

FACTORIES WITHOUT WALLS: WOMEN'S LABOR AND TOBACCO PRODUCTION IN LEBANON

By *Samira A. Atallah,*
Boston University

INTRODUCTION:

Since 1970, the United Nations International Year for Women, there has been a growing sense of the value of women's work both in the formal and informal sectors, and its significance to the international market and the larger economic system. Concurrently, there has been unprecedented interest in the role of religion, namely Islam, in the development of Middle Eastern women warranted by the rise of religious fundamentalist movements in the region. Despite the vast literature on these topics, there has been a marked absence of empirical studies with historical and comprehensive orientations. In the case of Lebanon, standard literature on its political and economic experience, has always overlooked women and gender. Neither do regional women's studies in general explore the lives of Middle Eastern and Lebanese women in the comprehensive context of their countries' evolution. They tend to rely on interpretations of religion and patriarchy as the main determinants of women's conditions. The study of rural women in the region especially, has been marked by outright negligence.² Akram Khater argues that, "buried under the label of family, peasant women [in Lebanon] appear as simply a part of the family, a sub-unit of the clan structure. Viewed mostly as happy matrons, no exploration is ever offered of peasant women as individuals."³ This study attempts to address these deficiencies. It aims to induce a recognition of the significance of women's role and gender relations in rural development, through a case study of the tobacco cultivation system in Lebanon.⁴ It provides quantitative and qualitative analyses of various aspect of non-wage agricultural domestic labour, the basic socio-political forces that create and perpetuate such a mode of production, and women's perception of their own role within this structure.

The objective of this paper is to demonstrate the dependency of an important Lebanese industry on the contribution of rural women. This contribution is treated in conjunction with the historical development of South Lebanon - the largest tobacco area in the country - under the rule of both the Ottomans and the French colonizers, as well within the context of post-colonial public policies. In the process, the

INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE WORLD LEADS TO THE SINGLE CROP, AND THE SINGLE CROP TO THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF THE FARM. BUILD A FACTORY COMMUNITY, AND IT WILL GRADUALLY MAKE A FACTORY OF THE FARM AS WELL - A FACTORY WITHOUT WALLS, BUT SUFFERING MANY OF THE EVILS OF FACTORY LIFE.

Frank Tannenbaum (1924).¹

study examines the effect of religious and cultural practices on the lives of rural women. It also highlights the role of various civil institutions, including the tobacco syndicate in enforcing differences between women tobacco laborers of different Lebanese confessions and regions. The analysis emphasizes the interrelatedness of these various variables in determining overall regional development as well as gender relations and the status of women.

The principle hypothesis of the study is that rural women are an essential yet exploited component of the agrarian project in Lebanon. I argue that this exploitation of women is a function of an official economic project which benefits from the predominant patriarchal and religious order, while accommodating the interests of a local elite and those of an international market. Furthermore, this case study challenges both a culturalist approach which identifies Islam and Arab culture as the main determinants of the status of Arab women, and mainstream modernization theories which stress the principle role of capitalist development in women's empowerment. It argues that Lebanese women's lives are shaped not simply by religion and culture, but especially by the dynamics of national economic development, class position, international relations, and public policy.

The analysis in this study builds on the foundation of the dependency and world-system approaches which consider capitalism as a system of production that incorporates the seeds of women's exploitation and underdevelopment in its very structure and historical process. It departs from both approaches, however, by recognizing some role for patriarchy and religion in the perpetuation of women's underdevelopment - a role equally unexplored in both approaches. Moreover, this position treats women as an integrated and active variable in the overall equation of capitalist development, whereas the top-down dependency approach considers them a passive non-integrated element available to join capitalist production as a reserve labor force only when needed and, then, to be withdrawn from the market when necessary. The examination of the dynamics of tobacco production in Lebanon and the analysis of the data collected to this end reveal that women are

in fact a central and constant element in the capitalist development process. Furthermore, it reveals that, despite the fact that their conditions are marked by a high level of exploitation, rural women reflect neither passivity nor irrationality of choices.

Finally, it is important to note that this paper does not claim an exhaustive exploration of the whole tobacco production system in Lebanon. Nor does it provide a detailed analysis of the political and economic structure of South Lebanon and the relations between its tobacco growers and the government. The analysis only focuses on one aspect of this industry which involves the labor activities of women (especially unpaid) in the context of rural family relations, and the role of these activities in agrarian capitalist production. Clearly, the other pertinent issues will not be ignored though only a brief overview of each of them will be provided in support of the main subject of inquiry.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION:

The methodological foundation of this study is based on a synthesis of theory building and empirical data collection and analysis. The theoretical framework is grounded in current paradigms of development and state-society relations, feminist theories of international relations, and recent interest in Islam and Middle Eastern societies. Considering the scarcity of literature on the tobacco industry and the deficiency of gender sensitive data in Lebanon, the empirical foundation draws on extensive field research⁵ I conducted in Lebanon in the summers of 1994 and 1995. During those periods, I conducted interviews with government officials from various ministries, including the Head of Foreign Relations of the Ministry of Agriculture⁶ and the General Director of the Ministry of Social Affairs; representatives of the tobacco company (La Régie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs, commonly referred to as the Régie); representatives of non-profit organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental agencies; tobacco plantation owners; and female agricultural workers and, whenever possible, their husbands. The objectives of the field research were:

- 1) to document the relative size of the female agricultural labor force engaged in this sector, its daily production activities, and the conditions under which it operates;
- 2) to identify women's perception of their work and its value;
- 3) to investigate the general perception of women's paid and unpaid work; 4) to analyze the effects of women's economic participation on their status and development within and without the family, and how this contribution interacts with other socio-religious and political variables specific to rural Lebanese society.

The initial stage of my fieldwork was at the Régie, a highly bureaucratic establishment. Since my contact person at the Régie was one of the top five directors, access to the company's archives and classified documents was relatively facilitated. At the Régie's Registry I had access to records of some details related to the country's tobacco plantations⁷ for the

pre-1975 period and more recent years. Even though figures on the size of cultivated lands and licenses were outdated and often inconsistent, they provided an overall background of the magnitude and potentials of the industry. I visited also two of the Régie's regional offices (Tyre and al-Batroun) where I obtained records of their respective towns; I also interviewed their local staff.

The highlight of field research and its main component were open-ended interviews carried out in 4 villages with female tobacco laborers. The villages were chosen along religious and regional lines: 2 Shi'a villages from the South, a historically deprived area under continuous Israeli aggression, with the largest concentration of tobacco crops in the country; and 2 (one Christian and one Shi'a) villages from al-Batroun - north of Beirut - a relatively privileged area with a large concentration of Christian Maronites - a minority whose elite until recently had the upper hand in the country's economical and political affairs. The rationale behind this selection was to consider the effects of regional and religious differences along with their political and economic implications on the status and development of Lebanese women.⁸

Formal interviews were conducted using a questionnaire which covered a wide range of topics ranging from family relations and background, personal activities and interests, to production activities. The main focus of the questionnaire was the division of labor within the household and in agricultural production. The questionnaire also included a section on decision making processes which relate to agricultural production and sales, children's schooling and socializing behavior, family health, and domestic outlays.

Most interviews lasted about 45 minutes, and more than often questions not on the questionnaire were posed when deemed necessary. My findings are based on a total of 82 formal interviews with 62 women and 20 men from all 4 villages (see Table 1). However, the concluding analysis is also based on many informal group discussions and informal interviews held without the formality of a questionnaire during visits to about 200 households.⁹

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF FORMAL INTERVIEWS BY REGION AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

	Male	Female
Shi'a from South Lebanon	10	40
Shi'a from Mount Lebanon	4	10
Maronite from Mt. Lebanon	6	12
Total	20	62

Field Research Data, collected by the writer, Lebanon 1994 - 1995

In terms of the definition and role of female labor in its various forms, tobacco farming typically involves the following categories of women laborers:

- 1- Women who are independently employed as seasonal full-time or part-time wage laborers on tobacco farms (category 1 or C1).
- 2- Female dependents of full-time male wage laborers on tobacco farms (category 2 or C2).
- 3- Women in tobacco-producing households whose husbands or fathers are engaged in outside paid employment activities (category 3 or C3).
- 4- Women in households completely dependent on earnings from tobacco production with no other sources of income (category 4 or C4).

