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**A Multi-Sphere Violence
against Arab Women**

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A Multi-Sphere Violence against Arab Women

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Abstract

Violence against Arab women is manifested in all forms of physical, psychological, and sexual assaults. These forms of violence include verbal abuse, aggression, miscarriages, torture, beating, honour killing, exploitation, humiliation, accusing of infidelity, rape, molestation, incest, and harassment, all of which occur both in the private and the public spheres, creating victims on the street and at home. This paper aims to explain how all these forms of violence occur against Arab women within various spheres—*cultural, social, economic, health, education, and political*—each of which interweaves with other spheres, facilitating or enhancing specific forms of violence, and contributing ultimately to a whole and comprehensive multi-sphere violence against Arab women. Cultural traditions, norms, and practices are the main sources for various forms of violence, such as honour and sexual crimes. Social inequalities between men and women discriminate against women's rights in society. Arab women suffer from economic disadvantages that affect their employment and roles at home and at the workplace. These cultural, social, and economic spheres lead to problems with women's reproductive and sexual health, including harmful practices with health consequences and dangers, impacting Arab women both physically and psychologically. As well, despite the growth in educational opportunities for women in the Arab world, obstacles and limitations in the endeavour still exist. Most Arab countries also tend to be sex-divided, patriarchal societies, perceiving politics as a domain reserved solely for men. It is therefore suggested that with the struggle for gender equality and the influence of globalization, the practice of violence against Arab women can be reduced; albeit challenges are not easy to overcome given the various spheres they stem from.

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Sphere-In

Women around the world are still disadvantaged both in the private sphere of the family and in the public sphere of employment, economic activity, and political life, as a result of the long-existing traditions and profound beliefs about women (Rendel, 1997). Specifically, women around the globe suffer countless acts of violence each day, simply on the basis of their gender. Violence against women is very much linked to males' desire to reassert or maintain control and power over women. It is perpetrated in every stratum of society—it occurs among all classes, ethnicities, age groups, cultures, and countries (Ba-Obaid & Buleveld, 2002; Faqir, 2001; Kulwicki, 2002).

Defining violence against women can be challenging due to the complex and widespread nature of this term; however, some unified elements emerge as useful indicators. Chomiak (2002) provides useful insight into outlining this notion, suggesting that violence against women is a human rights violation that not only devastates victims, but also fractures communities, erecting barriers to fundamental freedoms, development, and women's full participation in society. Violence against women has been defined to include: cultural prejudice (Heindel, 2001); improper treatment and verbal abuse (Faqir, 2001); and gender-based assault including physical (aggressions resulting in various bodily injuries, miscarriages, depression, aggressions by numerous in-laws, torture, beating, and honour killing), psychological (exploitation, humiliation, accusations of infidelity, preventing from leaving the house, denying medical assistance, forcing wives to accept polygamy, and various forms of explicit and implicit threats), sexual (rape, sexual aggression and threat, molestation, incest, sexual harassment and trafficking in women, involuntary prostitution, and certain kinds of pornography, forced abortion, infidelity within marriage as well as within other relationship agreements, and forcing women to participate in what society considers abnormal and bizarre sexual activity), emotional, and economic abuse within the family, all of which are forms of violence that occur both in the private and the public spheres, creating victims on the street and at home (Chomiak, 2002; Colombini, 2002; Faqir, 2001). Regardless of social development and increased focus on equality and human rights, violence against women is perpetrated by men, silenced by customs, and passed on from one generation to the next. Despite its widespread incidence, the ways in which violence against women is executed and perceived varies among cultures.

In the Arab world, research indicates that all manifestations and forms of violence against women can be found. This paper aims to explain how all the previously mentioned forms of violence, ranging from the simplest to the severest, occur against Arab women within an 'interweavement' (Eid, 2008) of various spheres—cultural, social, economic, health, education, and political. Each of these spheres interweaves with other spheres through facilitating or enhancing specific forms of violence, contributing ultimately to a whole and comprehensive multi-sphere violence against Arab women.

The accurate conceptualization and expression of the status of women in the Arab world is a complex task. Each of the 22 Arab countries possesses unique

cultural, historical, and social standards (Jad, 2004). Thus, to understand the status of women, it is important to explore the overarching themes that comprise the general experience of women in Arab countries.

