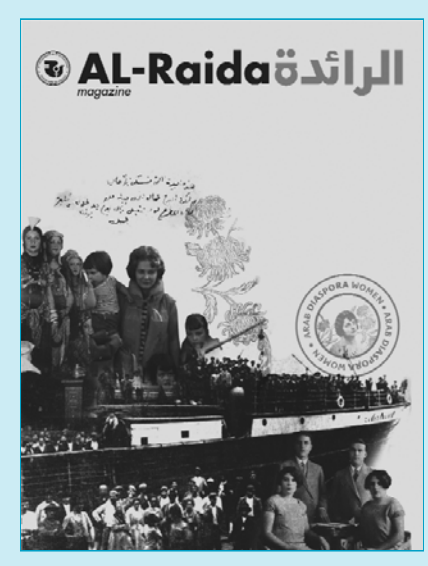
مجلة
AL-Raida الرائدة
magazine
Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, LAU

Volume XXIV, Nos. 116-117, Winter/Spring 2007



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Editorial

Arab Diaspora Women

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Portraying the lives of North African and Middle Eastern women and girls in places as diverse as Argentina, Canada, France, India, and the United States accentuates the artificiality of the concept "Arab diaspora." As many of the articles in this file point out, a constructed sense of group identity was initially externally imposed. It was based more on the defining power of host societies than on any common denominators easily recognized by the respective Arab immigrant communities themselves.

Historically, Arab pioneer migration was predominantly Eastern Mediterranean and Christian, either from Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, or Palestine. These first generation migrants often had more in common with neighboring, early 20th century Greek, Southern Slav or Italian diaspora communities in the Americas, Australia or Western Europe than they did with the predominantly Muslim societies from which they came. This was nowhere more obvious than with the issue of gender.

Until the collapse of the European colonial empires after World War II, Arab emigrants settled mainly in the traditional countries of immigration, i.e. North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. As Europe began to recover from the effects of the Second World War, the ensuing shortage of labor led to a large scale recruitment of young, able-bodied men from North Africa, South Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caribbean. A significant number of these new immigrants were Muslim and as the "guest workers" stayed on to form immigrant communities, migration became increasingly feminine. This laid the foundation for one of the most contentious issues surrounding Arab migration to the West, i.e. the role of Islam in determining the position of women in industrialized, liberal democracies.

This issue of *Al-Raida* covers a wide variety of topics, encompassing seemingly unrelated issues such as war, the arts, forced migration, motherhood, the ICT communications revolution, the anti-colonial rebellions in the Middle East, and the roles played by religion and politics in the self-construction of Arab diaspora community identities. It deals with a timeframe of over 100 years and, with the exception of Australia and Africa, covers all significant regions of immigration. On the surface, most of these articles share only one common denominator, i.e. their focus on women and girls from North Africa and the Middle East. As editor of this file I hope, however, that the reader will soon realize that these contributions also reflect the manner in which Arab diaspora women have gradually begun to take control of their own fate; defining themselves in opposition to both the prejudice inherent in their host communities and the entrenched gender traditions still predominant in their countries of origin.

In the first four articles of this file, the authors deal with the often politicized nature of the role of Arab women as seen from within their immigrant communities and from the perspective of the majority populations in the West. María del Mar Logroño Narbona deals with the conflicts that rocked the Syrian and Lebanese communities in Argentina with respect to French occupation of the Middle East after World War I. She highlights how this issue impacted the portrayal of Arab women in the diaspora print media. Along similar lines, Nina Sutherland deals with the collapse of the French colonial empire in North Africa and how refugee and migrant women from Algeria began to gradually redefine themselves. Rachel Epp Buller introduces four artists, from Algeria, Iran, Morocco, and Palestine, who deal with the thorny issue of the Muslim women's covering in very personal and contradictory ways. The hijab, like no other symbol, clearly marks the transition from the historical, predominantly Christian Arab emigration of the past, to a modern, overwhelmingly Muslim exodus.

Gunther Dietz and Nadia El-Shohoumi deal with a phenomenon which is typical of the traditional countries of emigration in the northern Mediterranean. As they gradually became more modern and secular in the late 1980s and 1990s, countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal experienced a wave of predominantly Muslim labor immigration for the first time. Drawn by job openings in the burgeoning Spanish economy, as a result of European Union accession, North African women were caught in a triangle of cultural alienation, which they shared with post-fascist indigenous women.

These four case studies, which all make important points about the history of women in the Arab diaspora, are followed by two articles with a strong cultural-sociological emphasis. In "Arabs, Copts, Egyptians, Americans," Phoebe Farag demonstrates how current day Egyptian Christians are torn between multiple identities, which have unique implications for Copt women in the United States. Helen Vallianatos and Kim Raine report on the way giving birth in Canada can contribute to a mutually experienced sense of Arab female identity. In both articles, the authors offer insights into the way being "the Other" in a largely benign environment makes Arab women aware of the costs and benefits of living away from a "homeland" that they largely only know from a visitor's perspective.

The final section of this file is dedicated to personal, anecdotal, and self-reflective opinion pieces, interviews and reports about distinctive aspect of the Arab diaspora. In an interview with Guita Hourani, *Al-Raida* managing editor Myriam Sfeir asks LERC's director how her experience as a refugee and emigrant in North American and Japan, during and after the Lebanese Civil War, has affected her work as an administrator and scholar in the field of diaspora studies. In "'Aqlah Brice Al Shidyaq: A Woman Peddler from Northern Lebanon," Guita Hourani tells the story of a pioneer Lebanese migrant to the United States, whose individual courage, perseverance and integrity laid the foundation for her family's future. Hourani illustrates that 19th century Arab emigration was also feminine. During the 2006 Summer War in Lebanon, the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) monitored the mass evacuation of Lebanese dual nationals and summer vistors of Lebanese origin. In "Gender Mainstreaming Forced Migration Research," Hourani and I reflect on the difficulties inherent in developing gender sensitive research methods in the midst of a crisis situation. Rita Stephan recalls how the introduction of the internet transformed the nature of Arab-American feminist activism over the last two decades. Based on personal experience, she underlines the link between the anti-colonial Arab struggle and the fight for gender equality.

Running parallel to Stephan's portrayal of Arab female activism, Nancy Jabra tells the story of Lebanese activist women in southern California. In a personal opinion piece, Jehan Mullin deals with the exclusion of Lebanese daughters of foreign fathers from Arab society, because of the sexist nature of Middle Eastern citizenship laws. Finally, Naine Athalye, an Indian graduate student, describes how she "discovered" the Arab diaspora community in her native town of Pune City, and discusses how Muslim Arab female students rediscovered and redefined their own identity in a largely Hindu environment.

ARAB DIASPORA WOMEN • ARAB DIASPORA WOMEN •

Letters to the Editor

March 16, 2007

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude for the presence of *Al-Raida* in my life. I came across this invaluable publication many years back when I was still in undergraduate university and I've been a loyal and eager reader since then. I can not tell you how proud I was when I found *Al-Raida* on the shelves of my university library in the United States and how helpful these issues and the diverse themes they covered — were to me as a student and a woman interested in women's studies, especially Arab women. I have benefited tremendously in my academic projects and in educating myself in general about Arab women from the myriad of articles, research, reviews, rigorous scholarship and the many other interesting material available on the pages of your publication.

Al-Raida indeed deserves its name because it is a pioneering and unique source of much needed information about Arab women and Arab societies. How many publications exist in the Arab world or elsewhere that focus on Arab women or that address Arab societies from the prism of their women. As you well know, Arab women, perhaps like women everywhere in the world, are often marginalized, silenced and misrepresented to the point of rendering them almost invisible. *Al-Raida*, for decades now, has courageously and diligently broken this sound barrier shrouding Arab women's lives. It has done so by covering a wide range of subjects from the mundane to the daring helping us in the process to understand our societies better, which is the first step towards change.

As an Arab woman living in the United States, I can not emphasize often enough and strongly enough how important it is to have Arabs and especially Arab women write about, talk about and represent Arab women with their own words at a time when certain elements in the "west" insist on representing us or rather misrepresenting us from a culturally imperialist point of view.

I think *Al-Raida* has done a fair job over the years presenting the diversity of "arab women" in terms of geography, class, religion, culture and so on. I would like to see perhaps more on class/poverty as a category of analysis in writing and doing research about Arab women and on sexuality and sexual orientation. I would like to see as well more focus on women from ethnic minorities living in the Arab world perhaps leading us to very interesting discussions on democracy, on how to make our societies more inclusive and on what it means to be "arab," an open, flexible and ambiguous-in a positive way-category as I define it, timely discussions that are often monopolized by men.

As an Arab American, I would love see some issues of *Al-Raida* focus on Arab women in the diaspora, the challenges they face, their histories of struggle, their contributions and so on. Personally, I could never have enough on literature, art, theater, films and culture in general, especially by and about Arab women, perhaps incorporating the creative contributions of Arab women in the diaspora into this narrative.

And my final wish is to keep *Al-Raida* a "feminist" journal. What I mean by that, is don't be afraid of being political, controversial, polemical, radical and rebellious. The ultimate purpose of the work you do is to make waves, create change and make our societies less sexist.

I apologize for being long-winded but I am passionate about women's issues, feminism and arab culture and therefore I am passionate about *Al-Raida* and I feel personally affected by the work you do.

respectfully,
Nadine Saliba

The 'Woman Question' in the Aftermath of the Great Syrian Revolt:

A Transnational Dialogue from the Arab-Argentine Immigrant Press

María del Mar Logroño Narbona

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Beyond the geographical borders of the Middle East, discourses and debates about Middle Eastern women played an important role in the Arabic immigrant press in the *Mahjar* (diaspora). This article explores the particular case of *al-Istiklaal*[1] in the final moments and aftermath of the Great Syrian Revolt, "the largest, longest, and most destructive of the Arab Middle Eastern revolts" (Provence, 2005, p. 12). From its first issue in June 1926 until late 1929, this Arab-Argentine newspaper systematically attacked the French Mandate and advocated for an independent Syria and Lebanon, which should be part of a larger pan-Arab political entity. Although *al-Istiklaal* was a political publication produced by men and intended for a male audience,[2] it nonetheless introduced women as an iconographic and discursive element. *Al-Istiklaal* incorporated in its issues visual images of female activists and prominent Middle Eastern and European women along with editorial articles on debates about the veil and education that, to some extent, reproduced those taking place in Syria and Lebanon. What were the reasons that led a pan-Arab political publication in Buenos Aires to include women? What was the relationship with the politics expressed in the publication? How did *al-Istiklaal* reproduce or transform general debates on women and gender in the late 1920s in the Middle East?

Although still in its early stages, the literature on Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in Argentina is a growing field with groundbreaking works from scholars such as Ignacio Klich, Michael Humphrey, Gladys Jozami, Christina Civantos, and Margot Scheffold, among others. Their studies explore the intersections between identity, ethnicity, and nationality in the context of a heterogeneous immigrant community that dates back from the last decade of the nineteenth century. As is the case with Middle Eastern studies literature, however, women have been a neglected subject in most of these works (Fleischmann, 1999, p. 93). This article builds on previous work in the field and sheds light on how general debates in Syria and Lebanon on the 'Woman Question'[3] in the 1920s were adopted and, in some cases, adapted to accommodate the special characteristics of *al-Istiklaal* as a pan-Arab newspaper published in Argentina. The 'Woman Question', thus, becomes an analytical tool to explore the tensions that originated in the intersection between national identity and transnational nationalism as represented in *al-Istiklaal*.

The Great Revolt: the Courage of Exceptional Women in Exceptional Times

Al-Istiklaal came into being in June 1926 as a political and

intellectual response to the upheaval caused by the Great Syrian Revolt. The revolt was an anti-colonial nationalist movement that by 1927 had been brutally repressed by the French authorities (Thompson, 2000, p. 46). But the revolt also had a component of mass mobilization; as expressed by Michael Provence, "[f]or more than two years a ragtag collection of farmers, urban tradesmen and workers, and former junior officers of the Ottoman and Arab armies managed to challenge, and often defeat, the colonial army of one of the most powerful countries in the world." As historian Elizabeth Thompson has shown, gender and women were also integral parts of the mass mobilization of this revolt. While gender was "both a discursive and physical battlefield" among Syrian nationalists and French authorities, women "participated in the physical and rhetorical combat" (Thompson, 2000, pp. 46-47). Although published in Argentina, *al-Istiklaal* reflected both the 'physical and rhetorical' combat of women in the battlefield on three occasions.

On July 15, 1926, *al-Istiklaal* reproduced the letter that a Druze woman had sent in April to the wife of a French Captain after he had perished in a battle in Sweida. After giving her condolences to the widow, the anonymous Druze woman harshly criticized the brutality of French military attacks in Sweida and explained why the Syrians were fiercely fighting against the French. In addition to this letter, and still during the last months of the fighting, *al-Istiklaal* once more reproduced an article, this time from the *Daily Chicago News*, in which a French correspondent praised the courage of Druze women in the battlefield. The article included the opinions of French military officers who expressed their surprise at the courage of Druze women joining Druze men in their fight against the French troops. Seven of those women died in fierce combat. However, there was no mention of any specific female heroes, from which we should conclude that these were Druze peasant women.[4]

The final article was a long editorial describing the fight of a Druze woman, Um Sa'id, mother and wife, who had fought and died with her husband and son in order to defend her family and her nation. The dramatic description of her death led the journalist to reproduce an article by Muhammad Jamil Bey offering a historical overview of the courage of relevant women in the history of early Islam. In this particular article, *al-Istiklaal* reproduced prevailing discourses of elites in Syria and Lebanon who, "influenced by Salafi reformist thought[,] looked to the days of the Prophet Muhammad for models of how to behave as Muslims and how to reform their communities" (Thompson, 2000, p. 124). In this vein, biographies of female Arab warriors like Zenobia or exemplary women in the history of early Islam like 'Aisha were featured in women's magazines (Thompson, 2000, p. 124). Despite the initial fervor that the courage of these women produced in male discourses about women in Syria and Lebanon, Elizabeth Thompson concludes that these discourses were exceptional and did not add support to the feminist movement at the end of the armed conflict. *Al-Istiklaal* adopted the regressive attitude of Syrian and Lebanese men. Although this is not the place to narrate in detail the intricate history of 'nationality status' among Syrian and Lebanese emigrants in the *Mahjar*, it is important to mention that citizenship issues were not compromised as a result of these vibrant narratives about women's heroic collaborations. After the revolt, and despite the concern over citizenship issues among Syrian and Lebanese immigrants, *al-Istiklaal* did not raise the question of citizenship rights so that they could also be granted to women. In this way, *al-Istiklaal* perpetuated the general male consensus that women's heroism during the revolt was nothing but "women's duty toward the community to protect it in times of need" (Thompson, 2000, p. 124).

Pan-Arabism, Islam, and Modernity in an Argentine Context

Al-Istiklaal, however, did not merely mimic its Syrian and Lebanese counterparts. In its treatment of women and gender, the political biweekly reflected the tensions of a newspaper published in Argentina with a pan-Arab leaning. This tension was explicit in two main instances: the discourses about the veil and the choice of what can be called exemplary women. In order to understand fully the nature of this tension, we need first to contextualize *al-Istiklaal* in its double sociopolitical backdrop as a newspaper published in Argentina that related to Middle Eastern politics.

Shakib Arslan and the Istiqlali Faction of the Syrian-Palestine Congress

Al-Istiklaal was the initiative of Emir Amin Arslan, who by 1926 was an experienced newspaper editor and well-reputed intellectual in Argentina.[5] Cousin of Emir Shakib Arslan, Amin Arslan had arrived in Buenos Aires as the Ottoman Consular representative to Argentina in 1910 (Klich, 1993, p. 182). Despite his well-known loyalty to the Committee of Union and Progress, during the war Amin Arslan sided with the French. This political choice undermined his diplomatic credentials and exposed him to harsh criticism from the Syrian community.[6] He reasserted his pro-French position in December 1918 when he was made honorary president of Union Siria, a Syrian-Lebanese organization, sponsored at that time by the French government.

However, Arslan's friendly rapport with France did not last long beyond the war. In 1925, he launched a fierce campaign against the French in Syria and Lebanon. Following the general outrage after France's harsh repression of armed Druze rebels, Arslan published a short pamphlet in Spanish about the Great Syrian Revolt entitled *La revolución siria contra el mandato francés* (The Syrian Revolt against the French Mandate). In this work, Arslan denounced the French Mandate as a disguised colonization (colonización disfrazada) (Arslan, 1925, p. 42). Like other critiques of the French Mandate at the time, Arslan printed photographs and graphically described the ruthless bombardments of Damascus and its population at the hands of the French military (Arslan, 1925, p. 86). Arslan was not the only Syrian-Lebanese emigrant to radicalize his position against the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon during the Great Revolt. As greater research shows, many Syrians and Lebanese in the Americas actively protested the French military presence in Syria through letters to French consulates and formal complaints to the League of Nations.[7]

This radicalization of politics among the Syrian and Lebanese in the *Mahjar* paralleled the changes brought about by the Revolt within the Syrian national movement. According to historian Philip Khoury, the revolt sharply divided the members of the Syrian-Palestine Congress, the opposition movement in exile. Divisions between the two main factions, the Arslan-Istiqlali and the Shahbandar-Lutfallah, had already emerged before the Revolt as both factions held opposed political visions. However, their differences grew with the adoption of radically different approaches to the negotiation of the conflict (Khoury, 1987, p. 225). As the name of the editor and the title of the publication may already indicate, Emir Amin Arslan was a close follower of the predicaments of his cousin Shakib Arslan and the politics of the Istiklaal party. The political ideals of the Arslan-Istiqlali faction have been defined by historian Philip Khoury as: "anti-British, [reluctant] to align with the Hashemites, [the] use of Berlin as a major center for his propaganda campaign against the French, [the] interest in gaining Turkish support for the independence of the Arab territories, and [the] emphasis on an Arab nation whose underlying moral principles were based on the Divine Law of Islam, were bound to clash with the Lutfallah-Shahbandar factions' British and Hashemite links, its suspicion of the Turks, and its secularism" (Khoury, 1987, p. 225).

Amin Arslan's support of the Arslan-Istiqlali faction did not translate into open criticism of the Lutfallah-Shahbandar faction. On the contrary, *al-Istiklaal* mostly portrayed opposition to the French Mandate as a united anti-colonial movement. However, his support of the Arslan-Istiqlali faction, although not explicit, was clear in the subtext of his writings and editorial options. This became evident in the series of articles reproduced in *al-Istiklaal* authored by Shakib Arslan that were reprinted from 1927 onwards. The necessary question that arises from this situation is how to interpret Arslan's editorial strategy of not offering explicit political support for the Arslan-Istiqlali faction. Should we consider that Arslan was not aware of the internal politics of the Syrian-Palestine Congress? Due to his extensive political experience, his contacts, and the cosmopolitan outlook of the Arslan-Istiqlali movement, it would seem appropriate to look in a different direction for the answer. The publication of his short anti-French pamphlet suggests that Emir Arslan presented himself to the Argentine community as a member of a larger unified anti-French movement. It should also be pointed out that in it he had characterized the division of Lebanon and Syria as a '*sainete*' (a grotesque situation or comic sketch). How would factionalism among the Syrian anti-French movement have been regarded by Argentine society whose knowledge of the Middle East was limited to some orientalist notions?[8] Could Emir Arslan as a pan-Arab leader in Argentina afford to share the internal divisions in the anti-colonial movement?

... theater and cinema had been the battleground of protest in the most conservative religious sectors of Syrian and Lebanese societies in the 1910s and 1920s.

Arslan's editorial strategy is important in our analysis for one main reason: it evinces his awareness of the position of his own writings as a Middle Easterner writing about the Middle East in Argentina. This awareness had an important effect in the treatment of the 'Woman Question,' and may help us explain some of the apparent contradictions in *al-Istiklaal*'s discourses about women and gender. Although *al-Istiklaal* was published in Arabic, it included some Spanish content as well, especially in the form of captions. More important, however, was the common practice of magazines and newspapers among the Syrian and Lebanese community of commenting upon each other.[9] Since many of these publications were bilingual, these commentaries about other newspapers could be subject to interpretation by a Spanish audience. In other words, it could be argued that the Syrian-Lebanese immigrant press in Argentina functioned as an alternative public sphere with its own control mechanisms. Therefore, Arslan had the double need to consider the impact of his writing and editorial choices on the Syrian-Lebanese and

Argentine audiences, while maintaining his own political principles. This tension between Arslan's political ideals and loyalties to the Middle East on the one hand, and his position in Argentine society on the other, was manifest in the depiction of women in *al- Istiklaal*. The question of the veil and the choices of exemplary women were the two occasions that further highlighted this tension.

