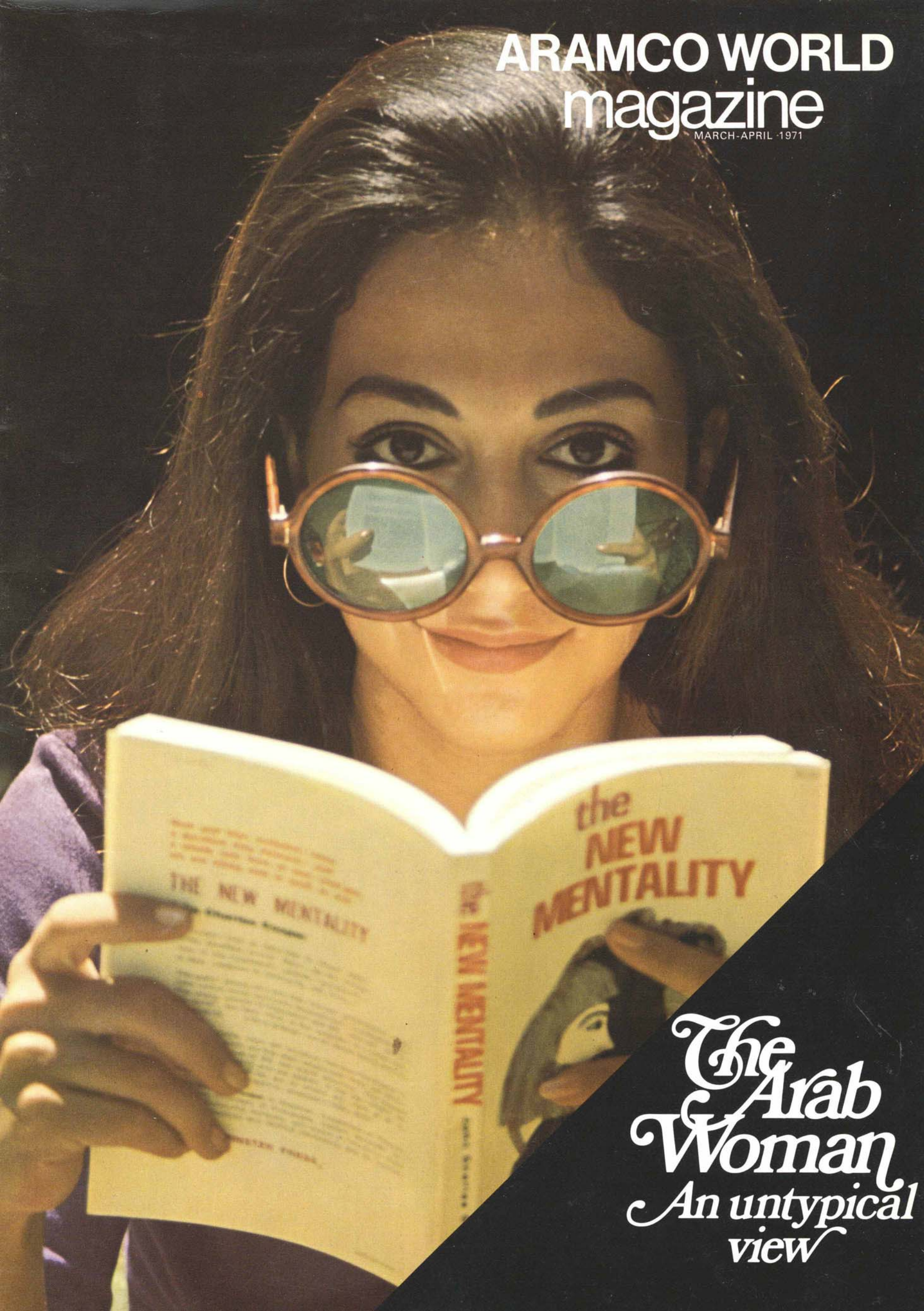
ARAMCO WORLD
magazine
MARCH-APRIL 1971



The Arab Woman
An untypical view

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Queen Elizabeth recently offered an opinion that we are certain will go unchallenged. "It is becoming more generally recognized," she said, "that the home is not the only place for women."

That splendidly cautious observation capsules what we hope to prove in this very special issue: it is no longer possible to ignore the fundamental changes now transforming the lives of women in the Arab East.

These changes are by no means the ominous rumblings that presage social upheaval. Kate Millet will never reach the Best Seller lists in Cairo and at this writing no one was burning bras in Baghdad. We would not be too surprised either if the veil survives not only Miss Millet but also her generation.

Yet there is change. From Beirut, where wispy bikinis give agreeable notice of the extent and direction, to Jiddah, where voluminous abayas conceal, among other surprises, a new commitment to education and advancement, the Arab woman is quietly redefining a role that has been too often restricted to fetching, carrying and breeding.

We know—too well—that to one school of Make-Believe travel writing this is sheer heresy. The customs and costumes of a retreating culture are, like Irish thatch and Japanese Geishas, infinitely more photogenic than the dull realities of canning factories and drainage projects, or the invisible momentum of curriculum improvement and public health programs.

That is why we decided to present, for once, a view that is not at all "typical". That is why we deliberately instructed contributors to focus exclusively on Arab women who are smart, sophisticated, talented, intelligent, athletic, and, when possible, beautiful—women like Sulafah Bassam.

Miss Bassam, whose photograph by Nik Wheeler adorns our cover, is a perfect example of the Arab girl few westerners ever hear about. She is lovely, literate cooly independent and impressively educated; she is a candidate for her M.A. in sociology in the American University of Beirut. Yet Sulafah Bassam is also a Muslim and a citizen of Saudi Arabia, citadel of conservative Arab traditions.

Necessarily, our conclusions are more impressionistic than scientific. Yet we believe that they are also statistically sound. Our writers talked at length and in depth to nearly 300 women and men in seven countries and our photographers and illustrator, working in 11 countries compiled some 5,000 photographs and 200 drawings. We doubt, in fact, that a more extensive study of the subject has even been made, and hope it will at least modify the worst distortions that have been imbedded too long and too deeply in western imaginations.

—The Editors

1. Mrs. Isabelle Fakoury, hotel owner, Beirut.
2. Girls at a Beirut beach.
3. Aisha Ani, a Syrian pharmacy student at Damascus University.
4. Nagwa el-Kaframi, a secretary in Cairo, U.A.R.
5. Mrs. Asma Ombargi, Lebanese mother of five.

U.S. readers are asked to send all changes of address to Aramco World Magazine, c/o 1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y., 10019.

Published by the Arabian American Oil Company, a Corporation, 1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019; L. F. Hills, President; J. J. Johnston, Secretary; E. G. Voss, Treasurer. Paul F. Hoye, Editor. Designed and printed in Beirut, Lebanon, by the Middle East Export Press, Inc. Distributed without charge to a limited number of readers with an interest in Aramco, the oil industry, or the history, culture, geography and economy of the Middle East. Correspondence concerning **Aramco World Magazine** should be addressed to T. O. Phillips, Manager, Public Relations, Arabian American Oil Company, 1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019 or to The Editor, Box 4002, Beirut, Lebanon.

ARAMCO WORLD magazine

VOL. 22 NO. 2 PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY MARCH-APRIL 1971


ANNE TURNER BRUNO


KATSY THOMAS


LESLIE FARMER


PENNY WILLIAMS

In planning this issue the editors decided early that men were out. In the Arab East women do not discuss deeply personal opinions with strange men. We decided, to try to recruit four women willing to work in an area increasingly suspicious of westerners and able to do so. Two, we thought, should be experienced in the Arab world and two new to the area—so their impressions would be spontaneous. We succeeded, if we do say so, brilliantly. In Istanbul we found, l–r, free lancer Anne Turner Bruno. (**Reader's Digest** and **Ladies' Home Journal**). In New York we found Katsy Thomas, an established Manhattan professional, and in Beirut we found Leslie Farmer, who speaks fluent Arabic, and Penny Williams, a Canadian designer and illustrator, both long residents here. Design and layout: Don Thompson

The Arab Woman
A traditional view

"Outwardly there may be little change but under cover

In one of the traditional countries on the Arabian Gulf, a young woman from a good family is embarking on one of her regular solitary excursions out from the capital city in her chauffeur-driven car.

As the car pulls out of the most heavily-populated part of town the huge sunglasses that stand in for a veil come off. Further out past the suburbs the *abaya*—a full-length black cloak—follows them. And at her destination, the complex of "digs" where archeologists are uncovering some of the country's prehistory, the young woman—a member of the ruling family—steps down in the garb appropriate for a budding archeologist: pants and shirt.

This innocent stratagem, which both respects the slowly loosening bonds of tradition without sacrificing the girl's thoroughly modern interest in archeology, symbolizes the problems—and solutions—of many educated women in conservative nations of the Arab East, more particularly in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. Outwardly, there may be little change, but under cover—in many cases, literally—there are the stirrings of significant social change.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain are not at all alike. Saudi Arabia, with its 900,000 square miles, is vast and diverse. Kuwait, on the upper end of the Gulf, is smaller—6,000 square miles, 500,000 people.

"Women's education in Saudi Arabia began later than it did in the two smaller countries, but, conversely, advanced much faster."

And further down the Peninsula, off the coast of Saudi Arabia, there is Bahrain—one biggish island and a sprinkling of little ones, with 200,000 inhabitants and approximately 300 square miles of territory.

There are many common factors to be sure: language, dress, religion. And for women one more: the social and often physical separation of most women from most men.

Customarily, and from an early age, the Arab woman of these countries lives almost entirely with women—her only adult male contacts being her father, the relatives she cannot legally marry and, later, her husband and sons. Custom elaborates and perpetuates this separation: many Saudi houses—even poor ones—have separate entrances and reception rooms for men and women. Restaurants in Kuwait may have two sections: one for men, the other the "family" section, separated from it by a wall, a screen or by being upstairs or downstairs. One of the most impressive hospitals in Bahrain, the Salmaniyeh, is for women only. Women staffers in the Jiddah branch of the Ministry of Social Affairs, with a room to themselves, disappear at a male employe's voice and knock. The door of a Kuwait beauty salon bears the notice: "Men's Entry *Forbidden*." Furthermore, Saudi women's faces do not appear on passports or in Saudi publications and from at least puberty a woman lives with her face covered with a veil, her clothes by an *abaya*.

There are also, in many conservative families in these countries, other restrictions. As a member of what is known as an "extended family"—which includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, great-aunts, great-uncles, cousins of all degree, and in-laws—a woman must usually be prepared to consult them and listen to what all of them have to say on the way she is brought up, clothed, educated and married. Often all or most of such relatives will be living close by; in some families they all will be living in the same house and gather together for the noon meal. In one house of this kind, a huge and handsome old three-storied wood mansion in Jiddah belonging to a well-known family, there are, by one inhabitant's careful reckoning, 50 people at peak periods.

"Family ties like these are comforting and valuable..."

Family ties like these are comforting and valuable but, where a woman is concerned, can also be suffocating. "When my sister and four other girls became the first Bahraini women to go away to college," recalls Bahrain architect Abdurrahman Fakhro, "they had to get the permission of *all* their families." And Hussein al-Amri, a middle-aged Jiddah driver, says that he would not like his daughters to work in certain jobs "because my relatives wouldn't like it." A few very conservative families in Saudi Arabia might even discourage their daughters

Written by Leslie Farmer/Illustrated by Penny Williams

– in many cases, literally – there are the stirrings of significant social change."

from having woman friends outside the family circle; girls in such families would generally marry within the extended family and after marriage seldom visit women who are not related.

This segregation, however, has not blocked what to western observers in these areas is a significant improvement in the status of woman: the increase in educational opportunities. For although it is true that girls are segregated from boys at all levels, the very existence of the schools is a formal acknowledgement of the right —or at least the necessity—of girls' education. In some areas on the Peninsula, until very recently the most a girl could expect was elemental reading, writing and a brief exposure to the Koran in small, simple primary schools.

The first country in the Gulf to offer a program of primary education to girls was Bahrain, in 1927, and progress has been steady. In 1939 secondary education for both boys and girls began; three years ago a women's teacher training institute was set up. Girls now also follow courses in business and secretarial skills at the Gulf Technical College and a number of Bahraini girls have graduated from foreign universities. By the 1968-69 school year, boys still outnumbered girls in the school system, but the ratio was only four to three, and secondary schools alone enrolled 1,904 girls.

Other statistics are also encouraging. In 1959 only 37 percent of Bahraini girls between the ages of 7 and 15 (as opposed to 71 percent of the boys) were in school, but six years later the figures were 57 percent and 87 percent.

"In the 1967-68 final state examinations in Saudi Arabia, it was a Saudi girl who headed the honors list and women students captured most of the top honors at King 'Abd-al-'Aziz University last year."

Women's education began in Kuwait in 1937 with the opening of a primary school for 140 girls. By 1951, when the first girls' secondary school opened, Kuwait had 2,447 female students and all seven of the secondary school's first graduates went on to Cairo University. By 1966-67 there were 43,026 girl students below university level—60 times the figure for the first year of education—and primary and intermediate school, encompassing ages 6 to 14, were compulsory. In addition, Kuwait now has several special institutes for handicapped girls, a training institute which gives vocational and domestic courses, evening studies centers with anti-illiteracy classes and a nursing institute.

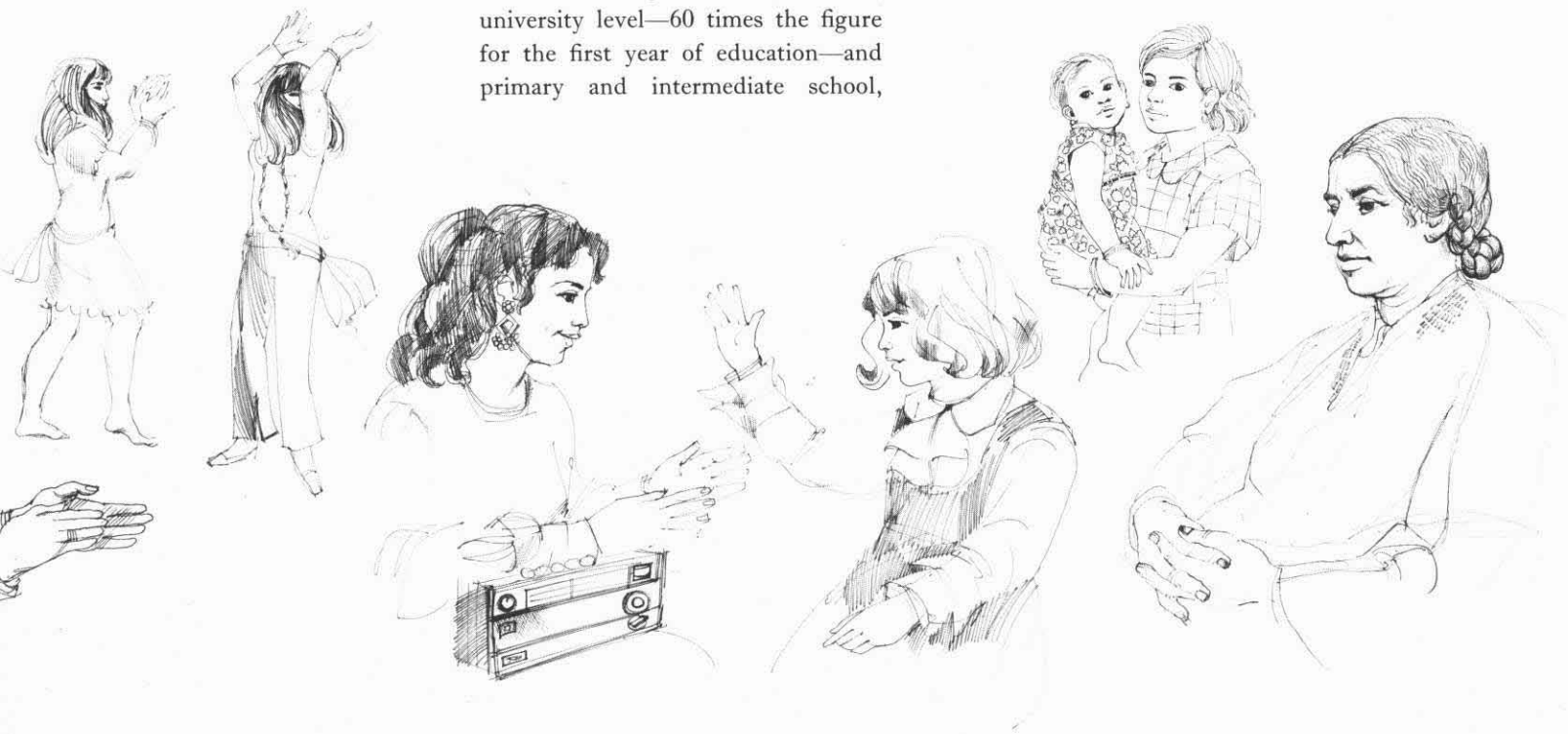
At higher levels, a women's teacher training institute was founded in 1953; and by 1965 a total of 38 Kuwaiti women and 365 men had graduated from foreign institutes of higher education. In the next year the University of Kuwait, including a Women's College, was inaugurated with 138 Kuwaiti girls among its students. Classes in the women's section are taught by both men and women, and the first crop of graduates is due this year.

Women's education in Saudi Arabia began later than it did in the two smaller countries but, conversely, advanced much faster. When government schools for girls were instituted in 1960 at the primary level, in a number of areas the government policy was running ahead of public opinion—and in some, directly counter to it. In a few instances, as a pamphlet handed out by the Ministry of Information notes, the schools had to be opened under military protection. Inhabitants of the localities concerned believed that education could only "corrupt" girls and weaken their religious faith.

"... near Riyadh ... a 45-year-old mother of 11 children attends a center offering instruction in reading, writing religion, nutrition and child care four times a week."

Education in Saudi Arabia is now open to girls from kindergarten to university, including teacher training and nursing schools. At the University of Riyadh, women students take their courses by correspondence or home study, and in Jiddah nearly 100 girls, many of them married, attend classes at 'Abd al-'Aziz University in off-campus buildings from 4:30 to 8:30 in the evening, dressed in long, tailored skirts and blouses. The girls can major in English literature or business and administration.

A few figures show how quickly women's education in Saudi Arabia has grown. In 1960-61 there were 11, 754 girls in all the kingdom's government and private schools—5 percent



of all the students in the country. In 1968-69 there were 115,745: 27.7 percent of the kingdom's students. In 1960 the government's budget for girls' schools was two million Saudi riyals (about 500,000 dollars); last school year it was 93,703,338 riyals.

Education has been probably the most important change in the lives of women in these three countries, opening up the possibility for other changes. The women seem to realize this: teachers and observers report that girls in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait in general study harder, and get better grades. In the 1967-68 final state examinations in Saudi Arabia, it was a Saudi girl who headed the honors list and women students captured most of the top honors at King 'Abd al-'Aziz University last year.

