

RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL, AND FAMILY INFLUENCES IN
THE SOCIALIZATION OF ARAB MUSLIM WOMEN

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PREFACE

The study is an examination of religious, social, and family influences in the socialization of Arab Muslim women. It deals primarily with urban, middle class women of Palestinian, Egyptian, and Kuwaiti backgrounds as observed during the author's two-year stay in Kuwait and on shorter trips to Beirut, Cairo, and Amman. Extensive use of the relevant literature and interviews with Arab women from different backgrounds provided added information. Some of the differences and similarities between the urban society of the author's experience and the more extensively-studied, traditionally-oriented rural and village areas are discussed. Special attention is given to acceptable avenues of change existant in the society which have often gone unnoticed by researchers. An attempt is also made to contrast the author's observations with the view of Arab women often encountered in the literature and in the popular stereotype. It is suggested that a more dynamic and comprehensive perspective, attuned to the variations and complexities of societies in the Middle East, would be of value in future research on the area.

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CHAPTER I

THE SCOPE AND METHOD OF THE STUDY

The Middle East has long been an area of intrigue and interest to the West. This has never been more true than in the past several years as the economic and political importance of the region has become ever more apparent. Nevertheless, in spite of increased interest and research in the area, Western perceptions of the Middle East often continue to be based more upon popular stereotypes and prejudices than on any true understanding of the dynamic realities at work in the region. Such an outlook is not new. In fact, misconceptions about the Middle East may be so deeply rooted in the West's own intellectual history as to be almost institutionalized. In an important and insightful book entitled Islam and the West, Norman Daniel (16) traces the history of the West's relations with the Muslim World and examines the concurrent Western works on Islam at each stage. He concludes that modern ideas about Islam are still derived from a history of official and unofficial lies, half-truths, and misrepresentations based on centuries of religious, military, and cultural conflict with the Middle East. That such deeply ingrained preconceptions could have an effect even upon the supposedly objective, trained researcher is evidenced by a new book by Edward Said (55) in which he attacks Western orientalists for approaching their subject from just such a slanted perspective. According to Said, the predilection of Western researchers to become obsessed with a

fictitious Eastern mystique and to view the Near East through an impenetrable veil of exotica and preconceived notions precludes their recognizing the actual processes they are supposedly observing. Similarly, the tendency to make explicit or implicit value judgments about Arab society, based upon the writers' idealizations of Western society and the assumed desirability of such non-indigenous goals and ideals as "westernization" and "modernization" (often used synonymously with westernization, although it is by no means the same thing), also often leads to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. The research thus reflects and perpetuates the stereotype.

Needless to say, if Daniel and Said are correct in their assessments, some of the research which has been done on the Middle East has not necessarily increased Western understanding of the region. Societies in the Near East, as elsewhere, are not static entities which can be defined, filed, and finalized. They are complex, ongoing processes in which innumerable elements are constantly in flux, and they need to be regarded as such. Given the importance of the area, therefore, and increased sociological and anthropological interest in it, it would perhaps be well to examine some aspect of life in the Middle East from a new and, perhaps, more dynamic perspective.

A study of factors effecting the lives and socialization of Arab Muslim women is particularly well-suited to such an examination, both because this is an under-studied and, therefore, valuable field of inquiry, and because Western stereotypes seem most pronounced in this respect. The predominant Western image of the Arab woman is of a shy, cloistered, submissive nonentity hopelessly dominated by her male-oriented society. This image is not borne out by observation. Arab

women very often tend to be strong, forceful, and self-confident in the extreme. This more complex reality--the development of a strong personality in the face of a supposedly oppressive and unappreciative society--will, therefore, be examined with respect to three factors influential in building a woman's self-image--the religion, the social structure, and the family unit.

The use of a mutli-factor approach to this subject is meant primarily to add depth and dimension to the study. However, it should also serve as an example to remind the reader that a multi-dimensional approach is, in the final analysis, necessary to the understanding of any society or social group, especially in an area as complex as the Middle East. For example, any of the three factors discussed could have a greater or lesser influence upon women's lives depending upon the particular regions, societies, groups, classes, families, or individuals involved. So also could a host of other factors such as economics, local politics or political systems, historical processes, etc. Explanation and understanding require a knowledge of how the factors involved have effected the area or group in question. Therefore, while this work focuses on three important factors related specifically to the author's observations and research on Arab women, the complexity of the subject, and of the Middle East in general, should be remembered and the necessity of applying such a perspective to any consideration of the region borne in mind.

Methods

Three methods of data collection and/or analysis were employed in this study: participant observation, impressionistic interviews, and a

content analysis of relevant literature.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is, perhaps, the optimum method for gathering data in a study such as this, for only direct experience can truly counter an accepted and established stereotype. Fortunately, this writer had the opportunity to live for two years in the State of Kuwait on the Persian/Arabian Gulf, from September, 1972, to November, 1974. More limited stays were made in Cairo, Beirut, and Amman. The time in Kuwait was spent living directly with a Palestinian family and both the length of the stay and the situation contributed to the development of great intimacy and a sensitivity to subtle nuance which could never have been attained through more casual contact. In Kuwait there was also extensive contact with temporary Egyptian residents, as well as with the Kuwaitis themselves. The observations made during this period form an important part of the work. It should be understood here, however, that Kuwait is primarily an urban society and that the writer's contacts there, and elsewhere in the Arab Middle East, were generally among the urban middle class. This fact necessarily biased observations in favor of the educated, progressive forces of the society. However, since these forces are the ones most often overlooked in studies of the Middle East, they are precisely the ones most in need of representation. The urban middle class is one of the fastest growing strata of Middle Eastern society and represents an important mobile and dynamic force in the area. As such, its perspective is a vital one which well may be a most telling indicator of future directions, especially with regard to the role of women in society. For example, the educated,

professional woman is very much a part of the urban scene. More significantly, she does not necessarily see religion as an inhibiting influence or encounter the institutionalized resistance to her activities that the literature would lead one to expect. Moreover, the place of the Arab woman in the family was experienced as being much more central and influential than the partriarchal image of the society would suggest. This leads one to wonder if much of the literature has concentrated too much on ignoring avenues for change in the society for the sake of describing a stable--i.e., stagnant--entity easy to define and categorize.

Most studies of the region have, in fact, tended to concentrate on "traditional" lifestyles or tribal societies in the most conservative and static way. Even under the best of circumstances, when the observations recorded seem fairly reliable, the effect of this approach is much the same as that which would result from describing American society solely from the perspective of rural Arkansas or Appalachia, ignoring the existence of such places as New York City or Los Angeles. Both approaches, obviously, are of value to research. However, to try to build an understanding of modern developments in a society totally upon the latter is an error. To assume that the rural areas of a society are unalterably conservative or backwards, and then to use them to represent the whole, is even worse. The urban bias and regional limitations of the study should, therefore, be recognized as such, but should also be understood to add a relatively new and vital perspective to knowledge of the area. Also, attempts have been made to broaden the base of the research through the use of other techniques of data collection.

Interviews

The writer's contact with Arabs and Arab society has continued

intensively for the six years following her departure from Kuwait. This contact, both then and now, has included a great deal of discussion with Arab women--and men--concerning the place of women in society. In many cases, these interviews have provided insight into more traditional aspects of Middle Eastern life through informants' knowledge of, or experience with, other segments of the society. Interviews were also conducted with women from places not within the author's direct experience. These interviews broaden the base of comparisons possible in the study and provide important insights into the dynamic processes of the society. They also, along with the author's direct observations, offer a vantage point from which to assess the literature available on Arab women.

Content Analysis of the Literature

Some of the problems encountered in the literature have already been discussed. This by no means implies that it is worthless. Some of the most recent works on the Middle East have, in fact, endeavored to provide the more complex understanding of social processes advocated here. These works act as valuable sources, especially those dealing with societies or regions outside of the author's experience. Other works on the Middle East provide more or less sound, if static, descriptions of life in certain places at given times. These also are valuable sources of information, although they must be used cautiously--a one-sided approach to the subject can distort many perceptions. In both their strongest and weakest aspects, however, these studies offer a basis for comparison and discussion and broaden the paper considerably. Likewise, the contrast provided by the truly biased and stereotypical

works is not only enlightening, but also badly in need of discussion. Extensive use will therefore be made of the literature, both to partially counter the urban, middle class bias of the author's experience, and to provide deeper insights into the workings of Arab society.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study, then, is to examine the role of women in the Arab world with specific reference to their place in the dominant religious framework, the society at large, and the family unit. The basic limitations of the work have already been discussed. The urban, middle class bias of the author's experience necessitates concentration on the most progressive forces of the society. However, it has also been explained that this perspective is one which is consistently overlooked, but nevertheless vitally important. It is, therefore, perhaps more valuable at this time to work from this direction. Also, an effort has been made to broaden the scope of the research through interviews with women from other backgrounds and through extensive use of the literature.

Given the author's somewhat unique perspective, however, and the conscious attempt made to challenge a simplistic stereotype, it should perhaps be understood that this paper is not intended either as an "apology" for Arab society or as a polemic against Western ideas and research. It is a description of one extremely important aspect of Arab society and reflects the lives, opinions, and aspirations of the author's informants. If knowledge of the existence of such a configuration necessitates rethinking popular idea about the Middle East, then the fault lies with the misleading stereotype, not with the "new"

perspective, and a knowledge of this can only benefit research. That other perspectives, and configurations, exist is taken for granted. Middle Eastern society is extremely complex and it is a serious mistake to generalize too freely from one area or sector to another. Indeed, it is a misnomer to speak of Middle Eastern or Arab or Islamic "societies." While such terms are used for ease of reference it should be understood that what exists is an arbitrarily designated geographical area--the "Middle East"--and a variety of societies, each with many strata, classes, or sectors, which identify themselves as "Arab." Many of these societies--and many which are neither Arab nor Middle Eastern--are Muslim, and may contain one or several sects or legal schools and a variety of accommodations of religious belief to traditional social patterns. The different areas, classes, sects, or configurations cannot necessarily speak for one another, although they often interact and may share a commonly acknowledged national, social, religious, or cultural identity.