This study treats women of these categories as a homogeneous group insofar as they suffer disadvantages because of their class and regional affiliation, their gender, and the sexual division of labor. However, the analysis will demonstrate that their individual status, value of labor, and relationship to the market differ to a great degree according to their immediate household context, marital status, and overall social situation of their families. The analysis in this study draws only on interviews with women from the third and fourth categories. During the war, the tenant system of production witnessed a great decline and only household production persisted. Therefore, the number of women from the first and second categories (at least in the selected villages) is not significant and does not provide enough data for an adequate analysis of their rate and modes of participation. Table 2 indicates the family status, household category, and employment status of female interviewees from the second and third categories.

TABLE 2: FAMILY STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS OF FEMALE LABORERS

	Married	Single*	Widow	C3	C4
Shi'a/South	36	2	2	7	33
Shi'a/Mt. Leb.	10	0	0	6**	4
Maronite/Mt. Leb.	11	0	1	9+	3

Field Research Data, collected by the writer, Lebanon 1994 - 1995.

*These single women are included in C4 and are treated as married women as they live with their families although they rent their own licenses.

**Including one who works part-time as an elementary school teacher.

+ Including 3 women who also hold outside jobs: 2 work as nurses and one as a school teacher.

Finally, it is important to note that I rarely had the chance to interview women alone. Family members, passers-by, and occasionally, husbands were present, and may have affected their responses. More often than not, I had to politely

interrupt the husband or a (male) neighbor as they tried to answer on behalf of the woman. But in all cases people were cooperative and willing to share their time. Some women were especially eager to express their views and frustrations with their life conditions. A few went as far as complaining openly (yet with a hint of a joke) about their husbands who, in their words, "spend their days socializing over coffee while we women do the dirty job." On many occasions, I also had the chance to 'silently' observe women at work. Typically, a group of women (commonly extended family members) of various ages sit in a circle around piles of tobacco leaves and spend

long hours stringing them. Those moments of silent observation brought me closer to the world of tobacco women

- a world of undervalued efforts and



exploited

labor - an assembly line of hard working hands stringing tobacco leaves with a bit of hope and a lot of anger, muted anger.

WOMEN IN LEBANON: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

A world-system approach situates national economies within "an international capitalist system with a division of labor corresponding to its constituent parts - core, periphery, and semi-periphery".¹⁰ Increasing globalization has extended the boundaries of this system and linked small units in the periphery, such as the household, typically regarded as outside capitalist production, to the interests and fluctuation of the

market in the core.¹¹ These units provide international capital and market with opportunities for profit maximization by performing undocumented labor at a very low cost. Both the state (another unit in the world capitalist system) and women (from within the household unit) are fundamental to the maintenance of this exploitative exchange process (Moghadam, 1993).¹² The state accommodates this process 1) through policies (or lack of policy) which permit the incorporation of household labor (women) into low-wage sectors and/or non-wage activities; and 2) by fostering ideological and patriarchal structures which undermine women's position and work and exclude them from the power structure. As a result, while typically situated outside the formal market, women form a substantial yet unacknowledged supply of the world's labor force.

Lebanon and its economic functions in the international division of labor fit well within the world-system perspective. Both as producer of raw materials and service center for international capital, it has always been dependent on women's work in its various forms. Nevertheless, official employment and educational policies have left women in a

constant state of marginalization and exploitation. At the same time, the political structure thrives on a system of primordial and sectarian groupings. This system is rooted in colonial policies and post-independence governmental strategies which have fostered ideological and patriarchal structures detrimental to the development and empowerment of women.¹³ They have also reproduced dependency, inequality, and uneven regional development.

The tobacco industry in Lebanon is a perfect example of an arena which illustrates the complex economic and political dynamics of the Lebanese system. This industry is a state monopoly which operates through a restrictive licensing system. As such, it is a national economic enterprise of a rather unique status, especially, considering the typically hands-off governmental policy and the laissez-faire structure of the Lebanese economy. In addition, its production constitutes about 10% of the total national agricultural GDP which in turn is 7.2% to 10% of the total national GDP.¹⁴ It has been a vital element in the Lebanese economy, primarily as a source of hard currency generated by the export of unprocessed tobacco products. It also constitutes the livelihood of a large segment of the rural population especially in, but not restricted to, the South, one of Lebanon's less developed areas. For all practical and obvious reasons, the tobacco industry in Lebanon represents one of the most intense and complex forms of

relations between the state and the peasantry - a relation that has been historically marked by recurring social and political unrest.



Picture Credit: Samira Atallah



Picture Credit: Samira Atallah

dynamics of great social, political, and economic relevance.

The tobacco industry brings together in a hierarchical order four divergent groups of different capacities and interests. The international cigarette industry and its market hold the strongest position in this order. The Lebanese official establishment through the Régie - the state-owned tobacco company which monopolizes tobacco sale and production - occupies a variety of positions. It is the middleman extracting raw materials (tobacco leaves) from the peasants and then exchanging part of them on the international market for hard currency. It is also the industrialist engaged in the production and sale (locally

and internationally) of national brands of cigarettes. Finally, it is the administrator organizing all the tobacco related affairs (including planting, pricing, manufacturing, etc.) through a restrictive licensing system. In the latter capacity, the Régie also regulates imports of foreign brands of cigarettes (including purchasing, marketing, and taxing). Obviously, this multiplicity of roles corresponds to a multiplicity of conflicting interests, which often come at the expense of the interests of the tobacco growers and local production. The third group in this hierarchical order is the tobacco growers (including landless as well as landholders owning various sizes of lands) who are mostly concentrated in South Lebanon. The religious and regional identity of this group as well as their own internal hierarchical relations bring another problematic dynamic to the whole industry. Finally, women as paid and unpaid laborers constitute a sub-category situated within the latter group (more details on this category will follow).

That women are the majority of the labor force engaged in the agricultural production of tobacco in Lebanon is an understatement. With the possible exception of land clearance, they participate actively in all phases of tobacco farming. Simultaneously, they are also responsible for all ongoing domestic and family tasks, including in some cases food harvesting and processing, and care for livestock. Despite this, rural women's contribution suffer from negligence and under-evaluation. According to the National Report on Women in Agriculture in preparation to the Beijing Conference (1995), rural women as agricultural workers, enjoy no legal protection of their rights or working conditions. Official statistics and reports on the percentage and activities of women in the agricultural labor force suffer from inconsistency, lack of conceptual planning and analysis, and deficiencies in data collection and illustration. Due to this lack of official recognition and inadequate documentation, the work conditions and needs of rural women in Lebanon have rarely been identified or addressed. This neglect has consequently furthered their invisibility in national development policies, including those carried by international development agencies.

THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY: INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DYNAMICS

Tobacco production in Lebanon involves a number of significant issues pertinent to the discourse both on national and women's development. Those issues include 1) the character of agrarian capitalist production, 2) the definition of unpaid female labor in its various forms, 3) the interaction between official public policy and gender relations, and 4) the relations between paid and unpaid work, on the one hand, and local and international markets, on the other. As such, the dynamics of this state-owned industry represents an arena of complex

At different stages of production, relations between those various groups have revolved around four sets of socioeconomic transactions: commodity market transactions (market / Régie), unequal surplus transfer and exchange (Régie / landlord), feudalistic appropriation (landlord / laborers), and traditional gender and hierarchical relations (male / female family members) supported by social beliefs and practices rooted in an Islamic/patriarchal cultural foundation. Those transactions operate in an exploitative system whose dynamics are reproduced at different levels of social interaction and between the various actors involved. Within that system, household relations develop in a manner which enforces gender inequality and women's underdevelopment.

