

**SECOND SECTION**

**RESEARCHES  
IN OTHER  
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## **MEDIA & ARAB WOMEN**

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Perhaps it is of benefit before discussing the role of Media in the advancement of Arab Women's issues, to refer to a number of facts concerning Arab women:

Firstly, we must acknowledge that the status of Arab women achieved a tangible level of progress during the last half-century. But although popular and official efforts were exerted in addition to that of the United Nations in the Arab World countries with the aim of enhancing women's status and attempting to incorporate women in their societies as stated in Nairobi Strategy and Beijing, Action Plan, many of the stated objectives didn't materialize.

Arab women are still deprived from their civil, cultural and economic rights. Hence, addressing Women's issues with their problematics, is the duty of enlightened men and women.

Secondly, Arab countries are closely similar due to the common land, language and heritage. This doesn't negate the diversity of florins of government and the social and economic disparities besides the difference in production patterns and social value systems. This couldn't be truer in relation to Arab women, for they bear most of the brunt of the current economic crisis, as well as the inhuman conditions in occupied Iraq and the Israeli occupation of Palestine, South Lebanon and Golan Heights. In order to expound this in

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detail, the Oil prices meteo..., rise helped in creating a new labour market in the Arab world and at the same time illiteracy rates among women is very high in most of the Arab countries especially in Egypt, Yemen, Sudan and Somalia.

Seventy percent of school-age girls don't receive any form of education whatsoever. While educational systems are in dilemma and suffer from lack of co-ordination with the labour market which consequently contribute to graduating large numbers of unemployed men and women. Also, curricula instill negative cultural heritage against women which stresses females' inferiority, and supports traditional roles for women. The paternalistic way of thought is still predominant in laws and in interpreting religious texts which in its turn deepens gender discrimination.

Thirdly, Arab women form between 10 to 40 % of the total

Arab workforce, putting into consideration that this statistics aren't quiet accurate because it excludes housework from labour work. It is noteworthy to mention that women are the first victims of unemployment. Agricultural sector comprises 40% of total women workforce while the service sector comprises the largest percentage of female workers. There are still some fields that are closed in women's faces such as the judiciary and Oil exploration. The laws that regulate Women's Labour are found only in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Many economic sectors witness stark discrimination in wages given to women.

In the light of the aforementioned, an essential question should be raised: 'does the Media play a positive role in fostering women issues through raising the awareness of their rights and responsibilities and focusing on what international treaties stated in relation to abolishing

discrimination against women and applying national constitutions which stipulate equality between men and women or does it secure the current status quo with all its shortcomings and disparities in rights given to women in comparison to those given to men and exploiting women in promoting consumerist values for the interests of the international markets?'

Let's tackle the role of Media towards women's rights and responsibilities in the context of political, economic, social and cultural developments which draw the outlines of the Arab World. There are two patterns that are predominant in the Arab society today, the traditional one in which the framework of the individual rights is non-existent, whether for men or women, except within the clan or the tribe to which one belongs. Man plays the role of producer and fighter in a direct relationship with the world, while

women stay in the house as a productive element without acknowledging their production. Man monopolizes decision-making and enjoys top priority in the value system while women are taboos and their role is confined to being a mother, sister, wife and daughter. The second pattern came to Egypt and the Arab World with the invading Western forces in the late Eighteenth century, carrying along technology, political and economic hegemony and at once it entered a fierce battle with the traditional pattern which stood fast in defending its political and economic interests and cultural identity. The conflict took several forms and it ended with a formal political independence, and economic subservience, yet at the cultural arena clashes are still blazing until today.

The present scene can be divided into four intellectual trends that control the approaches and

standpoints of the Arab Media towards women's issues that are summed as follows:

Traditional trend: It derives its legitimacy from cultural heritage, the paternalistic interpretation of religion, women's submission stressing females' inferiority and excluding any repayment for the household duties whether economically or socially. This trend benefits from the deteriorating situation in the Arab World as a whole from the breakup of value systems, absence of democracy, repression of governments and economic subservience. This trend expresses itself in the media through confining women's roles either as executors of household duties or preservers of their femininity.

Social liberal trend: It emerged due to the writings of Rifa'a Al-Tahtawi, Qasem Amin, Khair-Al-Din Al-Tunsi and Abd El-Rahman Al-Kawakibi who advocated for women's liberation within the Pan-

Arab renaissance. This trend was influenced enormously by national liberation movements and women going out to learn and work, it also received a much-needed boost during the seventies of the last century thanks to the efforts of the United Nations in the field of implementing equality between men and women.

Westernized feminist trend: It confines women's struggle in cutting off frameworks and away from the social context. It calls for destroying the patriarchal system which characterizes familial relationships throughout the Arab World with strong emphasis over the unilateral nature of women's struggle. It manifested itself in some feminist writings which in its further turn marginalized women's struggle in the Arab World.

