

Lebanese Masculinities

■ Samira Aghacy

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Dominant discourses surrounding gender tend to promote the view that the human race is naturally divided into male and female, where masculinity is fixed, stable and timeless, and where the natural difference between men and women is sharply emphasized. Nevertheless, gender studies are shifting from exclusive focus on women to a new interest in men, not as a monolithic group with fixed boundaries but rather as men whose masculinity is molded in particular times and settings. There are no significant studies that treat Arab males as gendered subjects, or products of "social conditioning."¹ Indeed, masculinity in the Arab world is generally treated as timeless and universal. In *Theorizing Masculinity*, Harry Brod and Micheal Kaufman assert that "we cannot study masculinity in the singular, as if the stuff of man were a homogeneous and unchanging thing. Rather, we wish to emphasize the plurality and diversity of men's experiences, attitudes, beliefs, situations, practices, and institutions, along lines of race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, age, region, physical appearance, able-bodiedness, mental ability, and various other categories with which we describe our lives and experiences."² Indeed the history of Arab masculinity in the past forty years or so is composed of a number of elements that reveal the volatile nature of the culture's sense of masculinity and makes a study of male representation especially compelling and informative. As the older village and rural structures were being systematically destroyed and new urban values were taking precedence, men found themselves faced with disorienting challenges to masculine prerogatives. In a highly politicized and emotionally charged atmosphere there is the need to take on board the religiously diverse and ideologically divided nature of such societies and the forms of masculinity produced. Furthermore, the family, educational institutions, the state, all contribute to and are shaped by cultural constructions of gender. Since the Arab world is a region of diverse religious, sectarian, and ethnic groups with a plurality of experiences, one cannot look at it as a coherent whole. Accordingly, my focus will be post-war Lebanese society and the situation of men at this juncture. At a time in Lebanese history when men are becoming increasingly concerned over the feminization of culture and women are

beginning to make inroads into traditionally male territories, masculine identities are changing in complicated ways. This involves a radical questioning or redefinition of the meaning of masculinity in post-war Lebanon where there have been great ideological and political upheavals precipitating changes in social values, including greater freedoms for women. This complex gender dynamics has brought about a shift in the notions of masculinity within the Lebanese society. Today in Lebanon, women are still seen as bastions of traditional values. Their identities continue to center around the importance of virginity and on their achievements as wives and mothers. In other words, men are still in control of women's sexual behavior. Despite that, the ideology of patriarchal structure has undergone change in response to the complexities and transformations of the contemporary world. Indeed, if there are forces within the Lebanese society that insist on maintaining conventional ideals of manhood by stabilizing the idea of masculinity, and upholding the authentic ways, there are others who under the influence of modernity flout and contest these ideals. Masculinity is being reinvented and reinterpreted to meet the specific exigencies and complexities of current conditions. The Western cultural assault has penetrated an extensive range of institutions and socio-cultural realms making it impossible for many to resist an inevitable modernization. Indeed, many men see the need to embrace modernity to remain in touch with civilization. Accordingly, for a large section of the middle class urban sector of society, the meanings of masculinity and femininity are becoming increasingly blurred, varied, and problematic. For others, change is seen as a potential betrayal of one's culture, values, and language. As a result, regression towards original mythology appears to be the only way to preserve one's identity. Since the Islamic world has been unable to compete with the West at the scientific, technological, economic, and educational levels, Muslims present an alternative in the one area in which they take pride and feel secure, namely the realm of religion and culture. This perspective, however, demands that men adhere to essentialist definitions of masculinity, and ensure that women remain in their places since they are seen as the major symbols of stability.