For some women intent on getting or completing their education there are methods besides attending regular schools—government and private adult education classes, offering academic and practical subjects. In the town of Dir'iyeh, near Riyadh, for example, a 45-year-old mother of 11 children attends a center offering instruction in reading, writing, religion, nutrition and child care four times a week. In Jiddah, a middle-class matron attended primary school with her smaller brood and took the primary certificate along with the eldest.

Women who cannot attend regular classes may also study by correspondence. One notable follower of this route is the young woman who married in her early teens and despite a constantly growing family simply kept studying. Now in her early thirties, she is halfway through a degree in absentia at a foreign Arab university and plans another degree after that.

Men and women with whom I've talked in these three countries give a variety of answers as to why they think women's education important. The most common reason is that education will make a girl a better, more efficient and more interesting wife and mother. Another is that education could qualify a girl for a lucrative job.

The idea of women working, even among families whose daughters are highly qualified by their education, is hardly widespread, but there are signs of impending change. Saudi Arabia's labor laws, although prohibiting men and women from commingling in places of work, do implicitly sanction the concept by providing generous maternity leaves to female workers and requiring employers to pay the costs of a woman's confinement. In Kuwait and Bahrain the laws are socially more liberal in that men and women may work together.

"One womanly interest that neither the monotonously-concealing abaya nor the lack of male admirers has quenched is an interest in fashion."

Ten years ago the number of Saudi, Kuwaiti and Bahraini girls with jobs was miniscule. But Kuwait, according to its latest figures on the subject, had at least 1,000 women working by 1965—over half of them in government ministries. Bahrain, by its last census (1965), had nearly the same number then.

At present, the largest number of women working in the three states are engaged in teaching—traditionally in the Arab world the profession first open to women. Teaching in women's schools does not require contact with men and provides a relatively restricted environment. Next in number probably, come women employed in clerical and administrative work.

There is an increasing number of girls from poorer families working as nurses, a few women medical technicians, a small number of doctors (perhaps a dozen in all three countries) and some social workers. A number of women write for magazines and newspapers on home and family affairs and sometimes on social problems, contributing to daily or weekly women's sections. There are women radio announcers in all three countries, and women in Kuwait have appeared on television. Several wealthy Kuwaiti women—including one member of the ruling family—have opened smart boutiques and dress shops selling imported clothes in the capital.

(continued on page 7)

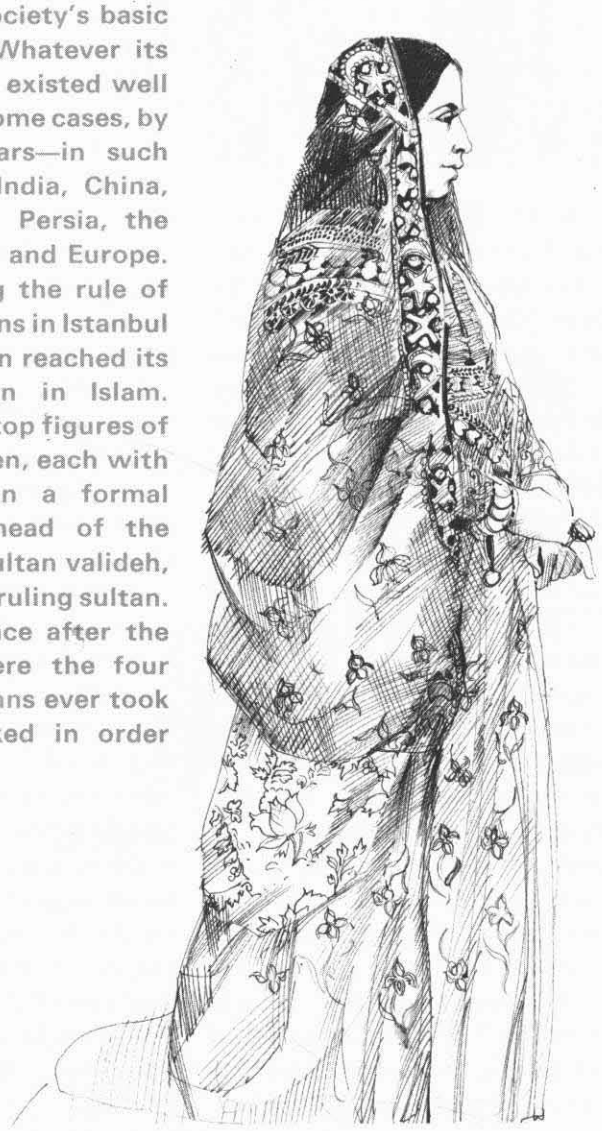
THE HAREM: image and reality

During the six weeks in which I was traveling through the Arab world for this study of Arab women I devoted a rather disproportionate amount of time to the subject of the harem—in Arabic, "hareem"—in hopes of dispelling some of the mystery—and misinformation—that has clouded the West's view of this now nearly extinct system of polygamy.

This did not involve, as some might imagine, bypassing ferocious retainers and double-locked doors to meet groups of secluded beauties; to uncover any remnants of the classical harem system would have required travels longer and further than mine. Today, in fact, the word "hareem" simply means "women," not, as it once did, "inviolable" or "forbidden," the sense which was beloved by story tellers and which still lingers, hardly less vividly, in western imagination.

The origins of polygamy have been variously ascribed to a superfluity of marriageable women and to the assumption that men must acquire as many women as possible for labor and for producing children—primitive society's basic form of capital. Whatever its origins, polygamy existed well before Islam—in some cases, by thousands of years—in such diverse areas as India, China, Babylonia, Egypt, Persia, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe. But it was during the rule of the Ottoman sultans in Istanbul that the institution reached its greatest extension in Islam. Historians report top figures of up to 1,200 women, each with a certain rank in a formal hierarchy. The head of the harem was the sultan valideh, the mother of the ruling sultan. Next in importance after the sultan valideh were the four kadines (few sultans ever took legal wives) ranked in order of arrival, the first highest. A woman of any grade could be promoted to a higher one, with its accompanying benefits of more luxurious accommodations and clothes and more servants, if she won the favor of the sultan.

Besides waiting hopefully for the sultan's summons, the women of the harem acted as servants in various capacities if in the lower ranks, and took instruction in whichever fields they showed aptitude—cooking, accounting, music or other subjects. Sometimes, laying their rivalries aside, they all danced or played music for the sultan. Occasionally they were allowed out of the palace for a carefully chaperoned boat trip on the Bosporus.



That the harem became a byword for intrigue of all kinds is not precisely unfair. All of the women yearned to rise in wealth and prestige within the hierarchy, and some had a taste for politics as well. One, not at all atypical, who combined both interests—and started the so-called "Reign of Women" in the middle 16th century—was a Russian girl called Roxelana. Second kadine, and a great favorite of the sultan, she managed to have her two main rivals for power—the first kadine and the grand vizier—respectively demoted and exiled, and herself soon became, next to the sultan, the strongest power in the empire. The following succession of weak and often degenerate sultans provided a vacuum of power—and the women moved to fill it. For a century and a half the harem ruled the empire, making and unmaking sultans, the power shuttling between the sultan valideh, the first kadine and occasionally the chief black eunuch, and intrigue, bribery, extortion and sometimes murder the order of the day.

The great harems in Turkey ended with the deposition and exile of the Sultan Abdul Hamid in 1909, but polygamy lived on. As late as the 1930's about 10 percent of families in the older generation in Beirut and Cairo, still accepted it, with the percentage somewhat higher in the countryside. Today, although it survives in isolated areas it is increasingly rare.

Seclusion is another matter. Up to five years ago there were women in Arab countries who literally never left their houses. They also disappeared when male visitors arrived and others never sat beside their husbands when driving.

Many older women, I must point out, are well content with this arrangement. As one woman said, "They don't want to give up being pampered." But some educated younger women are beginning to show signs of discontent. As a young married woman in Bahrain put it, "I want to know men's ideas, and not just from books. I think sometimes we have the wrong ideas about men, and they about us."

The image of the large and rigidly secluded harem—an institution which fascinated western imagination—was formed largely in the West by highly romanticized travel books and the colored writings of not-too-objective missionaries. Burton's English translation of the Arabian Nights, which appeared in the 19th century and circulated widely in America, was taken to present an accurate picture of current conditions. Even today an advertisement for one major airline features an Oriental potentate of some sort, complete with turban, whip-wielding slave — and some three dozen white-veiled women trailing behind him.

Such concepts, as they become further and further divorced from present reality, are a sore point among educated Arabs. Characteristic, perhaps, of both the amusement and the annoyance they awake, is the remark of one peninsular amir (not apocryphal) recently planning an official visit to a western community. "Please don't let the ladies start asking me about how many wives I have," he begged an American friend. "If I tell them one, they won't believe me; if I tell them two or three, they'll wonder why I don't have all I'm allowed; and if I tell them four they'll think it's too many!"—L. F.

THE VEIL: a darkness at noon

It comes in smoke-thin chiffon or opaque black crepe, gaily printed cotton or heavy blood-red linen, stiff with gold embroidery and silver ornaments that flash a shield-shape in the sun. It obscures all the face from forehead to neck, shadows it no more than a breath of dark air or covers brow and nose like a mask. A hundred forms, one function: it separates the women who wear it from the outside world as surely as a wall.

The veil—always associated in the West with Islam—actually preceded Islam in Arabia, but until the 10th century was not the rule, even among the aristocracy. More typical was the learned and witty Aisha bint Talha, an aristocratic beauty who, when her husband suggested that she veil herself, returned a reply that seems, historically, to have gone unanswered. "Since God, may He be exalted, has put upon me the stamp of beauty, it is my wish that all view this beauty and recognise His grace to them. On no account, therefore, will I veil myself."

Of all aspects of women's subordinate status in the Arab world, the veil—to both West and educated East—seemed the most glaring, a symbol of all the others. Some of the more self-righteous of the 19th-century western missionaries, in denigrating their sister faith, chose the veil as a symbol of woman's oppression (ignoring the indisputable fact that to girls with little knowledge of the world the veil did provide at least psychological protection).

The more educated men and women in countries where veiling is still common exhibit a similar attitude today. A popular opinion on the Arabian Peninsula is that the veil is something foreign—introduced to the Arabs by either the Persians or the Turks. Many men and women equally point out that in the time of the Prophet, that is when Islam was at its strongest as a religious force, there was little veiling. One foreign journalist taking pictures of Bahrain's 50th anniversary of education celebrations a few years ago provoked an unexpected reaction when he trained his camera on a group of veiled women onlookers: they immediately took the veils off.

Some premature efforts to lift the veil were indeed met by repression. When in 1911 the noted poet Jamil Khawi, in Iraq, made a frontal attack on the custom with a speech urging that the veil be "torn away," he was imprisoned for sedition. Some 10 years later when one woman in Beirut attempted, not to unveil, but to modify the color and form of the covering, she had vitriol thrown at her. Even in the mid-30's when a large group of Syrian women appeared unveiled in Damascus they found no safety in numbers: opposition bordering on violence forced them to resume their veils.

Reformers in Muslim countries have often taken first aim at the veil, none more strongly than Turkey's Kemal Ataturk two years after he became president. "I see women throwing a cloth or a towel or something of the sort over their heads covering their faces and their eyes ..." he said. ... "It makes the nation look ridiculous; it must be rectified immediately!" Shortly after, Iran's Shah Reza Pahlevi ordered schoolteachers and schoolgirls to unveil, then progressively forbade veiled women to use public conveyances or be treated at a government clinic. In the Arab countries, women themselves, took the initiative. By the 1930's a few upper-class women in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq had begun to unveil, and the practice had thoroughly taken hold in these countries among the young and in the cities by the 1950's. Few women now veil in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Bahrain and the veil is being discarded slowly in Kuwait. In Saudi Arabia, the veil is legally mandatory but is often of fine chiffon, sometimes totally nonfuctional as far as concealment goes, and is often dropped in cars or inside shops. Veiling also decreases progressively as one enters the countryside—since it hampers peasant and Bedouin women in their chores—and women in southwest Arabia do not veil at all.

Somewhat surprisingly, the custom of veiling also remains strong in the Mediterranean countries of North Africa where unveiling didn't begin until independence in the 50's and 60's and is still confined to the young and the educated in the cities. Arab Tunisia's Bourguiba echoed Ataturk's remark of four decades earlier when he commented. "It is intolerable ..." The former King of Morocco, Muhammad V, encouraged the just-beginning trend by making a point of sending his reform-minded daughter Princess Lalla Aicha — unveiled — to public meetings.

The women of the conservative countries who have totally unveiled seem to accept it as a matter of course; those who have not unveiled, accept it as a convention. Women's feelings towards the veil, in other words, are not at a reforming pitch. Among the men, the more educated seem anxious to have the veil disappear; the slightly less educated agree, with the provision that their own female relatives not be the first to discard it.

Today, however—even in the countries where it has long lain heaviest—the veil, like a dark storm cloud, is lifting. When the last vestiges of the veil have disappeared, those who regret its passing will, I think, be few, symbolizing, as it does, the shadow of a time when women from the lowest to the highest, the most educated to the illiterate, were begrudged not only freedom of marriage, of association, of movement, but even the light of day.—L. F.

Women's motives for seeking work range from strictly financial ones through the desire to expand their own horizons to that of aiding their countries' development. In the welfare state of Kuwait, in particular, a growing number of educated girls from well-to-do families—some daughters of millionaires—are taking jobs. By their own definition it is mainly for the challenge of proving their abilities and "because Kuwait needs qualified men and women," as Shaikha al-Nisf, a darkly pretty journalism graduate in the Ministry of Guidance and Information, puts it. In less wealthy Bahrain, many girls who work do so to help their families or to finance their own higher education.

The social lives of women in these three countries are also broadening. While the majority of social events for women are still women-only, women of all milieux can at least look forward to wedding and engagement parties, teas, baby-naming ceremonies, and, for the socially conscious woman, meetings of the women's philanthropic and cultural organizations that have begun to spring up.

At these meetings women plan welfare efforts to help their less well-off countrywomen or hear lectures, sometimes by Palestinian Red Crescent fund-raisers, sometimes by khaki-clad girl commandos. Typical of these multi-purpose clubs is Riyadh's Al-Jazira Women's Club, founded by the wife of King Faisal, Princess Iffat, and currently headed by her daughter Princess Sarah. The club runs an orphanage and offers vocational and anti-illiteracy classes as well as regular lectures, facilities for putting on plays and sports facilities.

"How much authority the woman has can vary greatly, depending on her character and education and that of her husband."

Mixed events are on the rise. Some men now go with their families on picnics or trips to the beach where, in a secluded area, women can wade in their *abayas* and men and children can swim. Educated younger couples in all three countries may pay visits together to friends of their own age. And Kuwait has the waterside Ghazal Club, where some wives go with their husbands. There are also mixed professional societies such as the Medical Society, the Writers' and Journalists' Union and the Teachers' Club. Increasingly in Saudi Arabia upper-class and professional men may bring their wives along to conventional evening parties if they are sure that other Arab men there will also be bringing their wives and know who will be present. And significantly, in celebrations marking Bahrain's 50th anniversary of education in 1969, the daughters of the Ruler, along with other Bahraini girls, performed traditional dances before a large and mixed public. Later they helped serve tea to the guests of honor, male and female.

One womanly interest that neither the monotonously-concealing *abaya* nor the lack of male admirers has quenched is an interest in fashion. Traditional dress throughout the three countries varies considerably, but usually conservative women wear full-skirted, long-sleeved, floor length dresses, smocks that drop to the ankles or a diaphanous variant on the *abaya* (usually black, chiffon or net and embroidered heavily with gold thread or sometimes sequins) as a festive overgarment.

Abroad, of course, or under the *abaya* in their home countries, some of the younger women adopt western fashions. Many, in fact, dress up more than a western woman would in equivalent situations and, as of our visit last spring, seemed to prefer pants suits and moderate minis.

As in all societies, however, the traditional Arab woman's central role is that of wife and mother. What may be different is that she still assumes this role at a very early age—an average of 16 for most girls, slightly higher for those with an education. And even this custom is changing.

Among families whose daughters are being educated there is an increasing tendency to defer marriage until the girl finishes at least high school or its equivalent. A few, girls who study abroad for instance, do not marry until their middle 20's.

Marriages are still generally arranged by the families of the bride and groom. Whether a girl's consent is legally required for marriage or not varies with the different schools of Islamic (Shari'ah) law in each country, often depending on the girl's age and whether she has been married previously or not. In practice, however, few girls still would have the assurance to oppose their families.

In the most traditional form of marriage—formerly the norm, and practiced still to some extent with uneducated or extremely conservative families—arrangements are made not between the young people, but between their fathers, with a professional matchmaker or the women of the families adding advice and recommendations.

More common now are marriages in which prospective partners are at least given some information on each other—they are often first cousins—and are in some way consulted, with perhaps the right to refuse if not the right to choose. The two may be allowed or somehow manage to get a look at each other. Some couples these days can meet and talk before making up their minds, naturally with plenty of company around.

"Concerning polygamy, one aspect of the life of Arab women that continues to intrigue the western world, I can only say, with little hope of being believed, that it is a practice that is on the way out."

Also common are marriages arranged after a man has somehow got a glimpse of a girl he has heard about—while on a visit to her male relatives, through a car window or fashionably thin veil or sometimes, romantically, with considerable effort and ingenuity. The man then either asks his father to approach the girl's father or goes himself; his proposal, if accepted, is relayed to the girl. One romantic story of this nature with a particular twist to it concerns a Saudi Myles Standish who, hearing great reports of a rather secluded girl's beauty, asked his younger brother to try to get a look at her. The young man bribed the girl's chauffeur to change clothes with him and found the young woman as attractive as her advance notices. So impressed was he, in fact, that when his day of driving was over he went to her father and proposed himself as a husband, successfully. When I met the girl, a few weeks before her wedding, her future brother-in-law was not speaking to her fiancé.

Finally, and rarest, are matches really arranged by a man and woman who have gotten to know each other somehow—though the form of proposal through the parents is usually preserved. Frequently these marriages are made "within the family"—the two are relations who can use family proximity or family visits to meet. "I met my wife (a relative) before we were married—we knew each other for two years," says Ibrahim Ahmed, a Bahrain intermediate-school teacher. "I sent my older brother to ask her father—our parents didn't know that we knew each other."

Although it is unlikely that the Women's Liberation movement would endorse this system, it rarely occurs to even the educated Saudi girl to enter a protest. Unlike the young Saudi male, especially those who study abroad, she has almost no chance whatsoever of meeting a marriage partner and she knows it. Opposition, therefore, is still the exception.

Once married, most Saudi women focus their lives on household routines varying basically very little from those anywhere else in the world. Women slightly better off or more educated leave housework and cooking to a servant. If they have a job, such as teaching school, they are back by lunch to eat with their families. Less educated wives of men in the wealthier classes tend to settle for visiting, travelling and either making new clothes or having them made.

"A saying of the Prophet quoted to me on this was, 'Of all things lawful, divorce is the most hateful.'"