Similarly, "the West" is a catch-all phrase which refers to a large and very complex area. Daniel's (16) analysis applies to Western European research in general and extends backward many centuries in time. The author's own experience is of more recent derivation and her personal exposure to "Western" thought based primarily upon her conversations with, and knowledge of the research done by, individuals better referred to as coming from the Anglo-American tradition. Exceptions to this include the works of the Finnish researcher Hilma Granquist (28; 29), several French studies not included for consideration in this thesis and, of course, the perspective provided by Daniel's research (16).

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the ultimate social entity is the individual and that individuals, even within a given class,

religion, or culture, find individual solutions and definitions for socially-generated problems. No work on any area can hope to cover all of the possibilities. What is discussed here, therefore, is the behavior and perceptions of certain individuals in given circumstances in particular parts of the Arab World. The expectation is that a knowledge of their ideas and experiences will contribute to a deeper and richer understanding of some of the forces at work in their complex society.

CHAPTER II

WESTERN PERCEPTIONS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The major problem one encounters in dealing with the Arab Middle East is the immense social and cultural diversity of the region. Stretching across North Africa, through the Fertile Crescent, and down the Arabian peninsula, and encompassing vast millions of individuals, the area does not lend itself to generalizations. One need only peruse the seemingly inconsistent and even contradictory literature in order to know that this is so. What is true of one group in a given place may not be true of another group in the same town or city, let alone in another part of the area. Unfortunately, however, studies of the region are often approached as though such broad generalizations were, in fact, possible on a grand scale. The error is an easy one as the genuine cultural and historical unity of the area may lead writers, and more often their readers, to assume that this unity extends to the local social level as well, which it often does not. Similarly, observations of religious observance in one community are sometimes taken as indications of Islamic belief in general when they are, in fact, only local variations.

Such difficulties with generalizations seem to be especially pronounced when dealing with the subject of Arab women. In part, this may be due to the fact that much of what was, until recently, written on the area was done by men, a group by definition usually excluded from

opportunities to observe the most dynamic processes of women's lives. Since the men are often dependent upon male informants, there may also be a tendency to mistake outward appearances and ideal representations for the deeper reality of an intricate and complex social process. What one man tells another about the dynamics of family life may not necessarily reflect the total reality. It may thus not be a simple coincidence that much of the new, more insightful research on women in the Middle East is being done by female observers.

Another problem sometimes encountered in the literature is an unfortunate predilection for drawing comparisons, explicit or implicit, between the reality of life in the Arab World and the ideal of life in the West. Needless to say, the reality of one culture can never compare favorably to the ideal of another and the resulting misconceptions serve only to perpetuate existing biases and stereotypes. Thus the continuing fascination with--and overemphasis upon--the legal but not necessarily extensive polygyny of Islam without acknowledgment either of the inhibitions to polygyny in the area or of the fact that there exists in the West certain practices which some might see, as many Arabs do, as somewhat analogous to polygyny and perhaps less morally defensible. Among these are the extensive serial monogamy of the West, expressed in high divorce rates and subsequent remarriages, and the indulgence in pre-and extra-marital affairs which is not only extensive but also lacking in the "redeeming" qualities of legitimacy and responsibility. In this sense easy access to many sexual partners may be more a common feature of life in the West than it has ever been in the Middle East. Nor is sexual access the only, or even the major, function of polygyny. Such a balance of perceptions needs always to be borne in mind and is often

often lost on the student whose exposure to Arab society, however extensive, is not intensive enough to allow for recognition of the fine distinctions. In many cases, therefore, especially when speaking to a general or uninitiated audience, it is the responsibility of the writer to consciously maintain this balance. If understanding is the goal of social science, then it is not sufficient to list strange or "exotic" customs without attempting to place them in their proper perspective to the ideals and realities of the indigenous population or to relate them to a wider context which includes the readers' frames of reference. Bearing this in mind, it is now possible to turn to an active review of the pertinent literature.

The general, background works on Middle Eastern research were discussed in the first Chapter (16, 55). These provide some insight into the preconceptions which may lead to error. Another cause, perhaps derived from these, is simply poor scholarship. Thus, David Hart (32, p. 38), a generally reliable and respected researcher on North Africa, can write that the Koran "absolutely forbids a wife to divorce her husband, who on the other hand can divorce her with ease." In fact, the Koran recognizes a woman's right to dissolution of her marriage through annulment or mutually agreed upon divorce and forms part of the basis upon which rest later legal decisions expanding these rights. Such a statement leaves one with the impression that the researcher either has not read the Koran or is incapable of distinguishing between local configurations and religious ideals. Such an omission, needless to say, leaves a very mistaken impression with the reader and precludes any understanding of one of the most important facets of Middle Eastern society. While the conditions Hart describes may, in fact, prevail in the

area under discussion, such a blanket statement is misleading with regard to the realities and complexities of Islam and the variability of Arab societies in general. It also ignores the forces which may act either to allow women to dissolve their marriages or to inhibit men in the use of their power to divorce. "The Islamic Law of Marriage and Divorce" is discussed at length by J. N. D. Anderson (7) in an article which not only notes the general legalities mentioned above but also discusses the refinements associated with the various legal schools and the elements chosen for inclusion in many of the new national legal codes. An even more detailed and comprehensive explanation of the subject is found in Hammudah 'Abd al 'Ati's (1) The Family Structure in Islam, which examines every aspect of Islamic family law. Such background knowledge is a necessity for research in this area. Likewise, a knowledge of the Koran is indispensable to the researcher intending to do meaningful work in the Middle East. The translation used in this research is by Arthur J. Arberry (33) and is one of the more respected renderings.

Unfortunately, some researchers seem not to have taken the time to familiarize themselves with the basics, but to have relied on common knowledge instead. Another article which gives ample support to--and, indeed, seems based upon--the stereotype is "The Changing Moslem Family of the Middle East" by D. F. Beck (12). Meant to explore recent changes in Moslem family life, the article sometimes makes little distinction between past and present, and almost none at all between one area of the Middle East and another. Since the writer's emphasis is upon what she believes are the effects of "ingrained patterns" of religious ideology, there is little recognition of variability, the interplay

between religious ideals and social customs, the possibility of violation of ideals, or the universality of some social behavior. Thus, a "Moslem" preference for male children, based on their more active economic roles, is presented as something unique to the area rather than as a phenomenon which applies to the author's society as well and is actually condemned by Islam. Similarly, what the author sees as social injustices--a value judgment she has no right to make--are attributed to the religion rather than to ignorance or poverty, from which such things more often arise and to which Muslim analysts attribute them. Generalizations are numerous. The divorce rate for Egypt, for example, is allowed to speak for the entire Middle East. Similarly, an observation from Afghanistan--thought by other Middle Eastern societies to be one of the most underdeveloped of nations, and not an Arab country--is used as an example to illuminate Muslim thought in general. Furthermore, certain observations may be suspect. Beck asserts that the educated Muslim woman often disqualifies herself for marriage because of her modernism. Aside from the obvious fact that this would be true in many societies, it should be noted that in the Middle East it is certainly not universal. In many cases the opposite is true and the educated woman has much better marriage prospects. Likewise, the competence of Muslim women in performing their tasks is attributed not to pride or a sense of duty, but to the insecurities inherent in living in a Muslim society. Aside from her expected role, Beck writes, "I understand that she often goes much further and uses within the home all her skills of coquetry, dress, modest flirtation, soft words, seductive dancing, and skillful intercourse" (p. 572). From where, exactly, Beck derives this understanding is not explained. Neither does she

question just where in such a "restrictive" society women are supposed to learn things like "skillful intercourse." However, it all fits well into the exotic stereotype of submissive and seductive harem girls, questionable as it may be as an overall observation.

The tendency to oversimplify is a major cause of misunderstanding in Middle Eastern research. In "Familism and Socialization" Raphael Patai (47), another generally respected researcher, reduces all of a female child's early socialization to the learning of her "unimportance" in the family and her role as a servant to brothers and father. The male child's socialization is to the opposite extreme--he learns that women are meant to serve him. Such a simplistic analysis is as inaccurate as it is misleading and ignores the very real fact of the claims a girl can make on male relatives and the extensive duties they may owe her. Worse, Patai generalizes this supposed socialization to cover basic male-female relationships in the entire area although it is not supported in all of the literature or by this writer's personal observations. E. T. Prothro (50) makes a similar mistake in oversimplification in his comparison of child-rearing practices among Lebanese religious groups. His reliance on very general independent variables leads to an analysis which ignores many important factors in a society as complex as Lebanon's, as does his tacet acceptance of the assumption that Lebanese Christians are more "modern" than the Muslims. Aside from the value judgment implicit in this position, such an attitude also tends to equate modernism with westernization, an approach which effectively negates the true dynamics of Lebanese society. The result is overgeneralized research leading to very simplistic conclusions which support the prevailing expectations--that Christians are more progressive than

Muslims, that Christian children do better on intelligence tests (a problem in themselves) than do Muslim children, and that girls are treated more coldly than boys in Lebanese society.

The tendency to view Arab social processes as somehow mysteriously and absolutely alien, and then to try to analyze behavior by reference to complex and exotic thought patterns, can also lead to some interesting conclusions. In "On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages" Richard T. Antoun (8)--again a generally reliable and respected researcher--attempts to explain female behavioral modesty in such villages in terms of an over-riding Arab obsession with sexuality and the connection between sexual shame and personal honor. According to this analysis the Arab's obsession with his honor is inextricably bound to his concept of sexuality--especially female sexuality, which must be controlled and guarded at all times. Antoun supports his thesis with a complex--perhaps overly complex--analysis of linguistics, especially those terms which can be related, however obtusely, to genitalia or sexual behavior, and hence to women. His linguistic analysis is vigorously debated by Nadia Abu-Zahra (2), who questions his basic premise as well. Antoun's (9) answer to this is that Abu-Zahra simply does not understand his point. Even Abu-Zahra's discussion of Antoun's linguistics, however, does not take note of other ways in which his basic premise may have led him to misunderstand or misinterpret his observations--observations which in themselves are not necessarily inaccurate. For example, Antoun (8) observes that little girls must be carefully and properly dressed, an observation which seems correct and which agrees with the writer's own experience. However, Antoun's explanation for this behavior is that girls are objects of sexual shame

and must be well-dressed to protect the honor--sexually defined--of their male relatives. In fact, it is a religious duty for Muslim men to provide adequately for their female relatives even if, in the case of female children, the male children must be slighted by comparison. In the author's experience, shame in this sense is social in a very straightforward way. It is a matter of having failed to fulfill obligations. There is no need to tie it to sexuality or sexually-defined honor. It is a matter of responsibility. Such an appeal to the actual internal structure and logic of the society provides at least as adequate an explanation of behavior as reliance upon a theorized, and perhaps fictitious, mental construct of mystical proportions.

