

# Meeting of Experts on Research and Teaching Related to Women

Unesco, Paris, May 1980

A meeting of experts on Research and Teaching Related to Women: Evaluation and Prospects, was held at UNESCO, Paris May 5-8, 1980. The group consisted of about twenty scholars representing different parts of the world. The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was represented by its Director, Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr. The conference was organized as a contribution to UNESCO's program in the social sciences dealing with the status of women. At this meeting, the Committee of Experts noted with satisfaction that the International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights (Vienna, 12-16 September 1978) had recommended that women's studies be treated as a special branch of research contributory to the development of human rights teaching. Women's studies programs are one of the means to secure women's complete equality.

Women's studies, which have developed independently in various countries, have already shown that they can enrich both scholarship and social policy, demonstrating their dynamic force in the development of new forms of knowledge.

The intellectual purposes of these studies are concerned with correcting and completing the record of women's activities. As we know, women have commonly been omitted from the scholarly record; for example, their contribution to historical events and to literary work is frequently ignored. Topics are often defined in such a way as to exclude women's activities; for example the omission from national income statistics of women's unwaged labour in the home, in the care of children, the old, the sick, in family businesses and subsistence agriculture. Similarly, our understanding is distorted by subsuming women into the categories of the men to whom they are attached by family ties; such is the case of sociological theories of stratification. Different standards and criteria are also applied to men and women.

The committee is in complete agreement on the necessity for women's studies to be both interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary, since the specificity of the conditions of women encompasses all disciplines. Women's studies, like other studies of an interdisciplinary nature, question the concept and structure of knowledge contained within the disciplinary boundaries and the power of those who define these boundaries and what comes within them. The same can be said for women's studies within disciplines. By their interdisciplinarity and in raising such points, women's studies could help bring about a restructuring and reunification of knowledge and scholarship at present increasingly fragmented, despite the fact that much of the most fruitful development is taking place between the boundaries of established disciplines.

Women's studies aim at bridging the gap between subjective or experiential knowledge, and academic knowledge. Academic knowledge, in its search for sustainable certitudes and truths that can be proved, tends to devalue subjective and experiential knowledge equating these to prejudice.

The relevance and the credibility of teaching and research on women depend on their close links with the activities of women who are outside the academic structure and who may be involved in women's movements, associations, groups, etc. The mutual criticism and exchange that take place between those within and outside the academic structure and the dialectical process which is engaged, are essential to the transformation of knowledge and thought. In this way, women participate actively in the development of the social changes that affect them.

It is apparent to us that all forms of socio-economic planning, if they are to be successful, must take account of the findings of research related to women. It follows, therefore, not only that such research must be developed in all regions but also that its results must be disseminated through teaching and other mechanisms.

The objectives of programmes for teaching and research in women's studies may be summarized as follows:

1. to raise fundamental questions about women in society, using a scientific and academic approach;
2. to stimulate interest in and support of research topics relevant to women and social change;
3. to investigate socio-political and cultural backgrounds and their effects on the status of women;
4. to engage in a continuous evaluation of research into the history, conditions and changing needs of women;
5. to promote the understanding of the historical and contemporary role of women in society;
6. to encourage a new and full recognition of the contribution of women to human achievement;
7. to ensure that women and issues of gender are studied in a non-discriminatory manner as part of the curriculum, either in separate distinguishable women's studies courses or in courses so transformed as to give women's perspective its rightful place;
8. to strengthen and widen women's rights by providing the conditions which allow women to exercise those rights;
9. to ensure the equality of all individuals without distinction of race, sex, age, language or religion, and thus transform society.

To meet the above mentioned objectives the

Committee suggested the following recommendations:

1. The inclusion of Women's studies in the Plan for Teaching of Human Rights drawn in the international conference on the teaching of human rights held in Vienna, Sept. 12-16, 1978.
2. The compilation of directories on teaching and research on women
3. The provision of professional assistance from UNESCO in the following areas:
  - a. curriculum design for women's studies
  - b. research tools to collect base-line data necessary for teaching and action programs
  - c. preparation of curricular materials for the teaching of women's studies

4. The organizing of regional and trans-regional seminars on women's studies teaching and research. Such seminars may have a two-fold objective of training participants in the development and teaching of women's studies' programmes and providing leadership training for future efforts in this field.
5. The establishment of scholarships to enable women from areas where there are few, or no women's studies courses or programs, to attend those existing in other countries.
6. The encouragement of visiting professorships to assist in the establishment of women's programs and also to help initiate new or additional research programs.
7. The increase of publications which will provide information on women's studies on a wide scale.

## MESSAGE FOR COPENHAGEN<sup>(1)</sup>

The tragic condition of Lebanon today is poignantly portrayed in these poetic lines written originally in French by the Lebanese poet and journalist Claire Gebeyli.

If I could go to Copenhagen, speak for the women of my country before all those who carry to the platform their wild whirl of claims and complaints; unfold like a rug our six years of woe.

Carry to the Conference all our worries and convulsions, the anxiety of a march with no apparent meaning.

The present for us is all too grave to permit any claim for rank or liberation. How obsolete seems to us the echo of the old refrains versus the sneaky movements of the world chess-board.

If I could go to Copenhagen, speak of the women of my country.

A chime, an upward step and the panic clutches the hearts. Will it be the turn of my child? Is it really mine? Or somebody else's?

The smoke is too thick for us to see through, too thick to show whence comes death.

Turning our backs, facing the wall, we can only sigh.

Waiting.. Between one wound and another passes the year. Six more months, then weeks fall, sticky like dead leaves. No issue. No dawn.

What shall we say to the boys who would like to return? Where to hide the little ones who threaten to grow?

The naked names on the marble of tombs; the mothers, fragile shadows with no power and no weight. Here we are, an obscure mass, showing our limbs burned by fireblasts, and our children, broken to pieces, their inaudible cry hushed in the depths of their souls.

If I could go to Copenhagen, scream to the world the fate of our women, say to all those running after illusions, that a large gray shadow locks for us the gates of sleep; that all their addresses, their banquets, their disputes sound on our walls like the noises of bottles. And in the evening cold, how lonely is our gaze.

Claire Gebeyli

L'Orient-Le Jour  
Beirut, July 24, 1980

### IWSAW PUBLICATIONS, 1979 – 1980

- **May Ziadeh, At Tawahuj Wal Uful**, a study of the life and literature of the Lebanese writer, in Arabic, by Rose Ghurayyib, 1978. (price LL. 10).

#### IN THE PRESS :

##### Books:

- **Contemporary Arab Women Poets**, in Arabic, by Rose Ghurayyib, 1979.
- **The Status of the Arab Woman: A Selected Bibliography**, in English, by Samira Meghdessian, 1979 (Mansell Publishing House, London).
- **Image of Women in Lebanese Children's Textbooks**, in Arabic, by Ilham Kallab, 1979.
- **Arab Women in Population Employment and Economic Development**, in English, by IWSAW and the ILO (comparative study of 6 Arab countries), 1979.

##### Monographs:

- "Position of Moslem women Between Tradition & Personal status"
- "Women and Work in Lebanon", in Arabic and English, 1979.
- "Arab Women and Education", in English, 1980.
- "Young Child Study", in English, 1980.

(1) Where the UNO Mid-Decade Conference for Women is taking place: July 14-30, 1980