Nazira Zayn al-Din and the Debate over the Veil

According to Elizabeth Thompson, one of the most intense debates on gender issues occurred in March 1928 after Nazira Zayn al-Din published her *al-Sufur wa al-Hijab* (Unveiling and Veiling). In it, the Lebanese Muslim feminist "not only condemned the veil, but also asserted her authority, as a Muslim tutored by her father, to speak generally on issues of Islamic law… Zayn al-Din called for a spiritual understanding of Islam, whose essence was to promote the freedom and well-being of all Muslims… she argued that women's veiling violated the spiritual message of Islam, which generally favored equal rights between men and women" (Thompson, 2000, p. 127). The writings of Nazira Zayn al-Din sparked positive responses not only among some prominent Muslims like Muhammad Kurd Ali and Muhammad Jamil Bayhum (Thompson, 2000, p.133), but also from Syrians and Lebanese abroad. The Maronite Lebanese society, *Ittihad Lubnani* or in its French version, *Alliance Libanaise*, for instance, referred to it as 'very beneficial and useful' (*al-jazil al fa'ida wa al-kathir al-nafa'a*) (Nazira Zayn al-Din, 1998, p. 201), calling for the Syrian and Lebanese community to hold it in high esteem (Nazira Zayn al-Din, 1998, p. 203).

However, *al-Istiklaal* did not take a clear stance on Zayn al-Din's book. Beyond the acknowledgement of her work, *al-Istiklaal* did not pronounce any explicit opinion about Zayn al-Din's writings. As it had been the case with the earlier editorial strategy adopted in regards to factionalism, *al-Istiklaal* limited itself to reproducing the debate between Nazira Zayn al-Din and the Mufti of Beirut. Once more, the position of the *al-Istiklaal* is understood through its editorial choices, as it only published the argument between her and the Mufti of Beirut, disregarding, for example, the positive words of Muhammad Kurd Ali, whose writings had previously been included in other issues. However, it is worth asking why Arslan's publication did not take an active position in its criticism of Nazira Zayn al-Din's work on veiling. In this case, it can be argued that the stance of *al-Istiklaal* may have reflected a combination of tensions: first, the tension between the Islamic ideals and morals of the Istiqlali party and the reality of how the veil was perceived in Argentina possibly as an element of 'cultural backwardness;' second, the tension between rival political factions within the Syrian and Lebanese emigrants, such as Ittihad Lubnan, which reacted positively to Zayn al-Din's ideas. However, it is important to read Ittihad Lubnan's comments as coming from a Maronite Lebanese association that advocated for a Greater Lebanon under the auspices of the French Mandate. The political animosity between the ideals of Ittihad Lubnan and other anti-French groups and personalities such as Amin Arslan may have played a role in the overall tension of negotiating Islamic ideals in a non-Islamic society. Until further information on the representations of the veil in the Arabic immigrant press becomes known, we can provide a general conclusion: it is clear that the veil had become, once more, the battleground for issues beyond veiling itself.

An Eclectic Mix of Exemplary Women

Like veiling, representations of women were another provocative subject that reflects the tension in *al-Istiklaal*. The iconographic display of what I call 'exemplary' women offered an interesting and puzzling picture of the 'ideal woman' that *al-Istiklaal* envisioned. During the first two years of the publication from 1926 to 1928, Arslan's newspaper included a series of portraits of European and Middle Eastern women who had made significant contributions to their societies. Some of the achievements of the Middle Eastern women chosen by *al-Istiklaal* fit into our notions of what *Salafi* reformers had envisioned for women. These were the cases of Suheila Saadeh, the first Muslim graduate nurse in Beirut; or that of Thariyya Fakhoury, founder of an organization against tuberculosis and pulmonary diseases. However, among these prominent Middle Eastern women there were professions less likely to fit the *Salafi* ideals. These were, for instance, the Egyptian singer, Munira Mahdi; the Egyptian actress and writer Fatima Rushdi, the first graduate student to attend Cambridge university, Firdaus Bassiouni, and a prominent leader of the women's movement in India, Sajjoni Naidu (Haidu, according to *al-Istiklaal*). All these women appeared hand-in-hand with leading European women like the first Parisian woman to obtain her PhD in law, the first female German judge, and others like them.

How is one to reconcile the apparently contradictory mix of Suheila Saadeh and Fatima Rushdi in Arslan's publication? From Elizabeth Thompson we know that theater and cinema had been the battleground of protest in the most conservative religious (Muslim and Catholic) sectors of Syrian and Lebanese societies in the 1910s and 1920s (Thompson, 2000, p. 202) Why then would *al-Istiklaal* include an actress as an 'exemplary' woman? These are questions that have no definite answer but suggest some other interesting ones: Could it be possible that the pan-Arab ideals of Shakib Arslan and the Istiqlali faction conceived of women in a more 'open' way than we might think? Or should we perhaps consider the Argentine backdrop as an element that may have led Emir Arslan to visually represent Middle Eastern women in a way that could 'speak' to an Argentine audience?

Unfortunately, the excellent work of William Cleveland (1985) on Shakib Arslan does not shed any light on this topic, and more extensive research on Shakib Arslan's journalistic writings is needed before we arrive at some further conclusions on the question of how the pan-Arab nationalist movement had envisioned the participation of women in society. However, what is clear from this tension is that even in the distant *mahjar,* women had become another battleground in which notions of modernity were to be defined. Could Emir Amin Arslan speak of women as nurses and teachers in a society where feminism had become a relevant social activity in the hands of both conservative and progressive women?[10] Could Arslan afford to refer to the pan-Arab nation in terms of modernity without mentioning women as active participants in a vibrant society? This article raises these questions as a step toward further research in this area.

Endnotes

1. *Al-Istiklaal* was the original transliteration in Spanish from the editors.
2. On this issue, it is interesting to note how most commercials included in al-Istiklaal were oriented towards a male audience.
3. I have borrowed the term 'Woman Question' from Ellen Fleischman. As she herself explains, the use of this expression is a translation from *Qadiyyat al-Mar'a*, an "underlying framework for all of the discussions related to women and gender in the Palestinian press" (Fleischmann, 2003, p. 246)
4. This conclusion follows Elizabeth Thompson's on the fighting of peasant Druze women during the revolt, see pp. 122-25.
5. Ignacio Klich's "Argentine-Ottoman relations..." is the most complete biographical secondary source on the life of Emir Amin Arslan. Recently, Christina Civantos has reevaluated some of Arslan's work.
6. As Ignacio Klich narrates and my own archival research shows, much of the criticism to Arslan came from his political rival in Argentina at the time Khalil Saadeh, father of Antun Saadeh (founder of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party, SSNP).
7. I develop this further in my larger dissertation research.
8. See Christina Civantos (2006) for further detailed information on Orientalist notions in the context of Argentine history.
9. I analyze this practice in my larger dissertation work.
10. For a detailed account of the feminist movements see Asuncion Lavrin, 1995.

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The Role of French-Arab Women in Constructing a Postcolonial France

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In the years following 2000, French society finally started to address problematic issues emanating from its colonial past (massacres, slavery, and forced labor) and to question what it means to be a postcolonial nation. The discussion of such pointed and problematic subjects had for so long been repressed by successive French governments who feared civil unrest among France's postcolonial immigrant communities and who were often composed of and influenced by powerful and nostalgic ex-settler pressure groups. The concept of "postcolonialism" also challenges the fundamental ideals of the French Republic whereby citizens should meld into the dominant social norms of French society and renounce their respective individual history or culture. Members of the first generation of postcolonial immigrant groups were themselves unwilling and unable to evoke their own memories of the colonial period because of their low literacy levels, their fear of retribution in the form of expulsion, or because of the sheer material difficulties that they faced in their everyday lives.

Both historians and members of local and national associations (immigrant, army veterans, and anti-racism groups) led the movement to reexamine France's colonial past. At the very forefront were young French women of Arab origin, members of the second and third generations of immigrant families from the countries of the Maghreb (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco), which were colonized by the French until 1956 (Morocco and Tunisia) or 1962 (Algeria). Some of these young Franco-Arab women arrived in France at a very young age, but the majority was born in the country and virtually all have passed through the French school system. These women belong to families who emigrated from their homeland in search of work, the fathers first, bringing their families to live with them later on. Such groups arrived *en masse* in the postwar economic boom period (called the thirty glorious years, 1945-1975); however, workers from the Kabylie region of Algeria are documented to have been involved in building the Parisian metro as early as the turn of the twentieth century.

This article will study the involvement of these women in the debates surrounding important political and historical events after the year 2000, including the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) in 2002 and the Stasi commission on secularism in French life and the resulting so-called 'headscarf' law in 2003/2004. Much of these women's struggle has been imbued by French colonial stereotypes of Arab women, both in their native homeland and as part of the immigrant population in France. Such ideas have continued to influence both official and popular French interpretations of their postcolonial populations; therefore, analysis of these stereotypes is important and recurrent in this article.

An explosion of shocking revelations[1] about France's last and bloodiest war of decolonization, the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), marked the beginning of the new millennium in France. This conflict has strongly influenced France's postcolonial mindset. Officially, Algeria was not an actual colony, but rather an integral part of France, in both an administrative and an emotional sense, with a large and longstanding colonist community. Following Algerian independence, not only did France lose international prestige and a large part of its territory, it also faced an influx of more than a million people; French settlers (*Pieds-Noirs*), "Harkis"[2] and Algerian economic migrants, causing severe financial and logistical strain. The first two groups were to differing extents fleeing persecution under the new regime, whereas the Algerian economic migrants were encouraged by their government to seek work in the territory of the former colonial power in order to remedy the substantial problems of unemployment, poverty and famine that beset the newly independent state.[3]

The story of the Algerian War of Independence has long been dominated by the highly divisive and ideological official histories written on both sides of the Mediterranean, stories of heroes and traitors. Members of the second generation, led by a woman, Fatima Besnaci-Lancou, president of the *Association Harkis et Droits de l'Homme*,[4] have sought to bridge the ideological divide between the Algerian populations on both sides of the conflict (Algerian nationalists versus Harkis). Such a rift was fostered by both the French and Algerian governments following independence: by the Algerians in order to foster their own national myth that the country rose up as one against the colonial oppressor (a concept which the position of the Harkis would at first glance seem to challenge) and by the French in a policy of divide and rule, which would keep both groups confined in their own respective low socioeconomic status. In order to foster reconciliation, *Le Manifeste pour la Réappropriation des Mémoires Confisquées* — or the Manifesto for the Re-appropriation of Confiscated History — was launched at the French Parliament on September 23, 2004. The location of such a declaration is itself highly symbolic; these second-generation authors can be seen to be situating their démarche at the very center of the French Republic, in its seat of power. The signatories, descendants of both Algerian economic migrants and Harkis, promised to promote understanding between the two groups by commemorating days central to each others' calendars; October 17, 1961 (the day on which numerous Algerian demonstrators were attacked and thrown into the Seine by Parisian police, causing them to drown, as well as hundreds more rounded up, imprisoned, tortured and often deported)[5] and the National Day of Homage to the Harkis, held annually on the 25th of September. Their stated aim is to 'inscribe [their] common history in the collective memory of both Algeria and France, to rewrite [their] history, a history recognized on both sides of the Mediterranean'[6] and therefore to combat the ideologically motivated rewritings of historical truth that have come to personify the commemoration of French colonialism.[7]

The Algerian conflict and its aftermath have always been inextricably linked in the two national consciousnesses with men; both the soldiers (French and Algerian) involved in the fighting and the Algerian economic migrants, whose numbers increased dramatically both during and immediately after the war. As the female descendants of the Algerian families directly involved in the conflict (both nationalist fighters and the Harkis) have gradually staked a claim to this part of their heritage, they have chosen to highlight other aspects of the war and its aftermath. The most important of these is the involvement of Algerian women in combat operations on both sides, a historical truth so long minimized, if not totally ignored. While Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 film, *The Battle of Algiers*, depicted women placing bombs in the European quarter of Algiers, most Algerian war literature and cinema subscribed to the view voiced by Frantz Fanon (the Martiniquan psychiatrist and intellectual who became deeply involved in the Algerian independence struggle) that an Algerian woman was "deepening her consciousness of struggle and preparing for combat" best by limiting her social scope, thereby restricting herself to the domestic sphere and avoiding all contact with the colonizer. French authorities claimed that colonial rule would enfranchise the Algerian women and so were unwilling to depict dissent amongst this group, which may have called into question France's 'civilizing mission'. To alter such a stereotypically passive image, the Franco-Algerian writer Leïla Sebbar has chosen to document the important presence of the wives of Algerian migrant workers in the demonstrations of October 17, 1961 and the subsequent all female demonstration on October 20, called by Algerian women to protest against their husband's imprisonment. In Sebbar's novel *La Seine était rouge*[9], one of the main protagonists is a Franco-Algerian teenage girl Amel, who is given a photograph of her mother and grandmother participating in the first march. Although Amel suspects that the two older women discuss this era regularly (Amel does not understand many of their conversations,

as she does not speak Arabic), it is never openly mentioned in the family circle, reflecting the fear and trauma caused by these events. Other female viewpoints abound, including another female character of Amel's mother's generation, Flora, who describes nostalgically the period of imprisonment that she shared with French women in Algeria, while the mother of Amel's friend Louis recounts her role as a '*porteuse de valise*', one of the Frenchmen and women who provided logistical help to the Algerian nationalists during the war. Although Amel is shown to have scant knowledge of the events, maybe from school considering that October 17, 1961 has appeared in French school history textbooks since the mid-1990s, she is utterly unaware of the level of female participation. Yet again, a highly gendered depiction of the Algerian war had to be challenged by young Franco-Arab women. The novel also serves to inscribe Algerian history on the very geography of the city of Paris, as the characters visit the locations from which the marchers started and in which they were held and tortured by Parisian police. This is a groundbreaking act, as the novel was published before a plaque had been erected in the city to commemorate the event.

Second generation Harki women have sought through public appearances, documentaries and autobiographical writing to stress the difficulties faced by their mothers in the conflict's aftermath. Not only did they, like all immigrant women, have to raise a family in a foreign country, but they also had to negotiate with husbands broken by warfare, racked by guilt that they had fought against their own people and infantilized by the patronizing and paternalistic attitudes of the French army officers who controlled the camps in France in which the Harki population was forced to live for more than twenty years. The daughter of a Harki, Dalila Kerchouche, has recently widened the scope of her writing, from journalism (she writes for the weekly newsmagazine, *L'Express*) and autobiographical works to screenplays and books of photographic portraits. Her television drama, *Harkis* (*France 2* - October 10, 2006), was the first major production of this genre exclusively featuring the story of a Maghrebi immigrant family, it being screened in a prime-time program slot on a major French television channel. The drama openly criticized the brutal and overwhelming control of the French authorities over the Harki population in the camps, whilst demonstrating how it was the second generation, especially the girls, who were finally able to liberate their families, through their knowledge of France and the French language, which they had gained at school. The review of the drama in the leading French daily newspaper *Le Monde*, while praising the work's courage, criticized it for possibly reviving contentious arguments and suggesting that the Harkis' history prior to their arrival in France was not all together glorious.[10] Therefore, it can be seen that second-generation Franco-Arab women are working in a society that often believes that it would be better if they put up and shut up in order to protect harmony in France as a whole.

Yamina Benguigui, another second-generation French-Arab woman, has chosen the 'seventh art' in order to undertake the process of inscribing her community's story into official French historiography. Her documentary, *Mémoires des Immigrés, l'héritage maghrébin* (1997), is a series of filmed autobiographies, which was subsequently released as a book. This work is groundbreaking as it was an audiovisual text that gave a voice to the first generation of both men and women North African immigrants. In the past, French officials had always been called upon to speak on behalf of these immigrants, if the subject was raised at all. The extent to which the fathers have been downtrodden is evident in the film and is manifested in the silence that these men have succumbed to concerning their lives and emotions. Benguigui describes immigrant life in France as 'a society that does not speak, where speech is taboo', a situation she has observed first hand, coming as she does from a family of Algerian immigrants in the mining region of Northern France. She has sought through her work to break this taboo. In the interview that accompanies the documentary on the DVD, Benguigui, at public screenings of her work, calls on immigrants and their children to 'appropriate the film and begin to tell their own story'. She describes how this is especially necessary for immigrant women, who had very rarely sought to speak out publicly before, even in front of their immediate families, but who took strength from seeing their female compatriots speaking in the film. Benguigui's first feature film, *Inch'allah Dimanche* (2001), again focused on the struggles of these first generation women to adapt to life in France, portrayed through the story of Zouina, who arrives in Northern France in the 1970s to join her husband with her mother-in-law and three children. Benguigui's later documentaries have focused on a variety of subjects, from the situation of young people from immigrant communities in the French army, in *Aïcha, Mohamed, Chaïb, engagé pour la France* (2003), to the glass ceiling that restricts young Franco-Maghrebins and Franco-Africans in the French workplace in *Le Plafond de Verre, les défricheurs* (2006). Notably, these works have always sought to highlight a female viewpoint.

Why should all of these cultural works by French-Arab women have appeared in the last six to ten years?In addition to the increased interest in historical events surrounding decolonization, this period also marks the arrival in positions of social and economic power of this specific group of women, meaning that they finally have the resources to undertake such projects. The fact that the first generation of North-African economic migrants and Harkis is becoming an increasingly ageing population may also have motivated these authors and filmmakers. Mary McCullough describes, borrowing a phrase from Foucault, how Leïla Sebbar's first-generation immigrant characters are "speaking so as not to die",[11] death being a metaphor for the disappearance from "the collective memory [of their own community]."[12] These novels, documentaries and fictional films, through the importance placed on the history of the parents, demonstrate how the second generation has decided to write so that the life stories of the parents will not die.

It is not only in the cultural but also in the political sphere that French-Arab women have been becoming more visible. The appointment of a French-Arab woman as France's first minister from an ethnic minority was a strong symbol of the increasing political activism of members of this community. Tokïa Saïfi was named as Minister for Overseas Development in the initial government of Jean-Pierre Raffarin, in June 2002. The daughter of Algerian economic migrants from the industrial north of France, she had joined the right-wing *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR) [later the *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP)] after becoming disillusioned with the unfulfilled promises made by French left-wing political parties towards voters from immigrant communities. However, the ministerial position to which she was appointed was itself very telling, as development politics has become the latest means for former colonizers to continue to exert political and economic influence over their former colonies.[13] In the same round of governmental appointments, a woman (Michèle Alliot-Marie) was named as Minister of Defense; therefore, claims that Tokïa Saïfi was relegated to such a secondary ministerial role because she was a woman are difficult to substantiate. However, the highly unusual act of a right-wing government appointing a minister of immigrant origin had the positive effect of highlighting the question of the place of members of the second generation, especially women, in French politics. The months following June 2002 were marked by numerous public debates on how to encourage members of ethnic minorities, especially women, to stand for election,[14] and how such candidates might then alter postcolonial French politics. In practice, however, it is only the French Green Party that has championed young Franco-Arab women and placed them sufficiently high up on the candidate listings in order for them to stand a real chance of being elected at the local, regional or European levels.[15] Despite the debates, there is still only one ethnic minority MP, Christina Taubira, sitting in the French Parliament, and she represents one of France's former colonial territories, French Guyana. Is this a case of enduring colonial stereotyping, where it is acceptable for a (post) colonial candidate to be elected as long as they represent their own group? As for Tokïa Saïfi, she lost her ministerial post within two years, returning to her seat as an MEP (Member of the European Parliament).[16]

More grassroots political activism is also evident among young Franco-Arab women.While French feminist groups have been extremely vocal in society since the 1970s, the winter of 2002/03 was marked by the creation of the first such group to be dominated by young women of immigrant origin, especially Arab origin. It appeared against the backdrop of increasing debate over the wearing of the hijab by young French Muslims and what the association claimed was an increase in violence towards young women in deprived housing estates. In October of the same year, such violence was brought to the attention of the French media with the death of Sohane, a young woman of Tunisian origin burnt alive by her boyfriend in Vitry-sur-Seine, a southeastern Parisian suburb. The first of these newly formed feminist associations chose the highly controversial name of *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises* — or Neither Prostitutes, Nor Submissive women.[17] This title reflects the way these young women feel about how their own housing estates view them (as prostitutes) or how the Franco-French public views them (as submissive women). This second image is a reflection of colonial stereotypes, which claim that indigenous Arab women are submissive, crushed by the weight of local tradition and by Islam. The need for this group to include and therefore challenge such stereotypes in their title can only suggest that such ideas are still present in contemporary French society. The French right-wing government that came to power in June 2002 has adopted the concept of *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises*. Photographic portraits of its leaders dressed as the Marianne, the female figure that symbolizes the French Republic, were displayed on the facade of the French parliament building for the national holiday, Bastille Day, July 14, 2003. The symbolic importance of this gesture cannot be underestimated, it was a highly courageous and controversial act to depict the French Republic as an Arab or Black woman only a year after the far-right candidate, Jean-Marie Le Pen, had won an unprecedented number of votes, which allowed him to reach the second round of the French Presidential elections. The association's leader, Fadela Amara, has been appointed to several national commissions[18] and is rumored to be a confidant of Nicolas Sarkozy, who at that time was the likely candidate of the French right in the 2006 Presidential elections.[19] However, such a close working relationship between the association and the government has also been highly problematic. The association has also been accused of demonizing young Arab men who come

from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds,[20] a fact that has been picked up on in the rhetoric of French politicians of both left and right and which has been widely relayed in the national press. Such men have fought back against this image of petty criminals and gang rapists by creating their own association named *Ni Proxo, Ni Macho* — or Neither a Pimp, Nor a Macho. Equally, the then French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin justified the law against the wearing of highly visible religious symbols in French schools, passed in 2004, by the fact that he had the support of Muslim women from *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises*. The association itself remained largely silent on the subject, when it could have exerted its influence in order to provide a female Franco-Arab, French-Muslim viewpoint on the issue. Such a viewpoint was largely ignored by the Stasi commission, established to make recommendations on the role of secularism in French life.