Nevertheless, despite resistance by supporters of traditional masculinity, Lebanese culture is becoming more feminized where men belonging to the urban middle classes have started to adopt habits and embrace acts formerly reserved for women. Earlier on, it was women who cared about their physical appearance, while men's indifference over their own image was the male norm. Today, if one casts a look at urban areas inhabited and frequented by the upper middle classes, one notes that, in many cases, gender has become blurred. The clothes that are worn by young people in these places such as T-Shirts, sweaters and pants are predominantly unisex. Furthermore, androgynous fashion which presumably emasculates the male wearer is seemingly everywhere. The opening of our culture onto Western patterns and standards has created a breed of men who are very much concerned about body image. Captivated by new ideals of male fashion, style and beauty, these men polish their nails, wear earrings, diet, exercise, and undergo plastic surgery to improve their appearance. Young men wear trendy clothes, sport body piercing and tattoos, grow their hair long, wear ponytails, color their hair, apply styling gel, and pluck their eyebrows. Other older men, worried about hair loss, spend a lot of money on shampoos and chemical creams or go as far as undergoing hair transplants. Men's beauty salons have replaced the old barber shops while special cosmetics for men such as hydrating creams, anti-wrinkle creams, all kinds of face masks and many other kinds of cosmetics are readily available. Indeed many men are spending increasing amounts of money and time to improve their physical appearance.

Satellite TV channels are broadcasting programs that run counter to our culture and tradition. Despite reservations at various levels, reality TV has thousands of viewers. Star Academy aired on The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation has attracted a huge audience and fans. Even though the idea of young, unmarried men and women living together runs counter to our customs and traditions, the program was a great success. The young men and women who participated competed on equal basis without discrimination between male and female and won the love of the masses all over the Arab world. Furthermore, if the organization of Mr. Lebanon contest is not as popular as Miss Lebanon, young men are taking a chance that would put them in the limelight and ensure a better future for them. These young men do not seem to worry about the fact that they are becoming objects of the (female) gaze. Indeed, middle-class, educated women are beginning to look at men more boldly and valuing them according to their appearance.

Indeed, Middle class educated men have a whole range of other sources of identity open to them, through their work, through fathering, through the way they treat their working wives and through friendship networks. Men are increasingly sharing responsibility with their wives at home and with the children, where they are learning that they too can be nurturing, caring and emotionally expressive. They are more in touch with a feminine side that they thought did not exist.

Since women are working with men and competing with them, men feel the need to appear attractive in the way the women had to be. Indeed surveys conducted in the West found that the more financially secure the woman is, the more important a man's looks were to her.

As the new age of globalization, free market capitalism and consumer culture takes over, men who have been associated with power, dominance and strength because of the type of work and jobs that they have held traditionally, are taking jobs that no longer require physical fitness and where an increasing number of women compete with them. Men are more present in the fields traditionally reserved for women and women are getting more positions in social, and business life that used to belong to men. The growth of the service economy has removed physical strength and fitness as a requirement and thus has accommodated women, in addition to men, in the workplace. In an age where consumerism is the main vehicle of expression, men who have nothing to measure their achievements against, have increasingly sought approval not for their actions and feats, but for the commodities that they possess such as expensive cars, houses and their physical appearance. The growth of service economy worldwide has changed the way men do business. For many, work value rests solely in one's ability to earn money and capital to buy such commodities in order to influence the perceptions and views of those around them. The rise of the male fashion industry epitomizes the importance of male appearance in a world where the image and spectacle predominates.

Because masculinities are stretched by the exigencies of change, the process of accommodating old definitions to new conditions have driven men to reexamine their experiences and reinvent their masculinity. In Lebanon, one could say that masculinity imported from the West has a precarious existence. For some it is seen as a threat, while for others it is a blessing. The definition of manhood is changing and many men are searching for a new understanding of manhood suited to the modern age. Owing to changes precipitated by modernity and by the empowerment of women, the Lebanese culture is becoming more feminized causing men to adopt habits and embrace acts formerly reserved for women. Nevertheless, opposing forces of modernity and counter-modernity stretch and strain the country's social fabric, and cherished ideals of masculinity are being challenged and interrogated. At the same time, traditional masculinity continues to rattle its arms to ensure that the field is still under male control.