The status of Arab women in rural areas, for example, is challenging, as the lack of agricultural machinery, access to healthcare, and sometimes peaceful community cohesion can allot great burden upon the women of these societies. For instance, women of rural Egypt carry serious responsibilities in relation to child bearing, child rearing, household duties, and agricultural work. Despite such massive efforts and contributions, their work to Egypt's development goes widely unrecognized and is seldom compensated (Ali, Cleland & Crael, 2001; Dickerscheid, 1990). Arab women's duties remain restricted to domestic and agricultural tasks, contributing to the soaring rates of illiteracy in countries such as Jordan. Walters (2001) explains that the persistent workloads ultimately do not permit them to take full advantage of growing trends in economic or educational opportunities.

Underreporting of violence against women in the Arab world is a serious problem (Buster, 2003). Many of the motivations linked to this trend are related to shame and taboo (Ba-Obaid & Buleveld, 2002). To avoid attacks, many women take far-reaching precautions, for instance, not going out alone (at night or even during the day) or always ensuring that a family member accompanies them. Despite these precautions, it is said that a large amount of abuse among Arab women actually occurs within the home. In Jordan, for example, the majority of violence against women takes place in the home and is carried out by perpetrators who are directly related to the victims. In Morocco, violence against women is a complex and complicated problem. Chomiak (2002) explains that it includes a variety of issues defined as taboo in both legal and social contexts, such as rape in marriage, incest, and pedophilia, to name a few. Due to the division of violence into private and public spheres under Moroccan laws, abused women are trapped in an almost no-win situation, as they can neither turn to their own families nor seek concrete legal protection.

Cultural Sphere

In the Arab culture, the control that men exercise over women in family relations marks a strong and definitive power relationship (Eldén, 1998). Cultural traditions, norms, and practices are the main sources for various forms of violence against Arab women, such as: honour crimes and sexual crimes.

Violent crimes against women that could result in death or physical harm for alleged disobedience or sexual misconduct are known as honour crimes because they are justified as being crimes against the honour of a tribe, community, or family. Cultural norms and legal practices related to honour crimes, Kulwicki (2002) explains, support the practice of killing women for sexual misconduct and excuse perpetrators of the crimes from punishment. For example, the Jordan's Penal Code, Sonbol (2003) explains, actually allows a man to kill a female family member (i.e. sister, daughter, wife, etc.) if he discovers her conducting herself in a manner that may threaten a family's honour. Sexual

misconduct is seen as the most serious offence to a family's honour, and therefore is understood to necessitate severe actions for the family to regain its respectability within a community. Jordanian courts almost always allow reduced sentences for males who kill female members suspected of sexual misconduct, no matter how innocent the females turn out to be once their bodies have been autopsied.

Honour killing is a form of murder of women; it is based on sexuality and patriarchy, occurring when women deviate from sexual norms imposed by society (Eldén, 1998; Stewart, 2002). It is a form of intrafamily femicide in defence of a family's reputation and honour (Faqr, 2001). Women are seen as hypersexual beings that must be controlled and oppressed in order to protect the social order (Sonbol, 2003). Therefore, sexual relations with an unacceptable man or outside of wedlock bring dishonour to a family and can bring death to the female who participates in these actions (Stewart, 2002). In many cases, honour killings are used to cover up incest. That is, some women who are murdered in such killings are victims of rape who have been impregnated by male family members. Families associate their honour with the virginity of their unmarried daughters and with the chastity of those who are married (Faqr, 2001).

