

AN OPTIMISTIC VIEW OF WOMEN'S CONDITIONS IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Dr. Muna Hammam, an American of Egyptian origin and assistant professor of sociology at the American University of Washington, made a survey trip to seven Arab countries in May 1978 and gave several lectures on the conditions of women in the countries she visited. The Arabic magazine *Al-Majal*, published in the States, interviewed Dr. Hammam and published in its issue of November 1978 no. 92, p. 8, an article expounding her impressions concerning the Arab woman. The following paragraphs include excerpts from that article.

Comparatively speaking, the Arab woman is ahead of the western woman in some respects and behind her in other respects, mainly in the field of technical training. From the point of view of equal pay for equal work, the Arab woman is in a more favorable position than the Western woman who

is still struggling for a fairer treatment in the way of salaries.

Educated Arab women occupy technical positions in a much higher proportion than educated western women, particularly in the fields of medicine and engineering. Their proportion in some Arab countries like Syria, Egypt and Maghreb reaches about 23% while in the United States it does not exceed 2% in medicine and 1.5% in engineering... The Arab woman is equally privileged in the fact that she enjoys complete freedom to manage her properties and possessions while the western woman is apt to meet certain restrictions in this respect. Moreover, the Arab woman has the advantage of stronger adherence to family ties, which helps her to coordinate her outside work with home duties.

Dr. Hammam presumes for the Arab woman good prospects for

further progress and complete obtainment of her rights provided she continues and follows up her struggle. In this case it should be necessary to try to awaken Arab men as to the justice of woman's claims and the necessity of supporting them.

As a conclusion Dr. Hammam expressed her great satisfaction with progress so far achieved by Arab women, especially in Bahrain where her attention was called by the Bahraini women's activity, awareness and desire to learn. As an example, the television program in which she took part was entirely projected and produced by women. She did not meet completely veiled women in that country. She thinks that it is the only Arab region where nursing is considered as a highly respectable feminine profession. The proportion of women who are government employed is around 50%.

AWP

NEWSLETTER

AWP (Association for Women in Psychology) Newsletter Feb. — March 1979, announces the midterm World Conference of the U.N. Decade for Women which will be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in either June or August 1980. The purpose of the Midterm Conference is to review the progress made since 1975 and to adopt a program for the remainder of the Decade. In addition to the Decade's three goals of Equality, Development and Peace, the conference will have three subthemes: education, health and employment.

WOMEN UNDER COMMUNISM

This is the title of a book by Barbara Wolfe Jancar, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, and reviewed by Diane L. Simpson in AWP Newsletter, Feb. March 1979, p. 8.

According to the reviewer, it is an "interesting and readable survey, showing that while women in communist countries have indeed made rapid social and economic gains, the prevailing definition of equality as the opportunity for women to enter the labor market as well as work at home on the second shift, means that women in those countries are faced with intolerable physical and time demands. Traditional sex-stereotyping continues to influence women to value home over work and serves to reinforce ideological and political

barriers which prevent women from attaining power in business or government."

Jancar views equality as a developmental process independent of capitalism or socialism, which depends on the stage of modernization and the degree of authoritarianism in a given society. "Jancar's conclusion is straightforward: The Soviet and Chinese variants of marxism have demonstrated that feminism cannot rely on male ideologies for its rationale, motivations or goals. Throughout history women have served the patriarchal establishment, whether as supporters of the status quo or as revolutionaries seeking to replace one variant of the male political order with another."