Unfortunately, however, it is possible to misrepresent conditions in the Middle East without falling prey to either questionable analyses or the inclusion of inaccurate observations. In "The Arab World," a chapter in Raphael Patai's Women in the Modern World, Charles W. Churchill (14) manages to support and perpetuate the stereotype without presenting too many inaccurate facts and while, indeed, trying to explain many of the rights women enjoy in Arab society. The problem here is one of presentation. Churchill leaves no doubt that he is presenting his readers with the absolute truth. His highly compact, often generalized narrative leaves no room for ambiguity or variation. There is also a poor sense of perspective. In rural Lebanon, for example, especially in predominantly Muslim areas, the author states that there is considerable lag in educational opportunities for girls, as compared to urban areas. Village parents, the reader is told, had an average schooling of 0.6 year for women, while men achieved a tremendous average 2.6 years of education. The younger generation showed little improvement--all of 3.1 years

of schooling for males, 0.8 year for females. In fact, Churchill tells his readers, the female population of whole villages may be illiterate. Given the overall literacy rates for both sexes this should not be surprising. Nor should it seem like deliberate discrimination that in underdeveloped villages the boys, with more financial responsibilities, should receive a bit more of an education than the girls. This is not so much a matter of favoritism as necessity. Later, in his discussion of divorce, Churchill states that the Muslim ban on remarriage of a thrice-divorced couple until the wife has been married to, and divorced by, another man is based upon the premise that the woman may mature through her marriage to a second partner--the implication being that women are basically immature. Another explanation--and one frequently given--is that the ban helps prevent the husband from abusing his wife by constantly misusing the right of divorce. The theory here is that if he has divorced her three times she should be allowed to go on with her life without his interference. The "second partner" is a husband in every sense and aside from the real possibility that the woman might stay with him, the experience at least serves to put the first husband in perspective. The wife is not obligated to remarry him. There is no room, however, for such fine distinctions in this article--the most accessible truism, the most concise summary, is deemed sufficient. For example, in this article the reader also learns that in the conservative parts of the Arab World husbands breakfast on "tea, milk, and eggs with unleavened bread," that at noon the man "is served a lunch of rice and meat," and that supper "consists of wheat and meat, stew, and laban" (p. 111). Assumedly, Arab men never eat salads or fruits or prefer a change of pace at supper occasionally. In this type of absolute

presentation, the stereotype stands out because the author is, in a sense, trying to create one. In light of this, Churchill's discussion of women's rights is dismally inadequate. In a book obviously intended as a complete reference to women today this is most unfortunate. Indeed, the only real balance of perspective attainable with regard to the Arab World comes from Patai's introduction to the volume, in which he attempts to explain how recent the emancipation of Western women has been. Churchill's only attempt to balance perceptions is a note that in some parts of the middle and upper classes, especially in Christian households, women's prestige has increased enough "that some women exercise the prerogatives of American women and are genuinely in control of the family" (p. 122). Churchill apparently sees American society as no more complex than the Arab variety.

That such overgeneralizations on the part of professional researchers should carry over to the general reader is not surprising. In less specialized works, only the stereotype remains. In Women in Cultures of the World, a work obviously meant as a handbook on women, Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow (31, p. 12) sum up the Middle East by describing biased child-rearing practices, such as those mentioned above, and then by stating, with regard to the segregation or partial seclusion of women, that such limitations on a girl's "access to experience foster shyness, timidity, and dependency." This statement is made on the basis of library research, not on observation, and certainly does not agree with this writer's experience, making it inapplicable to at least some portions of the Arab World. Nevertheless, it is presented as all-inclusive and as derived from reliable sources. Hammond and Jablow, in their turn, have been used as major sources for other research.

The limitations of articles such as those discussed above can only be truly understood when compared to other works which avoid the obvious pitfalls or make a conscious effort to critically examine the stereotype. An important change in Middle Eastern research began to take place in the late 1960's with the publication of several articles, most of them by women, aimed at examining more carefully the status of women in various Arab societies. One such article is Barbara Aswad's (10) "Key and Peripheral Roles of Noble Women in a Middle Eastern Plains Village." Carefully defined according to location and class, and thus free of over-riding generalizations, Aswad's article describes the social roles played by certain women in a given village, taking into account the ways they may influence village life and affairs, the legal rights and social perogatives they enjoy, and the types of social prestige they may attain. That this may be evidence of a change then taking place in research on women in general is suggested by the fact that the same volume contained an introductory article by Ernestine Friedl (26) entitled "The Position of Women: Appearance and Reality." This article was, in fact, an argument for research examining the real processes of women's lives more carefully and for noting the previously ignored but very real influences women exert on social life. Aswad's article did exactly that.

In a similar vein one finds Safia K. Mohsen's (40) "Aspects of the Legal Status of Women Among Awlad 'Ali." Again, this article is restricted with regard to time and place and concentrates primarily on structural aspects of women's positions. It includes a discussion of legal rights, types of violations of those rights, and non-institutionalized ways in which women can protect themselves. Here,

women are depicted as active participants in the social process, working within the system to attain self-defined goals. No attempt is made to suggest that what is true among Awlad 'Ali can apply to all Arab societies. The variability involved is acknowledged.

L. S. el Hamamsy's (30) article on "The Changing Role of the Egyptian Woman" is actually a much earlier work, but its reprint in 1970 bespeaks new interest in this approach. Dealing with a larger, more complex subject, el Hamamsy draws careful distinctions between the groups under discussion. Her examination of legal rights includes acknowledgment of the ideal, even when it is violated. Her description of change includes the efforts to promote it without removing them from the indigenous social context. In other words, she acknowledges that change can, perhaps, come from within and be based upon ideals already existing within the society.

Another early work reconsidered in 1970 is Ilse Lichtenstadter's (36) "An Arab-Egyptian Family." This article not only seeks to view life in the family by reference to its own ideals and priorities, but at times consciously questions the stereotype. For example, Lichtenstadter notes the differences in understanding what is observed when the observations are made from within the family unit rather than from outside of it. Likewise, the intimacy of her extended stay with the family, which lasted five months, is acknowledged to have made her aware of male-female relations which would not be discernable to the more casual observer. At times, Lichtenstadter goes so far as to mention the stereotype, such as the supposedly minimal role a woman plays in her husband's life, before explaining how her observations contradict the popular viewpoint. In this way, she manages to keep a balance and perspective to her

presentation which is too often missing in such works.

The 1970's saw an increase in this type of more accurate, deeper observation into the lives of Arab women. Robert and Elizabeth Fernea's (25) "Variations in Religious Observance Among Islamic Women" was a major step in acknowledging regional differences while explaining what is universal and unifying in the Muslim World. An important advance in viewing the Muslim ideal of woman's social role, and its relationship to existing social processes, came with Saneya Saleh's (56) "Women in Islam: Their Status in Religious and Traditional Culture." This article was a conscious effort to separate Islam and its ideals from the traditional culture with which it is often confused and to explain the interaction between the two, especially when they conflict. Such a perspective is vital to understanding social processes in the Arab World, but the distinction was seldom made in the past.

One of the most important works done on the Middle East at this time was Cynthia Nelson's (45) "Public and Private Politics: Women in the Middle Eastern World." Nelson carefully reexamines the idea of power generally used by ethnographers in the Middle East and the image of women derived from it. She then suggests re-thinking such notions of power and asks that it be viewed as a type of social relationship rather than something institutionalized in the social structure. In this sense, power is based upon a reciprocity of influence. Nelson cites major ethnographic works on the Middle East to illustrate her discussion of the traditional approach, but she goes an important step further when she examines the consequences to ethnography of adopting the new approach. Using research recently done by women in the Middle East, she explains the differences in interpretation apparent in their work when

compared to that done by male ethnographers. She cites evidence presented by the men themselves that suggests women exercised more influence than the researchers recognized.

In keeping with this new approach to the place of Arab women in society, Soraya Altorki (5) published "Family Organization and Women's Power in Saudi Arabia" in 1977. Her study of the women of elite families in Jiddah focused on the ways in which women could effect important decisions in things over which they are usually considered to have no control. Her major example had to do with marriage contracts, a matter of vital importance in Saudi society and one in which women are able to exercise considerable influence. That not everyone is yet willing to accept this perspective of dynamic processes working below the obvious surface of society is evidenced by Oliver Leaman's (35) response to Altorki's article. Leaman argues that "power" must be overt and result in immediately recognizable change. However, Altorki's analysis is quite in keeping with her definition of power as the ability to influence the behavior of others, a definition which Leaman rejects. Such "power" he argues, does not alter the basic structure of society. Altorki's argument is, of course, that eventually it does.

The interplay between Islam and traditional society, and the maneuverability of individuals within this framework, was finally visualized in a model developed by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Qattar Bezirgan (24). They describe individual and community solutions to the differences between religion and local custom as lying anywhere along the spectrum between the two extremes. Mediating factors are the local situation, the individual personality, the family, socio-economic situations, etc. No one position can speak for each society or individual,

although research has often been presented as though it could. To illustrate their point with regard to women, and to add a vital and vibrant dimension to the subject, Fernea and Bezirgan present a wide range of individual solutions expressed in the lives and works of known and unknown Middle Eastern Muslim women.