Large-scale demonstrations against the proposed 'head-scarf' law took place in several French cities, on December 20, 2003 and on January 17 and February 7, 2004. These demonstrations provoked outrage among the political community and in the French press, both concentrating on the predominantly male leaders of the Islamic groups that had organized these protests and very rarely on the young women who were demonstrating, whom the newspapers claimed were being manipulated by religious extremists. The Parisian newspapers headlined with '*La manif qui fait peur*' or — the demo that provokes fear'[21], which accurately reflected French public opinion. One of the most striking visual images to emerge during these demonstrations was that of a young Franco-Maghrebi woman wearing a hijab in the tricolors of the French flag. She seemed to be proclaiming with pride that she saw no contradictions in her identity as a devout French-Muslim, an opinion of young Franco-Arab Muslim woman that had great difficulty being heard during this period. This law has split women's groups in France. Two leading French feminists, Anne Vigerie and Anne Zelensky, even called — in a newspaper article published in *Le Monde*, — for banning the wearing of the hijab in the streets. They believe that the hijab is a sign of the oppression of women in Islamic societies, which, as it has been illustrated above for the French case, is an idea that originated in colonial propaganda. The divisive nature of this issue was also evident in the numerous parallel demonstrations organized to mark International Women's Day, which was celebrated on March 6, 2004. The main march through central Paris was led by *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises* under the banner '*Laïcité, Egalité, Mixité*' - or 'Secularism, Equality and Gender Diversity'. There were press reports noting that women wearing the hijab were prevented from participating in this march. A collective composed of a number of feminists groups, in which Franco-Arab women were again well represented, held another demonstration in the city under the slogan '*Une école pour tou-te-s/ Contre les lois d'exclusion*' - or 'Schooling for all, Against the laws of exclusion'. Several of the feminist groups represented in this collective were *Femmes publiques*, *Femmes plurielles*, *Les sciences potiches se rebellent*, *Les Blédardes*, and *Collectif des féministes pour l'égalité*. While large-scale marches to mark International Women's Day are indeed a recent phenomenon in France, this is considered the first time that a single issue has prevented a unified march from taking place, which can only highlight the highly divisive nature of debates over the hijab and French secularism. The final report of the Stasi commission recommended that a law should be passed in order to ban the wearing of highly visible (ostensible) religious symbols in the French state school system. This legislation was passed in March 2004 and went into effect at the beginning of the 2004-2005 academic year.

This article has sought to demonstrate the increasing visibility of French women of Arab origin in both the cultural and political arenas in contemporary France, as well as their important role in creating a truly postcolonial nation. Having been born and educated in France, these women have been able to stake their claim to being full members of French society, in a way in which their parents, downtrodden by colonial stereotyping, low socio-economic status and poor literacy levels, were unable to do. Such women have decided to use their position to champion the hidden history of their mothers and to repair ideological divides created by colonial politics. In the political sphere, the challenging position of being a French-Arab woman reflects the difficulties faced by the French establishment in envisaging the place of immigrant communities in such an arena. Maybe the election of a female president in June 2007 could open up new and interesting opportunities for such women.

Endnotes

1. These revelations focused on acts of torture and rape committed by French soldiers during the conflict.
2. The Harkis were the Algerian soldiers who fought for the French army during the country's War of Independence.
3. The French settlers were said to have faced a choice between the suitcase and the coffin. The victorious nationalists massacred the Harkis, who were seen to have chosen the wrong side during the war, if the French army did not repatriate them. While most Algerian economic migrants came to France for financial reasons, some, which belonged to different nationalist groups (such as the MNA), also fled Algeria for political reasons.
4. The association *Harkis et Droit de l'Homme* has a website, www.harki.net.
5. House, J. & MacMaster, N. (2006). Paris 1961. Algerians, State Terror and Memory. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6. The full text of this manifesto can be found at www.harki.net/article.php3?id_article=6.
7. The French law enacted on February 25, 2005, which sought to dictate how the history of French colonialism should be taught in schools, demonstrated this.
8. Fanon, F. (1972). Sociologie d'une revolution - L'an V de la Révolution Algérienne. Paris : Maspero.
9. Sebbar, L. (2000). La Seine était rouge. Paris: Thierry Magrier.
10. Kerviel, S., & Psenny, D. (October 8-9, 2006). Les harkis sortent de l'ombre. *Le Monde*.
11. This phrase of Foucault is taken from Language, Counter-Memory and Practice (1977). Ithaca: Cornell University Press quoted in Mary McCullough (2003). No more silencing the past: first generation immigrant women as bricoleuses de mémoire in Parle mon fils, parle à ta mere and Fatima ou les Algériennes au square by Leïla Sebbar, International Journal of Francophone Studies, 6 (2)
12. This addition is my own, as the experiences of the first generation of immigrants cannot disappear from French collective memory, in which they have never existed.
13. See Brauman, R. (2005) (Brauman was President of Médecins Sans Frontière until 1994). Indigènes et indigents: de la "mission civilisatrice" coloniale à l'action humanitaire. In Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard and Sandrine Lemaire (Eds.), La fracture coloniale - La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial (pp 165-172). Paris: La Découverte.
14. Bourtel, K. (2003, December). Grandes manœuvres politiques autour des Franco-Maghrébins. Le Monde Diplomatique, pp. 12,
15. The shock of the Jean-Marie Le Pen's presence in the second round of the French Presidential elections of the same year also caused Franco-Arab communities, like many other groups in society, to question their voting apathy.
16. Tokai Saïfi was in fact first elected as a Green local councilor in Lille. Alma Thiéry-Boumediène, a Green MEP for the North-West in the Ile de France constituency, detailed the position of the French Green Party at a conference on the place of descendants of immigrants in French politics. Quelle existence politique pour les Français d'origine étrangère ?, Mouloud Amokrane, Patrick Braouezec, François Rebsamen, Alima Thiéry-Boumediène, Catherine Withol de Wenden, Le Forum Bastille-Nation - Maison de l'Amérique Latine, Paris, October 21, 2003.
17. www.tokia-saifi.com/fr/portrait/default.asp.
18. www.niputesnisoumises.com.
19. *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises*, Une arme à double tranchant. (2005, February 23). Respect Magazine.
20. Fadela Amara: l'enfance d'une insoumise. (2006, October 19), *Le Monde*.
21. Guénif-Souilamas, N. & Macé, E. (2005) Les féministes et le garçon arabe. Paris: Editions de l'Aube.
22. (2004, January 16). *Le Parisien*.
23."Laïcardes", puisque féministes (2003, May 30), *Le Monde*.

"Un/Veiled: Feminist Art from the Arab/Muslim Diaspora"

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> Shrouded with exoticism and stereotype, the physical veil reveals the instinctive voyeuristic aspect of what is strange or other. It is this ambiguity of meaning that parallels the concept of veiling and exposes an exaggerated drama, a script of how the West reads Arabic culture (Zineb Sedira, as cited in Pasquier, 1999, p. 217).

Images of Muslim women in global popular culture convey ideas of restriction and oppression: to many in the West, the covered Arab woman appears a victim, unable to express herself in word and deed. Artists and writers from within Arab cultures have challenged such simplistic readings, some offering alternative readings of living behind the veil, others offering the possibility of a feminist existence within an apparently oppressive society, all challenging the Orientalist mindset implied by such assumptions. Zineb Sedira, as quoted above, pinpoints the Western fascination with veiling and the degree to which this has informed cultural stereotypes and misrepresentations. This article will investigate the work of four artists living in the Arab diaspora — Emily Jacir, Lalla Essaydi, Zineb Sedira, and Shirin Neshat — each of whom examines her own culture and produces feminist art about women's spheres and roles. As artists address issues of veiling and bodily representation with Islamic culture, it becomes readily apparent that veiling has not one singular meaning, either in the West or in the East, but that its meanings are varied and shifting. As Sedira says, the veil is "a puzzling emblem of progress, then of backwardness; a badge now of status, then of domination; a symbol of purity and a sign of feminine silence and constraint" (Pasquier, 1999, p. 216).

While female artists have differing homelands, from Iran and Palestine to Morocco and Algeria, each attempts in her work to negotiate two parts of her identity: how to claim her heritage within the diasporic situation, and how to read and critique the place of women in that heritage-within Islam, and within the stereotypical perceptions of Islam as perpetrated by the West. Through her appearance, veiled or not, the Arab woman is seen as a purveyor of Oriental exoticism, though also, in recent years, as a potential threat of irrational violence. Living in the diaspora, whether by choice or by exile, each artist confronts her status as "Other" in relation to dominant cultural images, a difference that has a lengthy history. As Edward Said (1978) first argued in *Orientalism*, Western writers from the South Asian and the Indian subcontinent sought to create differences between East and West, inevitably portraying the East as a weak, irrational, feminized "Other" to the strong rational masculine West. Simultaneously, each artist addresses the status of women within Islam. Part of the colonial narrative has been to portray Islam as a culture oppressive to women, and thus an inferior one that needs to be liberated by the West. This is not to deny the oppression of women; patriarchal Islamic societies subordinate women as do patriarchal Western societies. Colonialists, however, employed their vague understandings of Muslim societies to a political and circumspect end. As Leila Ahmed (1992) argues, "The idea that "Other" men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was used, in the rhetoric of colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples" (p. 151).

The Arab woman was problematic for Orientalists and colonialists in the nineteenth century, for she resisted representation through her veiling. Appropriating the language of feminism, colonialists denounced the practice of veiling as degrading to women. Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) suggests that the colonizers sought to unveil Arab women, as they sought to unveil knowledge of the region, as a means of making visible and asserting control over a potential threat: "It was only by rendering Muslim women's bodies visible that they became capable of being recodified, redefined, and reformulated according to new Western codes. The regime and control involved in colonial power needs the creation of docile, obedient subjects" (p. 116). Indeed, some embraced the unveiling, even in the nineteenth century. *Tahrir Al-Mar'a* (The Liberation of Woman), written by Qassim Amin and published in 1899, targeted veiling as a barrier to women's liberation. The text, however, as Ahmed (1992) details, is mere rhetoric, an ultimately conservative replication of colonialist thought that proclaimed the inherent superiority of the West and the backwardness of the East. In the early twentieth century, the Iranian ruler Reza Shah, hoping to portray himself and his people as modernized and westernized, issued a proclamation banning the veil, a move that testified again to the assimilation of colonialist perception in assuming the inferiority of the East.

Moves to do away with the veil were not wholeheartedly embraced by the popular classes, however. As Guity Nashat observes, for most Iranians the veil was not a symbol of oppression but "a sign of propriety and a means of protection against the menacing eyes of male strangers" (as cited in Ahmed, 1992, p. 165). Similarly, resistance to colonialism and to the imperialism of the West has occasioned affirmation of the veil, veiling even as a symbol of national identity. During the Algerian War of the 1950s, French officials forced Algerian women to unveil themselves publicly in an act of mandatory liberation (Hélie-Lucas, 1990). Algerians then embraced the veil as a way to affirm their own culture and resist that of the occupier. Veiling, then, becomes layered with meanings, not simply a possible sign of the oppression of women, but one of national identity, resistance to colonialism and imperialism, and a rejection of Western values.

Amidst the multivalence of veiling, Arab feminists continue to debate the issue. In *Women and Gender in Islam*, Leila Ahmed situates veiling within an historical framework of colonial legacies and argues against an uncritical embrace of Western feminism that necessitates a rejection of one's own culture (1992). Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi, in *Beyond the Veil* and *The Veil and the Male Elite*, asserts that the spirit of Islam was not to restrict women but to secure their equality and therefore argues against veiling (1975; 1987). As Reina Lewis (2003) points out, "For many women the requirement to veil is often the least of their problems in the face of economic and social deprivation. In other instances, women's veiling is strategic, providing an alibi for behaviors outside the home that would otherwise be deemed gender subversive" (p. 14). Azar Nafisi's recent memoir (2003), *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, includes many instances of such gender subversion, hidden beneath the veil, as her students gather to read forbidden novels.

It is within these contexts that artists in the Arab/Muslim diaspora address the status and the bodily representation of women in Islam. Emily Jacir is a Palestinian-American artist who grew up in Saudi Arabia and now divides her time between New York City and the West Bank town of Ramallah. Many of her photographs, videos, and installations explore geographical and colonialist concepts of boundaries and homelands, examining ideas of exchange and conditions of exile and displacement. In *From Paris to Riyadh* (Drawings for my Mother), 1999-2001, Jacir identifies the diasporic experience of women moving across borders. The work, a series of drawings in black ink on white vellum, isolates body parts in silhouette — arms, legs, and parts of torsos. The forms stem from Jacir's memories of watching her mother use a felt pen to black out forbidden elements in *Vogue* magazines, such as exposed bodies, as they flew home from trips abroad. Jacir isolates these illicit images to form the basis of her drawings, inverting her mother's self-censorship by calling attention to the prohibited display of flesh from Western mass media culture. As John Menick (2004) suggests, "like all fig leaves, the black forms comically call attention to what should be hidden, and force one to imagine what is supposedly so hazardous to see" (p. 29).

Jacir's installation plays on the binaries of good and bad, West and East, liberal and censorious, that occupy much mainstream thinking, where the Arab veiled woman is

inevitably oppressed and can only be unveiled by Western liberation. In stating her intentions for the work, Jacir (2004) underscores these perceived binaries yet disrupts them to point out a commonality on the social status of women: "Most people kept interpreting [that] it was about the repression of Middle Eastern women when it wasn't. It was about my discomfort with being in a society whose women were completely commodified. Being back and forth between these two spaces — one of commodification and the other of banning the image of the female body — which [sic] was equally repressing and equally discomforting" (p. 19).

Through Jacir's methods, the female body ceases to have coherent significance, for it is fragmented to such an extent as to be barely recognizable. Using semi-transparent paper, Jacir traces the exposed parts of women's bodies from magazine pages, filling them in with black marker in a recreation of her mother's actions. Some pages are filled with multiple appendages while others have only the tiniest of markings, indicating the disparities in women's representation from page to page in the original source. Jacir's methods recall those of 1920s photomontage, by Dadaists and others, where bodies were appropriated, fragmented, then recombined, often for a wider cultural critique. By fragmenting the commercial exhibition of women's bodies, Jacir effectively erases the original display of sexuality, combining the fragments instead to level a critique of the ways in which the representations of women's bodies are controlled — whether commodified and objectified in the West or banned in the East.

Jacir's fragmentations further speak to the anonymity of women. Women living behind the veil have little in the way of outwardly visible identities, and/or, the veil may allow them greater freedoms because of this anonymity. At the same time, Jacir's drawings imply that, through their commodification, Western women are made equally anonymous. By fragmenting their bodies to bits and pieces, Jacir removes any sense of identification and ensures their anonymity.

French-Algerian artist Zineb Sedira counters the anonymity of the veil in her photographic installation, *Don't Do To Her What You Did To Me*, No.2, (1996). Through a sequential series of photographs, Sedira makes visible the veiling process, showing herself in various angles in states of partial veiling. Using herself as the photographic subject, Sedira asserts through her series the individual identities of women despite their veils, which in turn combats Western mythologies about veiled women. As the artist herself asserts, "The unveiled woman is seen as an individual and civilized subject, a far cry from the over-represented and culturally constructed veiled woman, who is considered anonymous, passive and exotic" (as cited in Pasquier, 1999, p. 70).

Sedira's installation also confronts the viewers about their own voyeuristic expectations. The veiling process is a private one, so already we are intruders on this ritual. While Sedira makes visible this private moment, however, never does she meet the viewers' gaze. Sedira's series makes explicit the voyeurism that has surrounded the Arab woman's body in cultural discourse. While it is easy to gaze on someone unseen, it becomes less comfortable to have our voyeurism implicitly acknowledged in this way. By exposing the act of veiling, Sedira attempts to broaden the concept to include the idea of mental veils as well. In much of her work, Sedira uses the physical veil as a metaphor for the "veiling of the mind", which she reads as censorship and self-censorship in Western and Muslim cultures. In Sedira's view, the mental veil "is not about a forced Muslim enclosure but rather about an awareness of the cultural paradigms that inform our ideas around sexuality, gender and emotional space" (as cited in Pasquier, 1999, p. 58). In particular, Sedira focuses on how we metaphorically veil ourselves from potentially uncomfortable situations. She asks, "How often do we choose not to notice — or not to read — our surroundings, because doing so would make us feel uncomfortable?" (Pasquier, 1999, p. 58). It is precisely this sense of discomfort that is elicited from the viewer regarding her photographs.

The photographs of Lalla Essaydi, a Moroccan-born artist now living abroad, address veiling and the progression of age. Though Essaydi asserts that veiling is a largely abandoned practice in Morocco, traditionally, Moroccan girls began veiling as young as the age of ten. In her photographs, Essaydi speaks of veiling in part as an historical referent and in part as a psychological symbol. Essaydi's photographs, shot in a house in Morocco, have as their basis the artist's childhood memories of transgression. The house, owned by Essaydi's family, was the site of punishment. When a young woman of the family flouted expectations, she was sent to this house to spend a month in silence, accompanied only by a servant. As an adult, Essaydi returns to confront this space with other women, the women and girls who populate her photographs. Of her collaborators, Essaydi (2005) says, "The women participate because they feel that they are contributing to the greater emancipation of Arab women, and at the same time conveying to a Western audience their very rich traditions, often misunderstood in the West" (p. 26).

In a series of photographs entitled *Converging Territories*, 2005, Essaydi maps a terrain of women and fabric, where seemingly endless bolts of cloth veil the women to varying degrees, sometimes completely. Not merely an instrument of veiling, however, the cloth also doubles as a writing surface. For weeks before she begins photographing, Essaydi fills the cloth with complex, diaristic narratives. As is her intent, Essaydi's actions blur the boundaries of gendered segregation regarding specific cultural practices. Essaydi (2005) says, "In employing calligraphic writing, I am practicing a sacred Islamic art that is usually inaccessible to women. To apply this writing in henna, an adornment worn and applied only by women, adds a further subversive twist" (p. 27). Henna is a critical element in the life of a Moroccan woman, applied at times of puberty, marriage, and after the birth of a woman's first child. To employ henna for calligraphic writing is to disrupt the binaries of male/female, public/private, language/decoration.

In an untitled photograph from the *Converging Territories* series, Essaydi features a woman and child subsumed by cloth. The adult woman, presumably the mother, is fully veiled save for her eyes and forehead. The girl on her lap is only partially covered, her head and hair are fully visible and her bare feet emerge from beneath the cloth. With the progression of age comes increased veiling. A bowl of henna sits before them and every surface, even the visible skin of their faces and feet, is covered in calligraphy. Set in a childhood house of silence, the photographs are filled with Essaydi's silent words. Her writing gives voice to that little girl exiled to the house of transgression just as it gives voice to those women pictured, who seem metaphorically silenced by the veil. At the same time, Essaydi's words bestow another form of silence: silence for the viewer who cannot read her words. Since Essaydi posits an autobiographical basis for much of her work, one might even imagine the little girl pictured here as a young Essaydi, accompanied by a housekeeper, but forced to keep silent for the duration of her punishment.

Shirin Neshat is an Iranian artist and filmmaker who moved to the United States after high school to study art. Absent for the Iranian Revolution of 1979, she first returned to visit her homeland in 1990 and was shocked by the changed cultural landscape. The practice of veiling, banned early in the century by Reza Shah, was reinstated following the revolution. Shortly after that first return visit, Neshat began a photographic series entitled *Women of Allah*, 1993-97, in which she constructed narratives of militant Muslim women. The photographs each contain references to veiling and to armament, and like Essaydi, Neshat covers some of her surfaces with writing, this time in Farsi.