Globalised trend: It benefits from the notions of the traditional trend in stressing women's inferiority and

excluding any form of repayment for the household duties economically and at the same time tries to invest cheap women's labour without presenting any kind of insurance. It focuses basically on affluent women and promoting consumerist patterns through advertisements.

When we examine the results of studies covering Arab Media standpoint towards women's issues, we notice the following:

- 1- Arab Media promotes traditional images and roles of women as a mother, wife or daughter and doesn't stop enticing them from imitating American and European female examples.
- 2- Arab Media concentrates on celebrities in the fields of cinema, sports and diplomacy while ignoring thousands and thousands of women working as teachers, medical doctors, engineers, researchers, farmers and housewives.
- 3- Arab Media is partial towards upper-middle class women in capitals and urban areas and neglects rural and desert women except when dealing with crimes and the problem of finding servants.
- 4- Arab Media doesn't present a balanced point of view when tackling women's roles, responsibilities and rights within the family and falls silent when it comes to men's duties and responsibilities and focuses only on the traditional duties of women.
- 5- Arab terrestrial and satellite channels chose unqualified guests to discuss women's & family issues in order to slip from the restraints of censorship in addition to serving mutual interests and at the same time exclude the qualified ones because of their critical views.
- 6- Arab Media propagates consumerist trends among women

and children by the way of advisements and Drama that serves in boosting consumerism, individualism, getting rich quick and interest value system at the expense of work as a social value.

- 7- Female communicators lack the prerequisite societal awareness in relation to women's issues while media leaders' viewpoints swing between the traditional and globalize trends but it never embrace a progressive approach towards women's issues.
- 8- Absence of female audience from the Media priority list and this is manifested in total lack of conception among female communicators about this kind of audience whom they are addressing and writing to.

**Our latest study which covered the Egyptian Press standpoint from women's work revealed that:**

1. Discrimination against women in the workplace is manifested in

favoring males in almost all jobs.

- 2- Depriving working women from their insurance rights and exposing them to arbitrary dismissal in many sectors especially in the private sectors.
- 3- Not providing the suitable work environment for women as stated by law i.e. by building kinder gartens attached to the workplace.
- 4- Depriving women from certain public posts in the judiciary, being editors-in-chief, university presidents, syndicate presidents and the Oil exploration sector that doesn't favour women at all. That's why it is called (exclusively male jobs).
- 5- Newspapers dealt with the unjust working conditions that rural women suffer from which is manifested in lack of regular wages, widespread unpaid work, absence of all forms of legal protection, health care and social care. (It is worth



mentioning that Egypt's Labour laws have excluded the female farmhands from the labourers' rights).

- 6- Newspapers also covered the international factors influencing women's work represented in the investment companies which attracted women to work in two sectors that provide them with no security whatsoever namely: an informal sector that depends on seasonal work and the marginalized sector which offers temporary small loans.
- 7- Newspapers presented some negative examples in which women's work is linked to family collapse. It is noteworthy to mention that all national and party newspapers (in Egypt) were enthusiastic in presenting women's issues in the field of political participation and modifying the nationality law while the issue of women's work was relegated.

A question is raised: what should be done and how, can we raise a true awareness of Arab women's issues and rights, how can we develop balanced media policies towards women's issues, so we can put into consideration the several responsibilities piled on women's shoulders whether inside and outside the house, which hinder women from creative output in all fields?

Alternative media that we aspire to is the kind of media which adopts a critical approach and is characterized by an educational nature and attempts to reveal the disadvantages of commercial media and its role in falsifying people's awareness about women's status, rights and roles. In order to achieve these objectives, a number of necessities arise and can be summed up as follows:

- 1- Being aware of developing a national media strategy dealing with Women's issues as a whole,

the challenges that face women in the familial, professional and educational fields, participation in public work, a strategy that outlines priorities, policies and executable programmes in all forms of media.

- 2- Attempting to bridge the gender through concentrating on media campaigns to highlight rights and safeguards for working women especially in the marginalized sectors and female workers in the rural and desert areas.
- 3- It is necessary that Arab Media becomes truly committed to highlighting women's achievements in different fields whether outside or inside the house.
- 4- Organizing media campaigns to eradicate illiteracy among Arab Women because it is inconceivable to enhance working women in the field of agriculture and services depending on a constant human base.
- 5- Organizing media campaigns to raise the awareness of abolishing all forms of discrimination in wages, training and promotion which Arab women suffer from in most fields.
- 6- Organizing media campaigns demanding the incorporation of household duties within the economics of national income and call for passing a legislation that provide pensions for women in the case of disability or divorce.

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