A woman's relationship with her husband can range from total subordination to substantial independence. Women can, under the various schools of religious law in the three countries, insert binding conditions in the marriage contract—the right to initiate divorce or to complete her studies after marriage, for instance—but most continue to consult and defer to their husbands on every decision. Mrs. Ahmed Ibrahim and Mrs. Jasim bin Ahmed, two women living in Hajar village in Bahrain, say their husbands decide on most daily matters down to and including a choice of kitchen utensils. "I don't ask for what I want,

he just brings them," says Mrs. Ibrahim, "and if I don't like them maybe he'll exchange them, maybe not." Mrs. Ahmed says she does ask for such items, but not for larger ones such as furniture. "If he wants them he brings them," she says.

How much authority the woman has can vary greatly, depending on her character and education and that of her husband. Men may be influenced by their wives on the choice of a vacation or the sort of friends they consort with, the location of a house or social behavior. Mrs. Mas'oud Dabbagh, a young married woman who is the director of inspectresses of girls' schools in Riyadh, gives an example: "On our last vacation my husband wanted to go to Beirut. But I wanted to stay home and decorate the house, so we stayed home that time and decorated the house." The idea of women in these countries having "more power than you'd think" has some truth in it; even in the older generation, an outwardly retiring wife may make most of the decisions in the family.

Concerning polygamy, one aspect of the life of Arab women that continues to intrigue the western world, I can only say, with little hope of being believed, that it is a practice that is on the way out. In the course of six weeks of research I met and heard of only a handful of men who have more than one wife. (In one Bahrain village, though, nearly all the women who had drifted into the house I was visiting said their husbands had another wife—in most cases, in a different village.)

"In some circles it is not uncommon for a completely illiterate woman to have a daughter in college ..."

The decline of polygamy is partially the result of a changed social climate (a "progressive" man, as opposed to a Bedouin or villager, does not marry two wives) and partially the result of economics: supporting one wife is expensive enough; more than one could be ruinous.

With exposure to modern comforts, even villagers are beginning to see that smaller families and more amenities might be more agreeable than huge families and a dirt-poor existence for all. A survey made by Riyadh's Urban Community Development Center on its immediate neighborhood recently gave the following results; 69.6 percent of the married men had only one wife, 16.4 percent two, 5.8 percent three and 2.6 percent four.

If a man has more than one wife each may have a separate house—sometimes in different villages. Even if the separate establishments must be extremely modest, a man often will prefer this arrangement for the sake of avoiding disputes and will try, in accordance with religious doctrine, to treat both women with complete equality (sometimes to the point of buying them identical dresses). If two or more wives live in one house they may divide up the household tasks —and the husband's attentions—with mathematical exactness and at least surface tranquility.

Whatever her personal difficulties, the Arab woman in traditional areas tends to put up with them rather than protest against them, since men in general have the unqualified right not only to divorce at will but, under certain circumstances, to retain custody of the children. A woman can get a divorce, legal separation or dissolution of marriage, but she must show serious cause—impotence, insanity, extreme cruelty, presumed death, desertion, lack of maintenance or dangerous, contagious or repulsive disease and, if anyone cares to risk harsh penalties, adultery. From a religious standpoint, however, divorce on either side for less than serious reasons is abhorrent. (A saying of the Prophet quoted to me on this was "Of all things lawful, divorce is the most hateful.")

As a woman grows older, her status may improve considerably. A mother can be a powerful force with her grown sons—her position to some extent depending on whether they live with or are somehow dependent on the extended family or have broken away to set up their own homes. There are still, by all accounts, cases of mothers forcing their sons to divorce an undesirable wife, insisting that they build a house in traditional rather than in modern style or sometimes even choosing their grandchildren's schools and their daughter-in-law's dresses. (Says Muhammad Ghamdi, a driver in Riyadh: "If my mother chose a wife for me, I'd marry her even if she didn't attract me.")

"Arab women are generally willing to wait patiently for change ..."

On a more benign level, grown sons, even socially and financially independent of the family, hate to distress a mother. They may decide against a late or potentially perilous outing, forego moving to another town at her urging and visit her regularly. The late Umm Fahd, wife of King 'Abd 'al-'Aziz, from the powerful

(continued on page 11)

The Arab Woman in History

In the last part of the eighth century, in the reign of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid in Baghdad, the marketplaces of the Abbasid empire buzzed with rumor. The rebellious sect of the Kharijis in Iraq was up in arms and its forces under Layla—poet, beauty and rebel leader—were giving battle again and again to the troops of the Caliph.

In 1970, over a thousand years later, the **suqs** of the Arab world again ran with talk of a Layla. This time it was a young woman with an enigmatically lovely face and a background of teaching school and of guerrilla training with one of the most extreme Palestinian commando groups. This Layla had forced one plane to land in Damascus in 1969 and now had attempted to seize another en route to London—tough political gestures which again drew world attention—if also condemnation—to her cause.

In the more than a thousand years between the two militant Laylas, rare indeed were the Arab women who took such an active part in their people's history. Even more so than the generality of western women, from medieval times almost up to the present, Arab women have lived out their lives in the shadow of men.

From earliest recorded history human society has been patriarchal, women confined mainly to the home and the nearby fields, treated as the property of their husbands, and generally forbidden the society of men outside their families. The lands which are now part of the Arab world inherited this historical pattern, though women occasionally broke it to the extent of ruling as independent monarchs —the Queen of Sheba, Egyptian queens acting as regents, and the famous and tragic Zenobia of third-century Syria.

In the societies of the eastern Mediterranean which were to form the roots of western culture, the patriarchal tradition also persisted. The nomadic Hebrews were strongly patriarchal. In the city-state of Athens, the "freewoman" took no part in public life and was perpetually under the guardianship of her father or husband. And the attitude of writers and theologians of the early Christian church was often inspired rather literally by the tradition of Eve created from Adam and a paradise lost. In fact, the epistles of St. Paul, who shaped the new faith, and masses of early church writings fairly breathe misogyny: woman is useful solely for procreation; outside that she functions only as a temptation to sin and had best stay at home when she is not going to church.

In the Arab world, the triumph of Islam in the seventh century basically codified the position of women with its laws of spiritual and civic conduct. It banned female infanticide, limited polygamy to four wives, forbade sexual relations outside marriage and spelled out women's rights in marriage and inheritance. But part of this codification was to place women, in unequivocal language, below men: "Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property" (in support of women). (Surah IV, v. 34). Some modern Islamic writers and thinkers believe that, taking the Koran as a whole, women are given an equal-but-different status rather than an inferior one. But most Muslim laymen and scholars, living, it should be remembered, in an already patriarchal civilization, have taken such verses the way many Christians take the story of the Creation and the Fall: literally.

Even so, up to the 10th century, veiling and seclusion were not generally practiced. During the Abbasid era, two royal princesses went off in chain-mail to fight the Byzantines, Arab women composed poetry and music and vied with men in cultural salons and competitions, Harun al-Rashid's wife Zubaydah appeared at caliphal receptions in all her jewels and brocades, and in Muslim Spain ladies danced the zambra with their suitors. But with the exception of some women in agricultural communities, Bedouins, and a few women who ruled behind the caliphs, veils, seclusion and subordination had become general by the end of the 10th century and over the next millennium would remain so.

In the western world, during the same millennium, women were not faring much better. During the Middle Ages, despite a temporary elevation in their status when chivalry was in fashion, the legal position of women—especially with regard to property rights—declined. In the Industrial Age, as princely courts disappeared, the status of women who had been appreciated and encouraged in those courts waned. The same fate was in store for working women as guilds, in which they wielded some power, were replaced by factories. Cultivated hostesses in French salons did continue to receive the intelligentsia, but in the same era working class English women were toiling long hours in unhealthy factories and some English countrymen claimed the right to sell their wives. As late as the Victorian Age, despite challenge from rebels like George Eliot and Florence Nightingale, an Englishwoman could not attend a university, and could be sure that in divorce even the most erring husband would automatically take the children. The same erring husband could legally beat his wife, keep her at home for weeks on end and spend all her money.

There were exceptions. Working women in England, unlike upper and middle class women, had a certain social freedom, not unlike that enjoyed by women in the colonies of North America. There the scarcity of women on frontier and farm and the necessity for cooperation and companionship in rough, often isolated conditions, tended to modify the patriarchal traditions of the Old World.

By mid-19th century the anti-slavery struggle in the United States had begun to awaken American and English women to their own legal and social disabilities. In 1837, Mt. Holyoke became the first American college to admit women. The women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, was only the first of many such meetings. In the United States and England women's legal disabilities gradually faded and married women's rights over their own property increased. Gradually women began in increasing numbers to enter professional life then, finally, to push for the vote. Actually, women were first given the vote in New Zealand (1893); Australia and Scandinavia followed. Russia (1917) beat both England (1918) and the United States (1920). France, Italy and West Germany didn't give the vote to their female citizens until the 1940's and Switzerland still doesn't.

Worldwide today, it is still difficult for a woman to go on to higher education, to obtain equal pay for equal work, or to reach the top in any field no matter what her ability. Legal discrimination has also been slow to recede: before 1965 a French husband could dispose of all his wife's assets as he liked unless she was gainfully employed —but she could not work without his permission. In Spain a decade ago if a man caught his wife **in flagrante** and killed her out of hand, the worst punishment he could expect would be a short term of exile.

On the brighter side, in 1970 the world had three women premiers (none in a western nation) and two Japanese women successfully scaled 24,857-foot Annapurna in the Himalayas; the year before America's National Council of Churches elected its first woman president, the first woman jockey raced on a recognized race track and six women scientists were scheduled, for the first time, to work out of an American base in the Antarctic. Women in the United States and Britain furthermore, have in the Women's Liberation movement forged a formidable weapon that promises even more change.

In the Arab world, the position of women saw little of such changes until the 20th century. But the relatively few decades since then have seen a positive explosion of women's education throughout the entire area, the end of the "classical" harem, a substantial decline in polygamy, the gradual recession of the veil, the granting of the vote except in the Peninsula, and, in the major cities, the easing of restrictions on social mixing of the sexes and the rise of the Arab career girl.

Even these changes have touched the lives—and consciousness—of relatively few. The most important improvements in the status of women are just now beginning, and the most difficult to effect will not be in government-provided facilities or in legal provisions, but in attitudes—attitudes that are the more stubborn because they are rooted not only in Arab civilization but in civilization itself. To obtain full equality for women in the Arab world as in the western world, the change that must still be made is in the minds and hearts of men.—L.F.

Sudeiri family, is supposed to have convoked her seven royal sons regularly once a week for dinner—an occasion that was never missed—and to have had much influence on them until the day she died. Less illustrious matrons alive today do exactly the same—and offer a liberal flow of advice and suggestions.

It would be presumptuous to suggest that these necessarily impressionistic views of some 105 very diverse Arab women—rich, poor, college-educated, illiterate, conservative and not so conservative, conventional and highly individualistic—shed a definite light on Arab women as a whole. Yet I think certain points do stand out.

The first is that education, "for their daughters, if not for themselves," is of intense interest, as well as importance, to traditional Arab women. In some circles it is not uncommon for a completely illiterate woman to have a daughter in college, and women who have had and probably will have little chance to get much education for themselves express hopes that their daughters can go on at least to secondary school, perhaps to college. Why? "So they can *understand*."

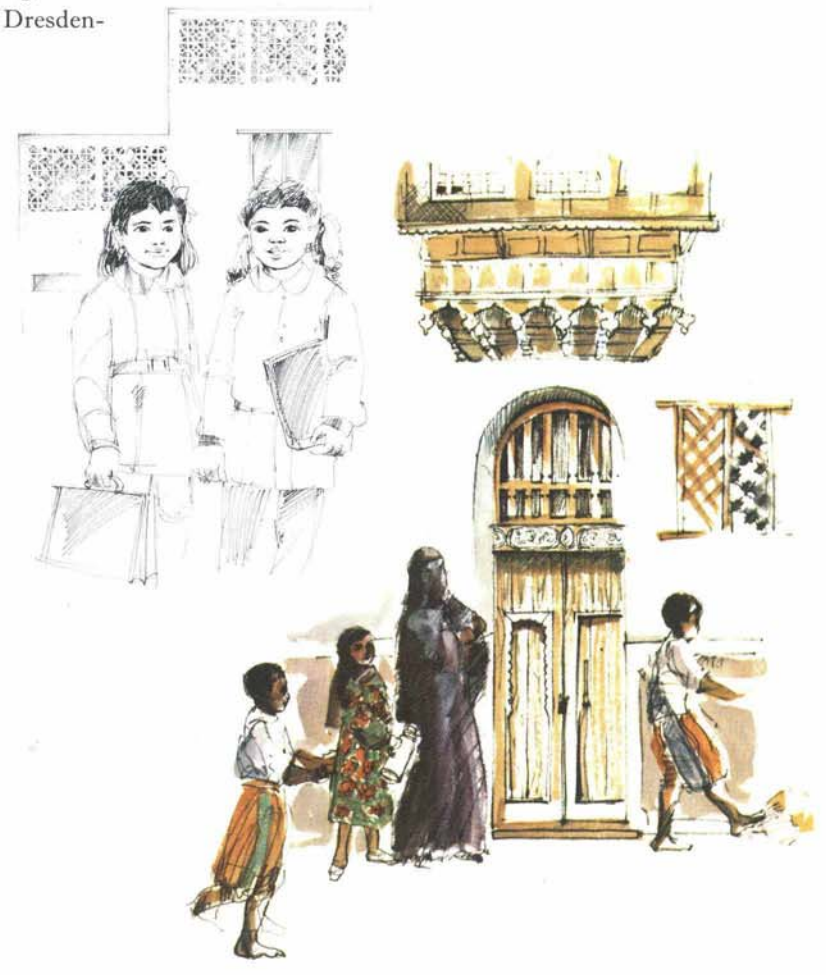
A second is that among educated women—those from families with somewhat liberal traditions—the idea that women are at least potentially equal with men is gaining ground. As Khayriyyeh Saqqaf, a Dresden-pretty young woman journalist in Jiddah just entering her first year at 'Abd al-'Aziz University says, "I think that women can do almost anything men can—even as far as physical work goes. I don't see why a woman couldn't be a soldier or, for that matter, a porter."

A third is that Arab women are generally willing to wait patiently for change—not surprisingly, since the whole idea of a woman being in any way able to determine her own life is so new. A headmistress of a school, for example, said that if Saudi men are "not ready to see us unveiled" the veils should stay for a while.

"I think that women can do almost anything men can ... I don't see why a woman couldn't be a soldier or, for that matter, a porter."

Fourth, younger women beginning to get educations and exposure to more liberal ideas are sometimes irked at restrictions on dress, behavior and participation in the life of their countries. One prominent Kuwaiti woman, quoted approvingly in a government publication, said, "In the past, men stood in our way in the name of tradition. But when society began to change men began to wonder if it was 'tradition' or rather their egoism and fear of our competition that was in our way ..." A pretty secretary with the Bahrain Petroleum Company, Homa Khoshaby, complains with a smile, "We can now see boys and even work with them. But we still can't go out with them, and that's what we'd like." An educated young teacher in Saudi Arabia, commenting after the headmistress' remark on veils exclaimed, "But if we don't start unveiling, they'll never be ready!" And some Kuwaiti women even expressed optimism about obtaining the vote in the near future, though they admit they are not "agitating" for this right.

Women in Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have a long road to travel before they are accorded complete legal, social and moral equality with their brothers and husbands. But even in the West few women have yet reached the end of that road and the most advanced have still a way to go. Furthermore, in the past 10 years the women in these three traditional societies have gone forward fast, against heavy odds. And as change, once begun, seems to grow at geometrical rather than arithmetical rates, in 10 years the process may have speeded up beyond belief. ■



A day in the life of...

Photographed by Katsy Thomas

Nada Creidi is not typical. That is, she is not one of the young Arab women whose day still turns on a routine of home and family life, nor one whose job, wealth or education permits any significant measure of independence. Nada does represent another group, however: the young women from families of moderate means and education who today are swelling the ranks of the Arab working girl.

Nada, 22, is typist, telephone operator and part-time receptionist at the Hotel Pavillion, a four-star hostelry in Beirut's Hamra quarter. She speaks Arabic and French fluently, enough English to register the guests. Nada lives at home with her mother, her father, a retired taxi driver who managed a three-car fleet, and an older sister, Marie, an elementary school teacher.

When Nada completed her "brevet" studies (roughly junior high school level) a family friend offered her a job running the magazine and gift stand at a small hotel not far from her home. In spare moments she taught herself to operate the hotel's switchboard and moved into her present job at the Pavillion when the hotel opened. Nada takes shorthand classes each afternoon when she goes off duty and hopes to land a job—on the ground—with an airline, so she can take advantage of travel benefits. Last fall, she joined a group of friends on a 17-day tour of Turkey and Greece by bus.

Such a trip suggests fairly liberal parents, which is the case—now. "They used to be very strict," Nada admits, "especially when my sister was young. But we're both grown up now and we talk things over with our parents."

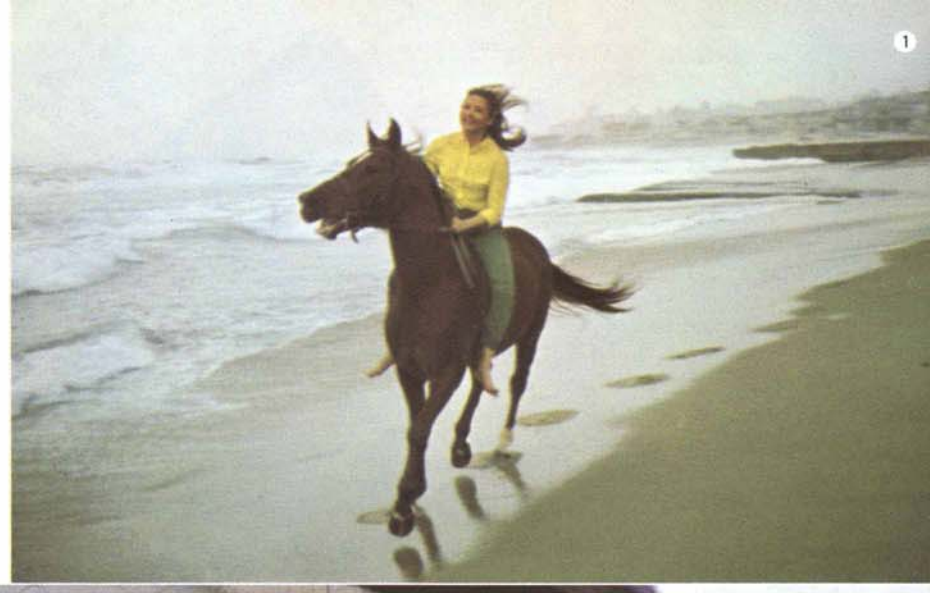
Nada goes out with friends an average of three evenings a week. "Twice on the weekend, but usually only once during the week," she says. "I have to restrict myself because I have to get up at 7:00 to go to work." Dates are usually for dinner, then to the movies or dancing; weekends to the beach. Her film and music tastes are "mod" and her reading includes Hitchcock and "really deep things, like psychology."