Structural relations between the Régie and tobacco growers (landless or land holders) as well as within the

household between male and female members seem to fall outside the capitalist mode of production as they do not always involve exploitation of wage labor, rent, and profit maximization. Additionally, the landlords' appropriation of peasants' labor evolves in seemingly "feudalistic" manners which involve neither a simple commodity exchange cycle nor a surplus product, at least not in the traditional sense.¹⁵ The existence of these apparently feudal and non-capitalist relations does not necessarily signify that the tobacco industry (and consequently agrarian relations in South Lebanon) operates in a dual-economy structure. The economic agrarian reality in Lebanon as manifested in the tobacco plantation system reveals a complex capitalist structure in which wage labor is only one important component. It reflects other relations of production which technically fall outside direct market exchange systems, both at the macro level (between peasants and landlords) and the micro level (within the household). Although of feudal and non-capitalist character, those relations constitute an important component in the maintenance and survival of the capitalist system. The integration, reproduction, and development of those relations are conditioned and limited by both their own internal dynamics as well as by the manipulative requirements of the capitalist rationality of the dominant mode of production.

TOBACCO IN LEBANON: AN INTRODUCTION

The history of tobacco in Lebanon is one of precarious fortunes and constant struggle. It involves many complex dynamics of significant impact on the directions of the labor movement, gender relations, and regional and capitalist development in rural Lebanon. Its initial evolution was closely tied to foreign (namely French) interests, while its growth has always been completely subjugated to the interests of the private sector, the cigarette cartel, and the feudal elite. Both the industrial and agricultural sectors of tobacco production suffer from mismanagement, exploitation, and corruption. And nowhere is the impact of these problems felt more than in the Shi'a region of South Lebanon which comprises the largest concentration of tobacco growers and farms. Hasan Sharif argues that "tobacco cultivation is the source of much of the South's misery" (H. Sharif, 1978, 11). Over the years, *al-tabegh* (tobacco) has become a political 'issue' largely associated with the Southerners' struggle against internal and external forces, including the Israeli occupiers. This issue has acquired emotional overtones of patriotism which go beyond economic as well as political considerations. For a Shi'a from South Lebanon, the term *al-tabegh* evokes both survival and defeat. Majed Halawi (1992) argues that politicians from all ideological spectrums have capitalized on the tobacco issue in a manner which has not always benefited tobacco workers. The feudal elite of South Lebanon often played the tobacco card to pressure the government into policies that suited their own interests. While groups of opposition, especially from the leftist camp, always adopted the tobacco issue as part of their strategies to confront the establishment and criticize its policies towards the workers and the South.

Despite its economic, social, and political significance, the tobacco issue in Lebanon has rarely received much academic attention. Except for a few limited unpublished graduate theses (Hasib Faquih, 1993; Nahla Faquih, 1981; Georges Yacoub, 1972)¹⁶ and one monograph published under the auspices of the Institut des Sciences Sociales at the Lebanese University (Michel Morcos, 1974), no recent studies have attempted to conduct a comprehensive inquiry on the important social, political, and economic aspects of this industry. Those few studies are marked by one of two patterns: either a focus on the managerial and productive structures of the Régie, or on the suffering of the "Shi'a" tobacco growers (with emphasis on the Shi'a element). In both cases, they base their findings on insufficient data which reproduce the same gender bias of most Lebanese statistical studies, and/or fail to advance their analysis in the historical context of Lebanon's development and labor relations. Many argue that this deficiency is due to the secretive and bureaucratic nature of the Régie which does not allow much room for statistically sound analysis¹⁷ (N. Faqih, 1981; H. Faqih, 1993). On the other hand, studies of the political history of the Shi'a community in Lebanon (see Majed Halawi, 1992) rarely devote more than a few pages to the tobacco issue; in many cases, most discussions of the topic lack historical and/or national relevance.¹⁸ As for women's role, most studies mention their heavy concentration in the labor force of tobacco farming, but only in passing and without any significant analysis of the value of this involvement and its relevance to the overall economy of modern Lebanon. It is hoped that this study will trigger further research interest and contribute, however modestly, to a better understanding of rural women's conditions and their chances for empowerment.

THE TOBACCO AREA: AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH LEBANON

As advanced above, tobacco farming has been largely concentrated in South Lebanon. Initial French interests focused tobacco cultivation in this region largely because of its convenient agrarian land tenure and the availability of female cheap labor through domestic production. In the post-independence period, Lebanon's official development policy promoted the advancement of the service, trade, and banking sectors in Beirut and its immediate surroundings to the disadvantage of other regions as well as sectors, especially agriculture. The Shi'a Southerners, lacking educational and employment opportunities and, therefore, skills, found in agriculture their only chance for survival. The subjugation of agricultural policies to private interests, the monopolization of fertilizers, the neglect of productive irrigation plans, and the domination of agricultural credit by moneylenders and wealthy landowners, pushed the inhabitants of the South into dry-farming and cash crops, such as tobacco. Although the Régie's policies were exploitative, tobacco farming still seemed attractive to the Southerners considering that the licensing system adopted since the 1930's guaranteed the sale of their entire crops. Successive governments encouraged Shi'a involvement in tobacco farming with the objective of keeping

them on their land and limiting internal migration.

By the mid 1970's, 72% of the population of South Lebanon was dependent on tobacco farming, while the region accounted for a similar proportion of the total area under tobacco cultivation in Lebanon (Halawi, 1992, 59). It is almost impossible however to identify the number of laborers who actually work in tobacco farming. The official statistics of the Régie indicate that 35000 licenses (out of a total of 41126 for the country) were granted to the Southern region in 1974. This number however does not correspond to the number of tobacco laborers, because 1) owners of licenses are not necessarily the ones who work in tobacco. According to A. Baalbaki, the maximum number of license holders who actually engage in tobacco production does not exceed 20,000,¹⁹ and the rest are either sharecroppers, or absentee landlords who lease their licenses to one or more persons. 2) Tobacco farming is labor-intensive and involves both seasonal labor and all-year activities; therefore, the number of required laborers that varies throughout the year depends on the size of the licensed crop. 3) Tobacco farming is family based and all family members are involved in its various phases which makes it even harder to calculate the number of laborers. By all accounts however, at least 150 thousand laborers (full time and part time) are needed to cultivate all licenced lands.

In 1971, tobacco production contributed 10% of the country's net national income, amounting to LL. 41208304, with the South providing 76% of this total (see Table 4). Figures of the Régie's profits in recent years are unavailable. H. Sharif, however, argues that in 1961, the Régie's profit was LL. 62,314,000 or about \$US20 million (Sharif, 1978, 11). On the other hand, the yearly income of a family of tobacco growers in the South averaged LL. 1,208.14,²⁰ or LL. 8.14 more than the LL. 1,200 that the Institut de Recherches et de Formation en vue du Développement Harmonisé (IRFED) in 1960-1961 identified as destitute (Halawi, 1992, 58).²¹

TABLE 3 - TOBACCO PRODUCTION IN LL. BY REGION (1971)

Region	Amount (LL.)	%
South Lebanon	31,399,201	76.20
Other Regions	9,809,103	23.80
Total	41,208,304	100

Source: Morcos (174, 109).

Throughout the civil war, tobacco production in South Lebanon witnessed a significant decrease. Continuous Israeli aggressions in the region and overall economic depression led to a significant increase in internal and external migration.²² Moreover, the arrival of UN security forces into the region and along with them a strong purchasing power (in US dollars) triggered the emergence of new types of commercial activities

especially in petty trade and small appliance shops catering to the needs of the foreign inhabitants. At the same time, immigrants' remittances brought to the Southern economy a flow of cash allowing a further increase in these new business ventures (Baalbaki, 1994; Halawi, 1992). With the instability of the tobacco situation, especially that the Régie suspended production and purchasing for a number of years, many families abandoned tobacco farming.