In the *Women of Allah* series, Neshat poses visual questions regarding the roles of women in the violence and martyrdom of revolution and challenges Western preconceptions of Oriental women. "I see my work," Neshat says, "as a visual discourse on the subjects of feminism and contemporary Islam — a discourse that puts certain myths and realities to the test, claiming that they are far more complex than most of us have imagined" (Matt, 2000, p. 13). Through her photographs, it becomes apparent that she sees stark contradictions surrounding women's roles in Islamic revolution. In *Rebellious Silence*, of 1994, a woman fully veiled except for the oval of her face stands with the long barrel of a rifle upright in front of her. The discrepancy is immediate: while women are once again veiled and barred from participation in most public spheres, they are compelled to participate in revolution and war. Women, too, must be willing to martyr themselves in the name of Allah. Hence, the striking juxtaposition of an armed but veiled woman is an image that struck Neshat when she returned to visit her homeland. Through her recreation of the contrast, Neshat implicitly challenges the Orientalist (mis)perception of Muslim women as passive and subordinate, substituting instead proud militant women whose visible flesh pressed against weapons of death alludes to the figure of the femme fatale (Sherwell, 1999).

Hamid Dabashi (2002) writes of Neshat "performing" the veil. The artist often uses herself as model and employs the veil as a tool in constructing photographs with shifting and manifold meanings. John Ravenal (2005) argues that the *Women of Allah* photographs reflect an intensified Orientalist view of Muslim women in recent years as fanatical and violent, shifting from earlier assumptions of erotic submissiveness. Simultaneously, however, Alison Donnell (2003) asserts that in the post-9/11 era, Western media perpetuate Orientalist assumptions of veiled women as victims, choosing to ignore instances of women's resistance and agency. Neshat's photographic series of veil-as-performance, then, reinforces the complexities she asserts in our understandings of feminism and contemporary Islam. Indeed, her series is as much about a westernized audience as about Iranian women living behind the veil. Jacqueline Larson (1997) suggests that the photographs "are also about America's gaze […] and what America expects to see" (p. 7).

Like Essaydi, Neshat makes use of handwritten text within her photographs. For each work in the series, Neshat's point of departure is a verse of Iranian feminist poetry. The verse inspires each particular set-up; Neshat then brings it full circle, ending with the poem by writing it in pen-and-ink on the surface of the photograph. The verses, many on the theme of love, establish yet another contradiction within the images, with notions of love removed from other apparent themes of veiling and martyrdom. At the same time, the poems function metaphorically to give voice to the women pictured. Neshat says,

"The written text is the voice of the photograph. It breaks the silence of the still woman in the portrait" (Goldberg, 2002, p. 67). In *Rebellious Silence*, the woman pictured is doubly silenced — through her veil, and through the gun that seals her lips, barring them from speech. As Neshat's title suggests, however, her silence is rebellious: while she may not be allowed to speak freely, her potential for violent actions would speak louder than words. Simultaneously, she rebels against her Western viewers' expectations, subverting assumptions of aggression and instead proffering verses on love that themselves remain silent, unreadable to many of her viewers.

Emily Jacir, Lalla Essaydi, Zineb Sedira, and Shirin Neshat are not the only artists living in the Arab/Muslim diaspora to confront the cultural perceptions of veiling and bodily representation within Islam. Jananne Al-Ani, Ghazel, Samta Benyahia, and Majida Khattari are all diaspora artists who examine political, social, and cultural dynamics of veiling through performances, photographic installations, and videos. Shadafarin Ghadirian, an artist still working in Iran, reformulates historical images of veiling within her photographic studio. Recent scholarship by David Bailey (2003) and Fran Lloyd (1999) testify to the diversity of contemporary Arab women's art while also underscoring the recurrent theme of veiling. For too many years, the Arab woman's body, hidden beneath the veil, has been the object of the colonialist gaze — eroticized, passive, and silent. Reclaiming this body from a continuing history of misunderstanding and misrepresentation, these artists set forth insightful critiques that address the contradictions and complexities of feminism within Islamic cultures. And this time they will not be silenced.

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Muslim Women in Southern Spain between Discrimination and Empowerment

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In the last two decades, Spain has experienced a remarkable increase in its immigrant population (Cornelius, 2004), of which North Africans make up a significant percentage. Concurrent and concomitant to this increase, since the end of the Franco regime, a strong tendency for conversion to the Islamic religion has been observable in Andalusian cities like Granada and Cordoba. In the face of these two phenomena, anti-Islamic and anti-"Moorish" attitudes reflecting the combination of ethnical, religious, and nationalist dimensions of discrimination now prevail amongst large segments of the Spanish public. These attitudes are deeply-rooted and can be interpreted in one sense as historically transmitted stigmatizations of "the other". As Stallaert (1998) explains in detail, since 1492, when the process of the so-called *reconquista* resulted in the "Christian reconquest" of the Iberian peninsula from the various Muslim ruling dynasties beginning with the final fall of Granada after a lengthy siege by the "Catholic kings", the Spanish nation-state mission has been founded on a mixture of ethnically-based "arabophobia" and religiously motivated "islamophobia" (Runnymede Trust, 1997). The construction and imposition of a common Spanish-Castilian hegemonic identity has always relied on measures of religious persecution — such as the institution of the *Santa Inquisición*, originated in Spain — as well as "ethnic cleansing", implemented since 1492 through "laws of blood purity", which constantly blur supposedly biological, ethnical, and religious terminology.

Accordingly, even before the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington and the March 11, 2004 bombings in Madrid, increasing xenophobic and particularly islamophobic tendencies were observable within Spanish society; the Madrid bombings have now made former inherently hidden deeply-rooted attitudes more visibly explicit. Particularly affected by this newly emerging islamophobia are Muslim women, whose societal functions, in the opinion of the majority, are reduced to motherhood and obedience to their husbands. For several centuries now, Islam and in particular Muslim women have been misperceived, misunderstood, misinterpreted and consequently portrayed as the opposing reflection of the West's self-portrait as a modern, secularized, and inclusive civilization (Martín Muñoz, 1999). Regardless of their age, profession, ethnical or social class background, citizenship and immigration status, the West focuses on Muslim women as being the stereotypical prototype of "otherness". The recent feminization of North African migration reflects that many Moroccan women from

urban areas have been migrating alone to Spain, which is contrary to the traditional pattern of female North Africans migrating from rural areas as dependents of their husbands and families. Currently, Muslim women are becoming the most important protagonists in the process of forming and developing a Muslim diaspora community (Martín Muñoz & López Sala, 2003).

In the Context of Southern Spain

An ethnographic study has been conducted (Dietz & El-Shohoumi, 2005) in order to address the largely unknown daily living conditions of these "different" female migrants living within a secularizing, yet still mainly Catholic, southern Spanish society. Their daily lives are profoundly shaped by diverse, but often overlapping and mutually reinforcing, sources and forms of discrimination and exclusion. Gender-related, citizenship-based, ethnonational and religiously motivated discriminatory attitudes and behaviors are simultaneously at work — both from the "outside", the non-Muslim majority in Spanish society, and from within Muslim minority communities.

Granada was the local setting of the research. In this Andalusian city of approximately 300,000 permanent inhabitants, a highly differentiated migrant population has arrived and settled during the last two decades. The main reasons for choosing this city are economic. Granada is the principal commercial city in eastern Andalusia, with economic relations with both the northern province of Jaén, dominated by olive monoculture, and the eastern province of Almería, which has been transformed over the last decade into one of Spain's most vigorous agricultural export regions. Since the first non-European immigrants started to settle in Granada in the second half of the 1980s, a complex economic pattern of urban construction work (dominated by Moroccans), and urban informal trade (controlled by Senegalese) and seasonal migrations to the olive harvest in the north as well as to the tomato plantations in Almería, has evolved. Further advantages of Granada derive from its character as a university city. On the one hand, the flat market responds to the demands of 60,000 students for cheap rental property, from which the migrants also benefit, and on the other hand, the university has attracted highly skilled immigrants. Furthermore, the "orientalist" legacy of the city has turned it into a point of confluence for Muslim converts as well (Dietz & El-Shohoumi 2005).

Emerging Muslim Life-Worlds

The infrastructure of the Muslim community in southern Spain is still rather inadequately developed. After emigrating from Morocco, Algeria, and other Muslim countries, what were previously routine religious practices frequently become seriously problematic to fulfill, or at least a challenge for one's sense of duty. Different strategies are developed in order to cope with these challenges. Some women try to compensate for the lack of context and of cultural embeddedness by increasingly internalizing their faith. In many cases, however, the suddenly missing framework of family and kinship networks imbuing a deep feeling of personal isolation weakens their willpower for the daily practice of Islam. This supposedly only temporary loss of social support is exacerbated by the lack of a migrant community existing in many of the cities or villages to which some Muslim women migrate. If anything, the recently emerging "religious infrastructure" of mosques, community meeting points, shops that offer *halal* food, as well as products from the migrants' respective homelands, observable in cities like Granada and Cordoba, paradoxically strengthens the impression of losing the "naturalness" and deeply-rooted characteristics of religious faith. In contrast to the converts, who welcome the "changing face of their city" as a development towards its "oriental legacy", some of the migrants even feel somehow "instrumentalised" by orientalist tourism policies. The sense of the above-mentioned loss is also promoted by the surrounding social context. Members of the Spanish and Catholic majority society are frequently reported to show not just "mere" rejection, but complete ignorance and a lack of interest when interacting with Muslims. In response, some women have abandoned certain salient customs like observing all daily prayers, participating fully in Ramadan or wearing the headscarf. Finally, several younger women have developed "double standards" in order to face the challenge of bridging the expectations of their own family and those of the majority society. This strategy, however, is not only a result of migrating to Spain; since adolescence many of the interviewees were found to systematically change codes of conduct when spending time outside their parents' direct sphere of influence.

These more pragmatic and selective approaches towards practicing Islamic traditions and obligations are completely absent when it comes to converts. They perceive their religious duties not as something negotiable with and against the "forces of tradition" and/or the "surrounding social context", but as the result of an individual choice. In the same way as their conversions are experienced in rather mystical terms, their religious practices are seen as a unique opportunity of encountering divinity in the daily routine of life.

Another frequently discussed issue is the significance and necessity of wearing the headscarf. In Spain, despite the fact that there have been no major public conflicts surrounding the issue of the headscarf,[2] (women are "even allowed to wear it when taking a passport photograph", as one Moroccan interviewee gratefully acknowledged), nevertheless, the veil is seen as a prejudicial obstacle when searching for employment or trying to rent a flat. Institutions and NGOs see the "problem" of veiling as a major indicator of the host society's "racism". Even though tolerance towards veiling is always expressed, some institutional representatives say that Muslim women "should not exaggerate" and should not look "as if they were in Morocco", as this would make it difficult for their Catholic neighbors to "accept" them. A social worker dealing with Muslim women even claimed that some of them are covering their head as a means of "self-isolation".

In order to avoid this kind of discrimination, some migrant women in certain situations strategically remove the headscarf; however, this conforming action does not counter the underlying prejudice concerning the phenotypical distinction arising from wearing the headscarf, which results in islamophobic attitudes and the overt rejection of Moroccans. A majority of women who wear the veil regard it as an integral part of their religious and gender identity, and therefore an unquestioned part of their traditions. However, there is a minority of women, mainly of Amazigh origin, who reject the headscarf, which they identify as "something imposed by the Arabs" and above all by "the macho attitude of Muslim husbands". For this minority, the preservation of an archaic religious symbol, which has nothing to do with higher or lower degree of religiosity, is one of the factors preventing Muslim women from liberating themselves. This perspective, which is astonishingly similar to the mainstream Spanish public's perception of Muslim women as victims, is sharply contradicted by other women, who emphasize that the variability of veiling customs is just as susceptible to changes and fashions as any other "article of clothing". Ironically, several Muslim women, immigrants as well as converts, even claim the *hijab* serves as an erotic device, while Christian Spanish women are criticized as boringly "naked".

However, in the migration context of a non-Muslim host society, some women perceive the headscarf not as a question of custom or fashion, but as a strictly religious symbol of identifying oneself vis-à-vis the Christian "other". The Spanish converts, while being dressed modestly covering their heads in order to be recognized as Muslims, share this attitude. However, other Muslim women openly reject this tendency of using the *hijab* as a religious distinction or even as an "ethnical marker" in inter-religious contexts. In their view, it turns the issue of veiling into a superficial question of belonging to a religious minority regardless of one's individual faith and attitude towards religion.

Struggling for Community Formation

Above all, unmarried migrant women, and even many young Muslim women studying at Spanish universities who normally feel well integrated, suffer from loneliness, and especially isolation from their families. Their feelings of isolation also reflect the poor community relations which characterize their daily lives in southern Spain. To some extent, an emerging "transnational" and "trans-Mediterranean" migration network can counter the problem, i.e. experienced by frequent visits from and to families living in the region of origin (González Barea, 2003). On the other hand, even married women who migrated in the context of a family reunion opportunity complain about difficulties in establishing more stable social and neighborhood relations. This is due to their heavy dependence on their husband's social and work relationships or on their own employment in the shadow economy, which will be addressed below. While the necessity of community building in the migrant situation is reflected in all of the interviews conducted, immigrant community life is still strongly fragmented and departmentalized according to the needs of the first immigrants, mainly unmarried male employees. The immigrant sections of the two major Spanish trade unions that still dominate associational life are controlled by male representatives, and their union activities are accordingly focused on sectoral issues relevant above all to male employees. Additionally, men also dominate the religious organizational life that is emerging through newly established mosques and recently created groups such as the *Consejo Islámico de Granada* at the local level or the *Comunidad Musulmana de España* at the national level (Rosón Lorente, 2005). Therefore, these organizational frameworks unfortunately cannot satisfy the requirements of migrant women, who above all seek the opportunities to meet other Muslim women, in order to hold informal encounters and exchange practical information without the presence of men. The participation of Muslim women in activities carried out by migrant associations and/or by Spanish NGOs supporting them is actually very weak, either because they are not allowed to by their husbands or because they simply have no contact with or knowledge about these associations or NGOs. On the other hand, the "assistentialist" connotations conferred on such institutions often produce feelings of being somehow "stigmatized" when turning towards them — an attitude that is promoted by the often-criticized "charity" approach explicitly used by several NGOs of Catholic orientation (Dietz & El-Shohoumi 2005). Similar apprehensive attitudes are expressed concerning social services offered by the Spanish welfare system. Apart from those women who have never heard of the existence of such services, many female migrants deploy strategies of simply ignoring and/or explicitly avoiding them. According to one social worker's opinion, this

resistance stems from the "illegal" immigrants' fear that these public institutions will denounce and deport them.

While many Muslim women criticize the frequent NGO practice of "diverting" them from one organization or institution to another, NGOs are also critical of interacting and cooperating with Muslim women's groups and associations due to the lack of stability, continuity, and accountability in the daily operations of these organizations. In the opinion of the director of the Albayzín neighborhood Community Social Services Centre, the Muslim communities' organizational diversity prevents them from having a stronger impact on local issues. Apart from internal divisions and sectarianism, the main distinction that presently divides Muslims in Spain is between migrants from Muslim societies of origin and local Muslim converts. Due to their different approaches to and perception of Islam noted above, most converts implicitly distance themselves from the Maghrebin immigrants. In fact, these converts are the only Muslim group that succeeded in building up strong and stable, although rather small communities. This difference seems to be related to the process of conversion itself, which takes place not only as a personal revelation, but also in parallel as a "voyage" of initiation into the midst of a community of already-initiated fellow travelers. Besides, the strength of the convert communities is also the result of the necessity of compensating for one's own experience of being uprooted from immediate family, relatives, and other social relations that existed before conversion.

Between Gender, Religion and Ethnicity: Experiences of Discrimination and Racism

Many Muslim women report discriminatory attitudes in the local and personal contexts of their immediate neighborhoods. As one example, overt or subtle rejection is experienced when addressing the initial challenge of renting an apartment. According to public institutions and NGOs, the major factor preventing migrant families from renting a well-equipped apartment is the impossibility of paying simultaneously the first month's rent and the deposit. Due to this and to the stereotypical opinion that Moroccan immigrants "don't clean" and "leave apartments in a mess", real-estate owners feel very insecure when dealing with migrant people. In addition to the financial factor, public institutions also perceive "cultural differences" as a source of "misunderstandings" between local owners and immigrant tenants. When sharing a flat, Moroccan students are said to "lack tolerance" towards fellow Spanish students, particularly regarding alcohol, diet, and sexual habits. Another supposedly "cultural" factor is their refusal to accept the local urban habit of many older people who want to rent them a room in their flat, but who share the flat with their domestic animals.

From the point of view of all the Muslim women who were interviewed, these obstacles do not seem to be completely "culture"-based or economically motivated, but related to a generalized, historically-rooted islamophobia. The fear of, and skepticism towards, their ethnic and religious "otherness" are experienced by Muslim women in the neighbourhood as being the main sites of daily interaction with members of the majority society. It is in these places where converts and immigrants alike feel permanently observed and scrutinized. They become bored and tired of "proving" to their neighbors through their day-to-day behavior that they are "different" from the general prejudices leveled against them. This permanent requirement of arguing and justifying one's "difference" vis-à-vis the mainstream society — according to an Algerian woman — often leads to self-restricting leisure activities, and relating socially solely with other Muslim women or families instead of striving for "integration" into the social networks of their non-Muslim Spanish neighbors. Meanwhile, in the perception of the majority society and its institutions, this phenomenon of self-isolation is seen as an undesirable enclosure and "self-ghettoisation".

In the view of many women, discrimination, which fundamentally takes place on a personal and not on an institutional level, may range from mere joking and stereotyping experienced in daily interactions to legal distinctions between Spaniards and aliens, and finally to overtly racist threats or attacks. For several interviewees, it is not sufficient to explain the discriminatory experiences they are currently suffering by reference to the host society's simple ignorance about the immigrants' region or culture of origin. In particular, the converts stress the negative impact of the Spanish mass media in producing a generally negative and often false picture of the Muslim-Arab world, full of religious, phenotypical, culture-related as well as gender-related stereotypes, which inevitably guide the perceptions and interactions of the local majority society. Many women express how fed up, despondent, and insulted they feel when always having to counter allusions to "*machista* Muslim men" and "submissive Muslim women", to the "hideousness" of Arab men and the "lasciviousness and eroticism of Arab belly-dancers". They are further angered by having to answer explicit questions about the supposed customs of "Arab revenge and blood-feuds", or even about the strangely cultivated rumor according to which "the Arabs" are trying to reconquer the "Spanish shores" by sending their pregnant women illegally to the peninsula offering them money for giving birth to "so many *moritos*". The converts, however, who do perceive institutional and structural forms of discrimination, describe these attitudes and questions not as mere expressions of stereotypes, but as new forms of reproducing structurally rooted historical

phobias. Since to the converts' mind a mono-cultural and mono-religious core persists inside the supposedly secular and "neutral" Spanish public institutions, conversion to Islam is treated as an act of "disloyalty" and "national betrayal".

Many interviewees perceive this permanent confusion between national, ethnic, and religious dimensions of identification throughout the Spanish majority society's stigmatized and essentialized view of "the other" as the main obstacle to establishing and maintaining a genuine intercultural dialogue. In order to systematize the often overlapping and intertwined areas and sources of discriminatory attitudes and practices, a double distinction will be made between exogenous versus endogenous forms of discrimination (i.e. between discriminatory attitudes whose principal sources are situated outside or inside the Muslim women's own community); and between ethno-religiously motivated versus gender-based discrimination.

On the level of exogenous forms of ethno-religious discrimination, our data show at least five dimensions of distinction, inequality and supposed superiority, which are combined thematically in the following stereotypes against Muslim women:

- the religious and/or "civilizational" division between Muslims and Christians/Catholics, i.e. between "Orient" and "Occident" ;
- the ethnic distinction between "Arabs" and "Castilians", which reflects historical connotations of "them" and "us" (Stallaert, 1998);
- the radicalized perception of a supposed phenotypical bipolarity between "non-Whites" — either "Semites" or "Blacks" - and "Whites" (Hall, 1996);
- the national and citizenship-based distinction between "aliens" or "non-Spaniards" and "Spaniards" or "nationals", already codified in the Spanish Constitution (Agrela & Gil Araujo, 2005); and
- the dividing line drawn by public opinion between "immigrant" minority communities, who are supposed to be problematic per se, and the "sedentary" host majority society in charge of solving these migration-related problems (Dietz & El Shohoumi, 2005).