Most of Nada's paycheck goes for clothes. "I know how to sew, but I don't much any more." How does she feel about the demise of the mini skirt? "Strongly! I won't stop wearing 'le mini' to work no matter what," she insists. "It's so practical. But 'le maxi,' I'll wear evenings or for very casual parties. 'Le midi', never—except as a trench coat with boots. Then it's great."

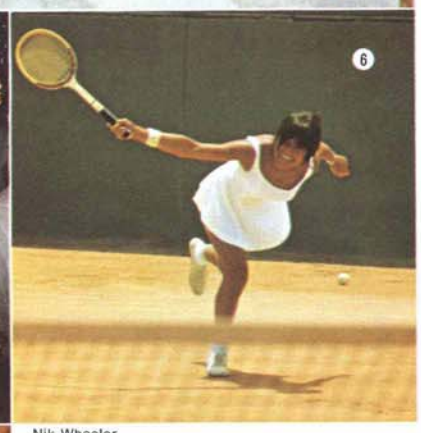




The Arab Woman at play



Nik Wheeler



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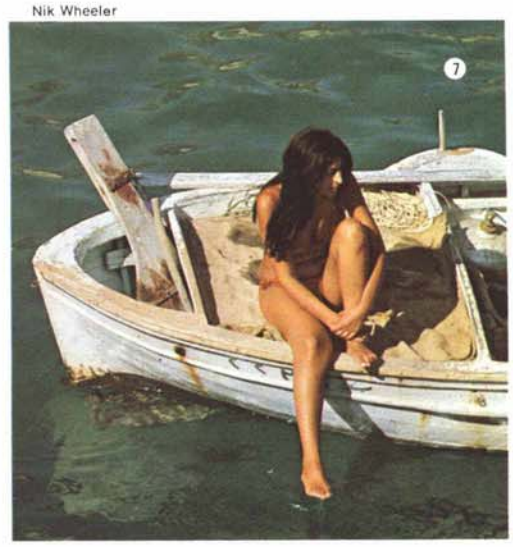

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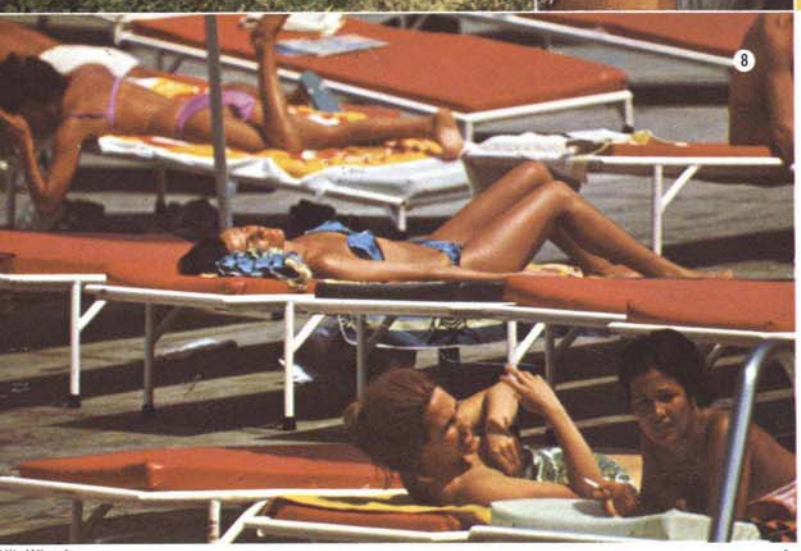

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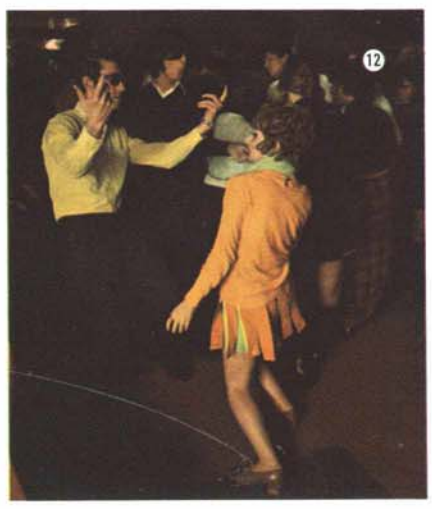

Photographed by Katsy Thomas

1. Leila Khalidy on her Arabian. 2. Skier Mrs. Andrée Riachi. 3. Hoda Helmi Ibrahim at a Cairo golf course. 4. Swimmers at Beirut's Riviera Beach. 5. Tamerino Night Club on Pyramid Road, Cairo. 6. Claudine Aziz at a Beirut tennis court. 7. Zeina Abou Kheir at Jounieh Bay. 8. Sunbathers at St. George's Hotel. 9. Ida Alammedine with her show jumper. 10. Lining up at Faraya in the Lebanon range. 11. Mrs. Samira Sisson and daughter in Jordan's Gulf of Aqaba. 12. Teen-agers at the Beirut discotheque "Barbarella."

Nothing could have shattered my preconception of the Arab woman faster than a sight that caught my eye not an hour after I first touched down in the Arab world. Driving in from Beirut airport along the coast I saw a young girl on a horse galloping along the wind-swept beach. She was blond, blue-jeaned, barefooted and, I learned later, Muslim.

In the following weeks I learned that wholesome, vibrant, suntanned women at play are by no means rare any more in the Middle East. While Lebanon, with its cool mountain resorts, its miles of seashore and its swinging discotheques, is still the playground of the Arab world, even such conservative cities as Damascus and Baghdad offer facilities for men and women to play tennis, ride and swim, and it is not at all surprising to see a woman driving a golf ball down a fairway in Cairo or hoisting a sail in Jordan's Gulf of Aqaba.—A.T.B.

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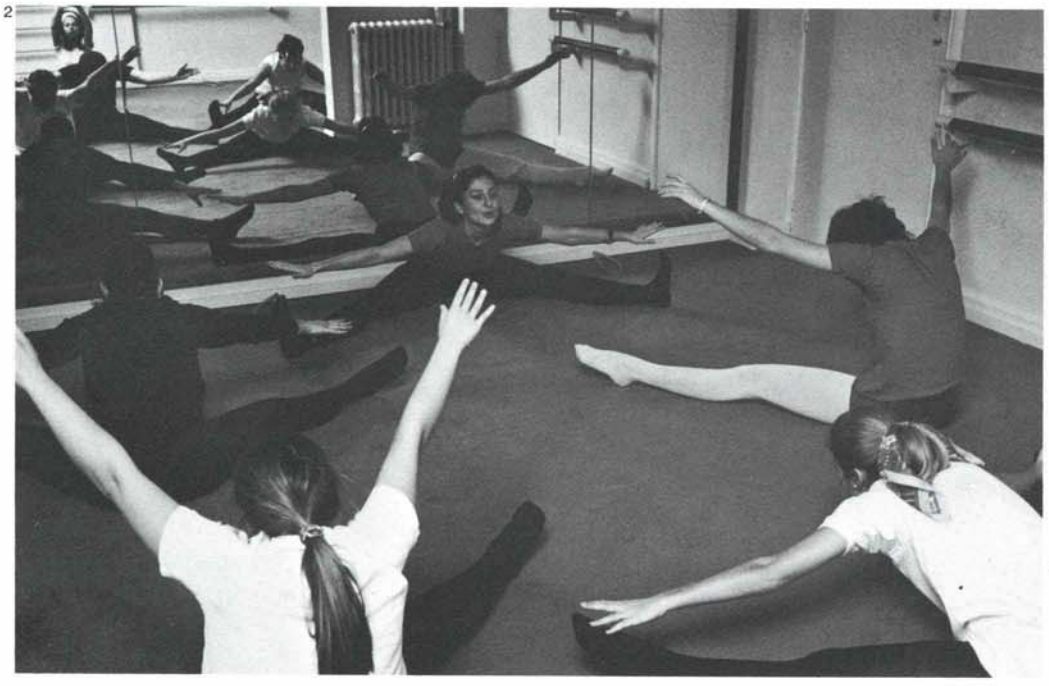

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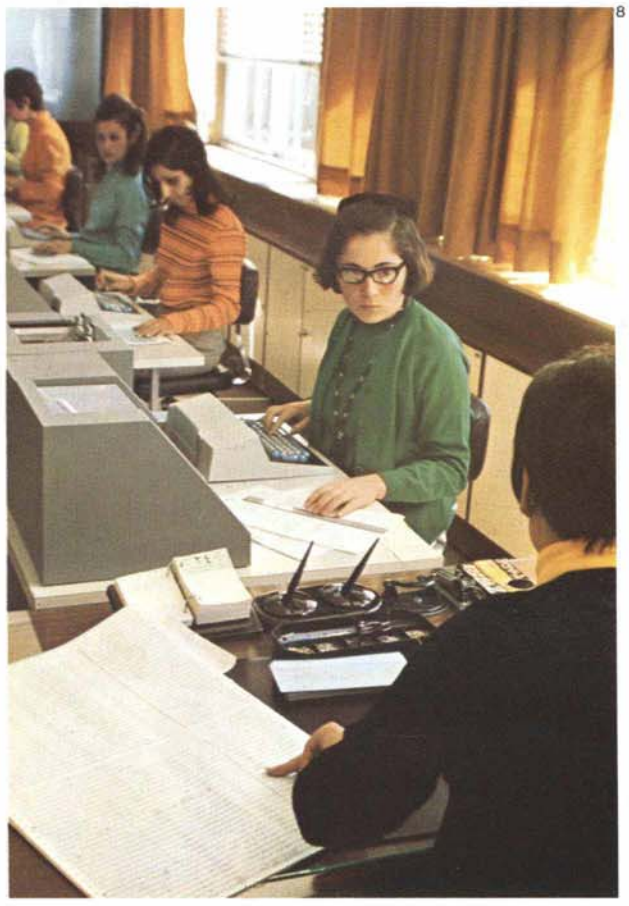

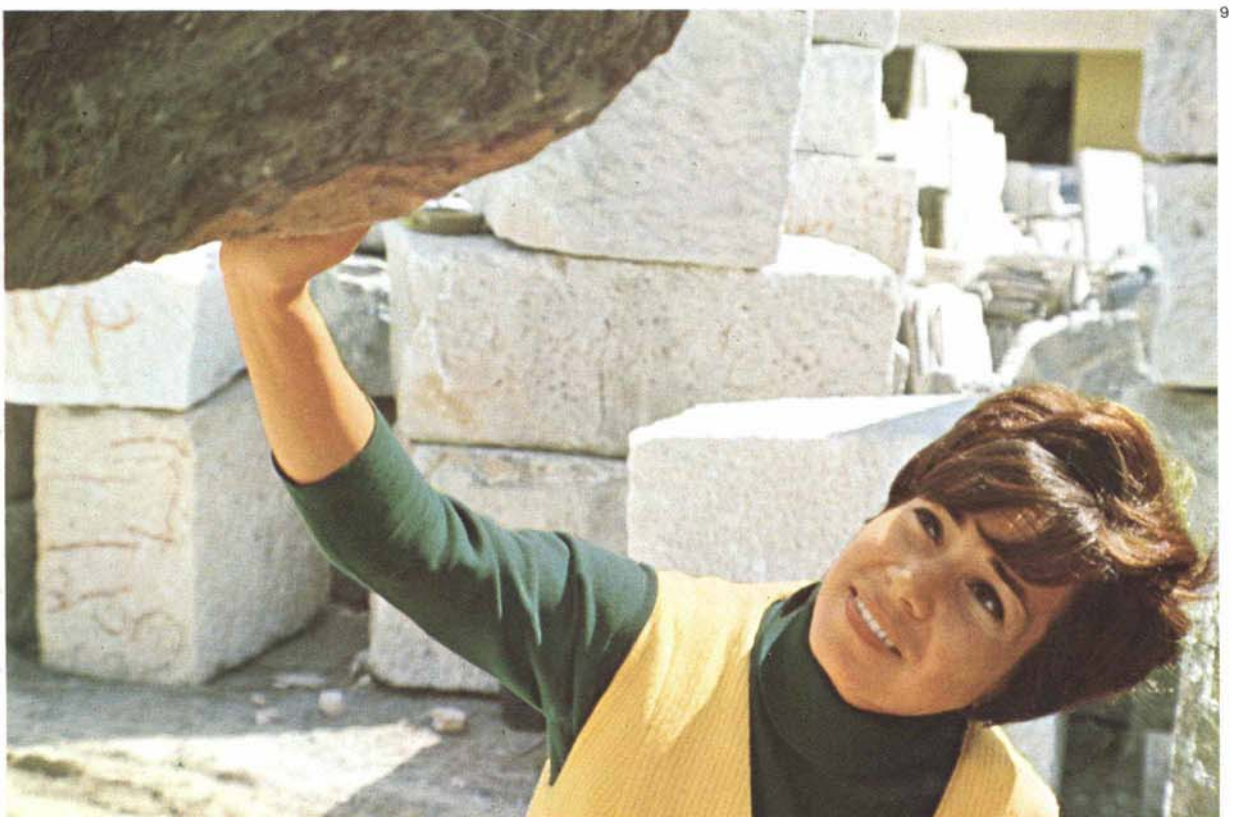

The Arab Woman at work

Photographed by Katsy Thomas

Drawings by Penny Williams

Among many western misconceptions concerning the Arab woman, one of the most misleading concerns her role as a worker. For reasons that psychologists may one day dig out, our western imaginations instantly place the working Arab woman in a setting that is remote, poor and faintly Biblical. More often than not she is stolidly threshing wheat with an ancient flail, carrying a jug to the river bank or weaving cloth on a rickety loom. Her garments are shapeless and dark, her body is strong and her face is at once impassive and weary.

This impression is not entirely inaccurate. Up and down the banks of the Nile and the Tigris, in the Lebanese mountains, in the Jordanian deserts thousands of women plod silently, and probably contentedly, through the ancient patterns which history and harsh climes have imposed on them and which, I have no doubt, will endure long past their lifetimes.

Elsewhere, however, such impressions bear little relation to reality. In Cairo, in Beirut, in Amman, in shops, in factories, in schools, Arab women are working at a range of occupations that embrace assembly line, operating room and court room. In one Beirut factory young girls manufacture perfume; in another, cigarettes. In a book store a young woman arranges a window display. In a super market busy young things pack inventory on the shelves, wait on customers and click off totals at the check-out counter with the bored efficiency of any A&P. They are brisk, competent and attractive.

They are not, certainly, typical of women in every Arab country, but increasingly they are filling jobs and entering professions which were long barred to them by tribal, religious and familial custom. In so doing they are proving the emptiness of many of those attitudes and spawning even more opportunity for tomorrow's Arab woman.—A. T. B.

1. Hana Barto, video tape operator, Jordan Television. 2. Nuhad Bishouty, gymnastics teacher, Beirut. 3. Leila Farag, salesgirl at Spinney's Department Store, Beirut. 4. Secretary in Bahrain, Homa Khoshabi. 5. Window display girl at a Beirut bookstore. 6. Mrs. Nassimah Ahmed Sa'ud Al-Khalild. Ladies Banking Department in the New National Bank of Kuwait. 7. Air Jordan stewardess Suad Zaghloul. 8. Secretaries at the Jordan Computer and Data Processing Company, Amman. 9. Mrs. Aida Motassem, manager of a marble and granite factory, Cairo.

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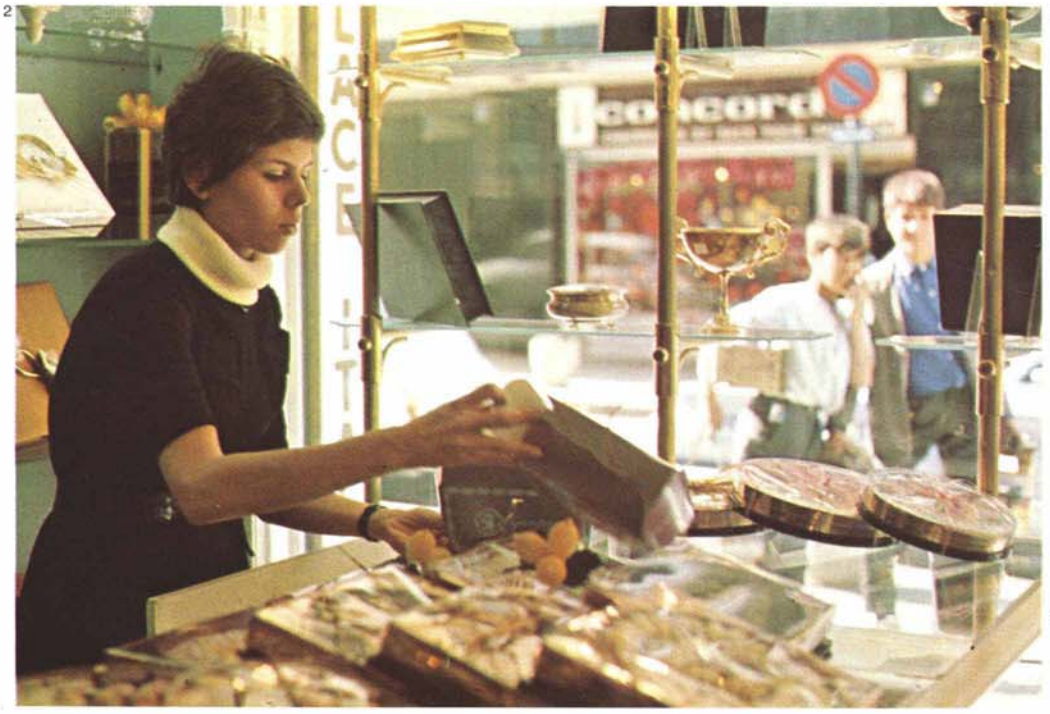

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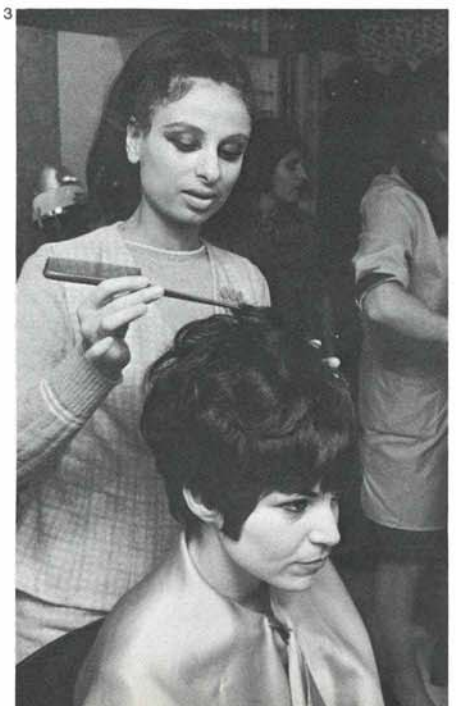