End Notes

1. See Scott, J.W., "Gender: A useful category of historical analysis," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 91, No. 5 (Dec., 1986), 1053-1075.
2. See Brod, H., and Kaufman, M. (1994). *Theorizing masculinities*, 5-6. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Working towards the Globalization of Peace

■ Nadine Saliba

Human Rights Activist

I want to speak about women under occupation in Palestine and Iraq. As we are caught in the clutches of war, speaking about ending violence against women means combating violence not only at the local and national level but also at the global level. Global forms of violence range from capitalist globalization to occupation, wars and militarization, and women in the 'third world are the primary victims of these forms of violence.

If we as women claim to care about violence affecting women, then I would expect us to have some sort of agreement on what defines violence and what qualifies as a threat to women. Can we agree that economic globalization is a form of violence against women? Do we think that the preemptive war, which the United States of America - residing over the largest military arsenal in history - waged against Iraq, in violation of international law, was a form of aggression against Iraqi women? And finally, can we agree that the Israeli occupation of Palestine - the only colonialist occupation that still exists in this day and age - constitutes a form of violence against Palestinian women?

Let's consider some of the effects of military conflicts, continued occupation, chaos and absence of security on

the daily lives of women. Today, under the US occupation in the "liberated" Iraq, women are afraid to go out. Iraqi women suffered tremendously and for decades under the previous regime, but according to a senior UN official they are worse off now, if that is possible to imagine. The poor security situation presents a direct threat to their personal safety. Young women cannot walk the streets without male relatives accompanying them because of the increase in instances of rape, attacks and kidnapping.

Scariest still is the rise of religious forces in Iraq under US occupation. While not all religious forces are reactionary, those that are, advocate traditional attitudes about women's role in society. The American appointed Iraqi Governing Council - obviously not an elected body - recently passed what is known as resolution 137, designed to install religious laws in place of the Iraqi civil code dealing with personal status laws. The Iraqi Governing Council, an interim entity appointed by the occupation authority, has no legitimate powers to change Iraqi civil law, a culmination of 50 years of struggle by Iraqi women and progressive forces in Iraq, not the product of Saddam Hussein's regime. Resolution 137 amounts to a direct attack on Iraqi women's rights. In response to this resolution, a large number of Iraqi women took to

the streets protesting it. Consequently it was repealed, at least for the time being.

Shifting to the occupation of Palestine, let's ask ourselves, what is life like for Palestinian women living under the Israeli occupation? It would indeed be stating the obvious to say that the Israeli occupation and aggression have a very negative impact on the lives of Palestinian women who have been the victims of massacres, rape, ethnic cleansing, economic blockade, torture, confinement, curfews and school closures. Countless numbers of Palestinian mothers have been forced to deliver still born babies at Israeli checkpoints because Palestinian ambulances aren't allowed to pass through to nearby hospitals. And this is routine procedure. The rights of Palestinian women and their families are impossible to realize under these circumstances. These women are only able to exercise the full range of their rights when they live in free communities and in a society free from military conflicts and occupation.

Palestinian women have always been politically active on the nationalist front and the gender equality front. They have been aware of the link between homegrown patriarchy and the Israeli occupation in the sense that both are instances of dominance of one group over another. Seeing the close link between their feminist and nationalist struggles, they have organized, mobilized and have been very active in the national liberation movement and in women's rights organizations.

The Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation has been sustained to a large degree by the resourcefulness of Palestinian women. During the first Intifada in the late 1980's and early 1990's, Palestinian women took

a pioneering role in the campaign to boycott Israeli products in the occupied territories. With no pre-existing indigenous industry to fall back on, Palestinian women took it upon themselves to provide alternative sources of income and products. They began establishing their own manufacturing industries from cheese and jam making to bread baking and cultivating community gardens. In doing so, not only did they enable the boycott campaign and made it possible to succeed, but actually developed a nucleus for the infrastructure of a Palestinian economy.

International women's organizations interested in playing a role in combating the oppression facing Palestinian women as women have to recognize the connection between patriarchy and occupation that manifests itself in the daily lives of women and integrate this connection in the theory, practice and agenda of the international women's movement.