The blurring of distinctions between the religious and the ethno-cultural dimensions of being a "Muslim-Arab-Maghrebin" woman are also suffered by interviewees inside their newly-emerging communities, where endogenous forces may also use Islam as an ethnic marker vis-à-vis the host society. As a result, incipient minority communities are increasingly "ethnicized" from within as well as from without (Rosón Lorente, 2005). In the case of Muslim women, this frequently means that particular cultural and geographically limited traits, customs and traditions — be they of Arab, Amazigh or other ethnic origin — are transmitted and acquired as if they formed part of Islam as such (Jawad, 1998). According to a Pakistani woman, who refuses the simplistic identification of one particular cultural horizon with the supposedly global legacy of Islam, "Religion is an easy argument and simply a way of controlling women."

Exogenous forms of gender-based discrimination have been documented several times in the course of our study and are mainly based on stereotypes about Muslim-cum-Arab men and women, which are shaped by a profound dividing line between the sexes. Whereas Muslim-Arab men are stigmatized as potentially violent, criminal and vindictive, Muslim-Arab women are supposed to be inherently ambiguous. Behind the "mask" of the headscarf, lasciviousness and potential promiscuity are suspected from the sexist perspective of the Spanish male.

Nevertheless, several Muslim women do define certain rules and practices, seen as "female" by the male members of their own migrant community, as endogenous forms of gender-based discrimination. The younger Moroccan interviewees criticize the unequal treatment, inferior educational opportunities, and lack of personal freedom they suffered during their adolescence, compared to their brothers. In general, the women acknowledging the existence of discriminatory practices — in their country of origin or inside their current minority community in the diaspora — agree that the Islamic religion is not to blame for such practices. They believe that the interpretive application of Islamic traditions and gender-biased interpretation of the Holy Quran by male Muslims are the sources of the problem (Jawad, 1998). Converts often take a similar view, their tendency to dissociate Islam from Muslim countries, examined above, is a constitutive part of the converts' religious identity. Finally, convert as well as migrant women concur in identifying male interests as construing forces that have always (also in several other different religions and cultures) ended up "manipulating" and re-interpreting an original distinction of gender-differentiated role-sets, which per se were not meant to be discriminatory, but have become over the course of time de facto sources of gender-related discrimination. Accordingly, "the problem of women in Islam is not a religious but a social issue - i.e. religion being used by a patriarchal society" (Martín Muñoz, 1999, p. 13).

Societal Responses and Institutional Perspectives

Finally, these experiences of discriminatory practices are contrasted, on the one hand, with official public definitions of and attitudes towards discrimination, and on the other hand, with the awareness of ethno-religious dis-

crimination and gender-based exclusion as shown by the NGOs and public institutions. Following Article 14 in the section on "Rights and Liberties" of the Spanish Constitution, which limits legal equality to those with Spanish citizenship, and Article 16, where "the ideological, religious, and cult-related freedom of the individuals and communities" is guaranteed,[3] there is neither a particular official definition of discrimination and anti-discrimination currently existing in Spain, nor are there distinctive agencies or institutions dedicated to the implementation of anti-discrimination measures. The debate on the necessity of introducing clearly defined anti-discrimination issues in Spanish legislation itself, as has already been accomplished in other EU member states, is only just beginning.[4]

Many Spanish organizations and institutions do not share the differentiated and interrelated perceptions of exogenous and endogenous discriminatory experiences, practices and attitudes, which in the view of Muslim women mutually reinforce each other. Depending on their governmental or non-governmental nature as well as on their Muslim or non-Muslim protagonists, each of these institutional actors tends to perceive only one aspect, source, or dimension of the multi-level phenomenon of discrimination against Muslim women. The representative of the Moroccan immigrant department of the Spanish *Unión General de Trabajadores* even argues that men, not women, are the sector (group) most discriminated against within the migrant population, since they have more difficulty in finding employment than women. In his view, also shared by most of the male-dominated immigrant associations, discrimination is primarily only inflicted exogenously on Muslims and/or migrants by the host society; furthermore, this external form of discrimination is racist, not sexist in nature. Contrary to this perspective, the Spanish public institutions dealing with migrant and/or Muslim communities tend to emphasize only the internal and supposedly "culture-specific" gender-based discrimination of Muslim women. In this official view, discrimination does not produce social exclusion, but, on the contrary, it is social enclosure and self-ghettoization which generate external rejection. While racist attitudes towards the long-established Spanish Roma communities, but not towards the small minority of Muslim migrants, are acknowledged by the host society, representatives of public institutions generally deny any significant presence of racist or islamophobic attitudes inside their organizations. Paradoxically, the same interviewees cling to the same above-mentioned stereotypes about the submissive, passive Muslim woman, "permanently producing children", which is a discriminatory view combining islamophobic and arabophobic elements.

The perspective of Spanish NGOs dealing directly with migrant populations is more nuanced. Contrary to the public institutions, all NGOs admit that exogenous discrimination against migrant and/or Muslim women does exist and on a rather large scale. The sources of this discrimination are perceived to be mainly of legal and political origins. Migrant Muslim women are exposed to legal discrimination when they are deprived of basic citizenship rights, like voting and social service benefits. Thus, migration and citizenship, not gender or religion, are the initial sources of Spanish discrimination faced by Muslim women. The second most important and distinctive source of discrimination appears to be internally motivated within Islam itself. Reflecting the state institutional perspective, NGOs identify the unequal treatment of women both in Muslim countries and in Islam as a major source of gender-based discrimination.

Conclusions

Even prior to the events of September 11, 2001, Huntington's evidently accurate prophecy of a "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1996) was increasingly becoming an attractive and often cited framework for the debate not only on international relations, but also on Muslim immigrants and integration policies throughout Europe. As briefly sketched above with respect to the issue of Muslim women, a scenario of increasingly visible and explicit islamophobia, arabophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes, which has been existing implicitly before, has been re-strengthened in Spain. The September 11 attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. and the March 11 bombings in Madrid have only accentuated this phenomenon.

Through the comparison of the experiences expressed by Muslim women themselves, on the one hand, and by their Spanish institutional counterparts on the other, the complexity of the Muslim woman's particular life-world as part of an emerging minority community inside a non-Muslim environment has become evident. For the Spanish case, this complexity results from a "double dichotomy" to which not only the Muslim women and their male partners but also the Spanish society and its institutional framework are exposed: firstly, the dichotomy of "oriental" religiosity versus "Western" secularism; secondly, the dichotomy of Christian-Castilian versus Muslim-Arab ethno-religious categories (Dietz in press).

As the institutional representatives frequently state, the "return of Islam" to the Iberian Peninsula challenges the process of secularization which the Spanish state and society are currently undergoing. In this perspective, a fundamental contradiction seems to reside in the relation between an all-encompassing, comprehensive world-view (formerly Catholicism, currently Islam) on the one hand, and Western meta-religious laicism, on the other. This perspective, however, is constantly challenged by an ancient rivalry which has been fundamental to the historical emergence and shaping of Spanish national identity, and which persists today inside the Spanish majority society and culture: the supposed antagonism between Islam, perceived as "Arab" or "Moorish", and Christianity, in general, and Catholicism, in particular, identified with the predominantly Castilian ethnicity. The resulting ethnic, intercultural and/or inter-religious conflicts analyzed above have a negative impact particularly on Muslim women. These conflicts have a negative impact on their daily experiences precisely at the moment when these first generation Muslim women migrants are establishing their own communities, struggling for their positions and networks inside a non-Muslim host context. As reflected in the women's experiences of both exogenous and endogenous forms of discrimination, ethnicized perceptions of religious and cultural otherness, and gender-based tendencies of female exclusion and victimization, mutually reinforce each other and end up restricting the development of flourishing intercultural life-worlds in the midst of the multicultural legacy of Al-Andalus.

Endnotes

1. A larger version of this article originally has been published in Studi Emigrazione / Migration Studies, Vol. 39 Nº 145, pp. 77-106, Rome 2000; cf. also Dietz & El-Shohoumi (2005).
2. For a sketch of this conflict, as it has manifested itself in different European countries, see Verlot (1996); El Guindi (1999) presents the evolution and diversity of country-of-origin interpretations and uses of veiling.
3. Nevertheless, in the same article, public institutions are obliged to "consider the religious beliefs of the Spanish society", and in this context Catholicism is explicitly mentioned; for details, cf. Dietz (in press).
4. The recent approval of a directive issued by the Commission of the European Union (Directive 2000/53/EC) and aimed at harmonizing the very heterogeneous national legislations of the member states on equal treatment on the basis of race and ethnic origin will force Spanish legislation to develop its own legal framework on racism, xenophobia, and ethnic, racial, and religiously motivated discrimination (Dietz (in press).

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Arabs, Copts, Egyptians, Americans

An Exploration of Identity in the Diaspora

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"Coptic," "Christian," "Orthodox," "Egyptian," "American," "North African": All of these words describe my identity, some more than others. As a Coptic Orthodox Egyptian American woman, one word, "Arab," is particularly problematic. Many Copts, including some of my dearest friends, vehemently deny the "Arab" label. The Copts, they say, are not Arabs, but descendents of the Pharaohs. Only Egyptian Muslims can call themselves Arab. The Egyptians who remained Christian after the Islamic invasion in the seventh century, the Copts, were not Arab. This idea was further reinforced when I read Leila Ahmed's memoir *A Border Passage*, and discovered that even some Egyptian Muslims reject the Arab identity.

> But how else might Egyptians define themselves, if not as Arab? Were Egypt not hostage, as it has been in our time, to a politics that so firmly fixes its identity as Arab, we might easily see that, on the basis of the country's history and geography, there are in fact quite a number of other ways of conceiving of Egyptian identity (Ahmad, 2000, p. 11).

Empowered by the possibility of different ways of understanding Egyptian identity, I continued to hold fast to the sentiment that "I am not Arab", though in recent years, through my work in grassroots international development, I have begun to understand "Arab" as a geopolitical linguistic appellation, rather than a religious or ethnic designation. I started to tolerate the label, aware that it is usually being used to talk about the populations from the Middle East and North Africa. However, I have become less vehement about rejecting the "Arab" label mainly because I have grown weary of explaining why.

Nonetheless, I flinch when even knowledgeable presenters at policy and academic conferences conflate the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" for convenience sake, only occasionally giving a cursory mention to the millions of Christians living in the Middle East and North Africa (if I am lucky that day), but thereafter talking about the region as if it were entirely made up of Muslim adherents. I often find myself constructing questions that force presenters to acknowledge the existence of the Christian minority in the region. How can I accept the use of "Arab" as a descriptive term for my identity, when so many others use it to describe a group of which I am not a member?

Identity, especially amongst diaspora communities, is a living concept, defined as much by individuals' and communities' perceptions of themselves as they are by politics, religion, history, and anthropology. Thus, rather than exploring this issue through research into the history of Arab nationalism in Egypt or the Copts in Egypt, I decided to carry out some action research among my various Egyptian American friends and acquaintances. Using email, I posed several questions focused on how they understand their identities as Egyptian Americans in June and July 2006. My questions asked about their understanding of an "Arab" identity, a "Coptic" identity, a connection with ancient Egyptian roots, and how these various identities affect their lives as Egyptians living in America.

Albeit not a random or representative sample,[1] I received 24 responses from the approximately 30 friends I contacted. The insightfulness and passion of the responses took me by surprise. Some responded by answering each question thoroughly; others by writing an essay about the topic, touching upon the issues I raised in my questions. Clearly, many Egyptian Americans wrestle with these identity questions and look for opportunities to discuss them. Almost all agreed that I could quote them and use their full names, but others requested anonymity. For the sake of consistency, I will use initials throughout.

Among the 24 Egyptian American respondents, there were 17 Christian females, three Christian males, two Muslim females, and two Muslim males. The respondents came from various parts of the U.S. Most lived in the Washington, D.C. area, others in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Illinois. Their ages ranged from 21 - 45 years old, with the majority between the ages of 25 and 35. All the respondents had a university education or higher. All the Christian respondents were members of the Coptic Orthodox Church and active participants in their local churches in the U.S. Most of the Christian respondents, and all the Muslim respondents, are active participants in Egyptian American community life, members or leaders of such organizations as the Egyptian American Alliance for Youth, the Egyptian American Cultural Association, and the Alliance of Egyptian Americans.

I present their responses in this essay as part of an ongoing discussion about Coptic, Arab, and Egyptian identity in the diaspora. My analysis organizes the responses based on the idea of an "Arab" identity, a "Coptic" identity, "ancient Egyptian" roots, and finally, for the female respondents, the experience of living out this mosaic of identities in the diaspora. Since little action research has been published on this topic, this essay presents both an engaging discussion and a call for further exploration of Egyptian diaspora identities in the U.S.[2]

An Arab Identity?

"As an Egyptian, how do you identify with the word 'Arab'?" I asked this to all the respondents, whose answers were divided in half between those who do not accept the term "Arab" as part of their identity (12 respondents), and those who accept it completely or with a modified definition of the term (12 respondents). Those who rejected "Arab" included nine Christian females, one Muslim female, and one Christian male. Those who accepted "Arab" included seven Christian females, one Muslim female, one Coptic male, and one Muslim male.

Most of the respondents who identified with the term "Arab" identified with it in terms of a shared language and culture that encompassed history, food, music, and so on. "I speak the language and share history with the Arabs," S.H., a Christian female, wrote, "The people that had to change their religion under oppression of the Arab rul[ers] are my people and are Egyptians" (June 21, 2006).

M.Y., also a Christian female, wrote,

> Both Copts and Muslims share the common Arab heritage. They are entertained with the same films, eat the same food, laugh at the same jokes, speak the same language, so I have a hard time separating modern day Copts from the Arab diaspora simply because Copts live an 'Arab' life, but the only difference is the religion (June 22, 2006).

The religious connotations associated with the word "Arab" complicate this term. M.G., a Christian female who rejects the word "Arab," noted that she has no problem being identified with other Arab Christians in the Middle East — in other words, while she rejected the word "Arab", she accepts this term if it identifies her with the Middle East Christian minority (June 23, 2006).

Establishing a connection with other Arabic-speaking diaspora members is thus key to Egyptian Americans in identifying with the word "Arab". M.E., a female Muslim, wrote,

> There were few Egyptian-American families around while I was growing up in Tucson, Arizona, leaving me with a feeling of utter isolation ... Since there weren't a lot of Egyptians with which I could identify, I had to cling on to the other 'Arabs' for a sense of community and belonging.

M.E. went on to question the dictionary.com definition of "Arab", and then constructed her own meaning: "Descendents of Arabic-speaking countries in North Africa and the Middle East who identify with a common cultural experience through music, dance, food, and language" (June 26, 2006).

H.E., however, did not define "Arab" in this way. She defined it as "those who live in the Arabian peninsula", and wrote, "I am a Muslim Egyptian and I do not consider

myself Arab" (June 25, 2006). H.E.'s perspective is interesting when placed in contrast with the Egyptian Christians who did not identify with the word "Arab".

To all the respondents, I asked, "How do you feel when you are categorized by others as an Arab in different contexts?" M.H., a Christian female, wrote, "It's insulting to be called something you are not and even more insulting when others insist you are" (June 28, 2006). Similarly, C.B., a Christian female who accepts the word Arab if it denotes modern Egyptian society, wrote, "People often confuse 'Arab' with 'Muslim', and I take umbrage to that because my Christian identity is most important to me" (July 1, 2006). The conflation of the term "Arab" with "Muslim" is the reason why all the Christian respondents rejected identification with this term. Some also further rejected it because of the "terrorist" stereotype associated with the word "Arab", especially after September 11, 2001.

J.Z.'s words reflect some of the sentiments I mentioned earlier on in this essay. "I am not the one who is excluding myself from being an Arab," she wrote. "The Arabs are the ones who excluded me from being an Arab when they based the Arabic nationalism on religion and language" (June 23, 2006). Thus, while some Egyptian Christians and Muslims accept the term "Arab" because of how it connects them to different members of the Middle Eastern diaspora community, others reject it because they see that it is actually a term of exclusion.

Many of the Christian respondents who identified with the word "Arab" indicated that they felt they were alone in this sense of identity. Their words implied a general perception that the Coptic community in the U.S. overall rejects an "Arab" identity. "One of the reasons I feel disenfranchised from the church," S.H. wrote, "is how they separate themselves from the Arab world and act like they could not care less!" (June 21, 2006). Here, even someone who is "included" in the Coptic community by being a Christian feels "excluded" because of her perception that this community rejects an Arab identification. However, the diversity of opinion within the responses I received indicates that this perception may be as much a stereotype of the Coptic community as the stereotype that all Arabs are Muslims.

A Coptic Identity?

Just as I asked all the Egyptian American respondents about their identification with the word "Arab", I also asked them about their identification with the word "Copt". While all the Christian respondents, unsurprisingly, identified wholeheartedly with this word, what was surprising was that three out of the four Muslim respondents identified with this word as well. With such a small number of respondents, it cannot be assumed that this reflects on the general Egyptian-American Muslim population, but it raises the possibility that just as "Arab" does not necessarily mean Muslim, so "Coptic" may not necessarily mean Christian.

S.E., a male Egyptian Muslim, wrote:

> First … just hearing the word [Copt] is like hearing one of those words that only relate to Egypt or its people or my ancestry. Words like Pharaoh, Nile, or Felookah (Egyptian sailing boat). Secondly, I do believe that all Egyptians, my ancestors, at some point of history were Copts. Now, a Copt to me means fellow Egyptian who only has a different faith. Otherwise, all other identities of a Copt are (should be) very similar to mine. In addition to all this, my parents used to teach art and art history … I would often go with them and their students to the Coptic museum in Old Cairo and to the "Fayoum Portraits" museum in Fayoum; both museums record the Coptic heritage in Egypt. Also, my father once took my sister, myself, and two other family friends' kids to visit the Anba Bishoi Monastery in Wadi Elnatroun. It was a great visit that I will never forget. It happened to be on the first day of Ramadan of that year. They treated us as special guests … my point is that the word Copt or Coptic means a mixture of all these things to me (June 24, 2006).

In the above email, S.E. made his connection to the word "Copt" to the influence of the Coptic language on Egyptian colloquial Arabic,[3] to a part of his ancestry, to the artistic and historical heritage of the Coptic period in Egypt, and to the living connection he felt when he and his family visited one of the famous Coptic monasteries in Egypt.

M.E., a female Egyptian Muslim (also quoted in the previous section), identifies with the word "Copt" for a different reason than S.E. does. She wrote:

> I have a relationship with the word "Copt" because of my affection for Coptic Christian Egyptians, not because of the word's original meaning. In spite of our religious differences, I still greatly identify with our common experiences … I appreciate Copts to such a deep level because I identify with their experience of being the minority religious group in Egypt as I am a member of a Muslim community living in the United States (June 26, 2006).

The word "Copt" originally meant "Egyptian". It is derived from the Arabic word for Egypt, "Dar Al-Qibt" (home of the Copts), which came from the Greek word for Egypt, "Aigyptios," which came from the Pharaonic word, "Hikaptah" (house of the ka, the temple of one of the gods of Pharaonic Egypt) (Kamil, 2002). Due to the modern use of the word "Copt" to mean an Egyptian Christian, it is unknown how many Egyptians are aware of this history. While S.E.'s comments indicate this knowledge and a connection with this Coptic ancestry, M.E. has a closer connection with the minority status of the Copts in Egypt, comparing it with her minority status as a Muslim in the U.S. However, in the case of both S.E. and M.E., while there was an identification and affinity with the word "Copt", it was very clear that modern use of the word signifies Egyptian Christians.[4]

With the exception of three Christian females, all of the Christian respondents defined and identified with the word "Copt" as it relates to being an Egyptian Christian, and did not include Egyptian Muslims in that definition. While most of the Christians acknowledged that at one point, "Copt" did mean just "Egyptian", they identified with the word in its modern definition only, "Egyptian Christian." "When I say I am Coptic", wrote M.I., a Christian female, "I am referring to my faith, being a Coptic Orthodox Christian" (June 22, 2006). Similarly, M.G., a Christian female mentioned in the previous section, wrote,

> Copt as simply Egyptian is meaningless to me apart from the Christian aspect. Maybe it would be more correct for me to consider Egyptian Muslims 'Copt', but I do not and I don't think they would welcome that (June 23, 2006).

D.G., a Christian female, separates "Arab" culture from "Coptic" culture.

> Although Arab [sic] and its language, traditions, etc. has become a part of our Coptic culture — I still feel that we have tried to preserve as much of our Coptic culture as possible and that has only happened through our Church — where the Coptic music, hymns, and traditions are still preserved (June 28, 2006).

While D.G. talked about the existence of a distinct Coptic culture, with language, music, and other traditions separate from that of Arab culture, she pointed to the fact that the only way it is preserved today is through the Coptic Orthodox Church, which still uses the language in its services and the music in its hymns. Although based on a related musical tradition, Coptic Church music is still quite different from Arabic music.