Since the advent of peace and the restoration of the Régie, tobacco farming has been on the increase again. According to informal figures of the Régie, 30% of the total number of farmers who hold auctioned licenses have not begun cultivation yet. At the same time, the Régie has increased the number of licensed lands in the South by 18% indicating a renewed interest in tobacco farming. The same reasons which initially prompted Southerners to undertake tobacco farming continue to exist. Official negligence of the South (despite the many promises declared by the new emerging Shi'a leadership) continues. Regional developments in the aftermath of the Gulf War cost many immigrant workers from the South their jobs and source of income. Political instability in West Africa - historically an attractive destination for Shi'a immigrants - also resulted in the return of many immigrants to their lands. Furthermore, a Régie representative suggested in an interview that the government is determined to limit the outflow of Southerners into Beirut and, therefore, is officially requesting the Régie administration to offer the growers more incentives. An official promise to extend social security and employment benefits to tobacco growers and laborers is contributing to an even further increase in production. While this promise might turn out to be just another empty one, Southerners are indeed choosing anew the "sour choice" (a term commonly associated with tobacco farming) with the hope that their "source of misery" (to use Sharif's term) might actually become their source of relief.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RÉGIE'S PUBLIC POLICIES AND STATE-PEASANT RELATIONS:

Tobacco cultivation in Lebanon is governed by a licensing system which gives the Régie absolute power over all phases of production: from auctioning the licenses, to fixing all the details involved in the production process (including the size of crops, processing, seedling) and marketing of the final product. The Régie's power is sanctioned by the Ministry of Finance Decree No. 10957 of 1968. This decree "stipulates that the Régie present[s] its yearly recommendations to the Minister of Finance supported by detailed studies and statistics, determining the areas needed to be licensed for tobacco cultivation in order to meet requirements for local consumption and export" (Yacoub, 1972, 5). Once approved, individual licenses are issued by a ministerial Arrêté, and as long as the growers continue to meet the requirements (including continuing yearly cultivation), their licenses are renewed every year.²³ Although the Minister is the one who ultimately decides on the final regulation of areas and licenses, the Régie as the

middleman between the Minister and the peasants plays an important and decisive role, especially throughout the recommendation process.

The main requirements of the licenses are: 1) submission of sufficient proof of ownership of cultivated lands; and 2) a proof verifying the status of the licensee as head of a household.²⁴ The minimum size of a licensed area is one *dounum* (equivalent to 1000 square meters or 0.05 hectare), while the maximum size is 50 *dounums* (2.5 hectares).²⁵ The Agricultural and Technical Departments of the Régie continuously supervise all licensed areas and provide technical advice to guarantee the quality of production and make sure the farmers are fulfilling the terms of their licenses. The Régie's representatives also estimate the output (size and quality) of each land and decide accordingly (and in advance) the price for yielded tobacco leaves. Packages of tobacco are delivered to the Régie's regional warehouses where the company's officials weigh them and pay farmers according to the previously prescribed prices. According to Yacoub, "farmers are supposed to hand over to the Régie all their production of tobacco leaf. Amounts in excess are destroyed without compensation to the farmer. Shortages, however, subject the farmer to penalties" (1972, 6).

Over the years, the licensing system has been shaped by many forces amongst which economic logic played a very small part, if any at all (Yacoub, 1972, ii). By all accounts, the relationship between the Régie and the peasants has always been one of exploitation and struggle (Morcos, 1974; Sharif, 1978; Halawi, 1992; H. Faqih, 1993). Halawi sums up the effects of the Régie's policies on the Southern tobacco growers:

The Régie has always wielded immense power and influence over the peasants. In more than one way, the company perpetuated the classic forms of political patronage in the South by promoting the dependency of the peasants on their zu'ama, traditionally also their landowners, for both granting licenses and pricing the crop. It would suffice to look at the list of the names of the major "growers", i.e., those who are allowed by the Régie to plant more than 2.5 hectares, to appreciate the extent to which patronage played a pivotal role in the granting of licensing (Halawi, 1992, 58).

And among those "major growers" are politicians who have probably never been to the South or worked in tobacco, as well as high ranking employees in the Régie itself who list their licenses under their wives' names to avoid getting into trouble with the law that does not allow employees to engage in tobacco production, fearing conflict of interest (Morcos, 1974, 61). The auctioning of licenses is only the first in a long list of exploitative dynamics. Both Halawi and Morcos argue that well-connected landowners and *zu'ama* always received the

bulk of the licenses and then, in turn, sold them to their supporters at substantial profit. This profit was sustained by the pricing policy of the Régie. Preferential treatment was given to those leaders and feudal families, at times offering them 3 to 4 times the price given to small peasants. Those buyers would then purchase the latter's crop at a slightly higher price and then sell them in turn to the Régie at the already prescribed higher price (Morcos, 1974; Halawi, 1992). The Ministry of Finance, the official body responsible for the Régie, overlooked these practices since they involved political figures from the highest echelons.

The Régie also holds a monopoly over the purchasing, sale, and marketing of foreign tobacco. According to Sharif (1978, 11) driven by preference for short-term profits, the company always managed to bypass the law which stipulates that foreign imports should not exceed 5% of native cigarette selling in the country. In 1972 alone, the Régie increased imports of foreign cigarettes by 50%. This led to higher profits, which were accentuated by an increase in local sales' taxes on cigarettes. Lebanese cigarettes could not compete with imported ones even if the latter were more expensive, given the poor industrial foundation of the Régie and the policy of reserving the best quality leaves for export. Hence, it is not surprising that Lebanese cigarettes are of inferior quality and, therefore, subject to low demand.

The manufacturing of local cigarettes has never been a top priority for the Régie. The Company's General Technical Secretary advanced in an interview that about 90% of the unprocessed tobacco leaves are exported to the US, Canada, and Brazil, and the rest (typically of the worst quality) are reserved for local production. The Régie benefits from exportation as it involves lower costs and therefore greater profit (the Régie's cost of tobacco planting is only for the price of leaves. At the same time, the Régie's preference for exportation is also due to the fact that the government grants the company about 6% commission²⁶ for all international transactions related to the sale of tobacco leaves (in addition to a 4% commission for the total amount purchased from the growers).²⁷ Furthermore, according to Yacoub, "in the profit sharing formula the Régie get an additional 4% of the adjusted profit which excludes LL.20 per Kilogram of foreign tobacco sold on the Lebanese market" (Yacoub, 1972, vii). As such, profits of the Régie rise at the expense of both the peasants and the national treasury, especially that much of the profit remains undeclared and gets channeled as high salaries and "extra" expense accounts for the high ranking officials involved in the business.

The exploitative approach of the public policy governing tobacco production is most apparent in the government's exclusion of tobacco growers from all employment benefits. Only laborers who work in large agriculture producing companies qualify for benefits. Family members employed in their family-owned agricultural companies (regardless of the size of production or number of

employees) do not qualify. Women, forming the majority of tobacco laborers, are by definition excluded.

LABOR OPERATIONS IN TOBACCO PRODUCTION :²⁸ FOCUSSING ON THE FEMALE

The licensing system of tobacco production establishes a formal relation between the peasants and the official establishment. While this relationship places the peasants within the control of the state, it does not, however, bring state benefits into the immediate lives of the peasants. Women, as the remainder of this paper attempts to demonstrate, are an indispensable element in tobacco production. That they are the majority of the labor force of tobacco farming is an understatement. They participate in all phases of production, except those involving land plowing. Women however, rarely have any direct interaction with the Régie even in cases where their husbands or fathers are not involved in the production process. During the evaluation period, Régie representatives deal directly with the male members of the household, partly for social reasons which restrict female interaction with male strangers and partly for the fact that lands (and therefore licenses) are mostly in the name of men. In the case where women are the holders of land and licenses, Régie representatives would still extend their technical advice to the male members of the family assuming that those are the supervisors of production. At the same time, however, rigid traditional attitudes become flexible if a woman is the sole owner of the license (in the case of widows). The same dynamics are also apparent during the delivery process as women rarely get involved in transporting tobacco packages. But between the initial stage which involves license auctioning and product and price estimation, and the final stage of transporting tobacco and collecting proceeds, most of the operations are in the 'hands' of women. And those hands are what keep the assembly line of tobacco production rolling - a production which transforms women's world into factories without walls.

Tobacco cultivation depends on two factors: land and

TABLE 4: SCHEDULE AND DISTRIBUTION
OF TOBACCO LABOR OPERATIONS:

January until May	Preparation of land and seed-bedding (plowing, disinfecting, sowing, watering, fertilizing, etc.)
May and June	Transplanting, planting, irrigating, and weeding.
June until October	Harvesting (leaf cropping and weeding), pest-control, and leaf-stringing.
October until December	Leaf-drying and leaf-pressing.
December and January	Leaf-packaging and transportation of bales.

