

### Announcement fo GRFA

The GRFA (Research Group on Algerian Women) asked us to announce that they have been excluded from the CRIDSSH (Center for Human Social Sciences Research and Information). They were notified of this decision by the director of the CRIDSSH who wrote:

"... the direction of the CRIDSSH has decided that as far as it is concerned, it wants to stop the GRFA experience. Starting today the CRIDSSH disclaims any responsibility concerning the activities of this group and does not authorize it to use the CRIDSSH any longer." November 6, 1983.

The GRFA believes that its work must continue at any cost.

They are asking all those for whom their efforts make sense to show their solidarity:

—Any letter of solidarity for the GRFA would help.

— Texts (poems, essays, reviews, life stories) as well as research, are welcome and will be published in a new journal they are starting.

Their address from now on is: BP 17049, ORAN EL FETH, ALGERIA



*GRFA: Group of Research on Algerian Women in Oran*



*In the bush in Senegal with Molly Melching*

## Impressions on a Trip to Egypt

Egypt, popularly known as the "Mother of the World", is one of the most fascinating countries of the Middle East. Not only does it contain great archeological treasures — dating back to Pharaonic, Coptic and Muslim times; it has also shaped modern Arab politics, literature, art, journalism and cinematography of this part of the world.

I have visited Egypt four times during the past twelve years, each time at a different season.

The last visit — **November 21-28, 1983** — was the most interesting one because I went not as a tourist, but as co-editor of *Al-Raida*, with the task of making contacts with various women who were involved in one way or another in the fight to improve women's status in Egypt. During this trip I also served as an observer at the MEAwards workshop, which was held in Cairo from the 25th to the 27th of November, and which focused on

the measurement of women's economic participation.<sup>(1)</sup>

I was truly fortunate for I was able in a short time and at a very short notice sometimes, to meet many outstanding women in their homes, offices, universities and during coffee breaks at the workshop, and talk to them about their work, lives, struggles and attitudes towards the women's movement in Egypt and the Arab World.

The outcome of my meetings was enriching and exhilarating both on the personal and professional levels. I was struck by the courage and patience of Egyptian women and by their stubborn

(1) See the report on this workshop by IWSAW's official delegate, Nada Khuri, on p. 18 of this issue.



determination to balance successful careers with rewarding family lives. I was impressed by the pride with which Egyptian women talked about, defended and practiced Arab and Muslim values.

In the minds of most, there were no basic contradictions between being an authentic Arab woman and being "liberated." For these women, "liberation" meant first of all freedom of choice in careers and personal lives. It also meant respect for the family as an essential component of society. Belonging to closely-knit family units, they said, was an asset rather than an obstacle to "liberation". Many mentioned to me the encouragement they had and still have from their husbands, fathers, bosses or teachers. Such encouragement enabled them to pursue more easily the aims they set for themselves in life.

This is not to say that Egyptian women are not aware of discrimination, injustice or bias existing in their society. It simply reflects the fact that these women were not anti-religion, anti-family, etc. They believe that they should build their struggle for liberation on what is positive and worthwhile in society rather than complaining and criticising what is bad, without attempting to do anything about it on the practical level.

One successful example of this way of thinking was **Amina Said, the first professional woman journalist in Egypt**, who started her career as reporter in 1943 while pursuing her graduate studies in English Literature at Cairo University. Her late husband, Dr. Abdallah Zein el Abideen,

then her fiance, would cover up to her parents when she used to return home late at night from work at the newspaper. Dr. Abideen an eminent professor of agriculture at the University, also took a major share in raising their three children.

Now in her middle seventies, Amina Said is the first Egyptian woman to be **President of the Board of Directors of "Dar el Hillal"** a renowned and powerful publishing house in Egypt. At the end of our hour-long interview in her office she told me that she is not considering retirement and that she will only stop working on the day she dies. (2)

Amina Said was probably the most outstanding woman I met during my trip and one of the most admired women in Egypt.

As for the outcome of my other encounters with women, they will be published in the next issue of *Al-Raida*, which will concentrate mainly on Egyptian and North African women. You will learn about Ikbal (Baraka) Fathia (Al-Assal), Sakina (Fouad), Mona (el Hadidi) and other Egyptian women, you will discover what interesting and important things they are doing with their lives and for their country. My gratitude goes to all those who have been encouraging and helpful and interested in the work of the Institute.

W. Stephan

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(2) Amina Said will be the pioneer of our next issue of *Al-Raida*.