M.Y., a Christian female, wrote that because the culture is only preserved through the church, it is hard to say that she is culturally Coptic:

> …How many Copts go around speaking with the language of the Pharaohs outside of the Coptic language that is used mainly during liturgies … I have a difficult time expressing myself as a Coptic American because I have been exposed to the Coptic church through a religious sense. I mean when was the last time someone cooked for me a 'Coptic Dish'? (June 22, 2006).

M.Y. preferred to refer to herself as an Egyptian American, rather than a Coptic American or an Arab American. However, she concluded her email by writing that above all this, she classifies herself as a Christian first.

C.B., a female Christian respondent, took this concept a step further in her email:

> As a Copt born in the U.S., I only consider myself Egyptian insofar as it is the nationality of my parents and my family for several generations. Being a Coptic Christian is my true identity — a timeless identity that crosses all political, cultural, national, linguistic, and ethnic boundaries. I relate being a Copt much more to the concept of being Christian than being Egyptian — for we have so many Copts who are not Egyptian (July 1, 2006).

The "Copts who are not Egyptian" that C.B. refers to at the end of this quote are non-Egyptian Americans who have become official members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. These non-Egyptians participate in all the worship and rites of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Some joined the church through marriage to an Egyptian Christian; others learned about the church one way or another and decided to join it. When asked about their religion, some of these Americans who joined the Coptic church say they are "Coptic" or "Coptic Orthodox". This represents an entirely different facet to this Coptic identity question in the U.S. For C.B., this phenomena indicates that her Coptic Christian identity can transcend the history and culture it came from, and has evolved into an identity that even non-Egyptians can claim for themselves.

Descendents of Pharaohs?

The idea that the Copts of Egypt are the direct descendents of the ancient Egyptians, without any mingling with the Arab invaders from the Persian Gulf is at least a century old. Elizabeth Oram's unpublished dissertation (2004) traces this idea that the Copts are the "Sons of the Pharaohs" back to at least the British colonial period, when the phrase was often used to describe the Copts in European travel writings, anthropological studies, and Egyptology studies during the early twentieth century. While it is not known when the Copts began referring to themselves in this way, it is a common phrase used by Egyptian Christians, especially those in the diaspora.

Out of the 20 Egyptian Christian respondents, 19 had heard about this description of the Copts. I asked them the question, "Many Coptic Christian Egyptians insist that they 'are not Arab', but are the 'descendents of the Pharaohs, the original Egyptians'. Do you fall into this category?" Seven of the respondents, five female and two male, said "yes", they do fall into this category. P.F., a Christian male, wrote, "… Coptic Christians by circumstances of history were isolated

and less likely to marry with other groups [and] as a result [are] probably closer in blood to the ancient Egyptians" (June 28, 2006).

However, nine of the Christian respondents had mixed feelings about this phrase, "descendents of the Pharaohs, the original Egyptians", acknowledging that this is a difficult statement to prove due to the numerous invasions of Egypt throughout history, and their own limited knowledge of their direct lineages. Of these nine respondents, some acknowledged that there may be some truth to the idea, but were uncomfortable with claiming a sort of "ethnic supremacy". Four of the Christian respondents completely rejected this phrase, believing it to be ridiculous at best, or racist at worst.

M.I., a female, wrote, "I have heard my parents say that. Truthfully, I only know my lineage up to five generations on my father's side and three generations on my mother's side." (June 22, 2006). While M.I. acknowledged that she cannot directly trace her family's lineage to the ancient Egyptians, D.F. pointed out that there is no way to know if other cultures, including British, French, and Turkish, were mixed into this lineage (June 22, 2006).

E.Y., female, also noted that she probably has some French and Lebanese in her heritage, and wrote, "It's probably naïve to think that there's 'no Arab' in my background." She also wrote:

> It's a pretty cool concept to think that you're related to greatness (the designers of the pyramids, highly skilled mathematicians, early surgeons, etc.) or royalty. It's interesting to me that no one thinks of themselves as a descendent of Pharaoh's subjects, which in my mind is the more logical scenario (June 27, 2006).

M.I., quoted above, also thought it was "cool" to say that one is a descendent of the Pharaohs. S.S., a male, questioned how "cool" it is to make this claim:

> If most people knew the complete history of the Pharaohs, I am not sure if they would want to identify themselves with them. Yes, they were an advanced culture in terms of science, art, and superior architecture, however, their history is full of corruption, murder, vanity, black magic, and incest (July 2, 2006).

M.A., a female, was similarly ambivalent towards this identification.

> … I feel it's a little derogatory to say that only Coptic Christians are true Egyptians, perhaps because even Coptic Christians share so little in common with ancient Egyptians; (although I do often feel that connection when I sing in Coptic, or hear about our other traditions that have close parallels with ancient Egyptian practices)" (June 25, 2006).

M.A. was not the only respondent to comment that limiting ancient Egyptian ancestry to the Christians of Egypt is derogatory. J.Z. also rejected this ancestry idea:

> … I do not believe in this nonsense. Egypt is the land of many, many, many invasions … Whether it was a Muslim, British, Turkish or Roman invader, everyone at some point intermarried and thus I highly doubt there is any pure descendent of Pharaohs left … I find no pride in being a "pure descendent of the Pharaohs". These people were idol worshipers, they were science and math geniuses who were ignorant pagans. All Egyptians, my Muslim geography professor, my Muslim [doorman door attendant], my Christian math teacher are all one way or another descendents of the Pharaohs. Arguing a purity of blood issue, if such argument was to hold, is in my opinion a covert form of racism (June 23, 2006).

Like S.S., J.Z. found more to dislike about claiming a unique ancient Egyptian ancestry than there was "cool" about it.

Out of the 24 total respondents, only three were not familiar with the "descendents of the ancient Egyptians" idea. One was a Christian respondent, and the other two were Muslim respondents. S.E. was one of the Muslim respondents who had not heard a Copt make this statement, and his response agreed with J.Z. that all modern Egyptians have some ancient Egyptian ancestry. "Copts probably have less … mixture than other Egyptians and have more direct ancestry. But all Egyptians have that ancient ancestry" (June 25, 2006).

These various responses about ancient Egyptian ancestry and the assumptions about how the "native" Egyptians intermarried or culturally mixed with various invaders for centuries indicates a dearth of real historical understanding of what has happened to the Christians and to Egyptian culture since the seventh century, after the Arab invasion. What Egyptians believe about their ancestry now is thus informed by the history of colonization, and mostly European studies of Egypt, with few, if any, translated primary sources from Egyptians themselves during that period.

Coptic Orthodox Egyptian American Woman

There is an additional gender dimension to being an Egyptian American. To explore this dimension, I asked the female respondents, "How does the additional identity issue of being a female Egyptian/Coptic/Arab living outside of Egypt play into your life?" Nine of the respondents, all Christian, directly addressed the female aspect of their identities. They discussed it in terms of their livelihoods, their church volunteer work, and their experiences as minorities in the U.S. Most discussed the freedom they have to affirm the various aspects of their identities openly living in the diaspora versus living in Egypt.

D.F.'s response addressed some of the feelings of alienation through being a "triple" minority.

> Having grown up in the States, I felt as though I related much more to my Egyptian side, however, evidently during my recent trip to Egypt, I realized I was as much a foreigner in Egypt as I am in the States. It is definitely difficult to cope with at times; however, you learn that you are always going to be different from everyone no matter what — being a minority (female) of a minority (Coptic Orthodox Christian) of a minority (Egyptian) in the States (June 22, 2006).

D.S.'s response also discusses a sense of being a minority. In this case, she felt that her English language skills make her a minority in her own church.

> As one of the few native-English speakers in my church, I was tasked with serving the younger generations whom the older immigrants could not connect with. Till this day, there aren't any female servants in my church who are native English speakers who are comfortable serving and helping high school and college age youth. This drought of female Copts who are active in their community is an added stress for all those who serve this age group (July 3, 2006).

D.S.'s words touch on a challenge that many Coptic Orthodox churches in the U.S. face as they try to reach out to second and third generation Coptic children and youth. Because the first wave of Coptic immigration to the U.S. occurred in the mid-twentieth century (El-Badry, 2006), the adults who are active in the churches are often not native speakers of English and thus find communicating with the younger generations more challenging. Some churches do face the "drought" of female native English speakers that D.S. refers to, but others have a larger number of female Copts who are active in their church community.

D.G., C.B., and S.H. are three such female Copts, and their responses all talked about how much they enjoy the freedom to live out their female and Christian identities. D.G. wrote:

> I definitely feel like I have more opportunities in the States. I know it (from what I hear from family) is discriminatory against Christians and hard for women in Egypt so I am thankful that I have much more of a voice here and freedom to choose a career how I want and freedom to worship and evangelize (June 28, 2006).

Similarly, C.B. wrote, "As a woman, I thank God for the freedom I have living outside the Arab world and living outside Egypt. In Egypt, I did not see many instances of women being able to find their voice in society, in politics, in cultural affairs" (July 1, 2006). S.H. wrote, "I am so proud to call myself Egyptian and even more proud to say that I am Coptic Orthodox. I feel it is easier to say that and not feel scared when living outside of Egypt" (July 10, 2006).

The stereotype that all women, and particularly minority Christian women, are living in constant fear and oppression is one that A.E. works to break by living out her identity in the U.S. She wrote, "Being a woman from Egypt … unconsciously I want to prove to people around me that there are women in Egypt who are modern, not veiled, educated and not submissive to their husbands" (June 27, 2006).

Conclusion

In the mid-winter 2006 issue of the self-published journal *Photo X Quarterly*, Sally Bishai wrote about the Fourth International Coptic Conference, which convened in June 19-21, 2006 in Newark, NJ. This conference gathered many Coptic and human rights leaders, and was entitled "Religious Freedom of Christian Minorities in the Middle East." During the coffee breaks, she wrote, one of the discussions centered around the question of "What is a Copt, anyway?" The varied viewpoints she quoted reflect the diversity of opinions that I have quoted in this article. Some believed all Egyptians are Copts, others that only Egyptian Christians are Copts, and one believed that it referred to the religion of the ancient Egyptians. "Interesting viewpoints, all," she writes, "but I must confess that I am no closer to having formed an opinion on the matter than I was last week" (Bishai, 2006, p. 3).

While I must admit that I have also not formed a definitive opinion on the question of an Arab, Coptic, Egyptian, American identity, I have drawn a few conclusions. First, an "Arab" identity remains just as complex and nebulous for Egyptians, both Christian and Muslim, as it has been since Ahmed wrote her memoir. It is an identity that is rejected by those who feel excluded by it (based on the stereotype that all Arabs are Muslim), rejected by those who feel strongly that their Egyptian identity supersedes it, and accepted, either wholly or in part, by those who believe it connects them to a larger community in Egypt and outside of Egypt.

Second, the Coptic identity is perceived as specifically an Egyptian Christian identity, even for those Egyptian Muslims who embrace a Coptic ancestry or a common minority experience with the Copts in the U.S. In the U.S., the Coptic identity has further evolved to possibly include non-Egyptians who join the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Third, in order not to impose on other Egyptians the sense of exclusion that Copts sense when Arabs are stereotyped as being all Muslim, I believe that Copts in the diaspora need to be careful about the claim that they are the direct descendents of the ancient Egyptians, possibly excluding other Egyptians from this heritage, and

creating more division that as a minority, would only create more exclusion for them. The majority of the Egyptian Christian respondents did understand that Egyptian Christian ancestry is probably just as diverse as Egyptian Muslim ancestry. Thus, a direct lineage to the Pharaohs should not be assumed by anyone, although a common heritage from a great and not so great civilization can be claimed in one way or another by all Egyptians.

Finally, I concur with the opinions expressed by the Egyptian American Christian women about how they live out their identities in the U.S. My frequent travels between the U.S. and Egypt have allowed me to spend large amounts of time with young Egyptian women, Christian and Muslim. I have concluded that while these young women do face challenges in Egypt that they would not face in the U.S., they also display an inspiring amount of creativity, courage, and empowerment. However, because of the challenges they face, it is much more difficult for them to live out their identities contrary to the stereotypes. I agree with A.E. that it is important to break stereotypes about Egyptian women while living out my identity in the U.S.

Thus, by fully living out my identity as a Coptic Orthodox Christian Egyptian American woman and embracing all those aspects of who I am, I break many stereotypes. I break the stereotype that all Egyptian women are oppressed. I break the stereotype that all Arabs are Muslim, and that all Egyptians are Arabs. I break the stereotype among Egyptians in Egypt that all Americans live "immoral" lives. I am no longer weary of explaining "why I am not Arab", as I mentioned in the beginning of this essay. I am now energized to talk about the multiple aspects of who I am, rich with history and community, to anyone who is willing to listen.

Endnotes

* Phoebe Farag was born in Cairo, Egypt, grew up in New York, and now divides her time between Washington, D.C. and Cairo. An active member of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the U.S., she works with youth in her local church in Washington, D.C., and also participates in the Justice for Women Working Group of the National Council of Churches. Currently the program director for an international nonprofit organization, she holds an M.A. in International Education Development from the George Washington University and a B.A. in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University.

1. There are an estimated 300,000 Copts in the U.S., if not more (Abd al-Fattah, quoted in Ayalon, 1999, p. 9).
2. Although it is not known what percentage of Egyptian Americans are Christian, according to an article by Helen Samhan, originally published in Grolier's Multimedia Encyclopedia in 2001, and republished by the Arab American Institute in 2006, approximately two thirds of the estimated three million Arab American immigrants and their descendents in the U.S. are Christians. Her definition includes Egyptian Americans as Arab Americans (2006).
3. Hundreds of words used in Egyptian colloquial Arabic have their roots in the Coptic language, which was the last phase of the Egyptian language before the Arab invasion in the seventh century. Coptic continued to be spoken in parallel with Arabic until the 11th or 12th centuries (Youssef, 2003).
4. My experience with Egyptian Christians in Egypt who are members of the Catholic Church or the various Protestant denominations is that they also refer to themselves as Copts and are included in the general statistic of eight million Copts in Egypt. My survey did not include Egyptian Christian Americans who are not members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, so I am not aware if Egyptian Christian Americans from other denominations identify with the word "Copt." This is another complication to this topic that merits further exploration.

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Reproducing Home: Arab Women's Experiences of Canada

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Birth is more than physical reproduction; through reproductive traditions and birthing processes, social reproduction is manifested. In other words, these traditions and ceremonies highlight the values of social life. Migration to a new country may affect the ability of women and their families to perform reproductive rituals; hence, examination of women's birth stories may demonstrate the tensions between the challenges and benefits of migration. This shifting ground of multiple identities in turn contextualizes the process of acculturation as migrants strive to adapt to their new country while maintaining cultural and ethnic identities. In this article, we study experiences of reproduction to examine how Arab immigrant women shape their Canadian identities while balancing connections with their families "back home" and their ethnic/cultural identities.

Introduction

Childbirth is more than the physical reproduction of the family, for it also functions as social production, in the reproduction of cultural values and belief systems (Franklin & Ragoné, 1998; Jordan, 1993). As such, the rituals associated with pregnancy, birth and the post-partum period symbolize ideologies of gender, healing, and religion as well as forming individual and group identities. We suggest that the process of reproduction may also be fertile ground for the study of the interplay between acculturation and maintenance of migrants' traditions and belief systems. Acculturation is defined here as the process whereby immigrants who are members of minority communities incorporate and practice traditions of the dominant group (Berry, 1980; Snowden & Hines, 1999). Of course this process is mitigated by actual and perceived opportunities for integration, as well as inter-group heterogeneity (e.g. variations based on individual behaviors, characteristics, etc.), with respect to both the migrant and dominant cultures and communities (Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001; Vega & Rumbaut, 1991). Furthermore, the process of acculturation is not unilateral, for migrant communities also influence and contribute to the dominant group's socio-cultural beliefs and practices (Phillips, 2005).

Migration can be a stressful process, especially for women who give birth to children in a new cultural context, and who do not have the means or knowledge to fulfill their obligations to arrange for traditional rites and rituals (Deitrick, 2002; Groleau, Soulière & Kirmayer, 2006). On the other hand, immigrant women may welcome the opportunity to participate in "new" reproduc-

tive technologies, and the diminished responsibilities of celebrating birth as a social event that was weighed down with "old", unnecessary traditions.

This article will compare and contrast Arab women's reproductive experiences in their home countries with those in Canada, as well as examine the factors that shape women's abilities and desires to participate in traditional pregnancies, birthing processes, and post-partum practices. To add historical depth to this discussion, comparisons are made between the experiences of recent and non-recent migrants. The examination of the sociocultural framework of reproduction and immigrant women's experiences of the reproductive process highlights both challenges and opportunities associated with migration and living in Canada.

Methodology

This study was conducted in a large city in Western Canada with a population of approximately one million. According to the most recent 2001 census, 17.8% of this city's population consists of immigrants and 14.6% of visible minorities. The Arab community makes up 6.7% of this visible minority population (Statistics Canada, 2001). The results presented here are part of a larger study examining adult women's migration experiences. Both recent immigrants who have been residing in Canada for less than ten years and non-recent immigrants who have been residing in Canada for more than ten years were recruited, in order to compare changes over time in immigrant women's experiences. A female Arab research assistant assisted with recruitment of participants, translation when required during the interview process, and transcription of interviews.

This study was designed to be community-based, and has been conducted in collaboration with a local community organization composed of immigrant women from various countries. It was with the help of this organization that we located research assistants (one from each participating community), who were also instrumental in the development of the research design (e.g. defining appropriate questions and how to best phrase them). One goal of the study is to be able to provide this community organization, and other interested parties, with information that can be used for advocacy, and in the development of culturally appropriate health education programs (e.g. food prescriptions/proscriptions, traditional knowledge and care of mothers' postpartum that could be incorporated into medical practices) both for participating communities and health providers.

Six focus group interviews were conducted, three with recent and three with non-recent immigrants. This number of focus group interviews was found to be adequate for saturation (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Morgan, 1997). Each focus group consisted of five to eight women. Discussions were elicited easily; therefore, groups of this size were adequate for collecting a range of opinions, as well as allowing all the participating women to be heard. Thirty-six Arab women participated. In conjunction with these interviews, demographic information was collected, and acculturation and body image measurements were administered. The findings from these focus group interviews are the focus of this article.

All women gave informed consent prior to participation in the focus group interviews, and they had the option of ceasing participation at any point, requesting that their comments not be utilized after it was over, or of not participating in a particular portion of the focus group interview. Interviews were conducted in women's homes or community centers, and took approximately two and a half hours to complete. Helen Vallianatos and a research assistant were present at all interviews; the former took notes and asked probing questions and the latter facilitated the discussion, using predetermined interview questions. The Human Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta approved the study.

Interviews were audio taped, translated into English where required, and transcribed. Data analysis from the interviews was content-based (DeVault, 1990). In other words, the data were examined for patterns in what women said, rather than doing a narrative analysis of the content. This method is useful in exploring themes. Qualitative data were coded by reviewing all cases. Codes were formulated through a line-by-line analysis of concepts that were identified in the data. Comparative analysis led to the development of categories. This level of analysis examined how women used the codes defined in the first stage. Themes were developed from the categories that emerged from the data, and by comparing these concepts to those reported in the literature. Helen Vallianatos conducted the data analysis.

Findings

Characteristics of Participants

A description of the characteristics of the study's participants is provided in order to contextualize their experiences of migration and reproduction. A total of fifteen non-recent and twenty-one recent Arab women participated in the focus group interviews. The non-recent immigrant women had been in Canada for an average of twenty-three years, whereas the recent participants had lived in Canada for an average of three and a half years.

Compared with the recent immigrant women, non-recent migrants were about a decade older on average (32 and 41 years respectively). All of the women were, or had been married; three were divorced. Household size varied from two (among those who were married without children) to seven members. Household income was variable, although just over half of the participants were living in low-income households. In Canada, a poverty line per se does not exist. Instead, low-income households are defined according to community and household size. Part of the financial difficulties faced by immigrants is the lack of recognition of foreign credentials, resulting in underemployment. According to various Arab informants, "We [in our city] have the most educated cab drivers," a statement that reveals the extent of underemployment in this immigrant community.

All of the participants were Muslim except one, and all self-identified as Arab. Their countries of origin were diverse: Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, but the majority were from Lebanon. The majority of participants had come to Canada on family reunification visas. In order to have some measure of assessing their various degrees of acculturation, an acculturation scale measuring language usage patterns was used. This four-item questionnaire, where responses are scored on a 5-point scale, was modified from one previously used among Spanish-speaking immigrants (Norris, Ford & Bova, 1996; Wallen, Feldman & Anliker, 2002). Unquestionably, language use alone does not measure all degrees and varieties of acculturation: previous research has found that language preference and use can be used to provide an appropriate estimate of acculturation (Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal & Perez-Stable, 1987; Norris, Ford & Bova, 1996; Wallen, Feldman & Anliker, 2002). Non-recent immigrants scored higher on this scale, indicating greater ease with, and frequency of English in everyday life. This suggests that non-recent immigrant women felt relatively more comfortable interacting with non-Arab Canadians.