Sexual crimes against women stem from a lack of respect toward females, demonstrating no recognition of their individual right to a decent, safe, and free life. Sexual abuse is prevalent in the Arab world, tragically impacting many girls and women. Recently, wife abuse and battering has emerged as a major concern throughout the Arab world. Wife abuse can take many forms, such as psychological, sexual, physical, and economic and be perpetrated against women of different ages, levels of education, levels of incomes, and at different stages of marriage (Haj-Yahia, 2000). In Palestine, for instance, women suffer from frequent sexual abuse by their husbands. Health consequences of sexual violence can be both physical and psychological. Physical effects can include severe body pain, gynecological problems, sexually transmitted infections, partial or permanent disability, infertility, and unwanted pregnancy. Psychological consequences can include feelings of shock, fear, shame, depression, anxiety, grief, and an increased difficulty establishing intimate relationships. When addressing the consequences, the different ways in which women experience sexual violence depend on the cultural background. For instance, in cultures where virginity is accorded a great value, cultural practices and traditions can lead to ostracism and shame towards survivors of sexual violence.

Rape is committed against Arab women in many different contexts; incest, by strangers, and can be used as a destructive mechanism during armed conflict (Parker, 2001). Although the Arab world is experiencing great change and development, Sonbol (2003) explains, the implementation of productive legal and policy sanctions remains slow, allowing the problem to continue. The laws that do exist are in many ways purely patriarchal and intentionally misogynistic and tend not to be victim friendly. For instance, Jordanian law does not recognize wife rape. As well, although incest is a serious issue in the Arab world, people often refuse to acknowledge the existence of this crime in society. Incest is culturally a very sensitive subject and is not easily broached anywhere in the Arab world, let alone conservative Arab countries. Quite often a victim who becomes

impregnated by incest is killed by her family, or in other cases, women are married off to hide the shame.

Social Sphere

Despite the recent cultural changes that have occurred in the Arab world, the family is still considered the main social institution. Traditionally, Haj-Yahia (2002) explains, the Arab society was built on the extended family; however, this structure is now split into nuclear family units. Nonetheless, both the extended and nuclear families continue to enjoy higher priority than the individuals within the units. This priority is reflected in various spheres such as commitment, aspirations, and social relationships. However, modernization trends, such as the division of the nuclear family, have affected the patriarchal structure by weakening the father's position in the extended family. However, the family unit in the Arab world continues to maintain a patriarchal hierarchical structure, in which the father is still the apex of the pyramid.

Since the early twentieth century, Arab men and women have debated the status of women in society and focused on issues of equality, allowing them to participate in making equal decisions in the family, in the labour force, and in politics. The introduction of women into the workforce and the challenging of traditional gender roles have resulted in some changes and developments that have liberated Arab women. However, the issues related to women's rights and freedoms have changed minimally. An analysis of various constitutional texts within the Arab world reveals that gender equality is not supported as much as is often claimed (Ammar, 2004; Wassef, 2001). For example, in many Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Sudan, women require permission of their husbands (if married) or father or brother (if not married) to travel abroad (Heindel, 2001; Mirza, 2001; Saeed, 1999). Women are sometimes robbed of the right to travel in the event that they resist or challenge social norms and rules. In Jordan, Faqir (2001) explains, most adult women dwell with either their husband or their parental families. Men usually own the family home and the major sources of income in families continue to be provided by male members. Women are intrinsically bound to men and dependent on them for financial support and social status.

In the Arab world, marriages tend not to be seen as a union between two individuals, but between families, which then become inextricably bound in a social network of ties that can last for generations. Marriages are usually arranged, giving the parents complete control over the alliances that will result (Holmes-Eber, 2003). Traditionally, young women marry their male cousins, more distant relatives, or neighbours who knew the family: 'These marriages were arranged, and the couple might or might not know each other before the marriage' (MacLeod, 1996: 34). However, Mostafa (2004) explains, the traditional methods of marital arrangements are changing due to the new roles that women are taking on in society. For example, modern marriage practices among Qataris are becoming more liberal in terms of mate selection in comparison to traditional arranged marriage. Such changes may be linked to

modernization factors, such as the process of urbanization and mass communication platforms in the Arab world, but in general, family patterns in Qatar are changing due to a transformation in attitudes toward marriage. However, mate selection can still sometimes be challenging in a culture where it can be seen as inappropriate for women to interact with men outside of the family and where premarital sex is still considered forbidden. For example, in Tunisia, spousal selection can be a difficult process, fraught with potential for conflict, due to the great emphasis that is still placed on arranged marriages.