Source: Data collected by the author, 1994 and 1995.

labor, with the latter being the most productive factor. The nature of tobacco farming does not allow mechanization and, therefore, depends predominantly on a large labor force (hands). At some point in the production process, a multiplicity of 'hands' is decisive, especially during the cropping and stringing period when leaves are at risk of dryness and damage. In these cases, both timing and time are equally important. The number of laborers as well as the period of operations depend on the size of land and output, but the schedule extends all year long (see Table 4).

In general, the cultivation of one dounum may require 100 to 150 days of work and about 8 part-time and full-time laborers (excluding a tractor-operator). What follows is a description of labor operations involved in tobacco production in order to give a clear idea of the division of labor and women's activities.

The first phase of tobacco cultivation begins towards the end of January or early February, when frosting is no longer a risk, and continues until the end of May. The period involves preparation of both seed beds and licensed fields. Seed beds are preferably located near the house and close to a water source. The preparation of the chosen area (rectangular beds) is a complex and detailed process which involves thorough plowing (manual) and then smoothing of the soil. Throughout this process chemical insecticides and weed killers²⁹ are used. After sowing the seeds, the beds are covered with a thin layer of soil mixed with fertilizers, and then watered thoroughly. Meanwhile, the fields are prepared simultaneously by tilling the soil (at least four times) with a tractor.

Most of the people interviewed for this study stated that they hire an outsider with a tractor to till the land (only one family had a son who owns a tractor). Preparation of beds and seed-bedding, however, is largely carried out by family members. Occasionally, only families which belong to category 3 (see above) hire part-time laborers, as husbands (and male children) with outside jobs (regardless of their work hours and responsibilities)³⁰ are less cooperative. In such cases, female hired-help³¹ is paid half the hourly rate of male labour. No satisfactory explanation was given for such discrepancy in wages. But in all cases, female family members are heavily involved (see Table 5). Those who do not participate in this phase are largely women whose husbands do not have outside jobs (see category 4). In this case the division of labor is clear: the husband and older children (male or female) are responsible for operations in the field; and the wife and younger children (mostly female) are responsible, besides their domestic duties, for operations within the household (especially at later phases). This division of labor is based on decisions taken in an atmosphere of cooperation and 'partnership'.

The second phase involves transplanting

TABLE 5 - TASKS BY WOMEN IN TOBACCO FARMING
IN LEBANON

Tasks	No. Of Women (Sample Size 62)	Percentage
Land Clearing (seed-beds)	42	67.74
Seed-bedding	48	77.41
Planting	53	85.48
Fertilizing	31	50
Irrigating	48	77.41
Weeding	53	85.48
Pest Control	40	64.51
Leaf-Cropping	61	98.38
Leaf-Stringing	62	100
Packaging	61	98.38
Transporting and Marketing	5	8.9

Source: Data collected by the author, 1995.

tobacco leaves from the seed-beds to the field. This process is very tedious and time consuming and requires a large number of hands working in teams. First, plants are carefully pulled out and handed over to another person who transports them to the fields. A laborer receives the plants in mud and plants them in holes dug at a distance of 40 to 60 cm in parallel lines and then shoves the earth with his/her foot. Throughout this phase, the whole family is mobilized. Out of the 62 women interviewed, 53 participated in this process. Of the rest, 2 women (from Mount Lebanon) had outside jobs, 2 stated medical reasons, one was 63 years old and could not sustain the hardship of the process, and 4 stayed home to take care of younger children and household chores. But the same women asserted that this lack of participation is not necessarily permanent as it may vary from one year to the other depending on their health and/or work circumstances. In addition, similar to the first phase, men who hold outside jobs are not heavily involved in the transplantation process and thus, outside help is sought.

Harvesting and leaf-stringing begin in June (although some transplanting may continue) and last until October (though it may end earlier depending on the size of the crop). Women and children are at this point the main element in the production process. As table 6 indicates, all but one (because of old age) of the 62 women interviewed engaged in leaf-cropping and all 62 of them in leaf-stringing. Husbands and male adult children of women in category 4 participate in harvesting, but

rarely if ever in leaf-stringing (only in one household an old grandfather was helping). Outside paid-help is never sought for these activities: all men interviewed said "this would be a waste of money; women can 'easily' do it while taking care of cooking and cleaning and even socializing."³² And, indeed, women do (it is questionable how easily though). Their days revolve around tobacco stringing which could begin as early as 6 a.m. and end as late as 9 p.m.

Women (mothers, daughters of all ages, daughters-in-law, younger boys, sisters) gather in circles (either on the house terrace or inside the house in a large room) around piles of tobacco leaves and string them into chains. They exchange stories, sing, or even watch television if available. Female visitors would occasionally join in the activities, either out of politeness or habit (as they are often tobacco growers themselves on a break from work).³³ Men, on the other hand, would go out to socialize with their male friends either in a local coffeehouse or in the village square. Even if they remain at home, they rarely participate; they simply sit with the women and watch them working. When I questioned them about the reason, men who have outside jobs claimed that they had already done their daily share of work in the office, and those who do not said that they needed some time to relax and socialize with their friends and, "after all, women (not men) can socialize together while stringing tobacco." They all supported this claim arguing that women do not spend time outdoors anyway (they have no place to go, but to other households) and in all cases they have more patience for monotonous activities. Women, on the other hand, either joked bitterly and sarcastically about men's resistance to this activity or even complained openly, yet rarely in the presence of men.³⁴

Throughout the day, chains of stringed tobacco are hung indoors until they turn yellow before they are brought out in the sun and hung between two parallel poles. In case of rain or high humidity (both cause leaf-fermentation) chains of tobacco must be entered into a storeroom or, into small houses, bedrooms and living rooms. No studies have been conducted to date about the health hazards involved in these cases, but all peasants who slept in rooms full of tobacco leaves complained of insomnia and headache symptoms. Additionally all women interviewed complained about skin problems. Once dry and crisp, tobacco leaves are packaged and clothed in bales. The Régie used to provide the peasants with special bags as part of the prescribed subsidy; however, since the beginning of the civil war in 1975 peasants have been purchasing those bags at their own expense. Packages of dry tobacco are ready for transportation to the Régie's warehouses by early January, and, at this point, women's involvement comes to a halt. Only 5 out of the 62 women interviewed participated in the delivery process: 2 were widows and therefore the heads of their households, and 3 were the owners of the cultivated lands and licenses and accompanied their husbands to Régie locations. The latter group told me that at points when they couldn't make it for one reason or the other, the Régie's officials overlooked their absence and easily dealt with the husbands instead.