Carla Makhlof (39) makes use of such a multi-faceted perspective in her study of urban women in Sana'a, Yemen. Dealing with a very conservative society, Makhlof examines the ways in which women find their places and attain their ends within the given framework, taking account both of traditional practices and modernizing trends. Her account of women leading dynamic, purposeful lives within a segregated, sometimes oppressive, framework effectively dispels the image of the insignificant, faceless Arab woman.

A reexamination of one of the major symbols associated with the stereotype of Arab women came with Elizabeth and Robert Fernea's (24) "A Look Behind the Veil," an attempt to put a face behind the faceless image. The Ferneas' discussion of the veil includes an examination of its many manifestations, an explanation of its origins and, most importantly, a look at its intended symbolism as an indicator of status and virtue rather than an instrument of oppression. In this work, as in the others cited, social reality becomes a complex process rather than a simplistic absolute and the multiple dimensions of life in the Middle East are made apparent.

Between these two extremes of stereotyping and deliberate attempts to avoid it lies a large body of more or less sound, solid research on the Middle East which contributes greatly to knowledge on the area. Some of this work contributes to the stereotype only insofar as it makes

no attempt to counter it, although it presents evidence which contradicts it. In other cases, the author is involved with descriptive work which touches only tangentially, though importantly, on women, and is not called upon to confront others' misconceptions. Some are general works which serve only to describe the framework within which women, and all members of the society, must function. In all cases, these works contain insights important to understanding certain aspects of life in the Middle East generally, and thus provide a background from which to view women in particular.

One such work is H. Ammar's (6) "The Social Organization of the Community," which deals with a village in Egypt. His overall description of village social organization includes a fairly balanced view of women's roles and rights in what he describes as a rather strictly patriarchal society. Likewise, S. H. Longrigg and F. Stoakes' (37) work on "The Social Pattern" in Iraq manages to place family life in the wider national perspective without reducing a discussion of women, traditional and modern, to an insignificant sidelight. The Iraqi woman here emerges as an intelligent and often forceful personality willing and able to take an active part in her changing society.

Other works which place women in a wider social context are the village portraits by A. F. Fuller (27) and A. M. Lutfiyya (38). Fuller examines marriage in terms of the wider network of kinship relationships and the importance of blood ties. She also notes religious inhibitions pertaining to the rights of polygyny and divorce, although her mention of Koranic punishments for adultery is oversimplified and omits reference to the stringent requirements of proof. Lutfiyya likewise places marriage, and family life in general, within the all-important kin

network. Also, his discussion of such problems as divorce and polygyny include explanations of Koranic law, inhibitions to the practices, and safeguards to women's rights, as well as observations of local practices. He does describe women as holding a very inferior social position, but he makes no attempt to generalize it beyond Baytin, where it may be true. There are, however, some troubling contradictions and omissions. For example, he states that men may give away any of the family's property they wish, even if it means that the wife and children will go hungry for days. This contradicts his observations that men are legally required to support their wives and may be divorced for failing to do so, and that consequently a house should contain staples to last for a year. He also describes the custom of calling parents by the name of their first son as discriminatory against women, although it discriminates as effectively against second or third sons. Finally, Lutfiyya states that women in the village are apt to lose their children in case of divorce, but in this instance neglects to note that religious provisions are for both parents to be granted a period of custody, provisions perhaps not followed in Baytin.

One work which deals with a more general subject, but which sheds considerable light on women in an Arab society, is Emrys Peters' (48) "Aspects of Rank and Status Among Muslims in a Lebanese Village." His analysis of status maintenance is based upon land passed through kinship and marital alliances, which perforce makes women key elements in the process. Peters describes village marriage alliances in great detail and explains the importance of women both as partners to the contracts and as property holders in their own rights. He also notes the bilaterality of Arab kinship reckoning, an important factor often overlooked by

those concentrating on the formal patrilineality of the system.

Samih K. Farsoun's (20) article on "Family Structure in Modern Lebanon" should perhaps be read in conjunction with the Peters (48) work. A solid effort in its own right, it examines the extended family as a basic institution in Lebanon and explains the often immense influences this has on the national scene. Farsoun does not deal extensively with women within the system, but their role is implicit in the political and social importance of family networks. Peters' article is in some ways a more detailed description of the same process in a microcosm.

Other articles dealing with the role of women in the formation and maintenance of kinship ties are Fredrik Barth's (11) "Father's Brother's Daughter Marriage in Kurdistan" and Raphael Patai's (46) "Cousin Right in Middle Eastern Marriage." Of these, Barth's is the stronger article. Although he is not dealing with an Arab society, Barth is describing a practice common in the Middle East and his structural/functional analysis allows a certain amount of generalization. In this view, patrilineal parallel cousin marriage serves to maintain property within the lineage and to seal over important points of potential intra-lineage conflict. Again, this necessarily places women in the center of the activities, a position of which, experience suggests, they are not unaware.

Patai's article, on the other hand, deals only with the extent to which such marriages are considered an absolute right of the FaBrS. He deals only with the ideal, and there is therefore no discussion of variation or frequency. Also, there is sometimes a poor distinction between time frames, with work done in the early part of this century related in

the present tense. Patai himself notes that his own observations in Palestine up to 1947 showed these marriages to be much in decline, with only a vague preference for them remaining, so closer attention to a historical perspective would have been helpful. Similarly, Patai hypothesizes that some geographically marginal tribes who do not practice the custom may fail to do so because they have not been sufficiently exposed to Muslim Middle Eastern customs. However, he cites no evidence that this is a Muslim custom and, in fact, notes that Middle Eastern Jews and Christians also adhere to it. Despite these weaknesses, the article is informative, although some knowledge of the actual extent of the practice and its significance would have enriched it immensely. Barth (11, p. 134), for example, cites a study published by Granquist in 1931 which indicates that only 13.3% of marriages in a certain village were with a FaBrDa, 33.7% within the same clan, 23% with unrelated co-villagers, and 42.8% with strangers. Such a wider perspective and an attempt at explanation would have been helpful in Patai's article.

The studies made by Hilma Granquist (28, 29) in Palestine during the 1920's were pioneer works at the time. The fact that they were published in English only many years later tends to make them look much too contemporary, although this is certainly not the author's fault. Her descriptions of childhood in Artas are sometimes one-sided with respect to what she perceives as the unequal treatment of girls, but in general the works remain well-balanced, even to the extent of mentioning that Europeans of the time also seemed to prefer male children. She includes discussions of the value of girls to the family, the closeness of their relationships with parents and siblings, and the rights they can claim

from fathers and brothers. She also notes that a lack of female children can cause as much hardship for a family as a lack of sons, due to their valuable economic and social roles.

Another work which deals more specifically with women in Arab society is Henry Rosenfeld's (54) "On Determinants of the Status of Arab Village Women," based on research in Palestine. This paper sometimes tends to follow the stereotype, concentrating as it does on structural features and formal male authority. Nevertheless, the article has the virtue of acknowledging that women do indeed have status, and of stressing the considerable rights which a woman can exercise over male kinsmen, such as expecting their moral or economic support in time of need. Rosenfeld also mentions the closeness and sanctity of the brother-sister relationship. However, his assertion that women are "reduced" to a dependence on kinship ignores the considerable advantages which can come from such a system and its suitability to certain circumstances. His hopeful assertion that things will undoubtedly change with the introduction of a moneyed economy and new (i.e., Western) thought processes likewise implies a value judgment which makes his concentration on what are presented as negative aspects of the system seem too one-sided.

Two works on different topics which nevertheless may shed light on some aspects of women's roles in the Middle East are Laura Nader's (42) "Communications Between Village and City in the Modern Middle East" and Kazem Naser's (43) "The Social and Political Functions of the Guest House in Arab Tribal and Peasant Societies." Both works deal with the flow of information in Middle Eastern societies and illuminate the ways in which seemingly local occurrences or opinions can effect actions or beliefs in other areas or in the nation as a whole. Farsoun's (20)

article, already discussed, also provides insight into this subject. Understanding the channels of information and influence is an aid to understanding how women, even without a "public" role, can have an effect upon society.

One more general work which has some bearing on this discussion is John Daniels' (17) Kuwait Journey. On the whole, this tends to be a very biased book, full of negative observations of Kuwaiti society and the shock of seeing women breast-feed their children in public. Nevertheless, Daniels includes accurate and very valuable statistics on the progression of educational opportunities in Kuwait, including those for girls, and the emerging description of rapid and directed change in one Arab country is enlightening. The rapidity with which women have achieved educational and professional equality with men in a traditional and religious society calls into question the stereotype of Arab conservatism in this respect and the popular view of Islam as a reactionary and oppressive religion. Despite his sometimes non-objective commentary, Daniels' facts speak for themselves.

A similarly factual article is Evelyn Podsiadlo's (49) "Egyptian Women Attuned to the Twentieth Century." This simply is an interview with Aziza Hussein, an early proponent of planned parenthood in Egypt. It provides insights into the dynamics of change in Egyptian society and the attitudes towards birth control there. Hussein herself serves as an example of the active middle class woman and this in itself makes the article relevant to this discussion.

There is another class of books which needs to be discussed with regard to the contributions they can make to our knowledge of Arab women. These are the works written by non-professionals, those who for

one reason or another have journeyed to the Middle East and become involved enough in the lives of the people to bring back insightful, and often very personal, observations. Some of these books, needless to say, are biased and antagonistic in the extreme. Others, however, provide an intimate perspective on life in the area which is generally missing from more formal studies. Among the best of these subjective accounts are those which provided information for this research and which are reviewed here.

