

Women of the Maghreb

by Dr. Alya Baffoun
Tunis University 1980

This study tries to contrast the present status of the working woman in the Maghreb with that of her predecessor whose function was limited to housekeeping and child care. In treating her topic, the author uses the concepts of dialectical materialism, as when she says: "All social relationships of dependence and oppression, of which the subordination of women is one case, are definitely founded in economic dependence" and "Economic dependence is supported by ideological discourse rooted deep in the unconscious of a culture".

Speaking of the radical change recently effected in woman's position, she says: "The woman is no longer the cousin of equal rank, formerly the preferred bride in the tribal community but neither is she an independent legal person able to fend for herself." "Work has not liberated woman, though it has helped to disrupt traditional life." "The most educated women are often also the most alienated and oppressed by the patriarchal structures of a dependent society".

The number of women in waged employment remains low: 20% of the working population in Tunisia, 15% in Morocco, and 5% in Algeria. Forty-nine per cent of all wage earning women are manual workers; 34% are office workers; a large number of them hold poorly paid jobs, especially the daughters of rural parents who have emigrated to the city where they are exposed to bad sanitary and living conditions.

Further on, the author gives a few details about the changes of status for working women as follows:

Waged employment has helped them to make new contacts and confront problems outside the family. From the matrimonial point of view, it has encouraged them to choose their husbands, favor marrying out of the kin-group, and use family-planning and contraception. A working woman has a voice in important decisions, greater independence in her relationship with her husband, which sometimes leads her to deviant behavior.

The indications of change are thus summarized:

The creative ways in which women, in spite of difficulties, try to realize themselves.

Abandonment of the veil.

Access to education and public life.

Learning to become more socialized and to organize themselves.

Holding more open and direct sexual relations, gradual undermining of the former ideology of honor in which women were such an important element.

Cult of money is replacing former idealism.

As a conclusion the author says: "Though industrialization and its effect on the availability of employment for women have led to a destructuring of the patriarchal family based on bonds of consanguinity and marriage between parallel cousins, yet they have not led to the establishment of complete commodity relations capable of absorbing the contradictions inherent in the new structure and leading to a non-sexist system of organization". Women are still oppressed by community and tribal life traditions.

Books

- **May Ziadeh : At-Tawahhuj Wal-Uful**, by Rose Ghurayyib, a study of the life and literature of the Lebanese writer, in Arabic, 1978. (Price LL. 10)
- **Nassamat wa A'assir fish sh'ir an 'Nissai'l 'Arabi l M:':assii**, by Rose Ghurayyib, a study of Contemporary Arab Women Poets, in Arabic, 1980 (Price LL. 30)
- **The Status of the Arab Woman: A Selected Bibliography**, in English, by Samira Meghdessian, 1980, Mansell Publishing House, London.

Monographs*

- **Women in Islam**, in Arabic, by Sheikh Dr. Subhi Saleh, 1980.
- **Women and Work in Lebanon**, in Arabic and English, by Irine Lorfing et al., 1980.
- **Arab Women and Education**, in English, by Edith Hanania and Dr. Munir Bashshur, 1980.
- **The Development of Three to Six Year-Old Lebanese Children and Their Environment**, in English, by Julinda Abu Nasr, Mary Makhoul, and Irine Lorfing, 1980.

In the Press

- **Arab Women in Population Employment and Economic Development**, in English, by IWSAW and the ILO (comparative study of 6 Arab countries), 1980.

*Price for each monograph: LL. 10 in Beirut and \$ 5 outside including mail.

*Above publications can be secured from the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College P.O.Box 11-4080, Beirut, Lebanon

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**ISIS : INTERNATIONAL BULLETIN 15
Italy, Switzerland, — June 1980**

This bulletin, prepared by Diana Calafati, Jane Cottingham and Marilee Karl is devoted to the anti-nuclear and anti-militarist movement launched or supported by women working for peace, as individuals or as groups, all over the world. It contains articles reprinted from world-known magazines, and other articles against nuclear power and militarization written by members of the ISIS collective.

In the editorial we read the following:

"Militarization itself is becoming an issue as women are increasingly being encouraged or conscripted into military service. Military service for women is often being couched in pseudo-feminist arguments of "equality for women" or "equal responsibility for equal rights". In this bulletin several women argue strongly against this manipulation of women and expose the myth of equal rights, equal duties".

The following statistics are reprinted from p. 38: Global **military** spending currently runs at about **\$ 400 thousand million** a year, nearly \$ 1 million a minute. Yet:

1. about 1,500 million people (nearly 40% of the world's population) have no effective services;
2. nearly 3,000 million live in countries which have more than 1,000 inhabitants per physician;
3. nearly 3,000 million people lack access to safe water;
4. about 750,000 die each month from water borne diseases;
5. nearly 570 million people are seriously undernourished;
6. nearly 2,000 million have a life expectancy of less than 60 years, usually less than 50 years;
7. about 800 million are illiterate, including about 70% of the population of Africa; and
8. nearly 250 million children under 14 years of age do not attend school.

(Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.)

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