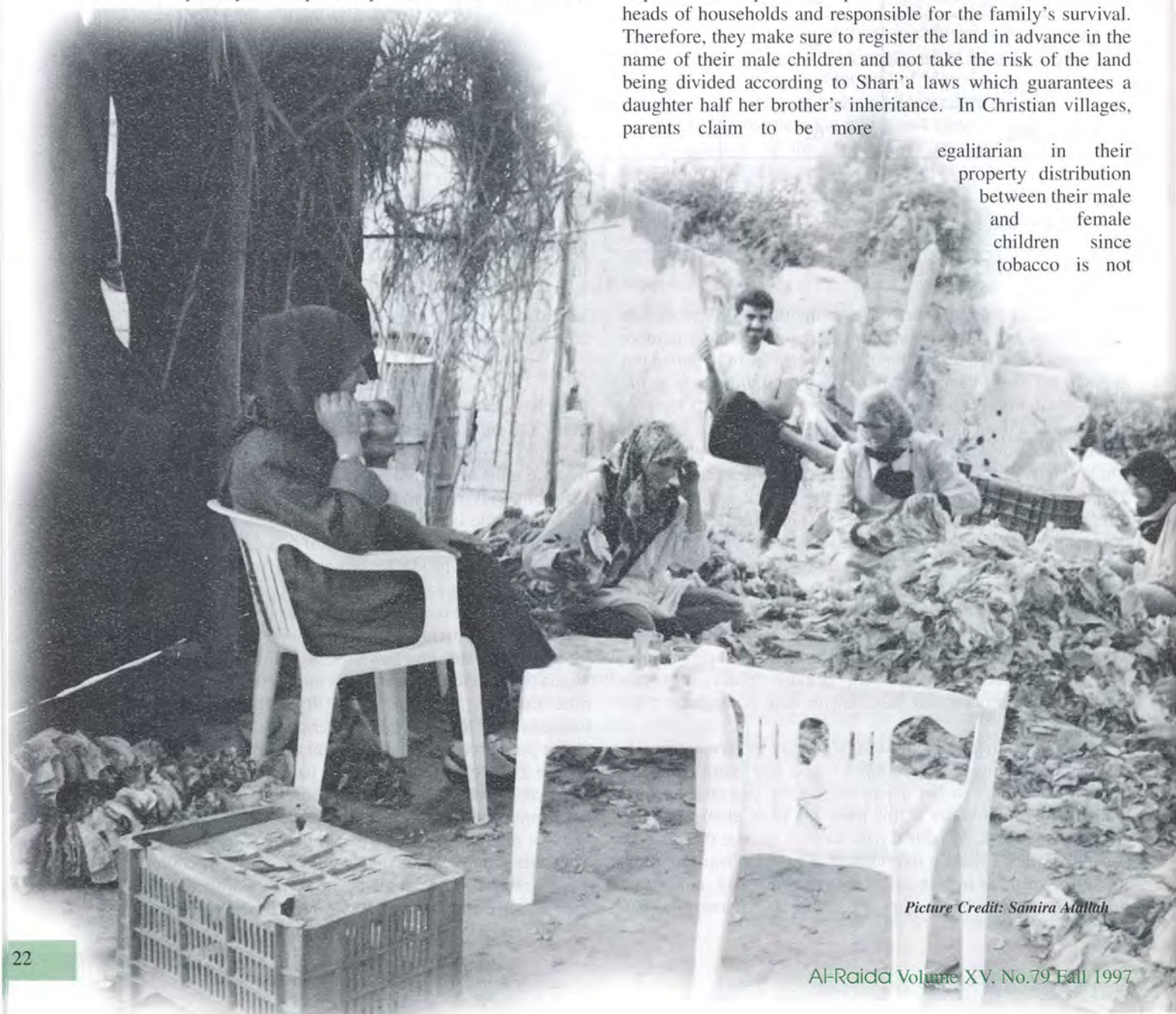
THE HOUSEHOLD AS A PRODUCTION UNIT:

The research findings show that rural women are not only involved in the tobacco sector as social reproducers of labor, but are participating directly as paid and especially unpaid laborers. Men's labor in this sector is secondary in number and value to that of women. This is apparent, despite the fact that available statistics on Lebanon's agricultural development as well as records of the Régie ignore women's involvement. In fact, the significance of women's and children's contribution to tobacco production is strikingly apparent in the Régie's regulation which restricts the granting of tobacco licenses to landowners who are married and heads of family. These two requirements (marriage and landownership) are extremely important in the development of both gender relations and landowner/peasant relations. They establish a state of complex, yet unequal, dependence between all the

groups involved. When questioned about the rationale behind this requirement (family status), all Régie representatives categorically affirmed that without family support, tobacco agricultural production is virtually unfeasible. When pressed for further explanation, they admitted that a family base (especially a large family) keeps the cost of labor very low and therefore the margin of profit very high, for the Régie and, arguably, for the family.

Land and family structures in South Lebanon are especially favorable for this strategy, considering the unavailability of other gainful employment opportunities in the region and the dependence of a large number of families on agriculture. (an immediate outcome of the economic development strategy of the government). Inheritance decisions are directly affected by the Régie's land ownership requirements as parents keep in mind that, after all, men are the heads of households and responsible for the family's survival. Therefore, they make sure to register the land in advance in the name of their male children and not take the risk of the land being divided according to Shari'a laws which guarantees a daughter half her brother's inheritance. In Christian villages, parents claim to be more

egalitarian in their property distribution between their male and female children since tobacco is not



Picture Credit: Samira Atallah

TABLE 6: EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF FEMALE LABORERS - SAMPLE SIZE 62 (1995)

Educational Level	Shi'a from S. Lebanon	Shi'a from Mt. Lebanon	Maronite from Mt. Lebanon
never attended school	25 (62,5%)	2 (20%)	1 (8,33%)
up to 3 years/school	11	2	0
Elementary Certificate	3	1	1
Mid-School Certificate	1	4	4
High School Degree	0	1	4
College studies	0	0	2
Total	40	10	12

Source: Constructed by the author based on data collected in 1995, Lebanon.

really the primary source of income in the region (at least not for Christian families).

On the other hand, the patriarchal structure (enforced by a traditional religious attitude) in the South which confines women to the private sphere of the family makes the region even more advantageous to the mode of production associated with tobacco cultivation. Tobacco is a labor-intensive crop (see Table 4 for a list of activities involved). As Vaughan and Chipande³⁵ argue, "because of the large number of discrete operations which need to be performed (some at short notice) on it, tobacco production is difficult to mechanize."³⁶ A large part of the activities, especially in the post-harvesting period (such as stringing leaves), is performed at home. At this point, the production benefits from the patriarchal family and draws heavily on the labor of a large pool of women and children (Shi'a families in South Lebanon are marked by a high level of birthrate).

The data on Southern women laborers' educational level indicates a very low level of schooling, especially in comparison with both Christian and Shi'a laborers in Mount Lebanon (see table 6).

The deficiency in the educational levels of Southern women limits their employment opportunities and direct participation in the formal sector, and consequently confines them to the home and to tobacco

activities. Those activities are largely seen as not requiring any "real" skills. They are of a repetitive nature and require patience and time. For instance, both men and women in Mount Lebanon stressed the fact (often proudly) that, if she chooses or the situation requires, the wife or the daughter may be able to have access to gainful (waged) employment in the formal or informal sector. They attributed this freedom to the woman's educational level. Furthermore, regional development in Mount Lebanon as favored by the establishment allows the availability of such employment opportunities outside the tobacco industry (for both men and women). In the case of Southern women, on the other hand, both men and women stressed that tobacco is their only possible arena. In the case when the male head of the household did not have access to wage activities outside the agricultural sector, a sense of equality was apparent in his attitude (if anything, he would stress his physical advantage, being stronger and more capable of enduring physical work). Almost all husbands of women from the third category, who are employed in governmental posts (Water company, Régie regional office, Electricity company), pointed to the fact that their wives could not have access to the same job due to their lack of "skills."

The detailed findings also show, that despite being subject to many common constraints, there are important variations in the situation of women in the tobacco setting, and in the general perception of the value of their labor activities. These variations are directly linked to household structures and, in the case of married women, to their husbands' economic activities. The labor of women whose husbands are engaged in waged labor is assigned less value (by both men and women) than that of women whose husbands are engaged full time in tobacco production. Even within the first case, there are further variations among women if the husbands' waged employment is outside or within the agricultural sector,

within or without the formal sector. As noted earlier, men with paid employment outside the agricultural sector do not participate much in the operations of production, and women seem to accept this lack of involvement: "after all he goes out to work," they told me. However, they seem to be even more sympathetic to their husbands' withdrawal from the operations if the latter worked within the agricultural field (but outside tobacco); women in these cases stressed that their husbands are indeed really working very hard. In this latter case, men themselves exhibited a stronger sense of understanding of the hardships associated with their wives' work in tobacco production. Furthermore, the positions and power of women are also determined by their access to economic resources outside the tobacco sector, as well as by their ownership of land (suitable for cultivation of any products). All of the few women who owned the cultivated lands (and therefore the licenses) claimed to have more say in the decision process related to tobacco operations (such as hiring outside help) and to have more control over the proceeds than those who did not own the land.

