

## Dorīyah Aaouni<sup>(☆)</sup>



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*Dorīyah Aaouni is an Egyptian journalist. She has been writing in the Egyptian and Arab Press since the fifties. She is one of the first women in the world to become a foreign news correspondent in economics and political news. Most female journalist in the world concentrated only on women's issues at the time as she puts it. Dorīyah Aaouni speaks of her struggle as an Arab woman in a sexist and racist world. She tells of her journey from Egypt to France at a time when it was improper for a girl to travel and live alone and away from home. Although Paris was the city in which her career boomed and where she has lived all her life, Dorīyah Aaouni remains deeply attached and proud of her Arab heritage.*

I was the only girl in my family. Living with two brothers taught me to deal with the role-differences between men and women in our male-dominated society. Women were submissive and obedient. Their true worth and their lives began only when they got married. Men were free to fulfill their ambitions without physical or social restraints. Despite it all, I did not want to get married and my dream was to get higher education in French in France.

My dream died with the death of my parents (I was eighteen). Consequently, my uncle, my legal guardian in the absence of parents, took me to Iraq to live with him. His aim was to get me married in order to relieve himself of his responsibilities towards me and to secure my future. Still I wanted to go to France and had no intentions of getting married.

During my stay in Iraq, I worked as a translator (from French to Arabic) for a French industrialist. Impressed

with my skills, he encouraged me to travel to Paris and even arranged a visa for me. I did not tell my uncle who was naturally against the idea. It was improper for a girl to travel alone or to live away from home. However, he did allow me to go to Turkey to visit relatives who had a 'suitor' arranged for me. As expected, the so-called suitor met me at the airport in Turkey. I immediately told him that I was already married. When he asked about my marriage, I replied that I was married to a cause; I was a devout Marxist at the time.

Shortly after my arrival in Turkey, I decided to visit Paris for two months and return to Cairo permanently. However, I never returned to Cairo and I have lived in Paris ever since.

My trip from Istanbul to Paris lasted three whole months. I visited various cities along the way learning about places and people. Bulgaria proved to be the most revealing, for it shattered my convictions in Marxism

when I saw the poor living conditions of people under a Communist regime.

Upon my arrival in Paris, influential friends I had met in Iraq helped me find a job to support myself. Meanwhile, Egypt was experiencing a revolutionary phase (1952), which forced me to stay in Paris indefinitely. Therefore, I enrolled at a university. Two years later, I was granted a scholarship to the Institute of Higher Learning in Languages and Translation in Paris. I was required to learn three languages other than my native Arabic, which was not in the curriculum of the Institute. When I suggested adding it, the Dean replied: «The Arabic language! I thought we were going to get rid of these people.» (The Algerian revolution was coming to its end at the time and the French government was under pressure in our part of the world). I answered him by saying that the future of France depended on Arab oil, which infuriated him even more.

Eventually, the Dean's discrimination against the Arabs culminated in his attempts to keep me from graduating from the Institute. After intensive pressure and persuasion, he allowed me to continue my term. In the process, I had managed to convince him to add Arabic to the curriculum by pointing out that if he did so, his name and his Institute would achieve a reputation in the academic world as being innovative. Since then, Arabic is one of the languages taught at the Institute for Higher Learning in Languages and Translation, in Paris.

## Journalism

Upon my graduation from the Institute, I applied for a job at the French Press Agency (AFP). Some previous experience in journalism in Cairo and my fluency in at least three languages qualified me for the job. I had been working at the agency for seven months when I made my first professional contact with the Egyptian Press.

At that time, a delegation of Egyptian journalists was visiting Paris. The Editor in Chief of the prominent Al-Ahram newspaper (The Pyramids), the late Kamal Al-Mallah, learned of my presence: an Egyptian girl, work-

ing at the French Press Agency and living alone in Paris. He called me and asked me to help him contact some French officials, which I did. When he returned to Cairo, he wrote about me in his newspaper. Consequently, Egyptian journalists visiting or transiting in Paris always called me for assistance.

Inspired, I myself began writing in Arabic for the Egyptian press. My report and commentary on the visit of the Israeli Prime Minister, Levi Ashkol, in 1964, and specifically about his anger over the poor reception he received from the French government, was my breakthrough in the Egyptian press. From then on, my article and other writings were being quoted in the press all over the Arab world.

For the next seven years, I was the foreign news correspondent for a number of newspapers in Egypt and the Arab World, notably, AlMousawer, Al-Akhbar, Akher-Sa'aa, and Kuwaiti newspapers. In those days, there were very few women working as foreign correspondents, even in Paris itself. Female journalists concentrated on women's issues, and none reported news for their country from overseas as I did. Furthermore, female journalist in general were rare. thus, twenty five years ago, there were only five women who worked at the French Agency, today they account for half of the staff ●

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(☆) Source: Tayyara, Anisa. «Robe' Qarn Bahthan 'An Khabar» («A Quarter of A Century in Search of News»). *Al-Shahed Magazine*, No. 57, May 1990. Translated from Arabic By Randa Abul-Husn.