

# A Course on Arab Women at B.U.C.

A course on Arab Women initiated by IWSAW has been introduced as part of B.U.C. curriculum during the spring semester of 1979. Mrs. Lorfing, researcher at the Institute, has been appointed coordinator of the course. The following paragraphs are excerpts from the statement by which she introduced the course on Feb. 20, 1979.

The Institute's objectives are "to create faith in woman and, more important, to instill in her self-confidence and assurance, to enable her to bring forth the full flow of her capacities for the betterment of the Arab nation and its development."<sup>(1)</sup>

One of the Institute's roles in the process of development is to contribute to the scientific study of woman in the context of her own culture. It is of extreme importance that "informed awareness that recognises the individuality of women and the societal differences in the developing world should be fostered to replace the projection of the western view of womanhood onto women of non-western nations."<sup>(2)</sup>

With this principle as a guide, the course has been projected to fulfill a two-fold aim: First, disseminate scientific knowledge as to the status of women in the Arab World; second, create interest for the creation of a "Women's Studies Program" that will in the long run help in the implementation of proper development strategies for the improvement in the quality of life of both Arab men and women.

In the last decade, due to the impact of modernization, the Arab countries have been swept by profound changes in their different socio-economic and political institutions. The rates of change, however, have been uneven with respect to urbanization, industrialization, and modernization between the different

Arab states. A differential of change is also noticeable within a given state, where some sections of society show different life-style options. The scope of the course is to present the status of the Arab woman in different social institutions with a critical approach in order to avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping. Women's roles and status vary greatly by class and productive unit. This course is only a preliminary attempt at understanding the social forces behind to-day's Arab women's place in society.

Despite some progress in some areas, research on Arab women and development is only beginning. The status of the majority of women who live in the Arab World is low and ongoing social change either does not affect women's primary roles or tends to deprive them even further of options and opportunities. The interplay of such factors as the socio-economic characteristics of a population, the nature and cause of attitudinal, as well as behavioral, changes toward women's roles... are all areas that should be further investigated.<sup>(3)</sup>

It is hoped that this course will raise many questions and lead to fruitful discussions, as a base for the development of new research hypotheses and seminars to investigate issues related to Arab women and social transformation in the Middle East.

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- (1) Dr. Albert Badre, "Women, a human resource of development in the Arab World", *Al-Raida*, vol.1, no.1, 1976, p.1.
  - (2) Nadia H. Youssef, "Women in Development: Urban life and Labor, in *Women and World Development*, ed. by Irene Tinker & M. Bo Bramsen, p.71.
  - (3) Wellesly Editorial Committee, *Women and National Development: The complexities of change* P.329.