Economic Sphere

The vulnerable position of Arab women is not only the result of legal and institutional restrictions, but also due to economic factors, such as economic hardships and unemployment (Ammar, 2004). The wealth generated by oil revenue has helped tremendously with the development in the economic sphere in the Arab world. Specifically regarding women's opportunities, the oil wealth has provided both positive and negative outcomes. For example, in the 1960s, Abdalla (1996) explains, the influx of oil revenue and foreigners in Arab countries aided in the creation of an atmosphere in which women were able to enjoy various aspects of liberation. These developments for women's status were quickly revoked due to the rise of the neo-traditionalist movement. In this, women's opportunities regressed due to the implementation of highly conservative values. While oil wealth also facilitated educational opportunities for women, it may have also discouraged some women from participating in the workforce due to the absence of economic needs.

In Morocco, according to Skalli (2001), women constitute the largest vulnerable social group in the country, experiencing the highest levels of economic constraints that increase their social exclusion. The patriarchal structure of Morocco operates at all levels of society, positioning women below men. Despite the confirmation of women's active participation in household expenses and their involvement in the labour market more out of necessity than choice, traditional beliefs and practices resist the idea of women's economic productivity.

Arab societies are seemingly reluctant to abandon their traditional viewpoints of women, which restrict them to household and child rearing commitments (Anker & Anker, 1989; Mostafa, 2004). Most Arab males consider domestic and household duties suitable for women and the majority of Arab families educate their sons instead of their daughters due to the assumption that males are a greater economic asset than females. These traditional viewpoints have resulted in limited career success for women in the Arab world.

Within the realm of employment, in spite of their increased participation in the workplace, Arab women continue to lag behind men in both salary and status (El-Ghannam, 2002). Women's lower income is due in part to various factors, but mainly justified because their incomes are still generally regarded as supplementing family incomes. The struggle for women's right to work outside the home has brought on a seemingly endless list of arguments. While many believe that women's participation in the workforce is necessary for women's

liberation, most Arab men believe that women should carry out household and domestic duties (Mostafa 2004). At home, women take care of virtually all housework and childcare, and even when they enter the workforce they are still generally expected to take responsibility of these duties.

In Egypt, patriarchal values continue to perpetuate male's control of females, as men hold the right to decide whether or not their wives are allowed to work outside the home (Assaad, 2003; MacLeod, 1996). Similarly, women in Saudi Arabia must obtain permission from their husbands, or if unmarried, their fathers or brothers. Women who own and run their own businesses, but are required to hire a male to handle daily operations if they do not have an all-female clientele (Heindel, 2001). In Kuwait, female employment demonstrates many inequalities within the workforce. For example, Kuwaiti women in general and especially those employed in the banking sector do not have employment roles that accurately match their qualifications and abilities (Metle, 2001).

Health Sphere

Cultural, social, and economic spheres affect issues of reproductive health and women's health in the Arab world. The widespread attitudes and opinions regarding family planning and birth-spacing indicate that Arab men believe that a large number of children, specifically boys, in the family would guarantee economic stability especially at times of emergencies. Male children are believed to support the family economically, provide parents with security in old age, and to carry the family's name, as children must take their fathers' full names (Kridli & Libbus, 2001; Petro-Nustas & Al-Qutob, 2002). These kinds of beliefs, in addition to the numerous negative attitudes and rumours about the use of contraceptives, put heavy burdens on Arab women's shoulders to get into a long process of suffering health and psychological problems. Fear of getting divorced is a continuous psychological harmful feeling for women when countering cases such as: not having male children, health barriers to have many children, or the mandatory use of contraceptives instead of husbands. For example, women in Jordan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, and Mauritania are willing to give birth to large number of children lest being divorced (Kridli & Libbus, 2001). Young women are even pressured to have children immediately after marriage.

Women in the Arab world also face many health issues and disparities, related to childrearing, armed conflict, and various diseases and ailments (Sibai, Fletcher & Armenian, 2001). It is evident that accurate understanding of women's health in this region is limited, especially among rural populations. In the Arab world, female circumcision is widespread in order to reduce women's active sex, believing that it helps reduce sexual diseases and protect family's honour. This practice is thought to suppress sexual desire, thus protecting young females from temptation and preserving chastity and marital fidelity (Cook & Fathalla, 2001). The virtue of purity is best achieved through circumcision, which is seen as closely related to cleanliness and purification. Thus, it is believed that becoming pure and clean not only helps women establish their social personhood, but also differentiates them from other women who do not practice circumcision and are

therefore impure (Abusharaf, 2001). In most Arab societies, it can be challenging for women without circumcision to marry (Stewart, 2002).

Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female genital cutting and female circumcision, is a painful fact of life for a large number of Arab women (Hassanein, El Hadi & Lithell, 2001). All forms of FGM involve the excision of some or all of the exterior female genitalia, and facilitate the disempowerment of women. Al-Hussaini (2003) explains that women are seen as impure and vile, sexually insatiable animals, or potential murderers, all of which can be undone by excising the female sexual organ. FGM is performed any time from birth to just before marriage, but most commonly between the ages of 4 and 10 years of age.

Health consequences and dangers are wide-ranging, impacting Arab women both physically and psychologically. For instance, research conducted by Hassanein, El Hadi, and Lithell (2001), reveal that reinfibulation can be associated with several serious complications, such as bleeding, obstructed labour, abscess formation, chronic pain, sexual problems, and sometimes death. Sexual problems, such as a lack of orgasm and anxiety due to inadequate emotions to effectively respond to sexual advances are considered very scarring for a woman (Koso-Thomas, 1987).

Education Sphere

Despite the growth in educational opportunities for women in the Arab world, obstacles and limitations in the endeavour still exist. For instance, over the last several decades there has been tremendous expansion in the education facilities in all six Gulf monarchies (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates). However, Bahgat (1999) explains, the actual quality of education does not correspond to the needs of Gulf societies. Such deficiencies in the educational system motivate the imbalance between indigenous and expatriate labour forces and the gap between men and women. Interestingly, unlike many other countries, the expansion of the educational system in the Gulf monarchies has not been accompanied by similar changes in domestic culture and values. Thus, the mentality and attitudes of Gulf citizens seems to have changed minimally.

In Kuwait, traditional child-rearing practices place few demands and behavioural restraints on males, but many on females. Tétreault (1999) explains that females develop work habits that result in superior academic performance, a pattern that persists at university where women competing for admission to technical and demanding majors (i.e. medicine, engineering, etc.) have an edge over men if the primary criteria for selection and retention are based on grades and performance. Despite these great achievements for women, many men have become threatened by female success. Various propaganda initiatives were launched in reaction to the academic and subsequent employment achievements. Such initiatives targeting women, especially working mothers, accused females of neglecting their children and contributing to poor Arabic language skills among Kuwaiti youth. Further, delinquency, divorce, rising alcohol consumption, and

disunity in Kuwaiti society as a whole was blamed on women leaving the home to pursue education and a career.

In Saudi Arabia, it is difficult to accurately trace the beginnings of national education for women prior to the unifications of the kingdom in 1930. Before this occurrence, Calvert and Al-Shetaiwi (2002) explain, the majority of education received by women occurred at home with the help of a female teacher. Modern education for Saudi women commenced formally in 1960, thirty years after that for men. Today, education in Saudi Arabia is not compulsory, but is open to anyone who wishes to participate in the state-run educational system. At this time, Heindel (2001) explains, females were able to attend school, with strict separation of the sexes observed after nursery school. Economic factors still influence female's attendance to the classroom; as lower-class families often choose not to send their children to school because of the high cost of clothing and school supplies. Despite women's growing access and participation in academia, inequalities and resource disparities among men and women exist. For example, fields of study for women continue to be limited to education, medicine, and liberal arts. Saudi women also face restrictions on travelling abroad for education, including the requirement that female graduate students on scholarship must be accompanied by their husbands.