During the interviews, both husbands and wives treated women's labor with less significance in the case of the husbands who have gainful employment outside home-based tobacco production. In this case, women's labor stands in a contradictory relationship to waged labor, and it, therefore, takes its meaning and value from this relationship. The outside income of the husband (real, stable, and measurable) gives him more importance in terms of the maintenance and survival of the family, and therefore more power. And again in such cases, these men insisted (rather arrogantly) that the family's well-being depends primarily on their salaries and that tobacco proceeds are "extra money," and the operations gave women something to do during the day. In these cases, men acted as the 'overseers' of production and dominated most decisions; they considered their wives and daughters to be "helping" with the family's income but not really "working" - considering that outside help is usually sought to make up for the husbands' absence. Women's activities at this point stood in comparison with the work of paid laborers whose role is considered more important than the work done by unpaid women. As for women's perception of their own activities in such cases (category 3), they all realize their vital role in the maintenance of production but only as an extension of their gender-defined duties. All women in this category answered the question "Do you work?" by saying rather timidly, something of this sort: "not really, I just 'help' and anyway, *bitsalla* (I kill time) with tobacco."

On the other hand, when both men and women work their own land and/or rent a tobacco license and land for family production and have no outside wages, the value of their respective labor is relatively equal. In this case a woman's labor and time are considered equally vital to the production process as her husband's. When asked if their wives and daughters "work," virtually all men in this

category answered positively. Furthermore, women in this case are more integrated in the decision - making process in terms of all phases and details of production. Most men said that they consulted with their wives about hired help (whenever needed), schedule of operations, and spending of proceeds. Women however, have no role during the phases which involve activities of direct contact with the public sphere (namely the Régie) - such as the sale and delivery of products. During those phases, the sexual division of labor is very rigid. But interestingly enough, this division, as in the case of widows, is maintained less by patriarchal structures than by the Régie's regulations related to land-ownership and licensing. Finally, all men regardless of their employment activities stated categorically that if the wife and the daughter do not agree to 'help' or 'work' in tobacco production they would definitely refrain from tobacco cultivation and would seek other possibilities. Furthermore, all families engaged in tobacco production (especially those completely dependent on this production for survival) expressed preference for daughters as opposed to sons - a preference which contradicts with the common perception that the Arabs typically prefer boys to girls.

CONCLUSION: GENDER RELATIONS OR CAPITALIST RELATIONS?

It is evident that women play an essential role in the tobacco production system. Their position within this system, however, is governed both by the dynamics of capitalist relations and those of gender relations. At the same time, the system of production itself depends in its development on two main factors: 1) the existence of certain patriarchal and gender relations and principles which define women's duties and restrict them to the confines of the household; and 2) the official development strategy in Lebanon which, in general, provided women with less educational and employment opportunities (with regional variations) and, therefore, made them available for unpaid household production.

As for women's perception of their role in this system, it is often determined by their immediate household and family context, as well as their educational and social attributes which determine their access to outside income possibilities. But regardless of these conditions, women often viewed their activities (whether working or helping) as part of an overall family strategy. Even when they complained about their husbands' lack of support and their work conditions, they viewed their ultimate "oppressor" to be the circumstances which have led them (and their families) into such situations in the first place. Those circumstances were, in their view, the result of the government's regional policies as well as the Régie's exploitative measures. Women in Mount Lebanon, however, carried less anger and a milder attitude towards both the government and the Régie since they lacked the sense of desperation apparent in the disposition of Southern women. The involvement of many households in Mount Lebanon in tobacco production is the result of a rational choice based on economic

calculation rather than limited income earning opportunities. Many women in these households insisted that they chose tobacco production out of convenience and appreciation of the freedom of movement it entails. This choice factor is also apparent in the case of a number of other women in South Lebanon who are resorting to tobacco farming as a strategy for survival and independence. From within the boundaries of their patriarchal households and social limitations, these women are challenging and attempting to change and/or benefit from the established social and economic order imposed by the dynamics of tobacco production. This paper will conclude with a presentation of the experiences of three such women.

Tahira (her real name) is 35 years old. Her family has been producing tobacco as the sole source of income for as long as she could remember. Since she was a child, she has assisted in all phases of production. Tahira is illiterate as her parents could not afford sending her to a school outside the village (none existed in hers) and also because her help was needed at home. As a teenager, she learned how to sew and, for over 15 years, spent her free time outside tobacco operations making clothes. A few years ago, Tahira decided to use her savings from her allowance and clothes-making to rent a land and a tobacco license. She told me that since she was helping her family in tobacco production, why not do it for her own benefit. When her parents objected she insisted claiming that she had probably missed her chance for marriage and she needed to secure her future and not remain dependent on her brothers. She also appeased them by explaining that they would not lose her help (as she would take care of her crop and theirs simultaneously), and after all, as she informed me, "they did not provide her with skills that would allow her to seek employment elsewhere".

Tahira explained her preference for tobacco over clothes-making on the grounds that tobacco sale is guaranteed by the license conditions, and this way she didn't have "to rely on the insecurity of making clothes to women who could not afford many dresses a year to begin with." When I went back to the village to conduct research on a different project at the end of the summer in 1995, I met Tahira in the female literacy program. She happily informed me that she was no longer illiterate. She also told me that, although she has enough money to buy her own land and license, she does not qualify for the license as she is not considered by the Régie as head of a household. However, she timidly hinted to the fact that this situation may change as at least one single man has expressed interest in marrying her.

Layla and Zaynab are best friends and both are in their mid 30's. The first is a widow (her husband died of a heart attack a few years ago) with three small children, while the second jokes that she "has missed the marriage train." Zaynab has been helping her parents with tobacco, as she claims, "since I was a toddler!" She always wanted to have her own source of income as her father is not very generous with her and has always been very strict. But considering her lack of skills and

education, she has had no other options but to concede to reality. Layla, on the other hand, has no experience in tobacco since neither her family nor her late husband was a laborer or grower. When her husband died, she and her children inherited a large piece of land and some money; however, she ended up under the domination and at the mercy of her family in law, especially since she had no skills to seek outside employment.

One day, Zaynab suggested to Layla to join efforts and get their own tobacco production going. And that's exactly what they did, at the outrage of both Layla's family in law and Zaynab's parents. Layla provided the land and got the license (being a widow she is considered a head of a household). Zaynab sold her jewelry and added the money and her modest savings to Layla's money. But most important, she provided her knowledge and skills in tobacco farming. Zaynab defied her parents' will and did what she wanted, but she was able to do so only because she used her own savings and also because, after all, she as well as Layla "did not break any social rule." They remained within the confines of tradition and religion. And the same applies to Layla vis a vis her family in law. Zaynab and Layla divide the responsibilities equally and in such a way that they do not overwork themselves. They hire laborers only if they have to and in such cases, they told me, they make sure to pay a female laborer a bit more than her male counterpart!

Zaynab and Layla both claim that they have the best reputation in the village and are pressured to watch their actions and not risk losing it. Zaynab has practically moved in with Layla and visits her parents infrequently but runs into them a lot (they live at a short distance). When I went to interview the parents, the father spoke angrily about his "selfish" daughter, while the mother managed to whisper to me proudly that her daughter is very smart and capable. Finally, Layla is tutoring Zaynab in reading and writing. They both told me jokingly that they are 'roommates' (they used the English word) just like women bi-Amerca (in America).

ENDNOTES

1 Quoted in D. Janiewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender, and Class in New South Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), p. 8.

2 A recent exception is "Al-mar'ah wa houdoud al fiqr fi al-ariaf al-loubnaniyah", in Arabic, by Ahmad Baalbaki, paper submitted to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Conference on the Role of Women in the Agricultural Sector and Rural Development, Beirut, Lebanon, 1994. This brief, yet comprehensive, study provides a detailed overview of the role of rural women in the informal sector and the effects of recent economic and agrarian transformation on their role and status.

3 Akram Khater, "She Married Silk: A Rewriting of Peasant History in 19th Century Mount Lebnaon," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1993, p. 8.

4 I am grateful for the valuable advise and meticulous comments of Dr. Irène Gendzier, Dr. Herbert Mason, Dr. Charles Lindholm, Dr. Shahla Haeri, and Dr. Cornelia Al-Khaled who read this paper as a case study of my doctoral dissertation entitled *The Politics of Inequality: Reconceptualizing Gender, Labor, and National Development in Lebanon*, Department of Political Science, Boston University, 1997.

