



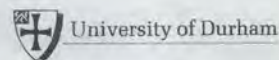
Graduate  
Studies  
in

Middle  
Eastern  
and  
Islamic  
Studies

# Focus:

## Women's Centers

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IWSAW Staffer



### United Kingdom

#### University of Durham Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

Since its inception in 1833, the University of Durham has promoted the study of Middle Eastern languages and culture. Moreover, degree and diploma courses in Arabic were introduced at Durham more than 70 years ago. In 1962 the Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies was established. Its main goal was to encourage, develop and co-ordinate research in Middle Eastern studies in several departments of the University, including the school of Oriental Studies and the Departments of Anthropology, Economics, Economic History, Geography, Politics, Sociology and Social Policy. In 1988, the Center, in addition to its research activities, became a teaching department in its own right with responsibility for undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses in Arabic, Middle Eastern History and Islamic Studies. In 1993 a range of new undergraduate and postgraduate courses in politics, international relations and political economy of the Middle East was also introduced. The Center now has more than 100 undergraduates, 50 full-time postgraduate students and a number of part-time postgraduate students from Britain, Europe, the Middle East, North America, Asia and Africa.

Postgraduate supervision is offered in various fields one of which is Middle Eastern Women Studies. This emphasis highlights contemporary gender and women's issues in the

Middle East, women and Islam, women and human rights in the Middle East, and gender and politics. Furthermore, M.Phil and Ph.d. students can benefit from supervision in various areas such as Gender and Development in the Middle East, Literature and Gender, Arab Women's Writing, Creative Writing: the Women's Dimension, Women in Islam, Gender and Democracy, Women in the Military Establishment (Women Soldiers) Women and Islamic Law (shari'a) and Personal Status Law, and Gender and the Arabic Language.

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### Sudan

#### Afhad University for Women

The Ahfad University for Women is the oldest and largest private university in Sudan. It may well be the only private women's university in Africa. It is dedicated to educating women and strengthening their role in national and rural development. Besides, it aims at achieving equity for women in Sudanese society and within the African continent.

In 1907, Sheikh Babiker Badri, a young Sudanese well known for his piety and religiosity, succeeded in convincing the British authorities to grant him permission to open a girls' school in Sudan. His was the first private school in Sudan. His school, secular in its nature, was situated in a mud hut, and the students that first attended were nine of Badri's daughters along with eight other girls who were daughters of his neighbours.

Babiker's Son Yusuf followed in his father's footsteps and established the Ahfad University College for Women in 1966. The university started off with 23 students; now it has over 4,600 students. The undergraduate program includes the School of Family Sciences, the School of Psychology and Pre-School Education, the School of Rural Extension Education and Development and the School of Medicine. At the graduate level, two programs are offered namely Human Nutrition and Gender and Development. Furthermore, Ahfad University also has six special units: the Women's Studies Unit, the Women's Studies Documentation Unit, the Teacher Research Resources Unit, the Early Childhood Development Center, the Center for Reproductive Health, Family Planning and the Eradication of Harmful Traditional Practices, and the Computer Center.

#### **The Women's Studies Unit**

The Women's Studies Unit offers a masters degree program in Gender and Development. In addition, it undertakes coordinating and teaching all required undergraduate women's studies courses to the various schools of the university. Last but not least, it strives to maintain the Bakiker Badri Scientific Association for Women's Studies as a means for achieving empowerment and equity for women in Sudan.

Given that research work is of utmost importance, the Women's Studies Unit along with the Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands are developing a program that includes research on peace, conflict, gender, diversity and ethnicity. The program aims to provide up-to-date documentation of women's lives in Sudan and help empower women and women's organizations at the grassroots levels in rural areas. The program will also teach women the importance of peace and will encourage them to maintain peace in Sudan. Last but not least, it will increase Ahfad's research capacity through the various publications and articles published.

#### **Women's Studies Documentation Unit**

Established in 1989, this unit serves as a data bank for information, references, and research related to gender issues, women in developing countries, and most importantly Sudanese women. The center also organizes conferences, seminars, and other activities related to developments affecting Sudanese women.

#### **Sudanese Women's Museum**

The Museum, founded in 1996, falls under the jurisdiction of the Documentation Unit. The staff working at the museum received their training at the Sudanese National Museum. The Museum is being developed in cooperation with the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums; the institute of African and Asian Studies and the Department of Archaeology, University of Khartoum; and the Museum of National Folklore.