It is important at this moment in our history to be politically informed and to be aware of what's going on in the world and of the role governments play in world events affecting women. Critical political knowledge is central to developing oppositional spaces and cultures of resistance where critical thinking can function at a time when policing mechanisms are tightened and a demagogical discourse of national security and terrorism is sweeping our public space.

Finally, being politically aware and being committed to issues of social justice is of essence. The women of Palestine and Iraq need us to stay informed, committed and to make people aware of the oppression they face. They need our solidarity in their effort to end the occupation so they can live in free communities.

**Forthcoming:
Young Arab Women**

Recent Publications

Adams, R., and Savran, D. (Eds.). (2002). *The masculinity studies reader*. Malden, Mass: Blackwell.

Hatty, S. (2000). *Masculinities, violence and culture*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

Noble, J. (2003). *Masculinities without men?: Female masculinity in twentieth-century*. Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press.

Silverman, E.K. (2001). *Masculinity, motherhood, and mockery: Psychoanalyzing culture and the latmul Naven rite in New Guinea*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Announcement

From H-Gender-MidEast

Michigan State University's Women and International Development (WID) Publication Series publishes peer-reviewed manuscripts that examine the relationships between gender and global transformation, and which illuminate processes of change, in the broadest sense. Through empirical studies, theoretical analyses, and policy discussions, individual papers in the series address a range of topics, including women's historical and contemporary participation in economic and political spheres, globalization, intra- and inter-family roles and relationships, gender identity, women's health and healthcare, and the gender division of labor. We particularly encourage manuscripts that bridge the gap between research, policy, and practice.

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Films

And Along Came a Spider

This documentary exposes the shocking portrait of the world of a recently captured serial killer, who believes that murdering prostitutes is in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Over the span of a year, 16 women were murdered in the Iranian city of Mashad. Because the victims were lured into the killer's traps, the press soon called these the "spider killings". The film visits the family of the victims, the perpetrator and his family, as well as prostitutes of this holy city.

Season Of Men

Eighteen year old Aisha who lives in Djerba, marries Said who works and lives in Tunis eleven months of the year. On her wedding night, Aisha announces to Said her desire to break with tradition by moving with him to Tunis. Said agrees provided she bears him a son. Aisha while awaiting the birth of her son lives with her tyrannical mother-in-law, away from her husband, who visits her once a year only.

All About my Mother

A single mother in Madrid sees her only son die on his 17th birthday as he runs to seek an actress's autograph. She goes to Barcelona to find the lad's father, a transvestite named Lola who does not know he has a child. She wants to tell him that their son's last written words were directed to him, even though he never knew his father.

As soon as soft hair began to thicken above my lips, whenever I looked in a mirror I began to imagine myself with a complete and perfect moustache. What I envisaged was a model moustache of the kind that I would have liked to have had, not as it would actually have been. I was handsome in that moustache which I added to my face like one adds a pair of sun-glasses, though I didn't acquire a pair of those until I was past forty. Nevertheless, a moustache and sun glasses, together with a pipe: the image was never far from my mind, though when I did adopt the pipe I only used it for about ten days. Pipe, moustache, sun glasses, and also the overcoat which we used to imagine as the dress of secret policemen, all this combined to make up the complete man who lacked nothing. (Hassan Daoud, *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, p. 273).

It would help to sort out from the usual clichés about "men-and-sex vs. women-and-love" the genuine intuition about what makes male sexuality distinctly male. Everyone has heard the clichés that say, when it comes to sexual relationships, women focus on the intimacy part and men focus on the physical part. But what really makes male sexuality distinctly male? Maybe it can be stated like this. Female sexuality is specific. Women rarely want sex-in-general: their passion is focused on one with whom the sex is desired. Commitment is inherent in female sexuality, no doubt in large part for biological reasons. The question for women is who the lucky winner will be. And the problem is avoiding bad or too early or serial commitments. But male sexuality isn't like that, perhaps again for biological reasons. It is naturally unfocused and amorphous. It is a challenge for men to focus desire onto one person, one woman, one life partner. Herein the culmination of sexual adulthood for men is found. If men engage in too-early-sex or pre-wife promiscuity, not only is true sexual adulthood subverted, but a crucial challenge to the man — an essential test of his masculinity — is lost or failed, all too often in the supposed pursuit of masculinity itself. Promiscuity undermines masculinity. Fatherhood perfects it. (Sarah E. Hinlicky, *Subversive Masculinity* <<http://www.boundless.org/2000/features/a0000195.html>>