5 My field research was greatly facilitated by the help and resourcefulness of Ms. Randa el-Husseini (UNIFEM), Ms Afifeh Arsanious (UNDP's

Registry), Ms. Randa Aboul el-Hosn (UNDP), Ms. Wafa Dikah-Hamzeh (Ministry of Agriculture), Mr. Mouhannad el-Asa'ad (Save the Children), Dr. Wadi' Jureidini (AUB), Ms. Naja Kassab, and the staff of the Régie in Beirut, al Batroun, and Tyre branches. I am especially indebted to the many women in the tobacco 'areas' who opened their homes and their lives to me with much generosity and gracefulness. A special note of respect and appreciation to the memory of Mr. K. Hijazi who passed away in February 1996.

6 When I first met Ms. Dikah-Hamzeh in the summer of 1994, she informed me of the recent creation in the ministry of a "Woman in Agriculture Division." She explained how the Minister was very interested in women's role in the Agriculture sector and committed to their development. Upon my return to Lebanon in the summer of 1995, Ms. Dikah-Hamzeh informed me (regretfully) that with the appointment of a new Minister "the new division was put indefinitely on the 'shelf'."

7 Agricultural production is divided into five geographical districts, which are in turn subdivided along their villages' lines.

8 My original intentions were to focus my field research on Shi'a Southern villages; however, considering the general interest in religion and its role in the lives of Lebanese women, I decided to include a Christian village in order to provide a comparative analysis of the status of Muslim female laborers and their non-Muslim counterparts.

9 Some of the most illuminating information came during a chat over tea or coffee. People seemed more careful and somehow "calculating" about their answers during formal interviews. In many cases, once the interview was over, the person would jokingly say to me "now we can talk"! Such instances confirmed my original conviction that the questionnaire is only helpful as a guideline and as a tool to gather statistics.

10 Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p.3.

11 J. Smith and I. Wallerstein et al., *Households and the World Economy* (Beverly Hill: Sage Press, 1984), p. 8.

12 For more on this argument see also Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989; and Jane Collins and Martha Gimenez, Editors, *Work Without Wages*, SUNNY Press, New York, 1990.

13 For an informative study of the role of state building and structure in the lives of Lebanese women and family, see Suad Joseph in Deniz Kandiyoti, Editor, *Women, Islam, and the State*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1991.

14 Figures on tobacco production are based on the Régie's archives and on Michel Morcos, *La Culture du Tabac au Liban* (Beirut: Lebanese University, Institut des Sciences Sociales, 1974); Georges Yacoub, "The Régie de Tabacs et Tombacs: An Economic and Organizational Appraisal", in Arabic, unpublished thesis, American University of Beirut, Lebanon, 1972; and Nahla Fiqih, "Zira'at al-tabagh: al-rokhas, tatawor geoghrafiyatoha, tarikhoah", in Arabic, unpublished thesis, Institute of Social Sciences, Lebanese University, 1980-81.

15 For more details on relations between landlords and peasants in the South as well as on landownership and feudalism in the region (including the way it differs from European feudalism), see Majed Halawi, *Lebanon Defied, Musa al-Sader and Shi'a Community*, Westview Press, Boulder, San Francisco and by Elaine Hagopian and Samih Farsoun, AAUG, Michigan, 1978.

16 During my research in the archives of the Lebanese University, I came across references to few other dissertations on tobacco, including a Masters' thesis which discusses the role of women in tobacco cultivation (by Ilham Rashid, 1974). Despite great effort, I never managed to have access to the thesis or to the writer.

17 While this may be one valid justification, I would argue that this deficiency is directly connected to a larger problem related to Lebanon's historiography as well as the study of labor relations in Lebanon.

18 For this genre, see Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shi'a of Lebanon*, Cornell University Press, 1986.

19 Ahmad Baalbaki, *Mouhawalat fi dirasat al-tanmiyah al-rifiyah fi lubnan, in Arabic* (Beirut: Al-Farabi, 1994), p. 45.

20 In 1971, \$ 1 averaged LL. 3.00

21 A study in 1980 by Joseph Chamie indicates that the Shi'a were the

poorest single confessional unit in the country. The average annual income for a Shi'a family was LL. 4,532 compared to LL. 7,173 for a Catholic family (the richest unit), as quoted in Halawi, 1992.

22 For a comprehensive study of the effects of Israeli aggression on the economy of South Lebanon including tobacco production, see Kamal Hamdan, "Tafkik al-bunya al-iqtisadiya al-ijtima'iyah" in "Nataej al-idwan al-israeli ala lubnan," pp. 75 - 91, in "Fi nataej al-'oudwan al-israeli 'ala jounoub lubnan", in Arabic, a publication of Cultural Council of South Lebanon, Beirut, 1979.

23 The Régie has, however, overlooked this requirement and automatically renewed licenses of 'important' landlords who suspended cultivation.

24 Although this requirement is not clearly stipulated in the Régie's official documents, it was clearly stated by all the company's representatives interviewed for this study.

25 Exceptions were always granted to landlords with 'strong' connections allowing them to go beyond the maximum dounums allotted to them.

26 While Mr. Hijazi, the Régie's General Technical Secretary, specified the commission to be 6% of the export value of all leaves sold abroad (interview in 1994), Georges Yacoub estimated a 3% commission (1972, vii). It is unclear if this inconsistency between the figures reflects changes over the years or inaccuracy.

27 Again, there is a discrepancy between this figure (based on the interview with Mr. Hijazi) and Yacoub's claim that the Régie is entitled to 4 piastres per kilogram of all tobacco sales made in the Lebanese market (1972, vii).

28 Details about labor operations are based on the author's field research in 1994 and 1995, and the Régie's literature. This section also benefited from the discussion in Marit Melhuus, *Peasants, Surpluses and Appropriation: A Case Study of Tobacco Growers from Corrientes, Argentina*, University of Oslo, 1987, 100-107.

29 The Régie is in principle supposed to provide farmers with these chemicals. Since the 1970's, however, the company has not met this condition. Peasants are at the mercy of merchants and their outrageous prices. Furthermore, women who are involved in seed-bedding are never informed properly of the health hazards associated with insecticides. Many of the women interviewed explained that they simply wash their hands after this process and then begin cooking or baking.

30 Many of these men are employed in the governmental sector in the nearest city (Tyre) and enjoy a very flexible schedule and light workload.

31 I carried my interviews in the summer when this phase of production was over and, therefore, I could not locate any seasonal wage laborers to interview. I was informed that those women are usually outsiders from nearby villages or from Palestinian camps.

32 Cropping takes place between 3 a.m. and 7 a.m. the latest, while stringing could continue well into the night.

33 I often found myself reaching for one of the "extra" needles in order to start stringing. They would then joke with me saying "you see, tobacco is not only addictive but it is also contagious!"

34 One woman began to rebuke her husband when he, during the interview, appeared neatly dressed on his way out. She openly complained about her fate and that of her 'female' children stuck with the dirty job, while the men of the house are socializing and roaming around the village. When I asked another woman if her husband helped with leaf-stringing she laughed sarcastically and said "oh ya right, he is a 'khawajah' (a pampered gentleman) who strings his 'masbaha' (worry-beads) all day."

35 Megan Vaughan and Graham Chipande, *Women in the Estate Sector of Malawi: The Tea and Tobacco Industries*, International Labor Organization, 1986, p. 24.

36 This is one of the main differences sericulture (the culture of raising silkworms) and tobacco farming. Although both involve tedious and detailed activities, the former may be mechanized or semi-mechanized and performed outside the home while in the latter case the processing of raw tobacco may only be manual and more convenient to be performed at home. This difference explains the variation in the development of sericulture in Mount Lebanon under French influence which turned Mount Lebanese peasants into cheap factory laborers and that of tobacco which kept peasants until today outside the conventional factory life. For a comprehensive study of sericulture in Mount Lebanon, including all its operational procedures, see A. Khater, 1993.