H. R. P. Dickson (18, 19) was born in Beirut, to a family already involved in work in the Middle East for the British Government. He was wet-nursed by a bedouin woman of the 'Anizah tribe, a fact which gave him, in Arab eyes, a blood relationship to this most powerful of the desert tribes from which come the rulers of Saudi Arabia, Bahrein, and Kuwait. Dickson made his own career in foreign service in the Middle East, serving in many capacities and places. He was Political Agent in Kuwait until his retirement in 1936, after which he remained in the country as a representative of the Kuwait Oil Company. His two books on the area therefore reflect the experiences of a lifetime, enriched immensely by his close relationships to some of the most important Arab leaders of the time. Furthermore, Dickson's knowledge of the history of the area is considerable, much of it gained first hand. Most importantly, his treatment of his subjects is sympathetic and often aimed at dispelling European misconceptions. The Arab of the Desert (18) is an exhaustive work on the history and life styles of the desert tribes illuminated by intimate, personalized vignettes which make the people seem very real and alive. This sort of treatment allows Dickson to describe both positive and negative events in the society without

creating a stereotype or eliciting value judgements from his readers. Often, he tries to explain aspects of the society, such as blood feuds, by relating them to the internal logic of the system rather than to Western values. Under these circumstances the women described emerge as active, thinking individuals, regardless of how harsh a given environment might be. While a certain amount of colonial patronizing does occasionally emerge, it does not seriously damage the work. Kuwait and Her Neighbors (19) is, for some reason, less balanced in its depiction of women, perhaps because its treatment of them is so cursory. A few of the most sensational vignettes, one dealing with Kurds rather than Arabs, are allowed to speak for the whole. A description of a marriage in Kuwait, written by the author's wife, concentrates on the discomfort of this one bride and contrasts sharply with Dickson's (18) treatment of marriage customs in his earlier work. This book also contains a few more traces of colonial pride, such as allusions to how trying tribal people can be. Nevertheless, the information contained in both these books is invaluable.

Carl Raswan (53) spent several years with a Bedouin tribe early in this century and his book, like Dickson's, is often presented in the form of short, very personal vignettes. Much of the book describes his friendship with one young man of the tribe and necessarily includes a close look at the social and family relationships radiating from this point. Most important, from the perspective of women's studies, is Raswan's depiction of the strong, forceful character of the Bedouin women he knew and an eyewitness account of the desert custom of carrying noble women into battle to cheer on the fighters.

Dr. Eleanor T. Calverly (13) was the first female doctor in Kuwait,

where she began work in 1909. Her descriptions of the woman's world concentrates more on the bad than the good but, although a bias sometimes creeps in, it is not overly unbalanced. Her perspective seems to be more a function of her enormous sympathy than of anything else. Her major slight comes in recounting a conversation with Prince Fahed Al-Salim. The Prince, she writes, asked her to understand that it had been the Prophet's intention to raise the status of women, not to relegate them to a lower position. Calverly agrees with his assessment on the basis of her knowledge of pre-Islamic practices and agrees, at his request, to repeat his remark in her book. However, she does nothing more. If one knows that Fahed Al-Salim was one of the most vigorous and effective campaigners for women's rights in Kuwait, this comes across as somewhat condescending, especially in light of Calverly's emphasis upon the hardships women endured. Aside from this, however, the book provides many insights and a good deal of information. Most revealing is her account of how little prejudice she encountered as a female professional, a problem she had learned to take for granted at home.

Dorothy Van Ess (57) spent many years in southern Iraq and her experiences in the area encompass the coming of age of an entire generation. Her book deals almost entirely with the women's society in which she moved and is an intimate portrait of the people who became her friends. Most importantly, her return to Iraq many years after her initial stay allowed her to make significant comparisons between the lifestyles and expectations of the three generations with which she was acquainted. Spanning a period of great social change in the area, these insights are most helpful.

Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (21, 22), now an established name in

Middle Eastern research, was only an unofficial observer when she wrote her first books on the area, carried there by her husband's anthropological work. Guests of the Sheik (21) describes her experiences in the women's society of an Iraqi village and, like Van Ess's, encompasses many of the changes then taking place in the society. A Street in Marrakech (22) deals with women's society in Morocco and a comparison of the two works provides insight into the differences and similarities between two widely separated areas of the Arab World. Written for popular consumption, these early works tend to lack the depth Fernea's knowledge of Islam and Arab customs could have given them, but they nevertheless provide valuable insights into life in some of the segregated Arab societies.

A final word should be said about religion here. The tendency in the West is to see Islam as an archaic, oppressive, and static belief system which inspires both backwardness and fanaticism in its followers. Such a view ignores fundamental social realities and, as Islam is one of the major motivating and binding forces in the Middle East, leads to a great deal of misunderstanding. Some of the reasons for such a misconception have already been discussed. It should be noted, however, that some of the impressions do derive from Muslim sources. This is because conservative Islamic thought has generally received wider attention in the West than the liberal interpretations. Needless to say, almost any belief system can be interpreted to uphold either liberal or conservative standards and a knowledge of the most traditional views of, say, Christianity, does not by any means lead to an understanding of the more dynamic configurations which also exist. The thing which must be understood about conservative Muslim thinkers is that their very conservatism

must, at times, bind them to some of the inherently progressive tendencies of their religion. Thus, most contemporary conservative tracts contain explanations of Islam's affinity to modernism. This is often very noticeable with regard to women. The conservative Muslim thinker, like conservative interpreters of almost any religion, tends to see women as, if not inferior, at least intellectually less adept and emotionally more unstable than men. He will, however, vehemently defend the rights she is legally granted in the Koran, a fact which has effectively ended many past abuses of these rights as the Islamic revival has gained momentum. Thus, the two conservative works cited here contain strong defenses of women's rights to property, inheritance, and higher education, even within a framework of strict sexual segregation and male authority (44, 51). In this sense, conservative Islam is in some ways less conservative than is perceived by the West. That Muslim women are not unaware of this is evidenced by Nuehat Afza's (3, 4) "Women in Islam I and II," which explores the subject, conservatively, from a woman's perspective. The second part of the article concentrates on the status and rights Islam gives to women (4). The first part explores this issue in comparison to other belief systems and is highly recommended for the stereotype of Western life and values it presents, a very direct parallel to Western stereotypes of Islam and an object lesson for those interested in just how misleading the caricature can be (3).

That the West has serious doubts about Islam's ability to modernize is evidenced by S. A. Morrison's (41) article "Islam and the West." While Morrison correctly identifies some of the conflicts inherent in the rapid change occurring in the Middle East, his discussion of their implications for Islam leaves the impression that the system will not,

in the end, be able to accommodate them, that Islam cannot change without collapsing. This is the result of seeing change, or progress, or social movement as something generated from without, rather than from within. Morrison himself notes the flexibility Islam has shown in the past, but nevertheless persists in seeing modernization, with regard to religion, as an either/or proposition.

The counterpoint to the foregoing themes is to be found in Fazlur Rahman's (52) excellent book on Islam. Rahman traces the historical development of Islam and Islamic thought from its beginnings to the modern era, taking careful account of the social and political realities concurrent with each development. His intent is to put each stage into its proper social and historical perspective so that modern developments and directions may be seen, properly, as part of an ongoing process. His historical analysis is also done with an eye to explaining how modernist interpretations can remain based on true Islamic philosophy. His final chapters on contemporary developments should be required reading for those interested in the Middle East. A "modernist" himself, Rahman presents forceful, religiously-based arguments for a dynamic rethinking and reformulating of traditional Islam. The book itself is thus a concrete example of modern thought in Islam, one which has the added advantage of describing and explaining its own roots. As many of this writer's informants, without having read Rahman, tended to take similar positions with regard to various aspects of Islam, there can be no doubt that this represents a significant intellectual movement in the Muslim World, and therefore in the Arab Middle East.

At the center of this complex process, as Rahman himself notes, stand the traditional Muslim social institutions, particularly those

dealing with such things as marriage and divorce--i.e., those which are of special significance to the role of women in society. Whether approached from the perspective of the Western stereotype, the conservative interpretation, or the modern dynamic, the rights and roles of women are a central issue. It is therefore fitting to approach social developments in the area from this perspective. That this writer's perspective is undeniably a modernist one should already be apparent. The reason for this is simple--it represents the sum of two years of direct observation in, and eight years of extensive contact with, the society. That the writer's experience has been primarily with the educated, urban middle class explains the apparent one-sidedness of the vision. She cannot, and will not pretend to, speak for the scattered villages and the rural population. Literature dealing with these areas is used primarily for comparison, for explanation of traditional configurations and, sometimes, to chart paths of change by identifying traditional elements sympathetic or amenable to it. However, as noted, the middle class is an important and indicative force in society, especially a "developing" society in which it represents the largest part of the intellectual elite and, therefore, the leadership potential. In light of this it is significant that the shy, timid, and dependent Arab woman alluded to in the literature (31) is not within this writer's experience. The Arab woman as the writer knows her--and as she sometimes appears in the literature, even on the rural areas--is determined, forceful, and self-possessed to a remarkable degree. It is now possible to turn to an examination of the basis for this sense of self as found in three social factors active in shaping a woman's experience: the religion, the social structure, and the family unit.

CHAPTER III

RELIGION

Islam is the dominant unifying force in the Middle East, stretching even beyond the edges of the Arab World into neighboring countries and cultures. To some degree, its influence is felt even in non-Muslim Middle-Eastern communities for they are necessarily affected by the dominant social configurations of the area. The all-pervasive effect of Islam upon the culture should be understood for it is into this environment, dominated by Islamic belief and often organized around Islamic law, that the Arab girl is born.

Islamic practices, however, are often as impervious to generalization as any other aspect of life in the Middle East. Islam was a tolerant and accomodating ideology and in many parts of the Muslim World pre-Islamic beliefs and practices continued to exist alongside the later religious framework, even those which are contrary to or forbidden by the religion having been accepted as genuine by the populace. Furthermore, the religion itself is divided into several sects, each possessing many different legal schools of thought which dominate in different communities or regions. For example, the predominant Sunni branch of Islam contains four major legal schools which are sometimes opposed to one other in questions of interpretation. Islamic law is very agreeable to interpretation in many respects and it is this fact which allows the most liberal and the most conservative of thinkers to draw their

arguments and justifications from the same source (7, 1, 52). Finally, it should be remembered that a large part of Islamic legal thought is based upon the Sunna and the Hadith--the example of the Prophet's life and the collection of sayings attributed to him. In a region which until recently was highly illiterate, especially in the rural areas, it should be obvious that many of the people were not well versed in all of the intricacies here involved. Folk wisdom and popular sayings were sometimes erroneously attributed to the Prophet and used to validate local custom. Furthermore, many communities were without the educated religious leaders and judges so necessary in Islam and legal decisions were often made by local sheiks or civic leaders unversed in the niceties of Islamic law and dependent more upon local custom and tradition for guidance. Finally, any legal system can be selectively applied to support the status quo and Islamic law contains long series of ever more refined decisions aimed at eliminating this problem (7).