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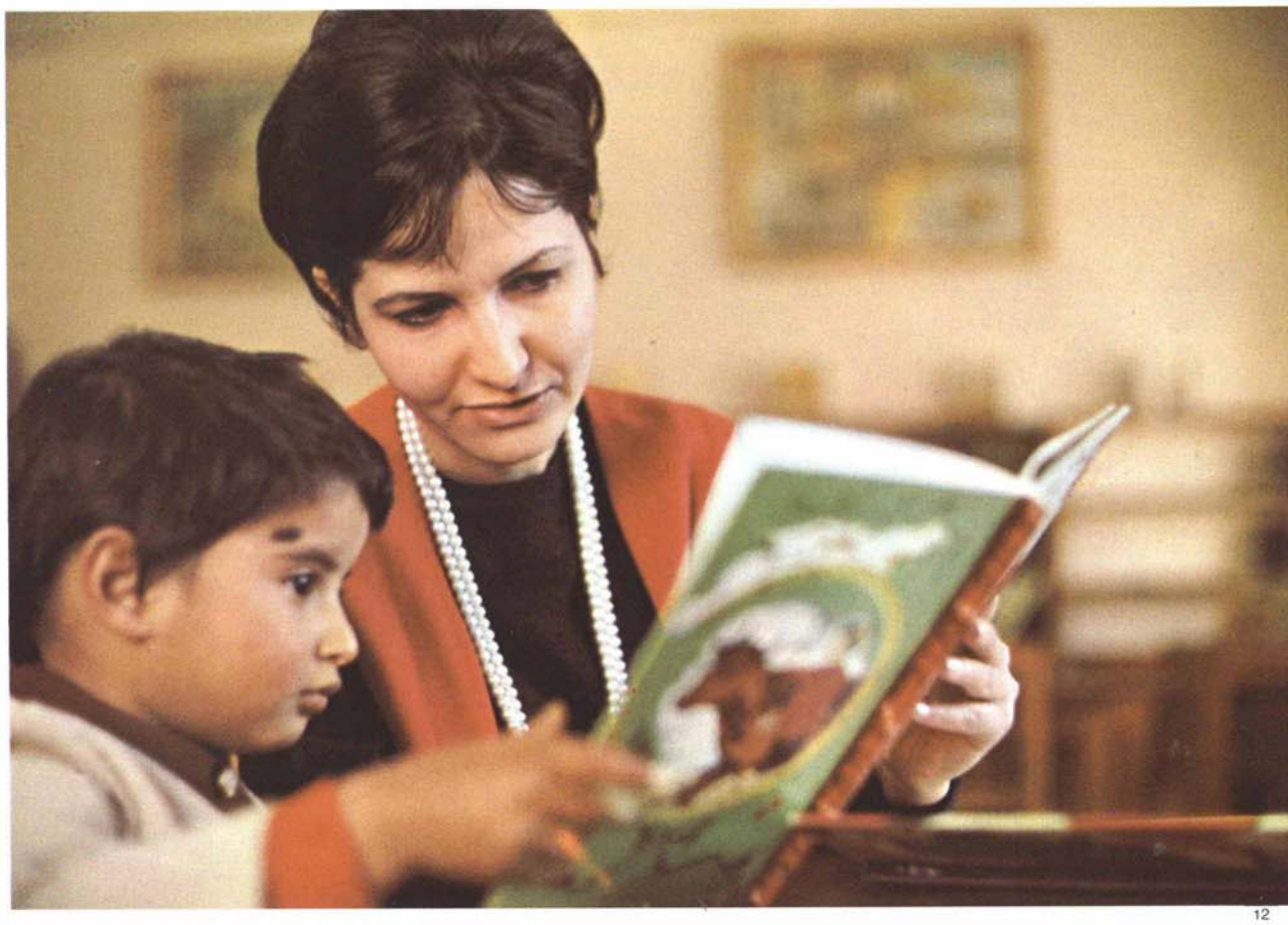

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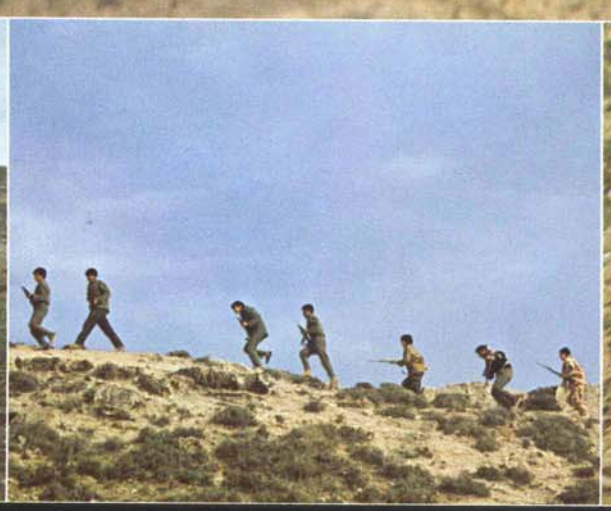
1. Dr. Nadra Haddad, Lebanese pediatrician. 2. Claudine Barrage, salesgirl at a candy shop, Beirut. 3. Mouna Sawalha, hairdresser, Amman, Jordan. 4. Stockgirl in Beirut. 5. Educator Mariam Abdul-Malik Al-Saleh, Kuwait. 6. A Kuwaiti librarian. 7. Sonia Beyrouthy, editor of **Hasna**, a Lebanese women's magazine. 8. Rose Ghurayyib, author and teacher of Arabic, Beirut College for Women. 9. Ateiat Abdou Mohamed, kindergarten teacher, Heliopolis, Egypt. 10. Mrs. Jacqueline Massabki, Lebanese lawyer. 11. Sister Carmella, Sacred Heart School, Beirut. 12. Haifa Sharaiha, children's librarian, Amman Municipal Public Library. 13. Workers at La Regie, Lebanese Tobacco Company, Hadeth.



The Arab Woman at WAR

Photographed by
Katsy Thomas

In some parts of the Middle East, Arab women are not only on the move, but on the march.

This is particularly true in Jordan, where newly emancipated refugee girls in their teens and early twenties are joining commando groups in increasing numbers, despite opposition from hesitant parents, who see problems in the inescapably close association with men.

The idea of girl guerrillas, of course, is not especially attractive in the West, which often recoils from both commando tactics and the expressed Marxist sympathies of some groups. Yet they do exist and are a part of the Arab woman's story. As one reporter said, "It is not a question of approving or disapproving, of glorifying or criticizing. It is simply a fact. To leave the female commando out of the Arab woman's story would be like leaving Florence Nightingale out of the history of nursing."

Not much is known about the girl guerrillas except that in addition to two weeks small arms training in the hills of Jordan, they usually work in refugee camps building support for an active resistance movement. Their numbers are small, but—like their sisters who fought the French in Algeria a decade ago—their influence on girls everywhere in the Arab world is great. They are mostly young and determined. Those photographed and interviewed by colleague Katsy Thomas were as young as 17 and no older than 21 and had no intention of giving up the battle until it is over. As a girl named Khalida (no last names are given out) said, "Since I was a child, it was said we would go back to where my people lived for thousands of years. But as I grew older I realized that this was only a dream unless I was prepared to do something about it."

In Syria the girls march to a more formal cadence. For 14 years military training has been mandatory for girls and boys in the last three years of secondary school who are usually between 16 and 19 years of age and live in the city areas. Called "futuwa," (youth groups) the girls, wearing khaki-colored tapered pants and belted tunics, take an hour's training three days a week, during which they learn to march, shoot, dismantle repair rifles and machine guns —mostly Czech and Russian—

"IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF APPROVING OR DISAPPROVING, OF GLORIFYING OR CRITICIZING. IT IS SIMPLY A FACT. TO LEAVE THE FEMALE COMMANDO OUT OF THE ARAB WOMAN'S STORY WOULD BE LIKE LEAVING FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE OUT OF THE HISTORY OF NURSING."

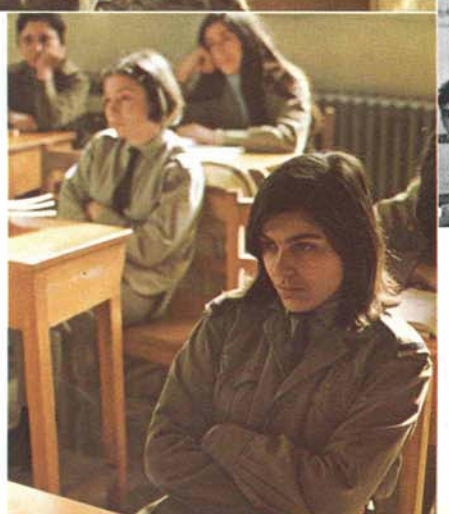
Nik Wheeler

treat wounds, crawl under barbed wire under fire, throw hand grenades and use bayonets—all under the tutelage of reputedly stern male drill sergeants. After graduation they also spend three weeks in camp, are on call for future service and may even join the militia.

Not all the girls and not many of their parents are enthusiastic about such training. The girls find the uniforms unfeminine and the families are uneasy at seeing their daughters marching in public in the tight head scarf that is Syria's transitional substitute for the disappearing veil.

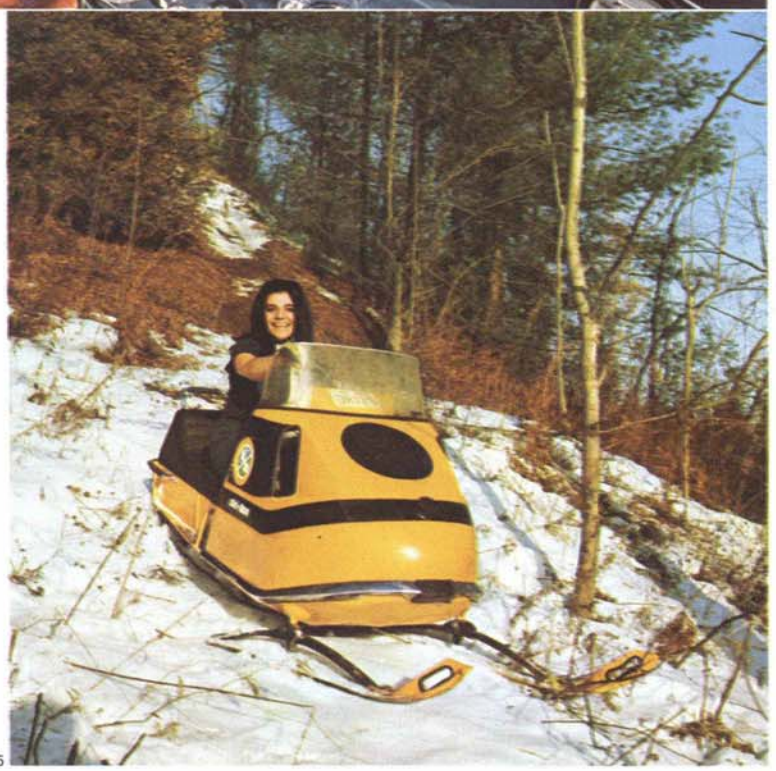
Beyond insisting on all-female classes, however, the parents can't do much about it. Without the completed certificate of the military course, girls cannot graduate from secondary school and their level of performance helps determine future jobs, most of which are controlled by the government.

Military training for girls began in Syria in 1956 during the Suez crisis, partly because only 45 percent of Syria's six million people are men. (Egypt, with its population surplus, has not yet had to call on women.) Girls then familiarized themselves with weapons and took first aid training. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the training took on a political tone as government officials of Syria, particularly the People's Organization of the Women's Union, began to demand greater participation in social and political activities in line with the Baathist belief that a women's role should include helping build the nation. "It is considered impossible that society today builds only on men," officials insist.—A. T. B.



The Arab Woman Abroad

Specially Photographed
for **Aramco World**:
in England by Peter Keen;
in North America by V. K. Anthony.



1. Mrs. Andrée Beidas, wife of a Lebanese insurance executive, at Covent Garden, London. **2.** Sabika Abdulrazzak, a Kuwaiti student, at Trafalgar Square. **3.** Zein Rifai, Jordanian Press Officer in London, at Piccadilly Circus. **4.** Mrs. Azza Badrawi, wife of an Egyptian businessman, at the Post Office Tower, London. **5.** Suzan Rizallah, formerly of Jordan, in Ontario, Canada.

Whatever her status at home, the Arab woman abroad is no longer outranked, overmatched or upstaged.

For years, and particularly since World War II, the Arab states have been increasingly conscious of the prestige accruing to countries with effective representation in foreign lands. It has been only recently, however, that they have been able to field an adequate number of spokesmen who enhance rather than blot the name of the country he—and she—represent.

States like Egypt and Lebanon had little trouble finding either men or women with the social, intellectual and linguistic talents so important in increasingly sophisticated international circles. During the century and a half when French and British cultures nearly eclipsed their Middle Eastern heritage, numerous Egyptians, including at least ruling class women, had achieved a sophistication to rank with any in Europe. To a lesser degree, so had the women of Lebanon and Syria. In at least dress and manner—and as often in the more important areas of intelligence and education—these dark-eyed, imperious, "exotic" women were every inch the match of their western opposites in the diplomatic, social and cultural salons of the world.

Katsy Thomas

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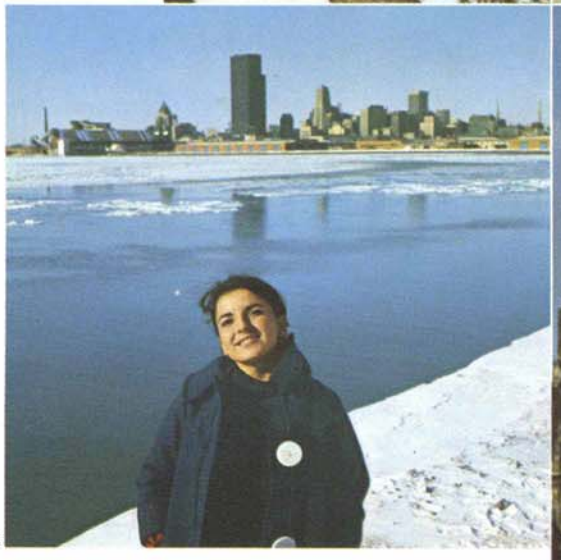

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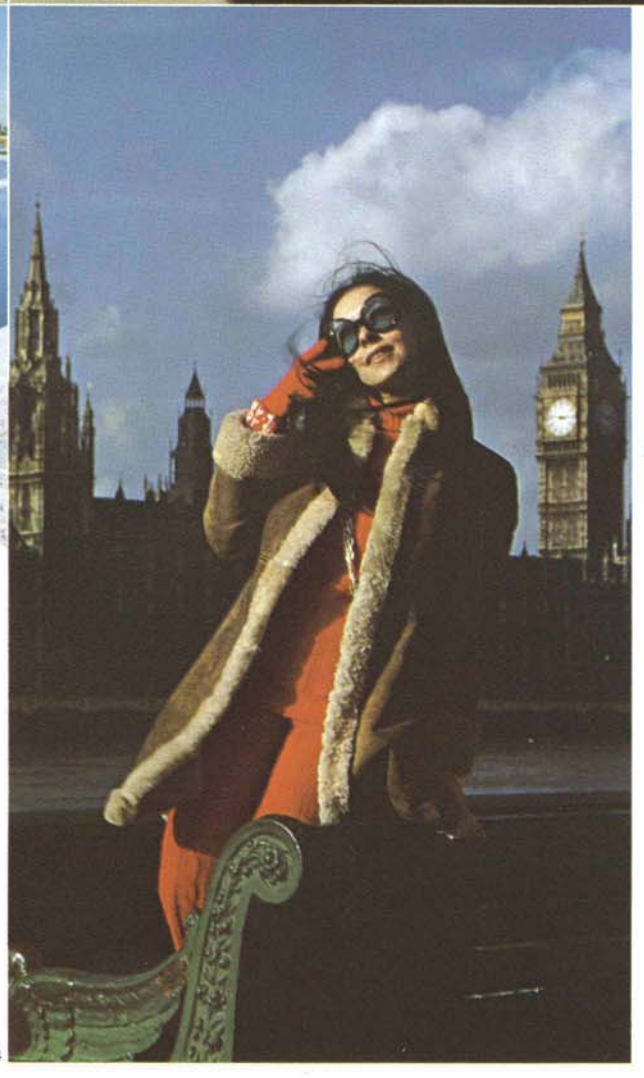

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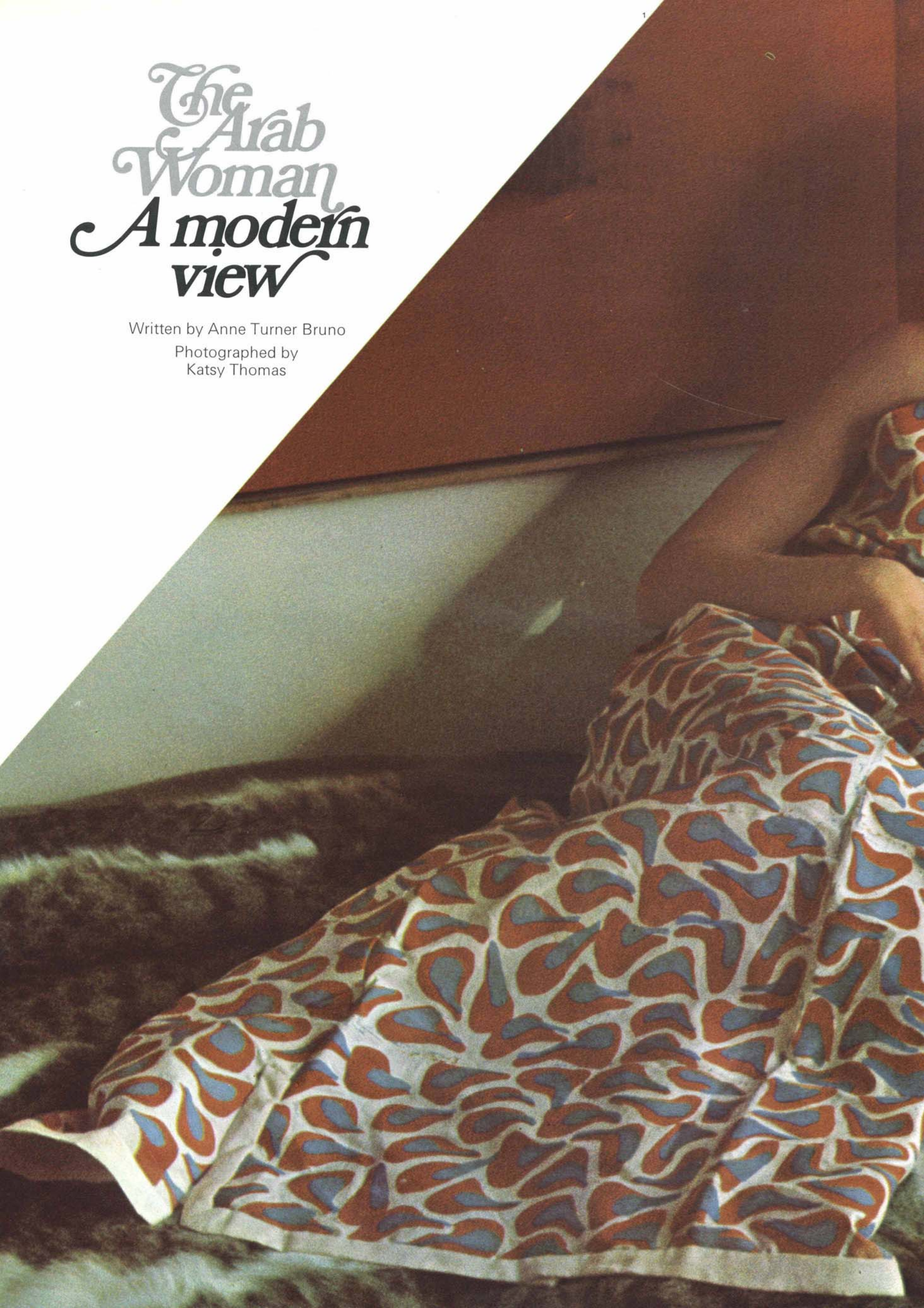
1. Leila Rihawi, Jordan Embassy Tourist Attaché on Rome's Spanish Stairs. 2. Mrs. Nada El-Habal, of Damascus, United Nations guide in New York City. 3. "Sandy" Gneim, formerly of Jerusalem, now of Toronto, Canada. 4. Abir Dajani, Palestinian law student, near the Houses of Parliament, London. 5. Mrs. Ebtissam Al-Sowayel, wife of Saudi Arabia's ambassador to Washington, mother of six. 6. Naila Al-Sowayel, Mrs. Al-Sowayel's oldest daughter, a student of French literature and economics at Wellesley College.