Arab masculinity (rujulah) is acquired, verified and played out in the brave deed, in risk-taking, and in expressions of fearlessness and assertiveness. It is attained by constant vigilance and willingness to defend honour

(sharaf), face (wajh), kin and community from external aggression and to uphold and protect cultural definitions of gender-specific propriety. In the Palestinian context, the occupation has seriously diminished those realms of practice that allow men to engage in, display and affirm masculinity by means of autonomous actions. Frequent witnesses to their father's beatings by soldiers or settlers, children are acutely aware of their fathers' inability to protect themselves and their children." (Julie Peteet, *Imagined Masculinities: Male Identity and Culture in the Modern Middle East*, p.107).

Men's clothing has been repeatedly restyled in the past, and contemporary trends suggest that it is still undergoing transformation. Some, for instance, have observed a 'feminization' and 'emasculinization' of men's fashion, particularly in the realm of haute couture. Recent designer fashions play on gender reversal in male fashion ... Apart from this gender swapping, there is also an air of androgyny surrounding modern fashion in general. 'On Catwalks and even in showrooms,' it appears, 'gender has become blurred beyond all recognition..' (Alejandro Diaz, *Fashioning Masculinity: Change and Paradox in Men's Fashion*, p.3. <<http://www.stanford.edu/~amd/download/masculinity.pdf>>

Although patriarchy has certainly changed in form over the last century or more, especially through the growth of the state, men's power still resides at least in part in the family and the institution of fatherhood. Historically, fatherhood is both a means of possession of and care for young people, and an arrangement between men. It has also been and still is a way for some men of living with, being with, being violent to, sexually abusing, caring for and loving particular young people (those that called 'your own'), and a way of avoiding connection, care and contact with other young people more generally. Even nice fathers can switch to become nasty ones. Fatherhood has often involved getting something for nothing, an assumption of rights and authority over others, principally women and children, rather than responsibilities for them. The problems of both father absence and father distance are now recognised more than ever (Williams, 1998). For some men, becoming fathers can and obviously does involve major changes in responsibilities and more work.

(Jeff Hearn, *A Crisis in Masculinity or New Agendas for Men*, p.7). <http://www.europrofem.org/02.info/22contri/2.04.en/2en.masc/01en_mas.htm>

From France

Restoring the Clitoris

(...) A tall, elegant Somalian woman in her late twenties slips nervously into the reception area of the Louise XIV hospital in Saint Germain-en-Laye outside Paris. Elham Farah has been booked in for a two-hour operation to be carried out by a man who has become a savior to thousands of victims of female genital mutilation (FGM). Dr Pierre Fordes is the only surgeon and urologist to have developed a surgical technique which restores the clitoris.

Elham is unable to give the exact details of what happened to her 20 years ago when she was led to a house outside her village in Somalia and was held down by a number of women including her grandmother and two aunts. Her legs were prised apart by two other women. She passed out when one of the women applied a knife to her genitals. When she came round she remembers an excruciating pain between her legs, which had been tied together. It was not until several weeks later that she discovered that her genitalia had been sliced away.

Elham is just one of 130 million women worldwide who are estimated to have undergone FGM, with an additional two million girls and women undergoing the procedure every year. In some cultures it is seen as a female rite of passage preventing promiscuity, and is mainly performed on girls aged between four and 12 years. The practice is prevalent in 28 African countries, with figures varying widely. About 5 per cent of females in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) and Uganda undergo the procedure; that figure rises to 98 per cent in Somalia.

There are three types of FGM: the removal of the clitoris only; the excision of the clitoris and surrounding labia; and, most radical of all, the removal of clitoris, inner and outer labia and the sewing-up of the vagina, where only a small opening is left for urine and menstrual blood. It is estimated that 15 per cent of women who experience FGM have undergone this most severe mutilation, known as infibulation.