Given these facts, it should be obvious that "Islamic" practice in one community may often differ significantly from "Islamic" practice in another. In some cases what is presented as such may not in fact be truly Islamic at all.¹ Needless to say, the social and legal position of women will thus vary considerably depending upon location and education. So also will the religious beliefs and practices which will help shape their self-images. However, as the Koran is the basis of Islam so also is it the basis upon which women will build their religious identities. While the Sunna and the Hadith may be vaguely or selectively known the Koran is widely read or at least recited and most people are familiar with its teachings--teachings which give to women a unique and protected status under the law. Also, most people in the Arab World

share certain basic views of their history and it is a generally accepted fact that Islam significantly improved the position of women in the society. It is from this perspective of privilege and status that the Arab girl learns to see herself in relation to her religion.

Historically, it is generally agreed that pre-Islamic Arab society downgraded women. Polygamy was unlimited, women had no legal status, and female infanticide was a widespread practice.² Islam is credited with changing much of that. While Christian scholars were still debating whether or not woman possessed a soul the revelations of the Koran acknowledged her as a full and independent personality, equal in rights and status in the sight of God (K. IV/123, III/193). Female infanticide (K. VI/151, XVI/60, XVII/33, XLII/49-50) and the forced levirate (K. IV/23) were outlawed. Polygamy was restricted (K. IV/3). Furthermore, the Muslim woman was accorded a special and protected position under the law and granted inheritance and property rights of a type that her Western sisters were not to achieve for many hundreds of years (K. IV/7-19). The basis for a separate and independent identity, therefore, is emphatically laid in the Islamic concept of the individual (1) and in the laws pertaining to property rights. Under Koranic law a woman's property is inviolably her own (K. IV/36). Neither her husband nor her father may touch it, although they are both legally responsible for her support and she may never need to spend it on the necessities of her own life. Thus one informant, a teacher for fifteen years, can say that in all the time she has worked her husband has never once asked her about her salary. He does not know how much she earns, or what she does with the money. Nor is it his right to ask. If she chooses to spend it on the house, as many women do, that is her business. She is not enjoined

to do so (15).

A woman is also not responsible for her husband's debts and under no circumstances may his creditors seek restitution by attaching his wife's assets, even in the case of the husband's death. Furthermore, a woman is guaranteed a portion of the estates of deceased parents and husbands, and sometimes brothers (K. IV/7/11-18/175). She cannot legally be denied this share. The fact that women inherit only half as much as men (K. IV/11) has often been cited in the West as evidence of bias and injustice and it should be noted that in Islam this practice is defended by pointing out the woman's lack of financial responsibilities and the man's legal duty to support his wife and family. It has been argued convincingly that under these circumstances women in fact end up with a substantially larger amount than men, for they may never need to dispose of their money (51). Since women under Islamic law may enter freely into business exchanges it is quite possible that the inheritance could be invested and thus increased (10, 56, 54, 57, Koran IV/37). Also it should be noted that a girl left without brothers inherits a much greater portion of her father's estate (K. IV/11) and still passes under the financial protection of her paternal uncles. Likewise, a woman without sons to support her inherits a larger portion of her husband's estate (K. IV/12) and returns to the protection of her father's or brother's household. The supposed inequity of Islamic inheritance laws may thus sometimes be more apparent than real and Muslim women are well aware of the fact that they have legitimate and divinely sanctioned rights in this respect. Such an awareness is not conducive to the development of the negative self-image posited by some writers (31).

Inheritance and private earnings are not the only areas in which a

woman's financial rights are guaranteed. The dowry a man pays to his bride is hers to keep and falls under the protection of the private property edicts (K. IV/3/23-24, V/7). He cannot reclaim this, even if he divorces her (K. IV/23, II/229), unless the woman's conduct is obviously the cause of the discord and is extraordinarily unacceptable (7, K. IV/23). In case of divorce, provision must be made for the wife's welfare (K. IV/24, II/241), a provision which has usually been fulfilled by dividing the dowry into two portions, one to be paid at the time of marriage and one to be granted at the time of the divorce (15, 27, 36, 38). In some cases, especially today, this second amount may be high enough to effectively preclude divorce altogether. Further, a man who wishes to divorce his wife is required to support her for several months in order to determine whether or not she is pregnant (K. LXV/5-8). If she is, he must continue to support her during the pregnancy and for as long as she is responsible for the child's care (K. LXV/5-8) provided, of course, that she does not remarry. Widows may claim support from their husband's families in the same way (K. II/234/241).

As was the case with property rights, Islam also instituted many changes in the area of marriage and divorce laws which increased a woman's security beyond what had gone before. Polygamy was restricted to the taking of four wives (K. IV/3) and the condition was added that the husband must be able to provide for all of them equally and adequately (K. IV/3). Furthermore, it was included that one wife could not be favored above another (K. IV/3/128-129), an enjoinder which many have interpreted as a de facto outlawing of multiple marriages in all but the most exceptional circumstances (51, 56).³ Divorce, while allowed, was condemned as the most offensive of permissible acts (1, 56)

and was restricted by the legal and financial considerations mentioned above. The option itself remained easier for men to exercise than for women, but the right to dissolution with financial compensation was extended to them in cases of ill treatment, lack of support, neglect, or sexual impotency (1, 7, 38). They could divorce without compensation provided their husbands agreed (7). Finally, it was stipulated that a woman could not be forced into marriage against her will (1, 56).

Such is the legal position ascribed to the Muslim woman at birth, a position which recognizes not only her financial needs, but her emotional ones as well. She is guaranteed not only support but also the right to sexual gratification (1) and the constancy of her husband's affection. Some of the West's misconceptions are due to the fact that, unfortunately, these rights have not always materialized. Koranic injunctions could not be changed but they could sometimes be circumvented through devices which satisfied the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit (7). As time passed, the ability to enforce the laws declined. The Islamic civilization which had helped to trigger the Renaissance in Europe eventually passed into a sort of Dark Ages of its own. Ignorance and local custom combined to deprive women in fact of the rights which they were granted in theory. Divorce could be made so difficult for women as to be almost impossible while remaining easy enough for men that they could abuse the privilege. Poverty also played a part. A poor man cannot afford a large dowry or generous divorce payments. Families with debts or many sons to marry may have a desperate need for the dowry a daughter can be convinced to relinquish more or less voluntarily. A farmer with more than enough work to occupy himself and his family may find a second wife a financial asset. Also,

as the society became ever more fragmented it became impossible for a woman who found herself at odds with the prevailing local legal school or custom to appeal her case to a different authority.

The fact that society sometimes conspired to deprive women of their rights did not, however, mean that they went totally unrecognized. For example, in some areas it became customary for women to forego their inheritance in favor of their brothers. The debt thus incurred guaranteed the women the continued support and protection of their brothers both financially and in disputes with their husbands. The sister's almost unlimited claims to her brother's services was thus an acknowledgement of her rights over her father's house (10, 40, 54). The fact that women were sometimes denied their rights should not, therefore, be interpreted as meaning that they did not know they had them. Whatever society might dictate for her, and no matter how ignorant a woman might be of the full extent of her legal rights, most Arab women were and are aware that they are entitled to some special considerations and a protected status under the laws of God. Women have also often learned to use the laws to their own advantage, even under some of the seemingly most difficult circumstances (39). It is interesting to note in this respect that the modern social reformers and the leaders of the various women's rights movements have not sought to improve woman's position so much through changes in Koranic law as through its more enlightened and extensive application. Both the arguments of the women's groups and the reforms incorporated in many of the new national legal codes find adequate support for their conclusions somewhere in the body of Islamic doctrine (7, 41). Thus, the Islamic Renaissance, which is often attributed to contact with the West, may be expressing itself less in an

adoption of western ways than in a reawakening of the dynamic process in Islamic law.

If the financial and legal considerations already mentioned, sometimes ignored or abused though they were, were not enough to remind a girl that she held a special place in Islamic society, then the continual observance of the rituals connected with Islamic worship would certainly do so. Muslim means, literally, "one who submits (to the will of God)" and one evidence of this submission is the performance of the required prayers five times a day. Such daily prayer serves to remind the devout not only of their close relationship to and individuality in the sight of God, but also of their relationship to the complex and dynamic fabric of Islamic civilization, millions of whose other participants are simultaneously engaged in performing the same ritual. Five times each day the Muslim woman must wash herself, consider the cleanliness of her apparel, direct her attention upon the universal focal point of her religion (Mecca), and give herself up to her personal devotions. Her equal and individual status before God is thus reconfirmed, together with her kinship in the vast family of Islam. However busy the household, no one would presume to intrude upon the worshiper's privacy and concentration. She is at this time totally at one with herself, her religion, and her society. The actual practice of religious observation may differ significantly from place to place, but the position of the worshiper within the total framework is a dominant fact of life (25).

The yearly round of Islamic observances also serves to remind a woman both of her individual functions within the religion and of the special attention it gives to her constitution and welfare. The most important of the annual observances are the pilgrimage, which every

devout Muslim will make at least once in a lifetime if it is at all possible, and the month-long fast of Ramadhan during which time nothing must pass the lips of the faithful from sunrise to sunset. The woman who makes the pilgrimage to Mecca will find herself not only very forcefully reminded of the unity and dynamism of Islam, and of her place within it, but will also on her return be accorded the same respect and status given to all who have made the journey. During Ramadhan, special consideration is given to a woman's physical needs. Fasting is forbidden to those whose health may be endangered and under this heading fall pregnant, lactating, and menstruating women who may have special nutritional needs. They will make up the fast at a later date, but the awareness is always there that their religion makes specific allowances for their needs (25).