This was not so for some Arab nations; the vital educational and cultural background was simply not there. But once exposed to the heady influence and challenges of more liberal societies, women from even the most conservative areas began to adjust. Today they are as confident and as competent as any group of women anywhere and from Ottawa to Rome, Paris to London, New York to Washington, they're making the scene wherever it might be, whatever it might require. The lecture at Georgetown? Excellent. Skiing in the Laurentians? Of course. Solzhenitsyn? I've just started it. Dancing at the Shoreham? We'll drop in later. Truffaut? No, I missed it. Lunch tomorrow? Lovely.

More proof, we think, that if they ever did, Arab women abroad need never apologize again for their countries, nor their countries for them.

The Arab Woman
A modern view

Written by Anne Turner Bruno
Photographed by
Katsy Thomas



"To try to loosen family ties in one way and maintain them in another is a very delicate process, and although the modern Arab woman seems to be managing, it is anybody's guess how long she can continue."

1. Lina El-Hoss, Beirut textile designer. **2.** Nidal Achkar, Lebanese actress.

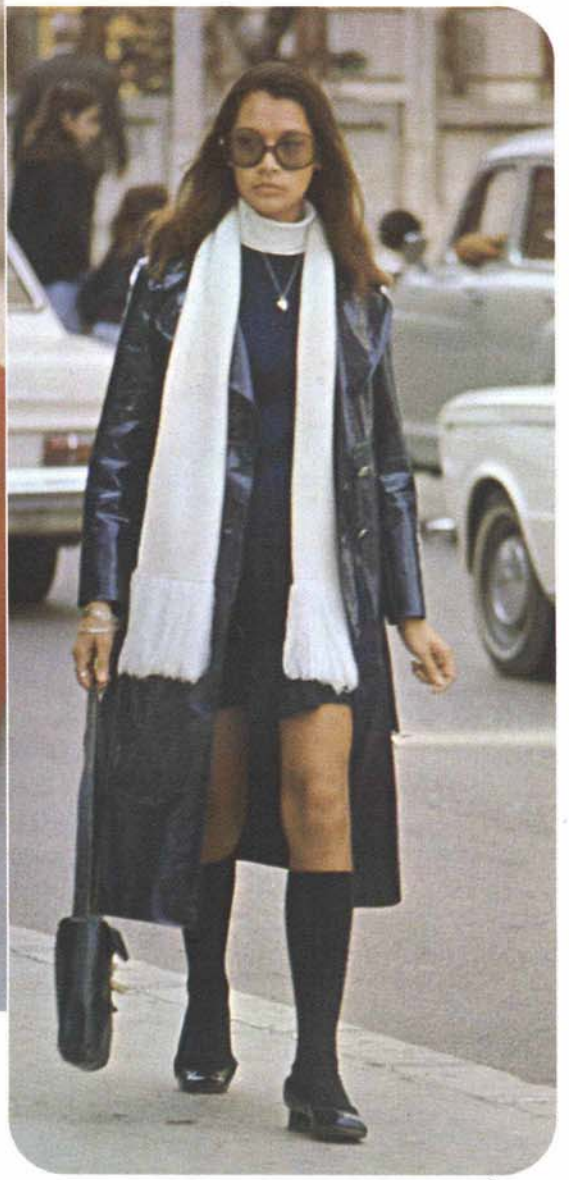
It was a vivid sight. Traffic surging through packed streets, fender to fender, horn to horn. Smart shops alight with a nighttime glow. Dazzling neon signs rainbowing messages on world products and the latest films. Bursts of laughter. Elegant groups going up to early cocktail parties in luxurious penthouse apartments overhead. Police whistles shrilling with helpless urgency. Circles of moustached, impeccably tailored men savouring the scene over cups of coffee in sidewalk cafes. And girls. Crowds of chic young girls, elaborately coiffed and darkly mascaraed, strolling arm in arm in a meandering tide of leather mini-skirts, snakeskin maxis, velvet pants suits and furtrimmed tunics. Others languidly studying their eye makeup or smoothing down high-riding skirts as they tooled polished Mercedes and sleek Fiat convertibles through the jam with the precision and aplomb of Manhattan matrons.

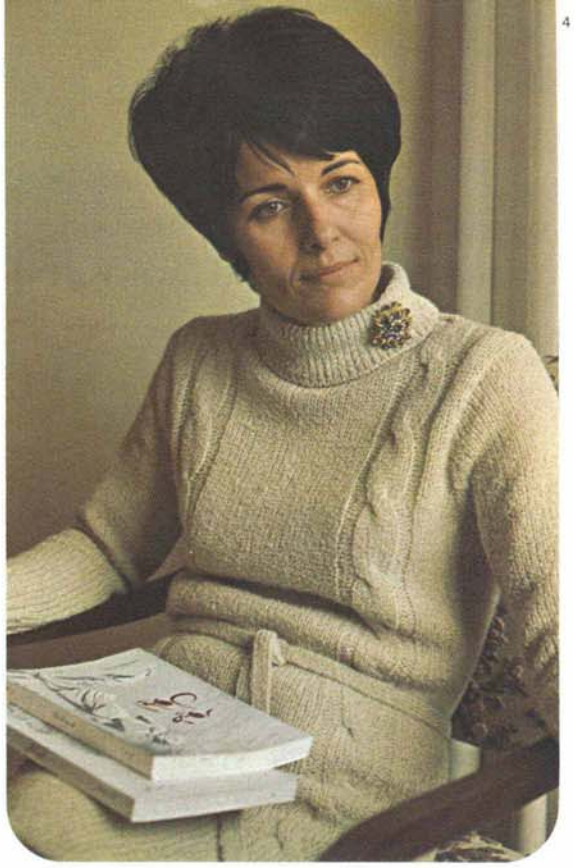
Piccadilly Circus? The Champs Elysées? Via Veneto? In terms of beauty, spirit and go-go fashions, it could have been any of them—except that the girls were definitely more striking. Surprisingly though, it was Rue Hamra in Beirut, capital of Lebanon and gateway to the supposedly traditional, hidebound, socially-backward Arab world.

When I had first planned to tour the Arab East—Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria—I was more excited by the chance to see new countries than new people. Like my mother, whose knowledge of Arabs started and stopped with Rudolf Valentino, I knew little about Arabs. I didn't really believe they all lived in tents, but from the few Arab businessmen I had met in Washington, Rome and Istanbul, I had a vague impression that they were self-centered and possessive. And I rather expected that the women would be squat, broad-featured and big-hipped, living, for the most part, a simple, submissive life in dusty villages or shabby cities.

During that first evening in Beirut, as I sat in a café and watched those clusters of proud, handsome, stylish girls eddying by, I realized that I was badly informed. And in the two months that followed, in which I interviewed literally hundreds of Arab women, I learned *how* uninformed. True, there is a large population of peasants and Bedouins. But I also found among them physicists and psychiatrists, judges and journalists, doctors and dentists, lawyers and learned professors, politicians and computer programmers, archeologists and artists, chemists and commandos. Many indeed were among the most brilliant, talented, imaginative, individualistic, progressive and—above all—the most feminine women I have met in the world.

The women of the Levantine Arab lands have a great heritage of femininity to live up to.





1. Maxi on Hamra Street, Beirut. 2. Rawya Beheiry, Cairo, U.A.R. 3. Midi-mini on Hamra, Beirut. 4. Mrs. Emily Nasrallah, Lebanese novelist and columnist.

"Changes of these magnitudes... of course, have not gone unnoticed..."

Past ages in this area have been dominated and memorialized by the beauty and wealth of Nefertiti and Cleopatra, the allure and diplomacy of Belkis, Queen of Sheba, the compassion of the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus, whom Muslims, like the Christians, honor as the highest woman in their faith. Yet it is only in the last decade or two that women in the Middle East have come into their own—nowhere more dramatically than in tiny Lebanon, the region's bank, playground, hospital, educational center, listening post.

As the most westernized Arab nation, Lebanon is a laboratory to which the daughters of the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates can come to train, test, adopt—or reject—the newest trends in education, work, culture, recreation and just plain living.

For some girls this experiment is an intoxicating introduction to independence. For others, those who have been isolated from boys since puberty, it is unsettling; even speaking in front of boys is a painful experience. But few would deny that it is exciting. "All Arabs are fascinated by Lebanon," says 20-year-old Alexandra Grochol of Buffalo, New York, a student at the American University of Cairo. "They love it, love to visit, shop, date, and go to nightclubs. Beirut is the showplace of the Arab world and they are proud to show it off."

Modernization in Beirut is no recent development, yet even the female pioneers who helped bring it about are astonished at the pace. One, the country's determined and doughty first woman physician, Dr. Saniyeh Habboub—who wore a veil while studying—exults, "I never dreamed in my life to see such an evolution in education and work. Women are awake now after sleeping 1,000 years. Now they are racing forward like a train."

The whistle of that train first blew in World War I when economic pressures necessitated wider employment for women, but the first significant blow for freedom was not struck until 1923, when two young Egyptian wives, Mrs. Hoda Charaoui, founder of the Egyptian Feminist Movement, and Mrs. Çeza Nabaraoui, returned to Cairo from an international women's conference in Rome and stepped off the train with their veils tied *around* their faces instead of over them.

Mrs. Nabaraoui, the junior of the pair, laughingly relates today what happened. "Hundreds of well-wishers waiting to cheer us in a welcome home gasped with shock to see our full faces. The men growled in rage. Then some women in the crowd tore off their own veils and threw them on the ground."

It was a dramatic beginning and more was to come. The same year Egyptian women presented the government with two demands that, amazingly, were granted: make 16 the legal marriage age to end the centuries-long practice of wedding 12-year-old girls to men they met first at the marriage ceremony, and provide opportunities for girls to attend secondary school. More importantly, by 1924 a handful of women, albeit veiled, had begun to attend university classes in both Cairo and Beirut, the first step in a long struggle to establish themselves in the academic world.

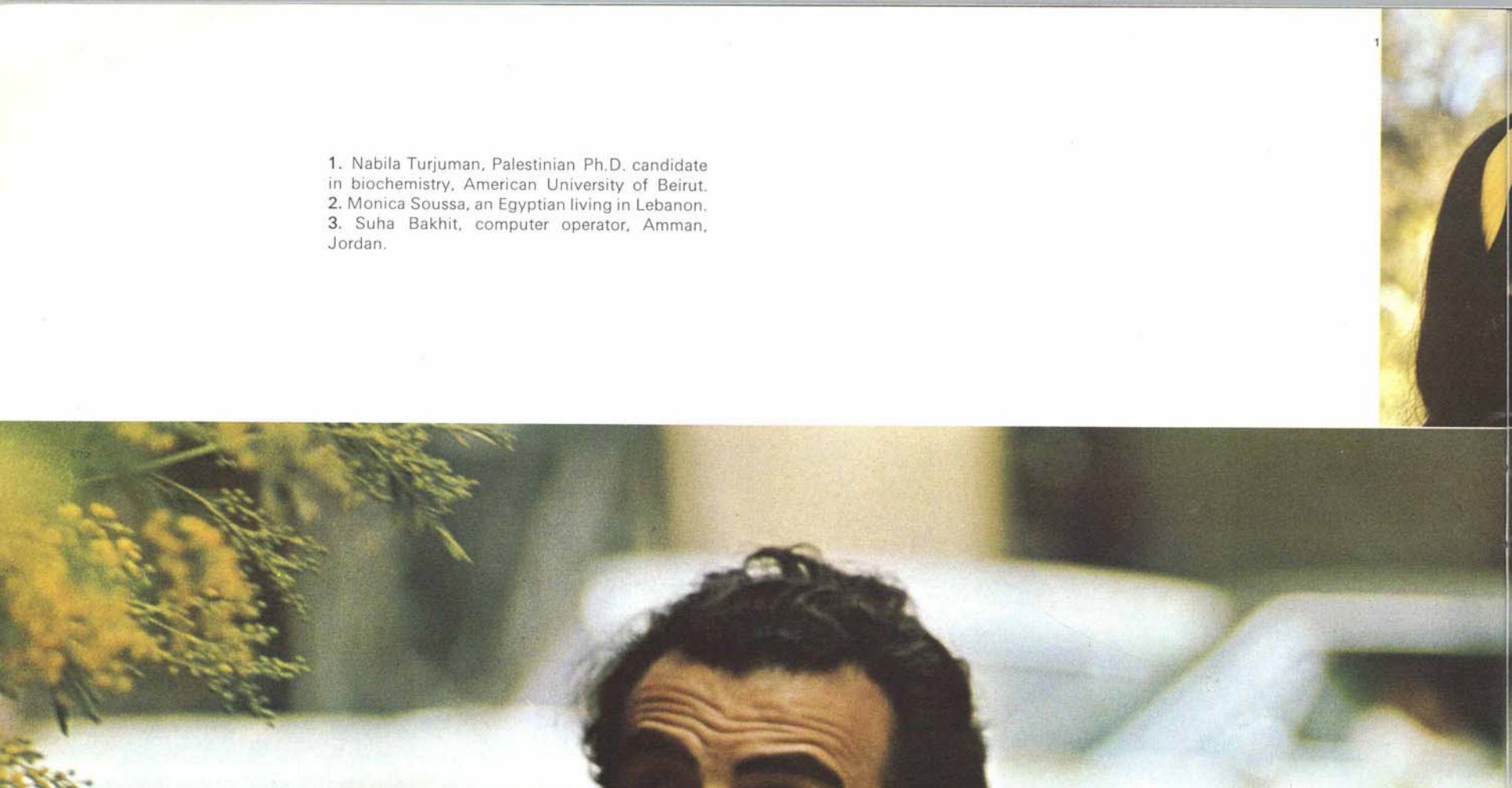
Subsequently, women began to participate in politics, too. In Lebanon in November 1943, a women's committee under the leadership of Mrs. Najla Saab, then seven-months pregnant, held daily street demonstrations, supported a city-wide strike, and publicly protested the French imprisonment of Lebanon's duly-elected president and parliament.

These developments, important as they seem, were actually only public manifestations of what is always a prerequisite to change: education.

The education of Arab women, in any real sense, began about 1834, when an American woman Presbyterian missionary opened the Beirut School for Girls with eight pupils. The founding of that school, which eventually gave birth to the Beirut College for Women, was a turning point. Not long after, the wife of the Khedive, ruler of Egypt, established a school for girls of the palace. Still later American Protestant and French Catholic missionaries began to accept girls in their schools. In 1908 the American University of Beirut opened its School of Nursing and in 1921 a girl was admitted to the university proper.

Progress, admittedly, was slow. The girl admitted to AUB, (and her successors for years after) came to classes veiled and her husband,

1. Nabila Turjuman, Palestinian Ph.D. candidate in biochemistry, American University of Beirut.
2. Monica Soussa, an Egyptian living in Lebanon.
3. Suha Bakhit, computer operator, Amman, Jordan.



“In Cairo, young couples can be seen holding hands in public, an act for which they could have

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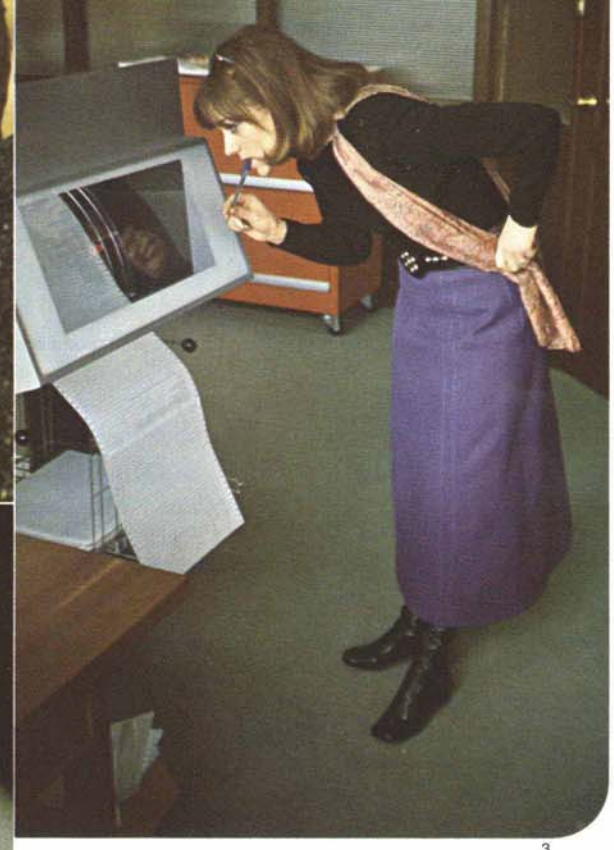

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"People said we would love each other after marriage, but it was like a nightmare."

been arrested a decade ago."

not a student, accompanied her everywhere. As late as 1926, Dr. Habboub, then simply young Saniyeh Habboub about to study medicine in the United States, would not unveil even to get her passport. Instead she described her features to the officials.

But the girls persevered, sometimes aided by wise fathers who thought education a valuable dowry, more often opposed by parents who thought it a waste. When they could, they used reason, when not, anger, tears and in one instance a hunger strike. And it worked. Today in the Middle East, not only families but entire nations give women's education the highest priority.

In Egypt, education for girls is not merely free but compulsory for nine years. In Syria and Jordan, the minimum is six years, enough to qualify them for vocational and industrial schools. In both those countries, moreover, where girls are often needed in the fields and factories, the UAR's Socialist Union and Syria's Women's Union sponsor supplemental classes in mobile school rooms in a "Boycottt Illiteracy" program. Lebanon does not have compulsory education, but because there are so many private schools, especially religious schools, well-to-do-girls usually have no problems. Those among the poorer classes who don't find a place in the limited state schools can often take advantage of courses provided by some 60 volunteer women's groups.