In France she came across articles and programmes on sex and female anatomy. "I realised what had been taken from me and how much I suffered physically and emotionally because of it. I became very angry. My womanhood has been cut away. I have never known what it's like to have normal sexual feelings. I am not a real woman. I always feel ashamed and dirty."

Every year Dr Fordes, 51, operates on 200 women like Elham, including at least six from the UK. Most of his

patients are Africans aged between 18 and 45 living in France. His doctor wife, Beatrice, and five children hardly see him; he performs the operations in addition to his full-time hospital work. He refuses to charge for the operations because he considers his patients to be victims of one of the biggest crimes against humanity. "Victims shouldn't pay for the crimes against them. These women have already paid a huge price," he says.

He explains the reasons for his determination to continue with his work: "Excision is worse than rape because the family are involved. And it is much worse in terms of the clinical aftermath," he says in his heavily accented English. Short-term complications include severe pain and a risk of haemorrhage; there is also a high risk of infections such as gangrene. Long-term complications include urine retention and infections, obstruction of menstrual flow causing internal infections and infertility, and prolonged and obstructed labour. (...)

When, 15 years ago, Dr Fordes embarked on his mission to develop surgical techniques to restore the clitoris he was shocked to find that the only organ in the human body devoted to pleasure had been metaphorically excised by the male-dominated medical fraternity. "It was invisible," he says indignantly. "It was shocking for me to discover in my research that there was nothing, absolutely nothing on this organ, although there are hundreds of books on the penis, and several surgical techniques to lengthen it, enlarge it or repair it. Nobody was studying the clitoris because it is associated with female pleasure. There was very little anatomical detail on it. It was as if it didn't exist. I had to start from scratch."

What Dr. Fordes discovered was that the organ, which Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis, once likened to kindling wood, is much larger than originally thought, with nerves surrounding the vagina and extending down the thighs. "It's about ten or 11 centimetres long, like a penis, and changes shape when erect," he explains.

To reconstruct a clitoris, Dr Fordes removes all scar tissue that has grown over the excised tip and snips the ligaments that support it, hence allowing more of the clitoral body to slip down so that it is exposed as a small tip like the original. The ligaments are then repaired. "After six weeks the area starts to look normal, but my patients tell me that it takes four to six months for them to feel anything," he says. Whether his patients are later able to experience orgasm is something he is not willing to guarantee. (...)

Sexism and Women's Rights: Bulletin 2004 - 10
<http://news.scotsman.com/features.cfm?id=516832004>

The European Project for Interreligious Learning (EPIL)

The European Project for Interreligious Learning (EPIL) held in cooperation with the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) at the Lebanese American University was the last module of an adult education program for women which took place from February 4-12, 2004. This program explores problems of living together as Christians and Moslems. It should be mentioned that the program consists of five modules that were held respectively in Switzerland, Spain, Germany, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Lebanon.

Twenty seven participants from these countries attended the module. Emphasis was placed on various ways through which national reconciliation took place in Lebanon, and this through a series of lectures given by prominent Lebanese speakers. In addition visits were organized to various religious groups during which Lebanese women gave testimonies about how they lived the war.



IWSAW director Mona Khalaf, IWSAW program officer Anita Nassar with participants in the EPIL workshop

Governor of New South Wales Marie Bashir Visits IWSAW



From left to right: Dr. Abdallah Sfeir, H.E. Dr. Marie Bashir, Mrs. Mona Khalaf, Dr. Riyad Nassar and H.E. Stephanie Shwabsky

On March 23, 2004 the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) in collaboration with the Australian Embassy in Beirut hosted Her Excellency Professor Dr. Marie Bashir, Governor of New South Wales. Professor Dr. Bashir gave a talk on "Challenges for Women in a Changing World." The talk was attended by Ambassador of Australia in Lebanon, Her Excellency Stephanie Shwabsky, friends, Australian nationals, Professors, and students.