It should be clear, then, that adherence to Islamic belief serves not so much to convince women that they hold a negligible and subordinate position in the world as to assure them that they are unique individuals whose legal rights, like those of men, are guaranteed. Whatever might happen to alter the reality of this ideal, the power of the conviction itself should not be underestimated, for it forms an important part of the Muslim woman's self-image and is a base for many of her interactions with her society.

NOTES

¹For example, one writer, describing a part of North Africa, writes that the Koran "absolutely forbids a wife to divorce her husband, who on the other hand can divorce her with ease" (32, p. 38). In fact, as discussed in Chapter II, the Koran recognizes a woman's right to dissolution of her marriage through annulment or mutually agreed upon divorce and forms part of the basis upon which rest later legal decisions expanding these rights. While the conditions described may prevail in the area studied, such a statement is misleading with regards to the complexities of Islam and the variability of Arab societies in general. It also ignores the forces which act either to allow women to dissolve their marriages or to inhibit men in the use of their power to divorce.

²Recently, some scholars have begun to question the exact extent of this oppression. Arguments are hardly conclusive, however, and in some cases attempts at reconstruction are so sweeping as to invite suspicion. Most writers acknowledge that infanticide and polygamy were customary practices to some degree. Most Muslims accept the traditional interpretation and it is this perspective which forms the basis for their opinions on the subject.

³Such a case, and the one most commonly cited as a justification, is the deaths of many men during a war. Under these conditions the need to provide for the legal support and sexual needs of the women left behind might make polygyny preferable to widespread poverty and illicit sex. Some informants declared this to be the only case in which they found polygyny defensible. Such conditions did, in fact, exist during the early years of the Muslim community.

necessity provided some relief mechanism through which justice might be obtained. The woman who forfeited her inheritance was allowed unlimited claim upon her brothers' protection. She may still have been given her share, or a part of it, if she insisted (29, 38), although this sometimes meant relinquishing her rights over her brothers (29).¹ A woman whose dowry was used to obtain a wife for her brother, or who was given in a marriage exchange, likewise found her brother deeply indebted to her (29). In communities where these practices were widespread families often found that a lack of daughters was a handicap, as it hindered their ability to marry their sons (29). Women deprived of easy access to divorce proceedings could usually depend upon fathers or brothers to defend their rights by reclaiming them from their husbands or by otherwise exerting pressure upon the offending party and, sometimes more importantly, his family until the problem was rectified or a divorce granted (10, 27, 29, 36, 39, 54). Failing this, a woman might be able to appeal to the protection of some important person who would be bound to defend her (19, 40).

Needless to say, some communities were more permissive than others, depending upon many factors. Bedouin women, for example, formerly enjoyed more liberties and freedom of movement in the open desert than did towns women in the settled areas. Under pressure from urban tradition, however, the desert women were restricted when they entered the towns and cities and now find themselves in the most conservative sector of urban society as they continue to conform to the old customs the city-dwellers have rejected. Regardless of how oppressive the local situation may have been, however, there were still usually several conditions which could contribute to a woman's security and status in

the community.

One of these was her economic worth. In all but the wealthiest homes a woman's contributions to household finances were a vital necessity. Whether she confined herself to her home, worked in the fields, or tended flocks, the labor of the housewife was indispensable. Both by local custom and religious tradition she generally ruled as undisputed queen of her home (4, 5, 6, 51, 54, 56). Women in charge of extended family households exercised considerable authority, regulating and overseeing the activities of grandchildren and daughters-in-law. Indeed, a major goal for many women was the establishment of an independent household in which they could exercise just such authority, a goal which often led to friction between mothers-and daughters-in-law (54). Both of these avenues to security, status, and authority continue to function today. In Kuwait, the women in the poorer sectors of society are as indispensable to household economy as ever and the close family relationships still allow them to seek the aid and protection of brothers and fathers when they encounter problems with husbands or in-laws. Among all of the Arab groups observed the educated, professional woman is considered a most desirable marriage partner, both because of her earning power and social status, and because of the belief that educated women make better companions and mothers. Such women are therefore able to command considerable, even exorbitant, dowries and the magnitude of prospective divorce payments can make dissolution of the marriage almost unthinkable.² Knowing their rights such women are also in an excellent position to seek a dissolution of their marriages themselves, a course of action which more are now electing, although the ideal of family unity causes most to prefer other solutions. On the other hand, these

women can even use the simple threat of divorce effectively against their husbands, as they can obviously support themselves with little difficulty. Since divorce is socially inconvenient for both sexes, the woman who has decided to risk the problems herself can confront her husband with the possibility of serious humiliation by threatening to initiate proceedings. It should also be remembered that the emotional stake of the male in maintaining the security of the home is often as great as that of the female. Under such circumstances a threat of divorce can lead to efforts at reconciliation for purely personal reasons. The woman's education and financial security can thus function simply as reminders of her ability to carry out her threat. This situation most closely represents the author's own observations. In the past, it is possible that the woman with a supportive family to return to could sometimes use the threat, actual or implicit, in a similar way. It has been suggested that the custom of Arab women retaining their maiden names after marriage serves notice on the husband that the family will always protect their daughter (38).

The mother-in-law also remains a figure of respect and authority in Arab society, especially in those sectors where residential extended family households persist. Where they do not, she nevertheless remains a figure of considerable influence and the author has heard modern families complain of the hold a daughter-in-law's mother has over their son. Similarly, the mother still retains control of domestic matters. The following conversation took place between a Palestinian father and son while a daughter of the house was entertaining college friends (of both sexes) in a very crowded dining area:

Son (to father, who is eating alone): "You must come and eat

with us. What are you doing here?"

Father: "There is no room, and I don't want to interfere."

Son: "But you must come. You are head of the household."

Father: "No. Your mother is head of the house and this is her moment."

Another factor which was and is vitally important in establishing a women's sense of self is the tightly-knit fabric of most of Arab social organization. Within the framework of her community a woman traditionally moved in a social milieu in which everyone knew everybody either directly or by reputation. Her activities, her industriousness, and her talents were generally well-known (29, 39, 21, 22, 57, 53). She moved in a society dominated by primary relationships in which individual standing was acknowledged and reinforced. Her daily routine was organized around a framework of duties, rights, and responsibilities which were socially and often religiously sanctioned.³ Where life was most difficult, such responsibilities often became the things which lent meaning and direction to that life (39, 54). For both men and women, primary responsibility was for the care of children and life was then organized around the clearly defined needs of the family unit, extended or otherwise. This pattern still persists in all of the groups observed. Older informants take considerable pride in, and are accorded a great deal of respect for, the ability with which they perform their obligations to their families. The younger women, many of whom work outside the home, continue to regard the family as their primary unit of orientation. The men share these perceptions and ideals.

The formality of duty, then, served and serves to remind a woman of her vital role in the community. Added to this is the special respect

accorded to motherhood within Arab society, a respect reinforced by religious precedent. The Prophet is quoted as saying that "Paradise lies under the feet of the mother" (45, 56), and that a man's first, second, and third duties are to his mother and only then to his father (51). The best Muslim has been said to be the man who is just to his wife (4), while the man who married may be considered to have "perfected half his religion" (1). The Arab matron, therefore, was and is generally aware of her position as a valuable and respected member of the community. Since this position was traditionally based on the reciprocity of duties and responsibilities, and accrued most fully to mature women, it could hold constant even for those in polygynous marriages.

With regard to polygyny, it should be noted that it was not as widespread in the Arab World as is usually thought in the West. The moral restrictions to it have been discussed in Chapter III. Discounting these, most men still could not support extra wives and it was therefore restricted to those situations in which the woman's extra labor was of vital importance, or in which the husband could afford the added responsibility (38). Often this last case included primarily husbands whose first wife produced no children, or perhaps only daughters, and who preferred to marry a second woman rather than divorce the first (38). In some cases women have asked their husbands to take second wives (38). Practice of the levirate also sometimes led to polygyny, if a man were already married, and it was justified in this case by the desirability of keeping the woman close to her children (38). Such a marriage could only take place with the woman's consent (K. IV/23). It is interesting to note with regard to polygyny that Arab informants almost universally described it as a very difficult emotional situation

for the man. Not only did he need to adjust to two wives, but to their families as well. Calverly (13) records that the first flush of oil money in Kuwait led to a sharp rise in plural marriages as men became able to afford second wives. Soon afterwards, this rise was followed by an increase in male emotional disorders and a drop in polygynous households as men divorced extra wives and most others declined to try the experiment. All of the author's informants considered monogamy to be the ideal marital arrangement, both practically and morally. On the basis of the Koranic stipulation regarding plural marriages polygyny has actually been banned in Tunisia. It is not common in Kuwait, or among the middle class Palestinians and Egyptians living there. Expatriate informants did not describe it as being common in their native areas, either. The author had no contact with polygynous households while in Kuwait, although two Kuwaiti informants said that their father's had had two wives.

One other polygynous situation deserves mention. Polygyny was sometimes seen as advantageous by tribal leaders who sought to strengthen their political ties through marriages into many powerful families or rival groups, much as political marriages were made in Europe. In such cases the women were usually aware that marriage to such an exalted husband increased their own status and was a great honor to their family and community. H. R. P. Dickson (18), who spent many years in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, notes that some men would make many such alliances by divorcing successive wives--the political nature of the marriage having been known beforehand--and that in such cases the woman was received with great honor back into her community and was then much sought after as a wife by other men. Her contact with her first

husband's position and prestige was maintained through the children she bore him.