In other Arab countries with much less economic status, women face more challenges in education. In Morocco, Skalli (2001) explains, there is an alarming status of illiteracy among the female population, demonstrating that investment in human capacities tends to favour men over women. Instead of attending educational institutions, young girls are often left to take on traditional chores such as cleaning and providing the household with water and wood. Various reasons are behind the exclusion of girls from education in Morocco; mainly, the patriarchal ideology that prioritizes the education of male children in Moroccan families over females. In Libya, prior to the 1969 revolution, the majority of women were not offered the opportunity to attend school, in part due to a scarcity of schools outside of urban areas (Hanley, 2001). In Jordan, women constitute fewer than half of Jordan's population. Although the average school enrolment is similar for males and females, the actual percentage of women who completed their secondary education averaged considerably lower than the completion rate among men (Faqir, 2001).

Political Sphere

Although Arab women have flourished in the education sphere, this has failed to translate over into the political sphere. Faqir (1997) explains that most Arab countries tend to be sex-divided, patriarchal societies, perceiving politics as a domain reserved solely for men. The lack of women's participation in this field is attributed to socialization patterns in these cultures that categorize the political domain as a male's field. Despite official declarations by many Arab countries of the intent to establish conditions of gender equality allowing increased participation of women in politics, female advancement continues to be restricted (Norris & Inglehart, 2001; Walters, 2001). In a 2001 study by Norris and

Inglehart, statistics demonstrate the nonexistence of Arab women in national parliaments of countries such as Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates; while very limited in countries such as Iraq (7.6%), Lebanon (2.3%), Morocco (0.6%), Yemen (0.7%), Syria (10.4%), and Sudan (9.7%).

Since the early twentieth century, the Arab world has seen great changes in relation to women's roles and rights in society. Arab men and women have contested the inferior status of women in society and worked to liberate females from the shackles of oppression. The emergence of the women's movement in the Arab world has been primarily attributed to the efforts of male intellectuals (Efrati, 2004). Amidst these efforts various societies within the Arab world have faced turmoil, unrest, and political upheaval, resulting in, or contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequality. For instance, dramatic wage disparities between the rich and the poor, illiteracy, neo-colonialism, armed conflict, and repressive political conditions have all contributed to a pattern of poor development and often resulting in the oppression of women (Ammar, 2000).

During armed conflicts, women can face brutal actions of harm, including rape, enslavement, and torture. Women who become human rights activists, political leaders, or military authorities in opposition to repressive regimes are also subject to severe cases of abuse. Females increasingly bear the major burden of armed conflict (Parker, 2001). Not only do women face various crimes of abuse committed against them during armed conflict, females are also responsible for household management and labour. This can include working long hours under primitive and unsanitary conditions (Cainkar, 1993; Gardam & Charlesworth, 2000). Sexual violence 'has become a weapon of war, very often used to destabilize the national and cultural identity of civilians' (Colombini, 2002: 167). The impact of sexual violence, Colombini (2002) explains, can often last long beyond the act itself, impacting the physical and mental health of victims. Assault can result in devastating health problems, such as: increased risk problems associated with sexual and reproductive health; unwanted pregnancy; sexually transmitted and HIV infections; and mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Studies illustrate the incidence of attempted suicide is nine times greater in rape survivors than in non-victims. Sexual dysfunction is also a resultant of sexual violence, including fear of sex and problems with arousal. Beyond all of the issues related to sexual violence, most societies that experience armed conflict are poorly equipped to assist survivors of such abuse, legally, medically, socially, or psychologically.

Sphere-Out

In the face of this multi-sphere violence, Arab women can seek equality and benefit from opportunities facilitated by globalization. In the Arab world, issues about gender equality continue to circulate around poverty, education, violence against women, the effects of armed conflict on women, and the need to end inequality in power sharing and decision-making at all levels of society (Sakr, 2004). The Arab women's movement has motivated the creation of various organizations and unions that strive to instigate awareness of the importance of

women's rights and with the aim of affirming and extending the scope of those rights to obtain gender equality (Darwiche, 1999; Moghadam, 2001; Salem, 1990; Sonbol, 2003). However, women's movements are still struggling to obtain basic political rights. One of the dominant trends in the evolution and development of Arab women's movements is a steady increase in the number of women's non-governmental organizations dealing with aspects of women's lives such as health, education, legal, literacy, income generation, and rights advocacy (Jad, 2004).