Comparisons of Reproductive Rituals between Canada and "Home"

In this section, we compare and contrast reproductive rituals practiced in Canada with what those women recalled from their home countries. All women could recount traditions associated with pregnancy, birth and the post-partum period, even if they had only experienced pregnancy and birth in Canada. However, most women could contrast their own personal experiences of reproduction both in Canada and at home, having had some of their children before migrating to Canada. Three interrelated themes on women's reproductive experiences emerged from the interviews, labeled as follows: 1) social support networks; 2) medical technology and personnel; and, 3) feeding the mother. As each of these themes is discussed, the viewpoints of recent and non-recent migrants are compared.

Theme 1: Social Support Networks

Many of the discussions concerning women's lives during pregnancy and the post-partum period focused on the traditions of social support evident throughout women's reproductive experiences. This was especially emphasized in the conversations with non-recent immigrants, one of whom explained, "You treat yourself, everyone around you treats you". Women recalled being pampered throughout pregnancy, demonstrated not only by the amount of food offered to them, but also by receiving special foods or foods that they craved. Extended family networks ensured that mothers were well cared for and helped first time expectant mothers prepare for birth. This continued into the post-partum period, when mothers recalled doing nothing but sleeping and caring for their newborn infant for the first couple of weeks, while female family members rallied to ensure domestic tasks were completed.

All women who reminisced about birthing in their home countries pointed out that one of the greatest challenges they faced in Canada was the lack of social support available for mothers, especially during the post-partum period. During these times, the comfort and care provided by families were especially missed. This was a source of the greatest tension, as it highlighted differences in how womanhood and birth are viewed in Canada. Neolocal residence patterns are the norm in Canada, reflecting emphasis on individuality and reliance on self. Families are often dispersed, and are not available to provide much help during the reproductive process due to both time and distance limitations. Birth in Canada is arguably a medical event, occurring primarily under the expert control of medical professionals, and in hospitals where medical technology is readily available for use (Bourgeault, Declercq & Sandall, 2001; Davis-Floyd, 1992; Davis-Floyd & Sargent, 1997; Daviss, 2001; Jordan, 1993; Wrede, Benoit & Sandall, 2001). In contrast, although Arab women reported that medical systems and interventions were commonly used in their home countries, birthing was to a greater degree a social event, marked with celebrations and women, ensconced in supportive social systems, could take at least some time to rest and bond with their infant.

Due to their inability to divide labor, and to lean on the support of others, some women perceived the Canadian birth context as detrimental to their own and their infants' well-being. This is exemplified in the following comparison made by a non-recent immigrant:

In Beirut, my mother-in-law bought me lemons and homemade soup, and she used to make me special foods because I was pregnant and it was good for me and the baby. My first son was born in Lebanon; he was 10 lbs, but my other kids were born smaller, like Hana was one month early and she was 4 lbs. That is because I did not like the food here; even if I found everything [that could be found at home], the food still was not good.

This woman's description of the important support she received from her mother-in-law also highlights the symbolic value of food. The above quotation also suggests that food can demarcate challenges of adjusting to life in Canada. The mother's dislike of the food, even if Arabic food was found and purchased, is symbolic of missing home and everything that home represents. The reliance on others for help in provisioning and preparing special food perceived as a requirement for a healthy pregnancy is further explored below. Before turning to explore in greater depth the care women receive as new mothers, represented by food items and the sharing of food preparation, an investigation into the medicalization of birth in women's home countries is in order.

Theme 2: Medical Technology and Personnel

In the past two decades, much research has been conducted on the medicalization of reproduction, including childbirth. This process of medicalization may be explained as when language and ideology of scientific medicine come to predominate in explanations of human behavior and biology. In relation to childbirth, emphasis is focused on increasing usage of technology in birthing, of "operationalizing" childbirth, of treating it as a "disease" to be fixed (Davis-Floyd, 1992). This process of medicalization of women's reproduction is commonplace in North America, thus birth in Canada can be categorized as a medical event (Davis-Floyd & Sargent, 1997; Daviss, 2001). However, it is a mistake to conceptualize reproduction and childbirth as either a medical or social event. Both, to varying degrees, are important in formulating women's experiences; they are not mutually exclusive. This is especially clear when discussing birth with recent immigrants.

Recent immigrant women further contextualized the meaning of birth in their discussions concerning medical and social aspects of reproduction in Canada and their home countries. Having more recently experienced birth in their home countries, they pointed out that medical interventions in the birthing process are global. However, both positive and negative contrasts can be made, as shown in the following exchange:

Woman 1: I was more comfortable during my pregnancy in Lebanon. Here I was tired all the time. But during delivery, here is much better because here you can have your mother or sister beside you in the delivery room, but back home, no one is allowed in the room with you. No, here is much better to have the baby, really.
Woman 2: But the doctors and doctor visits, the doctors' care is much better there.
Woman 1: Yeah, that's true.
Woman 2: Like when you're pregnant back home you go to the doctor right away, you don't need to make any appointment and wait, and the same doctor you go to is the same doctor who does the ultrasound. The machines are in the same office as the checkup and everything.
Woman 3: Generally being pregnant there is more comfortable, but here it's much better at the time of delivery.
Woman 2: Well I'm pregnant right now and I feel tired a lot too.
Woman 4: Like for the delivery, the nurses back home are not as nice as the nurses here. They yell at you if you're in pain, Wallah, they really do.

Note in this exchange that being tired was associated with living in Canada. As mentioned in the previous section, this reflects the fact that women have smaller social networks in Canada, hence they have fewer people on whom they could count on to help on a daily basis — a pattern that has previously been reported for Iranian and other immigrant communities (Ali, 2002; Dossa, 2004; Lock, 1991). This is exacerbated by the relatively fast pace of the Canadian lifestyle, where long work hours are required to stay financially solvent, let alone to get ahead and rise in socioeconomic status (Vallianatos & Raine, 2005; Vallianatos, Ramos-Salas & Raine, 2005). Constant work further impedes women's abilities to find others who have the time to help, so the pampering during pregnancy and the postpartum period experienced in home countries are idealized in immigrant women's imaginations. Furthermore, hospital stays for routine births are a day or two, so women must return to their homes and their household duties, with no one to help.

The above exchange also highlights a major difference in medical practices and interactions with medical personnel. Access and ongoing care were described as being better at "home" since women could see their care-provider whenever they wished, and were ensured that the same provider who was advising them throughout their pregnancy would be present at the birth. Building a personal relationship with one's care provider fosters trust, and in turn helps to make women's reproductive experiences more positive. This is usually not the case in recent years in Canada. Instead, the obstetrician on call attends the birth, and it is becoming common for obstetrical practices to consist of a group of doctors. For women this means that even for routine visits during pregnancy, they may see whichever partner is available, consequently not developing a strong personal connection with one doctor.

The next section examines the reproductive process as a whole, and food practices in particular, to develop an understanding of the social significance of reproduction.

Theme 3: Feeding the Mother

"When people know you're pregnant, they all want to feed you." (Non-recent Immigrant Woman) As this quote shows, women recalled pregnancy as being a special time back home, where they were sheltered, given special food, and encouraged to rest and take care of themselves. In contrast, because of lifestyle pressures in Canada, immigrant women often felt lonely, and missed the care provided by extended family members and friends in their home country. Recent migrants in particular spoke of these differences, as exemplified by this quotation: "They make the food for you, and you are always resting. Friends and family make you soup and other food. Here you have to do everything yourself, it's much harder."

Food cravings are a common experience shared by pregnant women around the world (e.g. Coronios-Vargas, Toma, Tuveson & Schutz, 1992; Demissie, Muroki & Kogi-Makau, 1998; Vallianatos, 2006). Folk knowledge often emphasizes the importance of satisfying cravings, for if not met, it is believed that something may happen to the fetus. An example of this is shown in the following exchange:

Woman 4: One advantage is that because here everything is available, when a woman craves it's easy to find whatever she wants. Back home, if you crave watermelon in winter, you can't find it.
Researcher: So what happens if you can't meet your cravings?
Woman 1: You wait until you find it and eat it, you just keep craving.
Woman 6: We believe if you don't get what you craved for, the shape of the food you craved will be on the baby's body.

In the above exchange, it is also clear that there are benefits to living in Canada while pregnant. Seasonality has little impact on food availability, as food items from around the world are imported, although food purchased out of season may be more expensive. Nevertheless, the plethora of products available in grocery stores from around the world ensures that cravings may be satisfied.

The study's participants also reported food prescriptions for the post-partum period. These dietary practices are believed to enhance breastfeeding by ensuring that adequate quantities of high-quality breast milk were produced. These foods included 'hot' foods, necessary for bringing the body back into equilibrium. Non-recent immigrants recalled:

Woman 1: After you have the baby, they give you a lot of milk and hot stuff to drink so the milk will come. Here the first thing they bring you in the hospitals is cold water! It was weird, back home they give you hot drinks.
{Aside as group discusses why they would be given cold items in Canada; no one knew}
Woman 2: We give her eggs with garlic and cumin after she delivers, for the milk to come.
Woman 3: Also chicken soup for one month.
Woman 2: And *sawdah* (liver) which is good for the blood.

The discussion of the necessity of giving new mothers 'hot' items seems to be folk knowledge based on traditional Islamic medical procedures. Islamic medicine is a humoral medical system, in which health is defined as the balance of humors. Imbalance can result from an individual's activities, including dietary and physical activity patterns, and must be corrected in order to maintain health. Also shaping the balance of humors are environmental factors, such as the seasons of the year, and individual characteristics, such as personality and different stages in life, including pregnancy, birth, and lactation (Ullmann, 1978). Pregnancy is considered a 'hot' condition, and birth releases this heat from women's bodies. Consequently, women must be given 'hot' foods or drinks that are strengthening, and protect against illness caused by being too 'cold'. Giving 'hot' foods also ensures that adequate milk will be produced, and that the breast milk will be of good quality. Although women did not have a deep understanding of humoral medical systems, it does seem to have permeated folk wisdom, demonstrated by the conversation above. In this context, it is surprising that women in Canada are given cold items during labor and after birth.

Breast-feeding has been shown to be a common practice; most of the women studied breast-fed for at least a few months, and often for two years. Social support was provided to mothers in their home countries, in order to successfully initiate and to encourage continuation of breastfeeding, as reported by one recent immigrant woman: "Back home, they all try to help you to breast-feed as long as possible. They try to make everything comfortable for you to breast-feed, and they make all the foods that bring more milk." Breast-feeding is a skill that takes time to learn, and even for multiparous women, time is required to develop the relationships with their new infant. The lack of a large support network in Canada means that women often feel harried to meet all their household tasks, leaving only a day or two to recover from birth and establish a routine. This lack of social space for breast-feeding, in conjunction with difficulties mothers face in implementing postpartum traditions, has been reported to negatively affect breastfeeding initiation and continuation rates

among immigrant women (Groleau, Soulière & Kirmayer, 2006).

Therefore, immigrant Arab women's remembrances of the reproductive process in their home countries emphasized the quality and extent of care they received. This was symbolized in the provision of special foods that ensured their own, and their infants' well-being. The importance of taking care of new mothers was also represented by the time they were given to recover from birth, and to settle into a new routine with their infants. Women received the most help with activities concerning food, as female relatives and friends took over food provisioning not just in providing special foods for the new mother, but also helped meet the dietary needs of the family as a whole.

Discussion

Reproduction is a rite of passage experienced by the vast majority of women who participated in this study. Not only is this a physical event women experience, but it is shaped by cultural values, affecting women's expectations and views of their reproductive experiences. The process of reproduction is also a social one, as it propagates not only new community members, but social values as well. In other words, the rituals associated with the reproduction process demonstrate fundamental societal worldviews. The suggestion being made is that because the reproductive process is intimately linked with sociocultural values and worldviews, an investigation comparing and contrasting immigrant women's reproductive experiences in their new and home countries is useful in highlighting tensions that are frequently part of the migration process.

Analysis of focus group interviews conducted with recent and non-recent Arab immigrant women showed this tension in the challenges they faced in birthing in Canada. The most common element missing in the Canadian context was a large support network composed of friends and family who would look after pregnant and lactating mothers, especially in the weeks following the birth event. Women recalled being vetted in their home countries while pregnant and lactating. This treatment was symbolized by the provisioning of food, in particular special foods. This was often not the case in Canada, where lifestyle changes resulted in fewer opportunities for socialization. The negative impact of the faster pace of life on women's abilities to perform traditional customs was exacerbated by financial constraints. Nevertheless, the study's participants spoke of the importance of continuing these traditions, not only because these practices shaped women's well-being, but also as a means of connecting with their homeland and living according to their ethnic and cultural identity. To participate in these traditions was a way of reproducing "home".

Challenges faced by immigrant women were balanced with benefits perceived to come with living in Canada. The medical system in Canada was overall highly regarded. Despite the complaint of lack of personal relationships with doctors, women appreciated the public health system and the consequent accessibility of care. Hospitals were clean and friendly, and staff were helpful and accommodating (e.g. religious dietary proscriptions were respected), allowing women to feel comfortable in this environment. Furthermore, for a small number of women, moving to Canada meant escaping the responsibilities that come with social reproduction, and they welcomed the opportunity to not participate in traditional reproductive rituals and ceremonies.

In sum, women's role as mothers is in large part manifested in reproduction, in their endeavors of reproducing children and society. Moving to a country where they are a visible minority group is accompanied by a variety of social, economic, and political stresses. These tensions may negatively affect their coping abilities of adjusting to life in Canada, and adversely affect their health and well-being (e.g. Dossa, 2004; Stewart et al., 2006; Vallianatos & Raine, 2005). Reproducing "home" through continuance of traditions may help to alleviate some anxieties, but in addition, efforts to address the issues female migrants face need further investigation and action (cf. Stewart et al., 2006). Advocacy with medical and governmental bureaucracies to increase awareness of Arab immigrant women's needs and development of culturally appropriate ways to help these women cope with the challenges they face in Canada are required. In addition, the education of medical and governmental administrators and staff members in the diverse cultural interpretations of health and reproduction is also necessary in order to provide culturally appropriate care.

Endnotes

Funding for this project was provided by POWER (Promotion of Optimal Weights through Ecological Research), a New Emerging Team research grant provided by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research — Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes, in partnership with the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada. We would like to thank Shaymaa Rahme, BSc, whose work as a research assistant was extremely valuable, as was the help and advice provided by Yvonne Chiu and her colleagues, at the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative.

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Guita Hourani Discusses Migration and her work at the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC)

Interviewed by Myriam Sfeir

Managing Editor

Interviewing Ms. Guita Hourani, Associate Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at Notre Dame University (NDU), Lebanon, was indispensable for this issue of *Al-Raida*, considering that she is a woman who heads one of the few centers that addresses the issue of migration in the Arab world. Being herself a forced migrant, her testimony is very poignant given that she experienced the alienation that migrants face when they flee their country of origin and settle in a foreign land.

1. Can you expound on your background, family, education and work?

I am from Taalabaya in the Bekaa valley, where I was raised in a closely-knit and very conservative family, along with two brothers and a sister. My studies began in Lebanon and then in the United States, leaving for the latter in 1983. In the US, after graduating with a Masters in Urban Planning, I was a consultant for several years to the World Bank and the International Institute for Development in Washington, D.C. Also in the US, I pioneered and taught a course at several universities and institutions on the role of women in war, peace and conflict resolution, founded the Maronite Research Institute (MARI) and its electronic publication, *The Journal of Maronite Studies*, and was a Fellow at the Institute of Christian Oriental Research Center at the Catholic University of America. I had intended to return to Lebanon on a permanent basis in 1997, when I started teaching at the Holy Spirit University and was the advisor for International Academic Affairs; however I left again in 1999 to finally return permanently in 2002.

I returned to Lebanon mainly because of my parents. My parents did not like living in Europe because of the weather and decided to return to Lebanon; therefore, being the only single child in the family, I returned to be with them. Both my parents are in their early seventies and need to be cared for, not so much physically as emotionally and morally. My parents could not, and still cannot, adjust to the fact that most of their children and grandchildren are not around them.

The first two years were very miserable — I was very unhappy and disliked living in polluted, noisy, and chaotic Beirut. Yet, with time, I got used to life here in Lebanon, especially after managing to persuade my parents to move to the mountains.

I am currently the Associate Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at Notre Dame University and a member of the University's Research Board. At LERC I wear three hats; I am the head manager, the head of research, and a researcher. I am responsible for setting up the research policy of the Center; I lead research projects, represent the Center locally, regionally and internationally, and provide consultation in my capacity as an expert on Lebanese migration issues for governmental and non-governmental institutions. I also served as an expert on migration for the Maronite Patriarchal Synod from 2003 to 2006.

A festival celebrating the Lebanese Independence in front of the Lebanese Embassy, Mexico, 1950. Courtesy of LERC.

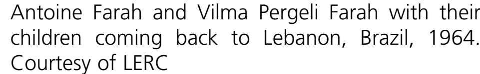
Mercedes Mafud de Rage carrying her daughter Ivonne. Accompanied by Juan Erales, José and Sara Cuaik and Latife Abdel Nur de Mafud, with Hilda Rage. Mexico, (n.d.). Courtesy of LERC.

2. You spent many years yourself as an emigrant, how did this personal experience affect your understanding of the migration issue and your work as a researcher?

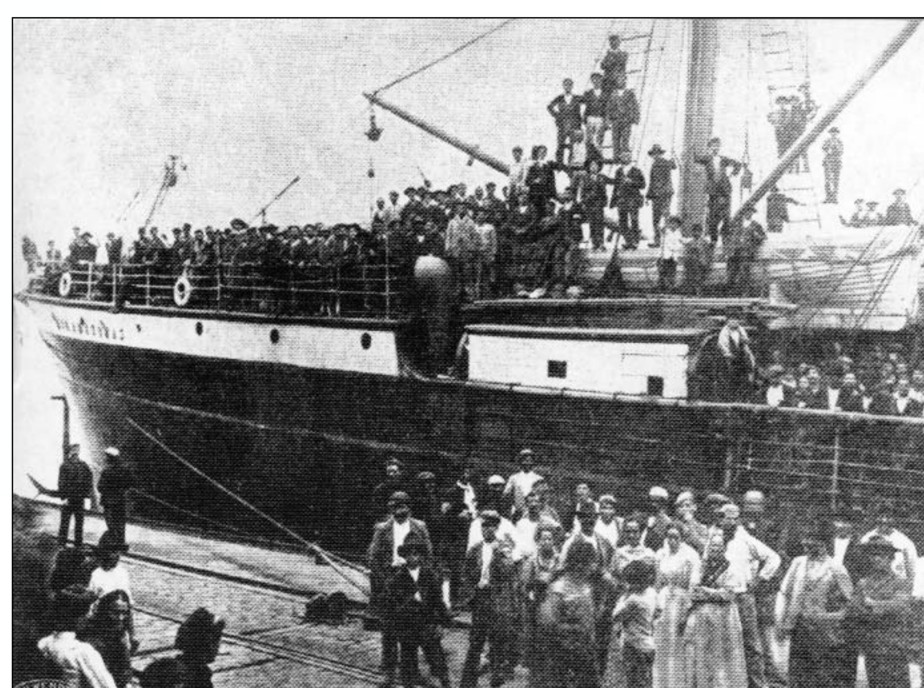
In 1983, I was forced to leave my country of birth, Lebanon. My parents sent me to the USA to my maternal uncle to recover from an injury I sustained during the war. I was supposed to stay in the US for a couple of months, but my parents decided that I should benefit from being there to further my studies, especially that I always wanted to continue my education. The months turned into years, too many years, actually. While living permanently in the US, I also tried settling in different countries, France, Japan, and then Canada, but the US was the place where I was destined to be a migrant. My migration was from 1983 to 2001 with an interval of two years spent in Lebanon between 1997 and 1999. My life has been marked by the experience of migration given that almost half of my life was spent away from my loved ones and from my country, Lebanon.

Had it not been for the Lebanese civil war that made of us forced migrants, I think I could easily have become another person. I shall never know who that person could have been, a pilot, or a medical doctor, or maybe a married person living incognito in my village. The only me that I know, however, is the one that is marked by the consequences of displacement and migration.

My siblings and I are forced migrants. None of us chose to leave and stay away for that long, we truly didn't have a say in this decision. I was supposed to leave to study medicine in France upon completing high school. However, all my plans were sabotaged by the war of 1975. Following our displacement and all the bloodshed I witnessed, I couldn't tolerate the sight of death and bodies and so my interest in medicine faded. My second choice was to become a pilot but my injury during the war prevented me from becoming a pilot and so I ended up being a historian and an urban planner, which is not so bad. At least I am alive, unlike my cousins and best friend.