The results throughout the Middle East are impressive. Of 300,000 students in national universities, at least a quarter are girls. In Syria, women make up almost half the enrollment in institutions of higher learning, even those that stress technical skills. In the UAR, they represent 25 percent of Cairo University's student engineers, 40 percent of the medical students and more than 50 percent of those in Arts and Letters. At the University of Jordan, women account for one fourth the enrollment.

The girls, furthermore, seem to be good students. Mrs. Lucy McVane, progressive new dean of women at AUB, says female students are "highly motivated and hard working," and keen, genial Frank Blanning, dean of students at the American University of Cairo (which the late President Nasser's younger daughter attended), enthusiastically described them as "remarkably bright, good-looking, efficient, wonderful women."

Another important element in the improvement of the Arab woman's position is the career girl. Increasingly it's the influential working woman—in medicine, in law, in education, in commerce and even in the arts—who is pointing the way.

Not many years ago, according to Mrs. Amina El-Said, the very idea of a decent Arab girl going to work was shocking. "Only a poor woman worked," she points out. "She was looked down upon. She apologized for it. Now every woman is crazy to work, to prove herself. The change in attitude is a miracle."

That may be a bit exaggerated, yet if anyone should know she should. Mrs. El-Said, a charming, cultivated Egyptian in her mid-fifties, founded, in 1954, and has edited ever since, *Hawwa*, ("Eve") a Cairo-based woman's magazine which, with a circulation of 200,000 copies, is the largest weekly in the Middle East.

Hawwa is in the forefront of the emancipation movement. Furthermore, it is in the mainstream of a tradition that includes *L'Egyptienne*, a magazine put out by the unveiled Mrs. Nabaraoui in Cairo from 1925 to 1940, and *The Voice of the Woman*, edited by Dr. Jamal Karam Harfouche, during Lebanon's 1943 fight for independence from France. "Every woman who stood out in the early emancipation of women," says one Beirut editor, "was involved in publishing a magazine." One reason, she adds wryly, was that it was an activity they could stay at home and do.

Teaching, traditionally the most acceptable work for women, still attracts the greatest number of female graduates. A survey of AUB graduates between 1927 and 1959 showed that 65 percent of the women responding still work and 40 percent of them are in the field of education. The UAR today has so many trained teachers that it exports up to 1,000 yearly, many of them women, to neighboring Arab countries. Teaching also attracts a large number of women in Syria where the overtime pay beyond the basic 20-hour week makes it one of the most desirable jobs available.

In Lebanon, women in teaching have long led the way to enlightened living. Since 1934, the soft-spoken and affectionate intellectual Mrs. Wadad Cortas has been principal of the Ahliah National School for Girls in Beirut, whose students

"The Cortas philosophy: 'More social consciousness. Less social success.'"

Mrs. Wadad Cortas, headmistress, Ahliah Girls College.

learn early the Cortas philosophy: "More social consciousness. Less social success."

Of all the possible careers, medicine and the sciences have long been the most severe tests of a woman's ability and stamina. When Saniyeh Habboub returned from the U.S. with her M.D. in 1933 and opened a two-room clinic on Beirut's Rue Georges Picot, everyone thought she was insane. Dr. Harfouche's first patient asked her in 1941, "Say, do you know *anything* about this subject?" And elegant Dr. Edma Abouchdid, the first woman in Lebanon to get her M.D. at AUB, in 1931, had to fight to have her own gynecological clinic and adjoining apartment because it was unthinkable for a woman to live apart from her parents.

One of the more contemporary medical pioneers is Egypt's Dr. Claire Fahim Ghobrial, an attractive 37-year-old brunette who surprised me by being one of six women psychiatrists practicing in Cairo hospitals and the *only* one to open her own private child guidance clinic. At this clinic she not only directs a 12-person professional staff, including a psychologist, a sociologist and speech therapist, but also personally examines, diagnoses, gives psycho-shock and play therapy as well as parental guidance, to some 1,500 patients a year.

Difficulties in the medical field have not been confined to physicians. Midwife Tamam Maasri, a big, enthusiastic woman who has been delivering babies in Lebanon for 40 years, has three special degrees from Lebanese and American institutions, and has been an important force in teaching village women the elements of sanitation and public health. When she started her career she often had to go blindfolded on donkeys to remote mountain hamlets to deliver babies. Even today, she muses sadly, many rural mothers won't let male doctors examine them at all and others, if in critical condition, will conceal their faces first, so that the doctor won't recognize them later. On the other hand, Miss Maasri emphasizes, "The education of village girls today is a thousand times better."

Law, another field that Arab women have found challenging, has also produced its share of determined pioneers. Like 56-year-old dynamo Mufida Abdel Rahman, the first woman to practice law in Cairo, the first woman member of the U.A.R.'s National Assembly, the mother of nine

Inside an Arab Marriage

Scattered through this article are the comments of a new breed of Arab women. They are the western wives who have married Arab men and, "for better or for worse," are living in any number of places between Beirut, Cairo and Riyadh, generally happy and always flexible, sometimes more Arab than their husbands in appreciating the slow pace of life and accent on human values and relationships.

Arab intermarriage with western women began about 40 years ago when Arab sons first went abroad to study in France and England, but in the last decade the trend has accelerated rapidly. Many professional and governmental leaders in Arab capitals have imported spouses from the United States, England, Germany, Sweden, France and Italy—even in Syria, which has a recent law forbidding marriage with foreign women—and in Lebanon there are at least 500 foreign wives, almost half being American.

"In America, you marry a man and the two stand guard against the world. Here (in Lebanon) you marry a family and accept family values."

For the most part, the Arab man meets his foreign wife while studying abroad at his most marriageable age. He is often an older, mature graduate student and she is usually attractive, intelligent and well educated; she knows who she is and what she wants to do. And while it is not a prerequisite, it doesn't hurt one bit if she is blonde. Most of them are.

More than half the women marry at home and couples usually live several years in the bride's country, where they both work until the first child arrives. Since the couples almost always expect to settle in the husband's country ultimately, it is not uncommon for the girls to visit their fiances' homes before marriage. It's also not unwise, according to Mrs. Darla Brooks Shehadeh, a bright, likable and happily married Texas blonde who lived in Beirut three years before her marriage to a fellow reporter. She proclaims, "Any girl who marries an Arab and doesn't know his background is a fool. If she doesn't like his background and still marries him, she is twice a fool."

"I wouldn't wish my period of adjustment here on my worst enemy."

In that blunt comment is a great deal of common sense. For the way an Arab lives in his own country has shattered more than one otherwise sound international marriage.

In the Arab world, the family is the beginning and end of most personal and social life. Families are so close that they can make or break any marriage—particularly an unapproved international marriage—and Arab sons are often so attached to their parents that it is to please them that they bring their foreign bride home.

The first shock for a western girl can come when they move in with the husband's family and she finds that every decision is subject to the discussion of his parents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts. Today many couples are resisting this intrusion; yet there are still some patriarchal homes in which the father or older brother will select the pair's household furnishings down to the pots and pans, will decide their children's education, will ask the daughter-in-law where she is going everytime she plans to leave the house, and can, in fact, forbid her such public activities as

shopping or walking down a main street, unless accompanied by several women, a male relative or her children.

Such unrelenting supervision is demanding, but eventually most wives—admittedly the ones in happy marriages, the failures having ended in divorce or departure—come to see this family closeness and unity as an emotional haven, full of love and security, that they would never want to give up.

One American in her early thirties, who has lived more than 10 years as the wife of a leading university figure in Saudi Arabia says, "It's nice to have lots of people looking after you. When I first came here and saw how all of the women in the family helped each other I thought it was too good to be true."

"Being married to an Arab man with an American education is like being married to several men at once."

Mrs. Virginia Khuri, a petite, pink-cheeked brunette married to one of Beirut's leading young architects, says "I like the close family ties. Sometimes I feel I have more in common with his family than I would have with an American family. And it's wonderful for our son to know his grandparents so well."

Another foreign wife, a slim blonde in her mid-thirties with several children, has adopted the Saudi viewpoint. "After seven years here, I can still see the differences between western and Saudi women's lives, but I don't look on most women outside Saudi Arabia as feminine. Women in the United States, for instance, have so much freedom they lose their femininity. When I was there on a visit I cringed to see a married women tell her husband to get up and make the coffee."

Another difficult problem is the Arabic language, one of the three hardest in the world. While their children pick it up quickly and fluently, most mothers have to work terribly hard even to get a smattering and five years intensive study usually achieves no more than an adequate conversational level.

Hospitality, the keynote of Arab life, can also sour a western girl's outlook. A wife is usually expected

to receive other women at any hour, give or go to an afternoon tea party, and entertain dozens for dinner at a minute's notice.

Many wives acknowledge that "it's hard to keep up with," but others, like Darla Shehadeh, a very hospitable Southerner herself, find it fun. "I do a hundred times more entertaining here than we do at home," she says, "but everyone helps and I enjoy it." Outgoing Mrs. Betty Badawi, a regal strawberry blonde, comments, "I love the entertaining. I was not used to so much, but I got into the spirit of it. It took a whole year to pay back the calls."

"I go to the States as often as I can. I need it."

One basic difference the foreign wives all find is in attitudes toward children. Under seven years, the boys and girls both can be extremely spoiled, are rarely made to obey or given any responsibility. It is heresy to ask a boy to do anything in the house, even carry a plate. Hand in hand with the permissiveness allowed the children is their overprotection, which can hinder a child's ability to learn, develop or express emotional needs.

Many foreign mothers say Arab fathers are more affectionate with children than men of their own nationality, playing with them and pampering them constantly but then, when the boy turns seven, abruptly expecting him to become a disciplined young man overnight. One gracious auburn-haired American who has spent more time in Beirut than her handsome, Egyptian husband says, "I try to reason with the children. He gives them orders."

"I found that families here were much closer than in the West. I like it. I feel there is always someone to fall back on."

The Arab approach to child raising, according to Mrs. Diana Abizaid, a stunning blue-eyed blonde from Poughkeepsie, N.Y., can make the children too "docile." Mrs. Abizaid, the mother of six children between 13 and 2, says she is criticized for allowing them to speak up in company, but that she prefers it. "Until the age of 12 years, Arab youngsters sit politely and say nothing unless spoken to. As a result they find decisions very difficult later in life."

Interestingly enough, Arab husbands seem to object much less to foreign wives working than they do to Arab women working. Mrs. Ruth Borel Fahmy, for example, a Swiss-born, American-educated economist who before the age of 30 had been the only woman advisor on the Pakistan President's staff and an administrator of a $60 million estate in New York City, is president of a company of which her Egyptian husband is the vice-president. Her husband, Mustafa Fahmy, is so progressive that he accompanied his wife when she was six months pregnant with their daughter so that she could fulfill her management lecture contract in the Sudan, and his family, Mrs. Fahmy says, accepted her completely. "I never made an effort to fit into the Arab woman's role. I have been myself and there is no friction," she says happily.

Numerous other women reported the same: Yugoslav-born Vojslava Fakhro, an architect who is a partner with her husband in their Bahrain architecture firm; Mrs. Ali Fakhro, from Atlanta, Georgia, now for more than 10 years the wife of Bahrain's distinguished, bearded Minister of Health; Mrs. Osman Jamjoom, an attractive Britisher with black hair and a model's figure, who for four years has been broadcasting in English and arranging programs for Radio Jiddah.

A western wife has other advantages over the Arab girl too. Her smoking and drinking are accepted immediately as is she into the men's circle for worldly talk. It may take years for a local woman to get that acceptance.

But there are limits. Anne Zahlan, an English teacher, and Darla Shehadeh, both of whom knew Southern conservative upbringings, now dress much more carefully, practice "lady-like reticence" and "would never go to a movie alone again." Anne's husband discouraged her from talking to taxi drivers, Darla's from greeting and smiling at everyone on the street.

In many of the Gulf states women cannot wear bathing suits but can only wade in their long robes. Even in Lebanon hill villages women have been criticized for playing tennis on private family courts. And if a wife wears lipstick or does not wear black after a death in the family, she is severely condemned. Husbands will not let even their foreign wives publicly kiss them goodby.

"My husband is more American than I am."

For all that—mother love versus smother love, family support versus family suffocation, entertainment versus exhaustion—most foreign wives would re-affirm their choice tomorrow. After a look at home, many insist, they could never live in the pace and rush of the West again. And wives concur with Diana Abizaid that although mixed couples can never stop working at their marriages and must be more understanding and tolerant, it's worth it. As Diana says, "No one should make an international marriage if she is looking for an easy marriage—only if she wants one that is challenging, very interesting and never dull."—A. T. B.

1. Sahair Soudani (left) and Nahla Khatib, Jordan Television, Amman. 2. Mrs. Nadia Tueni, Lebanese playwrite and poet. 3. Pauline Seryauo, sometime model, Beirut. 4. Madame Linda Sursock, grande dame of Lebanese society.

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"Of 300,000 students in national universities, at least a quarter are girls."

children and the grandmother of eight. Married at 19, "in the harem and veiled," Mrs. Rahman got bored after her first baby was born in 1934 and proposed to her husband that she study law. For four years she did so, each year having a new baby as well. "Sometimes I had a lecture at 10 in the morning and a baby at 2 in the afternoon," she jests.

In 1939, Mrs. Abdel Rahman opened her own law practice, often working free or for "sweets, fruits or flowers." But her reputation grew and soon people were begging, "Please let the lady plead for us." With the help of her seven sons who distributed campaign cards for her, she won the first election to the National Assembly in 1956 after her husband urged her to become a deputy "and get the women their rights." Now, her children grown, she works a 12-hour day on her own legal practice and as a member of parliament, all the while honoring her marriage which she sees as "a good example of a Muslim couple loving, sharing and working together."

Another pioneer, the lovely Beirut lawyer Mrs. Georgette Chidiac, proves there are still professional barriers for women to overcome. The recent widow and mother of three, who looks a little like Loretta Young, took, in 1960, a competitive test for a judgeship along with 65 men. She passed it but was not appointed. She had a baby, took the test again, passed again, and was refused again. Undeterred by either her third baby or a new requirement that candidates attend a three-year institute in jurisprudence, Mrs. Chidiac practiced law in the court mornings, attended the institute afternoons, and finally, in 1969, became the first Arab woman named judge, a member of the civil court and president of the juvenile delinquency court.

Oddly enough, in a nation of traders, there seems to have been little effort by Lebanese women to get into commerce. Some who have entered the field, however, even by chance, are veritable female tycoons. One of the most impressive is Mrs. Nadia El-Khoury, attractive mother of five children between 24 and 13 years old, owner of the prestigious St. Georges Hotel, president of the *Banque de L'Industrie et du Travail*, and managing director of the CAT Trading Company, which contracts and constructs dams, roads, pipelines in several Middle Eastern countries, many of them under her personal supervision.

"I never interfered with my husband's business," Mrs. El-Khoury explains. "Then, after he died five years ago, I came to the office for one week, and here I am." She modestly attributes her business sense to the fact that she was always "a very organized person ... with a natural gift for understanding the point quickly and making decisions."

Another Beirut widow, Isabelle Fakoury, owner of the distinguished Le Vendôme Hotel, also started to work after her husband's death. Although married since she was 15, Madame Fakoury, a soignée, white-haired grandmotherly type, joined her sons in an export-import business and quickly earned a reputation for both charming and confounding shrewd Arabian Gulf shaikhs, as she sold them sugar and flour.

Even Cairo has a woman tycoon, a very personable fortyish mother, who quietly runs a private business that grosses, she says, $50 million yearly, constructing and operating steel mills, chemical plants, textile factories in an unpublicized UAR emphasis on private enterprise since 1967.

One field in which Arab women have been especially successful is government. They have forged ahead in numerous countries; in Egypt alone they account for 20 percent (about 100,000) of the qualified government executives, despite the unstated demand that they prove themselves twice as good as men to succeed.

Dr. Hekmat Abouzeid is a good example. Secretary of the UAR's committee of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, Dr. Abouzeid started her governmental career as Minister of Social Affairs, and still deals with such national problems as family planning, child and maternal education and welfare. She introduced the governmental concept and program of training welfare recipients for productive family projects instead of doling out monthly relief payments. Her office directs rural women leadership training, and coordinates the work of almost 10,000 volunteer organizations, many of which are composed solely of women. Before the Aswan Dam waters began to rise she headed the sensitive project of preserving the culture and community relations of 35 Nubian villages with 50,000 persons who had to be moved.

Dr. Abouzeid's programs were based on population studies conducted by Cairo's private $350,000-a-year Social Research Center, directed by Dr. Laila Shukry Hamamsy. Dr. Hamamsy, with her M.A. in Sociology from Bryn Mawr and Ph.D. in Anthropology from Cornell, was only 32 when chosen to head this American University

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of Cairo affiliate and its staff of 55 professionals—mostly men.

Married to an orthopedic surgeon and the mother of two teen-aged boys, Dr. Hamamsy—a big woman in mind, heart and body—recalls how horrified the public was when she first went abroad to study alone. "They asked my father, 'Why educate her? You can afford to keep her at home!' " Later, to her relief, her supposedly conservative mother-in-law was so delighted that Laila was a professional woman that she pushed her own daughters out to work, too.

Equally impressive is Dr. Hamamsy's older sister, vibrant Mrs. Aziza Hussein, the second Muslim girl of Cairo to go to a university in America. Now serving her fourth three-year term as UAR representative on the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, she is best known for her pioneer work in birth control in Egypt. In hopes of helping a nation of 33 million which has a million new babies a year, Mrs. Hussein in 1964 launched the Family Planning Association, whose volunteers in one year alone established 23 clinics serving 20,000 women. Since then, the association's work has spread to a 1,000 societies, and has established family planning as a national priority.

Syria has outstanding examples, too. For three years Mrs. Nadwa Issa, a delightfully feminine 38-year-old brunette with a bright smile and twinkling black eyes, has been the director of the economic office of Aleppo, Syria's second largest city. A graduate of advanced economic studies in Brussels, Beirut and Damascus, the petite mother of three teen-aged sons is also her country's representative at the United Nations Trade Conferences in Geneva. She concedes that she "fought hard" for her job and that many men did not want to give it to her, but adds that now the governor doesn't want to let her go, even to accept a national ministry position.

Even more astonishing is the progress of Arab women in the cultural field. Actresses and artists, looked down upon as disreputable in the 1920's and 1930's, are now eligible for national awards and scholarships abroad. Outstanding women painters in Cairo, such as simpatico and sensitive Tahia Halim, patrician Inji Efflatoun and vivacious Gazbeya Sirry, have exhibited and sold their canvases around the world. Cairo also boasts a talented double threat named Souraya Elagizi, wife of Egypt's leading playwright Alfred Farag. Souraya, a painter and journalist, took up film writing (because a typewriter took less room in her two-room apartment than an easel and canvas) and has just sold her first movie scenario for a Cairo production.