Feminist activists and theorists play a large role in the efforts that strive to mobilize Arab women toward equality. Feminism interrogates the question of how we are formed as gendered subjects in the context of gendered societies (Barker, 1999). When the Arab world appears in the popular imagination it is generally misunderstood as a place both oppressive to Arab women and hostile to Western women (Doerre, 2001). Western feminist scholars, who often devalue Arabic culture, commonly approach the path to the emancipation of Arab women with the assumption that Western models and schools of thought are most suiting. Arab feminists and activists are very much a part of, and concerned with, their own societies and should not be dismissed or devalued when compared to Western ideologies (Jad, 2004). The problem about assuming that there is a universal Western norm, judged against which women in the Arab world fail, is that it ignores the reality that women all over the world have many similar difficulties, and thus far, none of whom have found the means of eliminating patriarchy (Afshar, 2004).

The task of finding measures of women's human rights is one that should be of interest to both the academic and the activist concerned with women's equality issues (Poe, Wendel-Blunt & Ho, 1997). If the status of women is linked to the condition of the nation, a country cannot properly progress with its females unable to participate fully in society (Efrati, 2004). Women's equality, liberation, and democracy are intimately connected. All have in common a concern with freedom, emancipation, human rights, integrity, equality, dignity, autonomy, power sharing, and pluralism (Faqir, 1997).

Globalization helps in the transformation of societies. It refers to the ever increasing abundance of global connections and our understanding of them, and is grasped in terms of the world capitalist economy, the nation-state system, the world military order, and the global information system (Barker, 1999). This transformation 'has overwhelmed our economies, politics, governments, legal and educational systems, social norms, roles, relations and identities' (Moranjak & Adla, 2006: 7). Our lives are no longer regionally confined; even if we are not travelling, due to technological advancements, we are still able to absorb stimuli from all over the world (Leydesdorff, 1999). Although such changes have been observed in the Arab world, Moranjak and Adla (2006) explain that some cultural norms and social practices continue to resist this seemingly all-encompassing transformation. The degree to which one moves beyond one's own culture has become a political and individual challenge for many, and in some circumstances a great struggle.

Many Arab women today find themselves in a generation of transition; sandwiched between the espoused tribal loyalties of their parents and the expected technological expertise of their children. While Arab females are being

prepared to confront a rapidly changing, information and technology driven world, challenges to their flourishing persist (Walters & Walters, 2005). Addressing gender issues continues to remain as an important factor in the Arab world, as sizeable gender inequality remains and undermines development potential. In fact, despite the pervasiveness of inequality, gender issues remain one of the least understood and least-studied fields in development. Policymakers often treat such issues as peripheral concerns, inhibiting Arab societies from further development. Thus, gender equality must become an integral part of short- and long-term development policies to create a society that encourages and allows females to flourish (Gender and development, 2004).

Growth and development within Arab societies must rely on human resources rather than on natural resources as relied on in the past. Women remain a massive, untapped reservoir of human potential for countries in this region of the world. Therefore, women must continue to enter into the public sphere and become involved in the further growth of such societies. The outcome of Arab women's active participation in politics and decision-making can translate into incredibly amazing changes in the Arab world. Faqir (1997) explains that the symbolism in this shift implies bridging the gap between the public and private spheres, making issues related to women a more explicit public concern.

Many Arab countries have dedicated significant resources to women's education with impressive results. Such investments have significantly changed the supply, quality, and profile of the labour force, especially for women. Females in regions with higher educational success are also living healthier lives. Countries that have implemented state sponsored education demonstrate an improvement in literacy rates and aspirations of women to advance (Ammar, 2004). While the degree of change in the position of women differs from state to state within the East, it can be concluded that with more women receiving education in schools and universities, the status of women will continue to improve (Bahgat, 1999).

Overall, however, seeking equality and benefiting from globalization are not easy or straightforward tasks, given the challenges that live in the various spheres. While the Arab world has undergone tremendous changes in the last few decades due to its globalization and exposure to Western influences, many basic power inequalities between men and women persist. For instance, the family structure continues to be patrilineal in nature, making males morally, legally, and economically responsible for their women. For example, despite growing trends toward modernity and equality, it seems that the justification of violence against women continue to happen, reinforcing gender struggles and the further dislocation of societies and communities.

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