Antoine Farah and Vilma Pergeli Farah with their children coming back to Lebanon, Brazil, 1964. Courtesy of LERC



The disembarkation of emigrants in the port of Santos, Brazil, 1907. Courtesy of LERC.

Even though my life has been very rich with travel, education, and very positive experiences, there are things that I was deprived of, things that I cannot recover or recreate. Things such as growing up with my siblings, knowing what my brother's favorite music was, how he lived his adolescent life, how much my other brother suffered when he was kidnapped, how my parents survived, things such as sharing the family burden with my sister, enjoying Christmas as a family, attending the wedding of my brother, the birth of my nephew, etc. Being a migrant is a very painful experience. Migration is separation; it is an agonizing experience especially when you are forced to migrate against your will, when you leave behind your loved ones under bombardment never knowing when you will see them next.

When I look back, I realize how polarized I became. I lived with one part of my heart and mind in Lebanon and the other part in the States. I left the US after fourteen years without even obtaining a green card. Had I been less idealistic, I could have secured the American citizenship that would have facilitated my life and the life of my family. I didn't even think of US citizenship as an opportunity for my family. I blame myself for being idealistic, for not being pragmatic, and sometimes when it hits me hard that we are spread all over the world, I feel guilty for not having put my family first rather than my principles. It was out of selfishness and stubbornness that I failed to bring my family together to the US when I had the opportunity of doing so. Now my sister is married in France, my brother lives with his family in Belgium, my other brother and his family are on the island of Guadeloupe, and my parents and I are in Lebanon. I will always regret not thinking of them first and not doing my duty to my family.

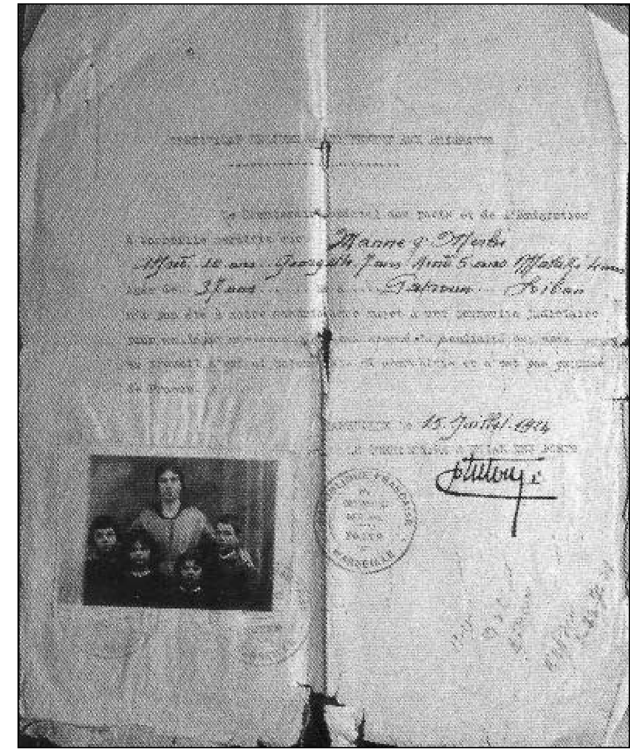
Migration is both an opportunity and a misfortune. It polarizes people, it makes them face their demons, and it challenges their identities, beliefs, fears, and strengths. Migration has made me a better person than the one I knew before leaving. Well, let me rephrase this, it exploded my talents, it widened my lens, it realized my dream to travel and to learn, it broke me and remolded me time after time with every failure and every success. Migration is a god that remolds its creation constantly.

As for what it did to my understanding of migration issues and its impact on my work? I wouldn't have been so effective in my work if I hadn't experienced migration myself. My own experience has given me a special entry into this complex and contradictory world of mobility and separation. I can deeply understand migration and migrants. Migrants face adjustment and integration issues that are probably the hardest to deal with because they demand a change of mindset, behavior, and misconceptions.

One of the issues that I had to deal with at different intervals in my life as a migrant in the US was the issue of race. During my first semester at the university I was asked to fill out a census. One of the questions was "are you White, Hispanic, Black, Native-American or Other" and my answer was Hispanic because I was in South Carolina and I saw that I looked like my Hispanic classmates more than anybody else. I was never faced with a question of race before. In Lebanon you are identified by your religion. Then a couple of years later I realized that being Hispanic is an identity as well as a race, and then when I learned what the definition of white is, I started referring to myself as white. After a couple more years had passed, and with better knowledge of race and ethnicity in the States, I reasserted my identity and my ethnicity by placing 'Syriac' next to 'Other' in the census. I wanted to reclaim who I was. So you see, in one decade I changed my perception three times vis-à-vis my racial belonging. This is not the least of the issues that people face in their journey as migrants.

3. You are currently the Associate Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC); can you tell me more about the Center and its activities?
We established LERC in April 2003, as an initiative of the Lebanese Notre Dame University, known locally as NDU. We created the center basically to promote the academic study of contemporary and historical migration to, from, and through Lebanon. We work with local and international scholars and we use both traditional-academic and alternative-grassroots methodologies. We also have introduced the use and study of information and communication technology (ICT) as a research tool and object of our studies here of late. Another of our aims at LERC is to support original research and to promote an intellectual exchange among experts, students, and others who hold an interest in international migration and national development. The focus of our work at LERC involves the relationships within the network of Lebanese diasporic communities spread throughout the world; and the role of Lebanese migrants and their remittances back home, which have come to play a continuing role in the development of their home country.

A postcard of Meu hotel in 1918 Brazil-Paraguay Borders. Courtesy of LERC.



Travel certificate of Manné Merhi, her son and three daughters from Batroun, Lebanon July 15, 1924. Courtesy of LERC.

In saying so, our ultimate aim at LERC is to become the world's principal center of research as well as being the chief repository for archival and other material related to Lebanese migration. The Center, we hope, will also serve as a forum where scholars and advanced students of migration, with all its related disciplines, can meet with actual migrants, as well as those interested in the field. We are trying to create a place where the university's faculty and students can discuss migration issues with local officials, businesspersons, and other professionals, and where a wide variety of human experience and knowledge can be accessed and explored.

LERC is also heavily involved in community activities. In addition to public forums on the economic and political effects of Lebanese migration I mentioned before, the Center organizes regional workshops on issues of particular concern to local communities, as well as occasional exhibitions of photographs and documents from its own archives. From October to May of each academic year, and as part of the Center's monthly lecture series, Lebanese audiences are introduced to a wide range

Grand receptions offered by Don Antonio Letayf in his ranch. Present In this reunion were President Carranza, diplomatic members and a group of Lebanese merchants, Mexico (n.d.). Courtesy of LERC.

of topics presented by local and foreign specialists. Our lecture topics till now have dealt mainly with the Lebanese migrant communities in France, Mexico, and Australia, the structure of the transnational Lebanese family, absentee voting and election reform, the effects of migration on the village of Bishmizzine, and migrant patriotism in times of crisis.

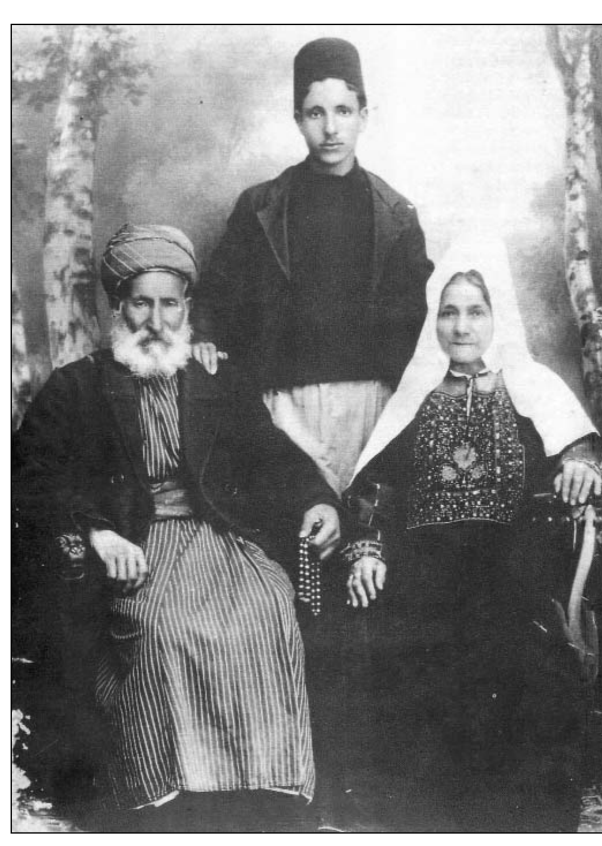
Apart from its activities here in Lebanon, we encourage the staff at the Center to regularly participate in a wide variety of international conferences and forums, again focusing in particular on migration and cultural exchange between the lands bordering the Mediterranean.

4. At LERC do you strive to include a gender dimension in the research you undertake? Do you collect gender-disaggregated data?

Migration studies, as a whole, are neglected in Lebanon, let alone a focus on women's migration experiences. However, many Lebanese and non-Lebanese scholars outside the country have published a wide variety of research on the subject of Lebanese women migrants: such as Dr. Akram Khater (*Inventing home: Emigration, gender and the middle class in Lebanon* 1870-1920), Dr. Evelyn Shakir (*Bint Arab*), Joanna Kadi (*Food for our grandmothers*), Anja Peleikis (*Lebanese in Motion: Gender and the making of translocal village*). Several PhD dissertations address the subject, such as Lebanese migration to Sierra Leone: *Issues of Transnationalism, Gender, Citizenship, and the Construction of a Globalized Identity* by Lina Beydoun. Most of these books and dissertations have been collected by LERC and are available at our Center for consultation.

At LERC we also highlight the gender dimension in our applied social science research projects. For instance, in our in-house survey on the evacuation that took place during the Summer 2006 War, we purposely included a set of gender specific questions. In doing so, we hoped to be able to map out the profile of the female sample from among the interviewees; that is, we not only wanted to know how many had already migrated or were planning to leave, but also to learn more about their evacuation experience as women.

We are currently in the process of aggregating the data collected from a later survey, commissioned by the EU's Consortium of Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM), on the impact of the Summer 2006 War and its aftermath on insecurity, migration, and return. We received well over 600 responses from our residents' questionnaire. Out of the 444 residents who filled out our residents' survey properly, 195 were women; we also canvassed the Lebanese expatriates with a separate questionnaire, receiving over 100 responses, and out of the 71 valid migrant responses 22 were from women. This information will be a large part of the initial basis for a database that will monitor the feminization of the migration from Lebanon. Simultaneously the statistics on women are being jointly aggregated with the data from the male participants in the final report, which will give us an overall picture of the status of migration in Lebanon for the survey period. The final report is available on the EuroMed website (www.carim.org), or directly at(http://www.iue.it/RSCAS/e-texts/CARIM-RR2007_01_Hourani&Sensenig.pdf).



Issa David Assaf and Anastacia Salvador de Assaf and their son Elieas in Belén, Mexico in 1899. Courtesy of LERC.

We understand that migration impacts gender roles, personal behavior, employment, education, and economic life. We also understand how migration challenges the meaning of being a woman, especially when migration is forced in many cases, as it is in Lebanon. Therefore, we are also planning several follow up studies, one of which is on the increasing phenomenon of young, educated, female Lebanese migrants; another is to collect Lebanese women's life narratives, not so much on a historical basis, as was done in the past, concentrating on former female migrants, but more on those who are migrants today and we would like to cooperate with your center on this subject.

Of course the term "gender" means both women and men. We are also looking at the other side of the coin, at migration as a specifically male experience. We now have enough raw data from our two studies carried out from July to December of 2006 in order to contribute to the study of male migration for the first time. Some of our staff members are preparing our first study of male migration, integrating our recent data with gender studies theory on male identities.

5. At the international level, migration flows are becoming increasingly feminized; is LERC undertaking any research along these lines?

LERC has been in existence for three and-a-half-years only. The founding years were dedicated to collecting material (books, studies, and archival material), establishing contacts, signing agreements, and setting up our objectives and goals. We were also keen on thinking and working outside the box, using oral history, visual history and physical culture studies in local village settings in the north of Lebanon. We haven't really got around to carrying out any project dedicated specifically to the feminization of migration in Lebanon. However, in all our ongoing and future research projects, LERC is paying special attention to the feminization of emigration from Lebanon. We know from observation and anecdotal information that there is an increase in the migration of young, single, and educated Lebanese women. This is the result of several factors. First, it is due to the disproportionate number of males who have emigrated previously, and it is also due to the large number of males who have died during the past decades of conflict. More women are being educated and are entering non-traditional sectors of the economy, and because of the insecurities,

The Elegant Jorge Trad Tueini in her twenties, Mexico (n.d.). Courtesy of LERC.

Juanita Majluf and her friend in Orizaba, Veracruz, 1916. Courtesy of LERC.

both political and economic, in the country, they are opting for migration, mainly to the Gulf, but more and more to other parts of the world including, but not only, Western Europe and Canada. In addition to the political and economic reasons, there is a specific social reason as well; it is said that there is one marriageable male to every five single females in Lebanon who are looking for a husband. The search for better marriage opportunities might also be a reason for some women to leave.

Currently, we are in the process of preparing a research project that will deal with this topic exclusively and we would love for it to be a joint venture between our Center and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab

Teresa and Raquel Nader with their fiancés, Mexico. (n.d.). Courtesy of LERC.

Young first generation Lebanese women disguised as wives of sheiks, Mexico, 1935. Courtesy of LERC.

World, in cooperation with scholars from other international and regional organizations.

6. What are some of the challenges you are facing at LERC in terms of gender and migration research and how are you dealing with them?
We are facing challenges in terms of conducting migration research in general and gendered research in particular. The challenges are basically the lack of data and the near absence of data collection by the different ministries, agencies, and departments of the government. It is the government's duty to collect the needed data. In general, international organizations, UN bodies and non-governmental organizations usually make use of the data provided by governments. In Lebanon, the situation is complicated, given that the past thirty years have been very chaotic with the civil war taking its toll on all government sectors. It is important to note that we have not had a national census since 1932. Hence, we do not know the actual composition of our population. There are projections, but without a national census and the proper programs needed to collect the different variables at the ports of entry and departure no factual data will be available.

Mind you, there are two studies that were done in the last 30 years, one by the government's Central Administration of Statistics and one by the Université Saint Joseph (USJ). Moreover, Dr. Anis Abi Farah of the Lebanese University started a database, a personal initiative, and published a small study on the subject. Two of

Jorge and Minerva Zacarías, Alfredo, Amira, Alicia and Guillermo Asali in traditional clothes, Mexico, 1942. Courtesy of LERC.

the studies put migration between 1975 and 2001 at around 900,000. This information does not include those who have returned and re-migrated or returned and stayed. So the data is not very detailed. Thanks to the studies mentioned, we are now able to form an idea about the number and makeup of the population that is left in the country. However, these studies are sporadic. In order to really understand migration, interim studies and interim aggregation of information, statistics, and data are required.

Since 2001, no studies have been published on migration. There might be some studies that are prepared for private purposes or by commercial enterprises, but these studies are not made available to the public.

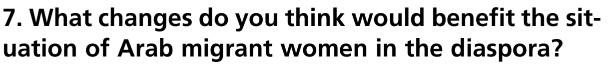
Another obstacle we are facing is that universities are not properly maintaining contact with their graduates, in order to know their whereabouts; that also deprives us of an alternative source of information. The respective alumni associations could become a major partner in improving migration studies in Lebanon.

It is unfortunate that there is very little we can do to deal with the lack of data other than conducting quantitative research. Quantitative research requires large amounts of funding that is simply not obtainable at this time for the social sciences. Given that the University is our main funding resource, we should look for alternative funding sources as well. Moreover, one needs relative peace in the country to be able to conduct research projects. One must be able to send researchers to conduct fieldwork without being worried that they might come in harm's way. We certainly will do our best to secure funds. This does not mean that we are not already trying different avenues to carry out such research. Here again, we might profit in this matter if our two institutions would work together more closely.

Juanita Serio de Asali, Mexico, 1930. Courtesy of LERC.

7. What changes do you think would benefit the situation of Arab migrant women in the diaspora?
The changes could occur on four levels. The first changes should occur on the level of the individual women themselves. Women should benefit from their migration experience in order to further their knowledge base, education and experience, to reinforce their identity, and to partake in social and national life, including politics. The second change should occur on the national level, to get women recognized as equal members of society and to enact laws that protect them as human beings and as women. Laws that will allow them full participation in social and national life along with the establishment of monitoring bodies that oversee the implementation of these laws. The third level is that of the host countries, whose laws should protect women against abuse and harassment, low pay, unequal pay and job insecurity, and allow them to realize their full potential. The fourth level is the international one, where we have seen serious efforts to set up laws that protect women, that encourage them to take action to emancipate themselves, and ensure their access to education, housing, employment, health treatment, food, credit, and the like.

The above mentioned items are applicable to all women. As for Arab migrant women, I believe that they have to do more for



The Funeral of Pedro Kahwagi Kuri, Mexico. Courtesy of LERC.

themselves in order to benefit from their migration experience, especially in developed countries. They should gain education and knowledge, participate in civil society, in political movements, in parties and in international organizations, exploit their talents, discover themselves, and realize their potential.

I agree with the anthropologist Emmanuel Todd when he said that the defining factor in the adjustment of immigrants — the factor that determines the ultimate success of the migration process for a specific group, that is in our case the situation of Arabs, is the social status of women in both the country of origin and the country of immigration. I believe that Arab women migrants have impacted the lives of women in the Arab world in the past and will continue to do so, especially with the development of technology and transportation, which facilitates networking and interaction. I believe that it is important to set up a networking channel between migrant women and resident women in Lebanon and the Middle East to exchange ideas and benefit from experiences and maybe have a mentoring program for young women.

A group of Lebanese leaving the French embassy in Mexico, 1930. Courtesy of LERC.

Dimitri Dib Family, Brazil, 1920. Courtesy of LERC.

8. What are the specifically Lebanese aspects of your work on migration?
All the work we do at LERC is on Lebanese emigration. We are very interested in doing comparative studies. Examining the migration experience of Lebanese women and comparing it to that of Egyptian, Jordanian, or Palestinian women is one of our dreams.

At LERC we are not concentrating much on the migration that happened in the past because research on that subject is well developed and enjoys a lot of support today. We want to catch up with what is happening today, to be able to benefit our society with suggestions for policies. There is so much work to be done; especially studying, for instance, the role of women as identity carriers and protectors, as well as their role in the integration process in the host societies.

9. Can you tell me more about the latest research project LERC has undertaken on the effects of the Summer 2006 War and migration?
All our projects that were planned for last summer were aborted as a result of the war. However, during the war — while we were literally sitting around wondering what to do next — we decided to use this unwanted "opportunity" to work on a study about immigration, remigration and evacuation under fire, so to speak. The study dealt with the assisted departure of return migrants who had actually returned to reside in Lebanon or migrants who were just visiting Lebanon for their summer vacation. We knew that the war affected remigration or return to Lebanon and migration from Lebanon. With the data as a basis, we found that 12% of our sample comprised people who had returned this summer to check out life in Lebanon and eventually bring back their entire families. Eighteen percent had actually already decided to return permanently, but were forced to leave, so you can imagine the impact. Even though the sample in our study was small, what was revealed was significant. The loss of hope was one of the major casualties of the war. Many of the Lebanese living abroad lost all hope of returning to Lebanon.

Over and above the aforementioned study, LERC has published two handbooks. The first book is a bibliography of Lebanese migration in Australia and New Zealand and the second is a handbook entitled *The Lebanese Migrants in Brazil: An Annotated Bibliography*. We also developed an alternative toolkit, using Sven Lindqvist's "dig where you stand" approach to local migration studies, which will come out as a book in the fall of 2007. Moreover, LERC prepared a white paper that was sent to the Boutros Commission on electoral reform in the fall of 2005, on the right of Lebanese migrants to vote out-of-country. Last but not least, we are planning a special study on Lebanese women migrants to be carried out in late 2007.

We are currently finalizing two studies, the results of which will be published in the spring of 2007. One is in the form of a book on absentee voting in the case of the Lebanese migration and the second is about Human Insecurity and Forced Migration in Lebanon following the Summer 2006 War.

Recent Publications on Lebanese Migration

Insecurity, Migration and Return: The Case of Lebanon Following the Summer 2006 War, Guita G. Hourani and Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous, Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM), Research Reports [CARIM-RR 2007/01] Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute, 2007. The study is available for download on CARIM's internet website at www.carim.org

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The Impact of the Summer 2006 War on Migration in Lebanon:Emigration, Re-Migration, Evacuation and Return, Guita G. Hourani, NDU Press 2006. ISBN: 9953-457-55-7.

http://www.ndu.edu.lb/lerc/

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