Beirut's leading half-dozen women painters are all noteworthy individualists. One is Nadia Saikali, who proved something 15 years ago by illustrating magazines, teaching French and ballet to save enough money for a year's study at the *Academie des Beaux Arts* in Paris. As an example of changing mentality, her father, who tried to discourage her from study abroad, later offered to send her younger sister to Europe to become a professional ballet dancer.

Another is Juliana Seraphim, who looks like a living icon herself, with her exotic black eyes and hair. She worked as a secretary in the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for six years, painted after hours, and refused to get married because she felt she must "find my own expression." Since winning first prize in an art contest and a year's art study in Florence, Italy, she does erotic oils and drawings which were strongly criticized at first but now are featured on TV. They help, in her opinion, to liberate

The Arab Woman & the Western Male

There is an old Arab proverb, "It is better to eat your own barley than to buy foreign wheat," but when it comes to Arab women a lot of men disagree.

Not everyone would go as far as one American free-lance writer who proclaims forcefully that the Arab woman is "one vastly superior creature," but then not everyone has a wife to match his: a handsome, stylish, intelligent woman who has two children, speaks three languages, edits several publications, serves as a board member of a worldwide organization and has traveled throughout Europe and America.

Such women—usually well-to-do and products of European and American educations—are by no means the norm in the Middle East, but neither are they rare. Western men who have married them praise them lavishly. Such girls, they say, combine beauty and sophistication with a very eastern desire to please her man.

Many western men not married to Arab women find them alluring. Some rave about the charm of girls who are naturally exotic, boldly stylish yet genuinely shy and even innocent. One man says that as soon as the Arab woman discovers dieting her beauty will explode on the international scene the way once equally robust Italian and German beauties did during the lean years after World War II.

The single man in the Arab East is less enthusiastic. He does say that the educated, westernized Arab girl is often more attractive, usually more sophisticated and always better dressed than most American girls, but adds wistfully that it is almost impossible to meet and get to know them. One American bachelor who worked in the Middle East for 10 years says of the Arab women he meets at diplomatic functions and dinners in Cairo, Beirut and Amman: "Generally the wealthy, upper class women are de-tribalized as a result of education and travel, but when you drop down the social ladder, it is almost impossible to meet the average Arab woman. And even with the upper class, there is a conservative streak. The old families invite you to tea, cocktails and dinner, but you can never invite their daughter out to dinner after dark. They stay close to daddy and the hearth after dark."

A British newspaperman in his early thirties, who covers the Middle East for a news agency, agrees. "If a girl takes her family seriously, one can't really talk to her, get to know her, at any length. In any possible friendship, there is a tension, not the relaxed atmosphere as with a western girl in London. One never gets close enough to know any of them—except those who have trained or lived in Europe. It is a shame. The women of Lebanon and Egypt are so beautiful, but you cannot get to know them."

John Riddle, a forthright, 22-year-old American photographer, who studied Islamic history and culture in the United States and Lebanon, dated an Arab girl every day, but usually at her family's.

"The principal problem for a girl dating a westerner is that of reputation and family honor," Mr. Riddle says. "The family is closer and worries more about her. They want to know exactly what a man is doing here and how much money he is making." One girl, he said, was so close to her family that she told a suitor "I don't know if I should marry you or not. I don't want to leave my brothers and sisters."

One point most western men agree on is that Arab girls are more feminine than American and English girls. "I admit I am annoyed at not being able to see girls alone," says an American diplomat, "but I never see an Arab girl in curlers either."

Bob Smith, an Arabic language student at the American University of Cairo, likes Arab women for their more feminine attitude and appearance, but adds that sometimes an Arab girl's submissiveness may have an element of deceit in it because she plans to rule the man indirectly later. Students he knows have an "illusory attitude toward love," he says. "They see someone and stare across a room and think they are in love, but it is not a sustained emotion. And with this over-romanticism, their parents force a materialistic preoccupation which favors older, financially-established men. They have marriage on their minds, but also are in confusion as to their role and relationship with men." He concurs with American girl students at AUC that Arab girls of 18 are not as emotionally mature as his sister citizens.

Some western males remark that though the Arab woman is initially more exotic than a western woman, her interests and personality are shallow and in a sustained relationship she is less intriguing. Her lack of casualness and flexibility, they say, prevents her from wearing well. They feel that while a submissive attitude may make a man feel more masculine at first, after a long time flattery can be cloying.

All Arab girls, of course, are, ecstatically happy about being married to western husbands, all of whom are handsome, intelligent, urbane, kind, loving, generous and considerate. I know they are because their husbands told me so.—A.T.B.

women—and the public—from an outmoded past.

Television, curiously, has always been more or less open to Arab women, and today TV jobs are decidedly fashionable. Mrs. Selwa Hagazi, 34, a pretty and petite poetess married to a judge and mother of four, works seven hours a day in Cairo on three different weekly TV programs for children, teen-agers and adults. She is the first woman in her family to work and had to battle a shocked father to do so. "Why do you work?" he asked. "You have everything you need, and if you don't, I will give it to you." She countered, "I must do something creative."

Fifteen years ago, faith in women's creative and organizational abilities moved the President of Lebanon to ask a women's committee to establish the Baalbek International Festival. Since then the annual summer cultural festival produced in the monumental Roman temples of Baalbek, has developed into a major production able to attract artists of world stature such as Rudolf Nureyev and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Recently the program became year-round under volunteer president Mrs. Selwa Es-Said, a sophisticated and attractive socialite who contributes a dozen hours daily to festival projects which have helped to develop national theater groups in Beirut as well as attract international tourism to Lebanon.

Typically, women's volunteer work has taken the form of numerous bake and handicraft sales by village religious societies or, among the more sophisticated, organizing benefit balls and shows to support a pet charity such as an orphanage or school. Also, of course, there were the dynamic women who pioneered the Red Cross-YWCA kind of organization at a time when cities such as Beirut and Cairo boasted a relatively high percentage of aimless *femmes de luxe* whose evenings were devoted to entertainment and entertaining and whose days were spent in rounds of shopping, gossiping and visiting.

One form of work common to women in the West—political activism—was not at all widespread in the Arab world before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. "With the shock and humiliation of defeat," as Amina El-Said puts it, "came an impressive change." One Palestinian mother explains that suddenly the loquacious, often wild optimism of the Arabs was shattered and women's action—purposeful action—came into vogue. Mrs. Rasha Khalidi, for example, is a professor's wife who had never worked in her life before. To help present the Arab case to western nations, she set up the Arab Women's Information Committee in a three-room office in her Beirut basement. Along the same lines some 20 professional women in Beirut began to contribute energy and talent to an organization called "The Fifth of June Society," which tries to explain the Arab view-point by providing speakers, films and information materials to writers, students and newspapers around the world. A third Beirut group, the "Friends of Jerusalem Society," with 200 volunteers, has raised almost $225,000 selling refugee-made handiwork and Christmas cards.

Changes of these magnitudes in women's professional and volunteer activities, of course, have not gone unnoticed by Arab men. The question is, what do they think of it? Do they approve? Or do they agree with the Bedouin farmer in Jordan who told a reporter: "It's not

"'Why do you work?' he asked. 'You have everything you need, and if you don't I will give it to you.' She countered, 'I must do something creative.'"

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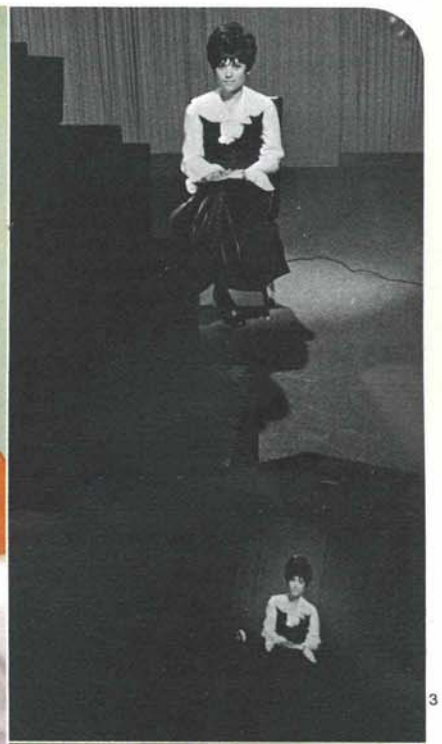

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Tor Eigeland

1. Mouna Bassili, designer and artist, Beirut. **2.** Nadia Saikali, Lebanese painter. **3.** Aida Bsisu, Jordan Television. **4.** Mrs. May Tabet, film editor, Beirut.

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"Work today gives women status, respect, social freedom and a fuller life."

honorable for a woman to work outside the home if a man can support her."

Social experts, I learned, are divided on what the answer is. A woman executive in Aleppo says flatly that men don't like it ("I don't believe men like women working anywhere—only in the United States where women first began it."), while an American male sociologist in Beirut believes Arab men are getting used to it. ("A few years ago women studying and working scared the living daylights out of the men. They were really uptight. Now after steady confrontation, the men are relaxed, even protective of the women.")

There's no doubt in my mind that many men do not like it. In the words of a pretty Beirut lawyer, they're "really frightened." This is considered especially true of the "threatened," less educated man. But there are also some men who do like a career wife, such as the engineer husband of Cairo physicist Mrs. Ingy Zein El-Abedine. "Before I was married," he says, "I thought women should be at home. Now I see that a working wife is better. They are more broad-minded, they understand life and appreciate a husband's efforts, and socially it gives a couple more opportunity to be together in leisure time."

A similar view is expressed by Silvio Tabet, Paris-trained and prize-winning film maker of Lebanon, whose wife, May, works with him ten hours a day in their SMT studio, but also takes care of their young daughter. Handsome, energetic Silvio says, "I would not want to be married to someone who sat at home all day." Many of Silvio's friends ask the tall, glamorous and clever May, "Where can I find a wife like you who helps her husband instead of just spending his money?"

Another question is what effect is emancipation going to have on basic values of the Arab world? Or more to the point, in view of those values is true emancipation possible?

These values, like many traditional Arab viewpoints, were shaped in the days when tribal codes and behavior literally determined life or death. Just as the Arab's open-hearted hospitality was based upon the state of human helplessness in the desert, so matrimony was based upon the survival and betterment of the tribe or family. Since a woman's role in this was a primary determinant of children's character her own moral standing was more important even than her wealth. As a corollary, one of man's primary obligations was her moral as well as physical protection.

Unfortunately, what was then a sound code has today come to mean that girls' social life must be rigidly supervised and the individual's needs and wants—like a daughter's wish for a specific mate—must often be sublimated to the family's desire for economic and social betterment.

For girls, this sublimation is manifested most often in submissive acceptance of an arranged

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marriage. In Lebanon, even today, according to Dr. Ala'ud-Din Drooby, an American-trained psychiatrist, nearly 80 percent of marriages in the lower economic class, about 35 percent in the middle class and 10 percent in the educated upper class, are arranged. His estimates for Egypt and Syria are much higher: nearly 50 percent in the two upper classes.

This is not, says Dr. Drooby, automatically bad. Since a family's criteria are essentially sound, more arranged marriages succeed than fail. Furthermore, husbands and wives in arranged marriages can, and do, fall in love. Love matches have higher expectations and a much greater chance of failure—especially today when divorce is easier. On the other hand, as a highly successful businesswoman in Cairo makes clear, arranged marriages are not ideal either.

"After living abroad for many years," she told me, "I returned to marry a government official as arranged by my family. I wanted to know him, but the family said, 'No. Get engaged and then you will know him.' There was no dating alone until we signed the marriage contract. We were

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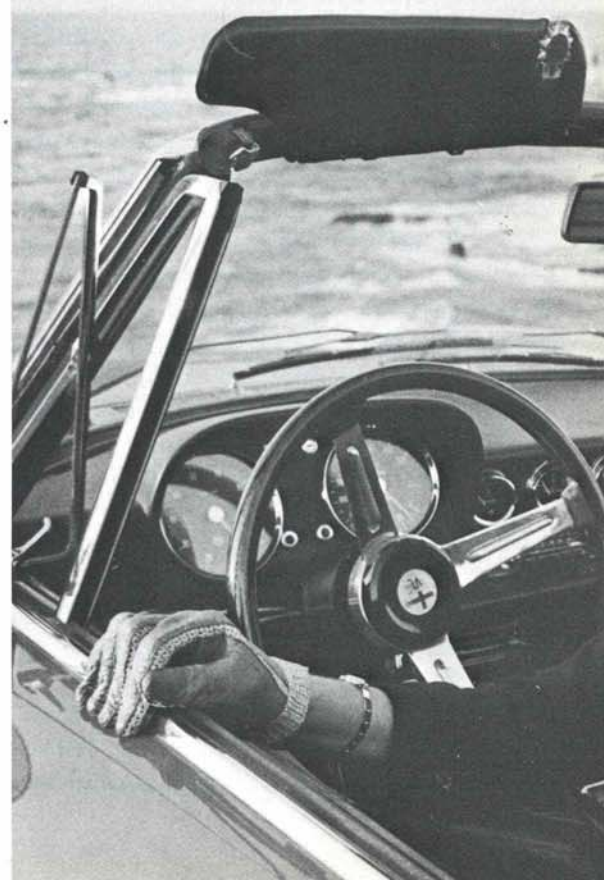

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1. Mrs. Aziza Hussein, chairman, Cairo Family Planning Association. 2. Nowar Istwany, accounting student, Damascus University. 3. Mrs. Vera Nahas, Beirut socialite. 4. Mrs. Salwa El-Said, chairman, Baalbek Festival, Lebanon.

different in every way, and I did not care for him at all. People said that we would love each other after marriage, but it was like a nightmare. We had two children, were very unhappy together and after 10 years got a divorce."

Getting to know a potential mate is still difficult. Casual dating as it is known in the West simply does not exist. Even university students must usually be content with meeting afternoons at the campus coffee shop; on formal dates a brother or a relative usually accompanies a girl. Teen-age girls and boys can go out together, but usually in groups.

For Arab girls the hardest problem of dating alone is that if a man takes her out three times she is considered engaged by parental and public opinion. If she is not engaged, her reputation could be damaged—with the result that many professional and working girls in their twenties, especially in Egypt and Syria, have *never* dated a man alone. Even successful professional women, says a psychiatrist in Cairo, would hesitate to do anything "to hurt their professional standing." A 27-year-old secondary school teacher in Aleppo, for example, confesses that she is terribly lonely, but says it is impossible for her to go out to a movie with a man as she did on trips to Paris, London and Beirut. "I always date in Beirut," she notes happily.

If public opinion makes it difficult for a girl to date alone, it can be appreciated that it is almost unheard of for a girl to live alone. Only the girl who has spent some time in Europe or America, or the divorcee, has her own apartment—and then only if she is particularly independent financially as well as emotionally. The persistent question is, "Why would a girl want an apartment alone except for boys and bad reasons?"

What then do Arabs, admittedly an emotional people, do? They wait! While young girls own up to amorous urges, they say that doing anything about it is "out of the question." In fact, most women of any age over 25 years in Lebanon, the UAR, Syria and Jordan (again except for the few who have lived in the West) are visibly outraged by the idea of pre-marital sex. And although more girls are dating alone, and even going to men's apartments in lenient Beirut, they are rarely, if ever, going to bed in them—even with fiancés. To do so, they know, could mean they would never marry.

As I said, this is changing. Younger women are demanding—and achieving—more honest and mature male-female relationships. In Cairo young couples can be seen holding hands in public, an act for which they could have been arrested a decade ago. Last summer a Beirut couple drove to Europe with only a 12-year-old boy for "chaperon." And when "*Le Jour*," a Beirut newspaper, recently published a survey on free love, many

1. Lily Sobhi Khalil, tour operator, Cairo. 2. Dr. Edma Abouchedid, pioneer gynecologist, Beirut.

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"I never dreamed in my life to see such an evolution in education and work."

girls under 20 said they approved of it.

Inevitably, such attitudes make for greater liberalism in marriage. Girls whose grandmothers' husbands were chosen for them, and whose mothers' husbands had to be at least approved, are beginning to insist on the right to chose their own. Today, they can marry younger and sooner. With state-approved birth control, girls can keep studying and working without the risk of having a family too soon.

It is particularly significant that there is a noticeable increase in inter-religious, inter-racial and international marriages. Up to 15 years ago, it was shocking for members of different faiths to intermarry in the Arab world, but today they not only do but get heretofore heretical support from women like Madame Linda Sursock, grande dame of Lebanese society, and Mrs. Selwa Es-Said. "There are many more mixed marriages today between Arabs and foreigners, between Muslims and Christians," says Madame Sursock. "And I'm for it." Mrs. Selwa Es-Said agrees. "Intermarriage, just as it did in the old tribal days, unites different groups and contributes to understanding and peace."

The answer to my question, therefore, is yes, true emancipation is possible. And the Arab woman will achieve it—but wisely, on her own terms rather than those of the western woman. For although the Arab woman wants greater freedom and independence, more self-expression, more chances to prove her capabilities, more responsibility and less dependence on the men of her family, whether father or husband, she still wants to keep her special role as a woman. "Equality of the sexes," she says, "does not mean identity of roles." Over and over Arab girls say, "We do not want to change valuable traditions. We don't want to destroy man's supremacy or the feeling that men are stronger and that we are dependent." As a Beirut artist puts it, "We may want to change how we select a mate but not his position as head of the family. That is what makes us feminine."

To try to loosen family ties in one way and maintain them in another is a very delicate process, and although the modern Arab woman seems to be managing it nicely, it is anybody's guess how long she can continue. Mine is that she can continue as long as she likes. Like Emerson, I think civilization is "the power of good women." And I find that Arab women are not just good, they're great.

1. Strollers on Beirut's Hamra Street.
2. Skier at Faraya resort in Lebanon.
3. Mrs. Nelly Thomas in a Beirut public garden.
4. Mrs. Leila Sharaf, wife of Jordan's ambassador to Washington, and son Nassir.
5. Juliana Seraphim, Lebanese artist.
6. Girls visiting at Cairo's Gezira Sporting Club.


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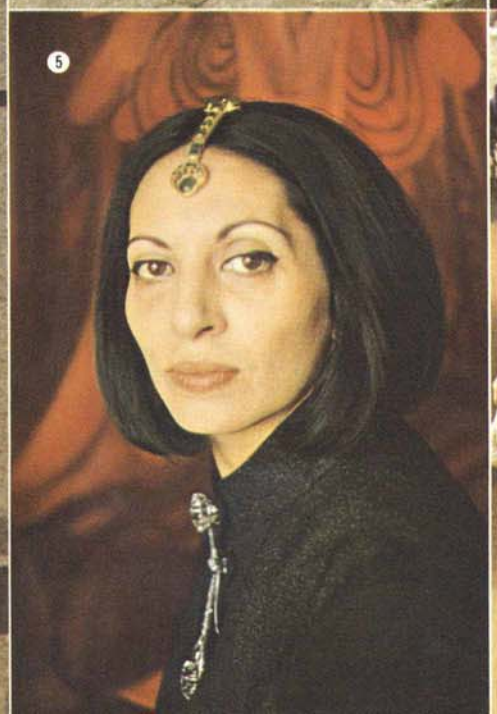
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