Among its objectives are to:

- preserve Sudanese women's heritage and culture
- exhibit the material culture of women in earlier and contemporary periods
- preserve records and document the life history of prominent women figures in the Sudanese Women's Movement
- support research on issues concerning women
- serve as a documentation center and data bank on historical information that will benefit the future generation.

(Source: <http://ahfad.org/specialunits/WSU/>)

### Syria

#### **The Arab Center for Strategic Studies**

The Arab Center for Strategic Studies was established in April 1995. The center came about in response to the growing need for a research center that concerns itself with the study of the Arab region.

An increasing need for promoting women's status was felt by most scholars. Hence, the first department to be set up at the center was the women and family affairs department. It was strongly believed that improving the status of women is not limited to appreciating the role of women as mothers, but also ensuring the mobilizing of all social potentialities to participate actively in the current changes at the international level, and cope effectively with the challenges of the coming twenty first century.

#### **Objectives**

The woman department aims at promoting the role of women in society through:

1. enlightening women about their political and legal rights and duties and emphasizing the importance of putting this into practice.
2. investigating discriminatory acts and combatting discrimination against working women in various fields.
3. eliminating the prevalent false stereotypes about women's capabilities and roles through consciousness raising and thus improving the status of women in society.
4. teaching women the importance of education since a good education is the best guarantee for a well-integrated family as well as for the utilization of all human resources.



### Fields of Interest

1. Arab women's participation in political life, decision making, development and production, etc.
3. Women's access to health education, culture, and other social services
4. Family conditions and the different pressures faced by families during economic, social and political changes
5. Current political trends and their repercussions on the status of women in society
6. Obstacles that impede women's participation in the different fields of life and ways of coping with these obstacles

### Activities Undertaken

1. Preparing studies, conducting research, and organizing conferences and symposiums on women and family issues
2. Setting up training programs that help women acquire certain skills
3. Implementing action programs as well as social, educational and health policies that boost the role of women and families
5. Analyzing the way Arab mass media present the status of women
6. Contributing to the creation of societies and bodies that concern themselves with women and family issues with a view to exchanging expertise
7. Co-operating with Arab and international research institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, in the preparation of studies and symposiums as well as in participating in symposiums and meetings held on women and family affairs.

Achieving this objective is a must. Once women's organizations be they Arab or international, governmental or non-governmental join hands and cooperate they will reach the desired outcome.

(Source: Brochure of the Arab Center for Strategic Studies) Damascus - P.O.Box: 36843-36844 Syrian Arab Republic Fax: 6621039 Tel: 2248422

## Bahrain

In 1955 the first women's association in the Gulf region was founded in Bahrain. It was followed by other women's organizations including:

**An Nahdad Association** (Bahrani Women's Awakening) The association came into existence in 1955 and is a pioneer in the region. An Nahdad Association strives to empower women through educational and cultural programs such as eradicating illiteracy, resolving marital disputes and divorce problems, providing day-care facilities for working mothers, etc. With the passage of time and after several young educated females joined An Nahdad, it's policy started to change. The approach became more radical, with members calling for social change and more involvement in the social and political life.

