (Stephan, 1984, p. 2). However, they provided relief efforts, and attempted to "hold together the collapsing structures of Lebanese society," volunteered with social welfare organizations, protested human rights violations, attempted to "appease the fighters by paying visits to refugee camps and military headquarters and putting flowers in the nozzles of guns," participated in national and international conferences on the problems facing Lebanon, organized demonstrations and sit-ins, and even "stormed into the local TV station to interrupt the news in order to have their demands broadcast" (Stephan, 1984, pp. 2-3). While the article mentioned in a footnote that this did occur between 7-10 of July 1983, no further information was provided. Furthermore, the movement for peace was not a passive one: The Lebanese women's movement actively argued for peace through literary works, and the sharing of narratives, and other political actions. The decision to continue

researching, observing, and narrating the effects of the war was itself an expressly political action taken by women writers, the women's movement, and *Al-Raida*. In much of the literature that appeared after the war, there was an attempt to document experiences, share stories, and shed light on the destruction of the war. In doing so, the journal created room for readers and writers alike to try to come to a collective understanding of the tragedy, the major loss of life, and the altered reality now facing those in Lebanon. The literary production that emerged during the war exhibited a shared identity as victims worked through trauma and attempted to make sense of the pervasive violence that affected every aspect of life in Lebanon. While the journal also continued publishing on issues of importance within the global feminist arena, such as women and work, development, environment, liberation, and gender violence, the shift that occurred during the civil war—towards a postcolonial feminist identity—remained. This shift from a liberal to a postcolonial ideology was also evident within the Lebanese women's movement during the civil war years and ultimately changed how various actors and individuals within the movement articulated their goals for the future.

As Ghurayyib's editorials illustrated, liberal feminist arguments for gender equality based on the concept of individuality and willpower often fell short in affecting any substantial and lasting change for women. Instead of focusing on individual change, which often implied a focus on women privileged enough to experience individual change (in other words, elite women), the journal began publishing works that focused on collective activism,

defining women's needs and goals within the larger societal context. This change in discourse marks an important moment in lebanese feminist history, as the movement began to collaboratively work towards a more inclusive ideology to challenge oppressive political, social, hierarchical, and sectarian structures still upheld by the current Lebanese political structure today.

## Conclusion

The U.N.'s discourse on development in the early 1980s, and the redefinition of development in Rose Ghurayyib's editorials in *Al-Raida*, exemplify an initial attempt to reconfigure and redefine the dominant discourse on development to suit the local context. Transnational discourses must often be translated into the local vernacular before they can have any real impact on the change in a local context. But, as Rita Sabat reminds us, this translation can be tricky and, as evidenced by some of the work published during the first decade of *Al-Raida*, might reinforce problematic hierarchies or implicit concepts before they become fully contextualized and localized (Sabat, 2010). This process of change can be observed throughout Ghurayyib's editorials and written work in *Al-Raida* during her tenure as its editor. The challenge of eradicating gender inequality in a fragmented political context such as Lebanon lies in the willingness to conceptualize gender equality as a local project rather than one that is imposed on the state by foreign actors. The significance of *Al-Raida* lies in its role in laying the groundwork for discussions on gender in Lebanon and evolving its approach to the discourse on gender equality.

The journal continues to address issues such as gender violence, women's health, dis/ability, and sexuality in later years, while acknowledging its own limitations. While *Al-Raida* now operates as a peer-reviewed journal with contributions from both prominent academics and grassroots gender activists leading the charge, the early issues remain a pivotal archival site for the research on gender issues in the Arab region in general, and in Lebanon in specific.

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