### Awal Association

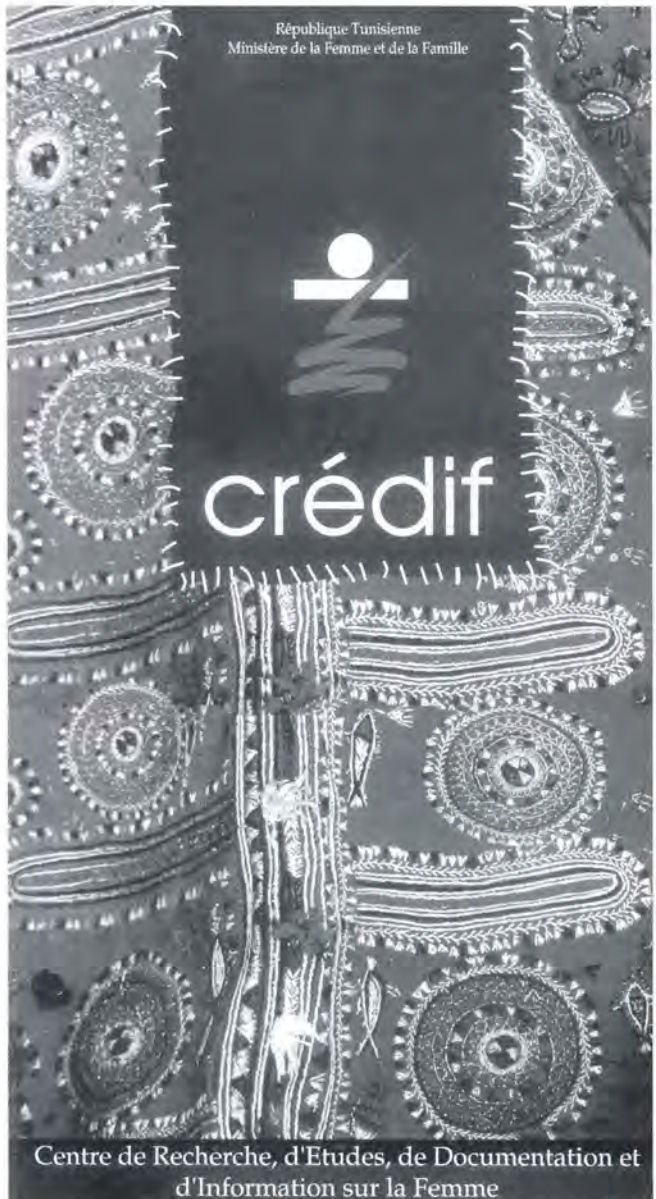
Established in 1970, Awal association is committed to social and political work. Members of Awal are involved in the cultural, social and political activities taking place in their society.

### The Child and Mother Welfare Association

Established in 1960, the Child and Mother Welfare Association is a conservative organization whose members are housewives. Most of its women members come from influential families in Bahrain.

### Rafa Cultural and Charity Association

This association was formed in 1970. It's primary concern is charity work, though it also aims at promoting cultural activities.



### International Women's Association

In 1975 the International Women's Association was established. It is primarily engaged in charity work and humanitarian activities.

### United Arab Emirates

#### The Abu Dhabi Society for the Awakening of Women

It is the first women's association in the UAE that aims at creating spiritual, cultural as well as social awareness. After its establishment several branches started mushrooming in many areas of the country.

#### United Arab Emirates Women's Federation

It was established in 1973 by Sheikha Fatima, the wife of the ruler of Abu Dhabi, as an umbrella organization covering women's societies functioning at the emirate level. Today member associations are: Abu Dhabi Women's Development Society, Dubai Women's Development Society, Sharjah Women's Development Society, Umm Al Mou'meneen Society in Ajman, Umm Al Qaiwain Women's Development Society and the Ras Al Khaimah Women's Development Society. At present there are 31 branches of the six societies, many of which operate out-reach programs in remote rural areas. The Women's Federation is concerned with working women's conditions as well as education. It also lobbies for change in personal status laws.

(Source: <http://women3rdworld...world/library/weekly/aa103199.htm>)

### Kuwait

#### Women Cultural and Social Society

In 1963 a group of Kuwaiti women joined hands and established the Women Cultural and Social Society. It is the first non-governmental organization (NGO) in Kuwait that concerns itself with women's issues. It currently has 300 members, all of whom are volunteers, who work to promote the status of women in society. This society strives to improve the status of Kuwaiti women by empowering them economically, educationally, culturally and legally. Furthermore, it



highlights the active role Kuwaiti women play as family members and citizens.

This society has been officially approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. It is run by seven board members who are elected every two years. The work is undertaken through various committees namely the cultural, social, nursery, zakat, health and media committee. Funds are provided by donors as well as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

([http://www.ecssr.ac.ae/04uae.women\\_organizations.htm](http://www.ecssr.ac.ae/04uae.women_organizations.htm))

### Tunisia

#### The Center for Studies, Research, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF)

CREDIF operates under the umbrella of the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs. It is engaged in conducting research, surveys, reports and studies on Tunisian women and their status in society. Moreover, CREDIF serves as a data bank that disseminates information on women, their rights and conditions in Tunisia. Last but not least, CREDIF recently launched a training program on Gender and Development for Tunisian and African women and set up an observatory in order to monitor the development in women's conditions.

### Egypt

#### Institute for Gender and Women's Studies American University in Cairo (AUC)

The Institute for Gender and Women's Studies, AUC, is an interdisciplinary center with a multi-purpose vision. It serves as a resource center for scholars, activities and policy makers interested in gender and women's studies. Among the work undertaken at the Institute is conducting research projects and educational programs, organizing conferences, workshops and seminars as well as encouraging policy debates on gender and women's issues.