Because so much of a woman's position was based upon her family duties, it stands to reason that children were a major factor in solidifying her security. In traditional society this was particularly true with regard to sons. Sons were a woman's protection and support in old age. They defended her position in the community, sometimes even against their own fathers if divorce was threatened (38). Informants mentioned cases in which sons had physically abused their fathers for divorcing their mothers and the author was present when three young men threatened their father with the same treatment when he jokingly suggested divorcing his wife. Among the author's informants the pressure to produce sons had lessened considerably and there seemed to be little marked preference for male children. Most informants stated a simple desire for same-sex children. Several couples expressed a desire to remain the parents of a single child, even when the child was female. It was also generally understood that the sex of a child was not the mother's responsibility. Similarly, the knowledge that the woman may not be the one responsible for a lack of children has eased pressure somewhat in this respect. The two childless couples of the author's acquaintance were middle aged and had been happily married for many years. Both of these couples, however, were aware that it was the husband who was sterile. Reactions to barrenness on the part of the wife vary greatly according to social group, family, and the individuals involved, although it is generally considered a great tragedy. It should be remembered, however, that the desire for children in Arab society is so great that sterility of the husband is a major

justification for granting a woman a divorce. Childless and unmarried women of the author's acquaintance were generally highly respected members of the community, whether they were professionally employed or not.

It should also be noted that even for women without children there were ways even in the past of enhancing status. In a social system so thoroughly based on primary relationships a woman's personality could to a large extent enhance her standing, perhaps more so than could a man's (10, 36, 54). She might wisely invest her money or develop her property. More recently, she might devote her energies to one of the many women's organizations. She could often intervene successfully as a moderator in family feuds. The importance of women in alliance and property considerations was also great (11, 18, 20, 46, 48). Certain occupations were traditionally open to women and served to enhance the status of their practitioners (24, 21, 45). Furthermore, a woman might also possess a degree of knowledge about community affairs unattainable by men. The informal communication network maintained by women and their opportunities to overhear, while visiting, discussions of business or political affairs to which men had only formal access often allowed them to wield significant influence upon the affairs of the community (10, 5, 45). The ways in which local opinions or events in the Middle East can eventually have repercussions on a much larger scale have been discussed in several contexts (20, 42, 39, 43). The activities of women often fell into this category.

In this context it might be well to note that the segregation of the sexes often condemned in Western literature did not necessarily have the debilitating effect upon women that some have suggested (31).

Within the woman's world an individual could establish a position in the status hierarchy quite independent of the male-dominated spheres of activity. Midwives, for example, could achieve an independent status (45, 24). Many communities had learned female religious leaders who attended to the women's services, individuals whose knowledge and financial independence made them much respected by the community at large (45, 24). Such was the power the women could collectively exert that they sometimes could directly oppose the men. Eleanor Calverly (13), the first female doctor in Kuwait, wrote that when she was called by a progressive and distraught husband to attend his wife during childbirth she and the husband were denied entrance to the house by female relatives and attendants. Furthermore, the women's exclusive access to information about other females placed them in a position to wield great power over marriage arrangements. The men were dependent upon the women for information and judgment and by withholding or selectively releasing information women could manipulate the choices to their own advantage (5, 39, 45). In their own sphere of activity, the women thus reigned supreme. Today, in the sectors of Kuwaiti society in which segregation persists the relative status and individual talents of all of the women are well-known. Among the middle-class Palestinians and Egyptians, who seldom practice segregation, each woman still holds a unique and respected position within the community and is well aware of her personal status among both her female friends and the society at large.

Occasionally, certain aspects of segregation have carried over into seemingly more progressive areas with beneficial results. In Kuwait, separate pre-university educational facilities for boys and girls seem to have worked to the girls' advantage.⁴ It has been suggested that

females, who perform better than males during the early school years, can benefit considerably from a segregated system. They have certainly done so in Kuwait. Women early out-performed the men to such a degree and captured so many more scholarships that it once became a local truism that they would soon be running the country (17). There are several reasons for this, not the least of which is that the girls seemed to work harder than the boys. However, it should be noted that they were not hindered by the biases against educated females which have sometimes caused difficulties for western women. Ability is highly respected in the Arab World and is usually rewarded regardless of sex. Dr. Calverly, who arrived in Kuwait early in this century, noted that she experienced none of the bias against female doctors with which she had been hampered at home (13). Partly as a result of this attitude both male and female students are well-acquainted with female literary, scientific, and political figures. Young boys have named such women as personal hero-images when questioned on the subject. The lack of attention to women's historical contributions sometimes encountered in other educational systems is therefore not a problem for the Arab children the author observed. Young women are educated in an environment which supplies them with a large number of influential role models ranging from their own teachers to historical heroines whom they know are highly respected by the society at large. Also, scholarships are granted on an equal basis and women in Kuwait aspire freely to the same professional and technical occupations as the men. During the author's stay in Kuwait one young female informant left to begin medical school in Cairo. Eight scholarships for this prestigious course of study had been granted that year--seven of them to women. Furthermore, women are protected by law

against discrimination in hiring, firing, promotional procedures, and wages. Finally, the Kuwaiti government guarantees female employees a paid maternity leave both before and after the birth of a child (34). The extended family system and the availability of maids who can serve as babysitters has led the government to consider daycare facilities unnecessary (although there has recently been talk of starting a program). However, kindergarten runs for two years and is entered at the age of four years. Students studying abroad on scholarships are reimbursed for one-half or all of the daycare expenses for children over two, depending on whether their support comes from a government ministry or from the University of Kuwait. Both sources of support will also pay the full tuition costs of students' wives who did not win scholarships of their own.⁵ One might expect such circumstances to enhance the modern woman's assurance and sense of self-esteem. This certainly seemed to be the case among those observed in Kuwait. Not only were they given the opportunity and encouraged to obtain an education but, once achieved, their social and professional status was in no way derogated because of their gender.

In connection with education it would be well to note that although in the past the right has been denied to women, and sometimes even considered religiously prohibited, the current consensus is that it does not in fact run counter to the teachings of Islam. Education is considered a duty on the part of all devout Muslims (4, 51) and is a most highly respected asset. Even the most conservative of Muslim thinkers will generally support the right of women to a higher education, if only on the grounds that better-rounded individuals make better companions and mothers or that segregation of the sexes requires that women have

their own female lawyers and doctors (51). Obviously this last is an extreme view, but it serves to demonstrate the almost universal official support for women's education. Segregation of school children has even been supported on the grounds that high school girls perform better when not competing for male attention or being placed in a position to worry about protecting male egos (44). The right to education is therefore not usually denied, although local social factors may determine its actual application. In Kuwait, the social environment has served to encourage women to obtain an education and afforded them opportunities to use it outside the home. In the middle class, working outside the home is often actively encouraged. Both of these observations also apply to the middle class Palestinians and Egyptians the author observed.

Another social custom of the Arab World which has less of an effect on women's personality development than is often thought is the tradition of veiling (23). In this regard it should be noted, first, that the full facial veil is probably not indigenously Arab but a later innovation introduced from outside.⁶ Also, with regard to the loose, concealing clothing and head coverings worn by Arab women, it should be mentioned that Arab men also wear long, loose-fitting clothes and head-coverings. Modesty is enjoined for both sexes (2) and the style of the clothes is well-adapted to the environmental conditions of the area. Further, there exists no true compulsion to veiling within Islam. Aside from the caution to modesty there remains only a statement that believing women should "draw their cloaks close about them" when venturing abroad, a precaution which was originally meant to identify the Muslim women and to protect her from harrassment (K. XXXIII/58-59). The

Prophet's wives, however, due to their special position and the use of slander against them by the Prophet's enemies, were expected to veil in public and it later became a sign of prestige for others to emulate this example (24). The traditional female cloak, or abbaya, which has become in the West so much a symbol of Middle Eastern women and of women's subjugation, was therefore intended to have an entirely different meaning. Informants also interpreted it as signifying that a woman's true worth lay more in her abilities than in her charms. Women who have discarded the abbaya, even young and educated ones, have occasionally told the author that they sometimes miss the sense of privacy, unself-consciousness, and self-containment which it afforded, a sentiment also recorded by other observers (23).

Middle class Egyptian and Palestinian women began abandoning the abbaya many years ago and most of the author's informants had either never worn one or, in the case of older women, had discarded it in their youth. Many rural communities never used it at all, as it hindered field work. The abbaya is now rapidly passing out of use in most areas to be replaced by Western clothes or, among the more conscientious, by a long dress and headscarf very similar to the men's wear and more in keeping with traditional Arab costume. It is also now generally acknowledged that dress is a matter of choice rather than religious injunction and conservative dress has become more a symbol of voluntary religious observance than a matter of compulsion. Some who have always worn Western clothes have recently chosen to adopt this costume. The abbaya is thus seldom worn now in Kuwait, especially among the middle class. Those of all nationalities who wear the new conservative style do so out of choice and there is always room for compromise. The young woman

studying engineering is quite willing to forego religious symbolism in favor of overalls in her factory because she understands the necessity of conforming to safety standards. The possibilities for personal adjustment within the society are therefore numerous.

The point which should be noted here is that the social fabric of life in the Arab World, while it may sometimes have conspired to deprive a woman of some or many of her rights, did not therefore function to inhibit her personality. Even sexual segregation allowed women ample opportunity to express their individuality and to enhance their status through their achieved social positions and through the force of their talents and personalities. Within the context of the society these may have been significantly more important sources of personal satisfaction than the marital relationship and it is a grave mistake to attempt to superimpose Western modes of thought into this other reality and to begin deductions, or inductions, from there. In a system based in large part upon primary relationships and extensive social contacts, and organized around a formal reciprocity of duties and responsibilities, such a configuration could actually encourage the development of a strong sense of self and individuality. Accounts of the lives of Arab women and the memories of some who have lived in Arab countries are ample, and often overlooked, evidence of this (13, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24, 39, 53, 57, 37). Finally, it should be noted that the ability of the individual to maneuver within the social system and to manipulate it to his/her own advantage has too often gone unrecognized, as Makhoul has demonstrated in her study of Sana'ani women (39). It should be borne in mind, therefore, that Arab women have often been able to work within the

social system to achieve their goals and that the knowledge of this ability can in itself contribute to a sense of personal identity and control.

NOTES

¹The only informant located with a knowledge of inheritance forfeiture insisted it was strictly voluntary, although considered customary. Women who claimed their inheritance were still considered entitled to their brothers' protection, although the informant stated it was sometimes withheld in spite. This was not socially approved. Some of her statements are recorded in Chapter V.

²Among the middle class Palestinians in Kuwait the preliminary dowry (mahr), which is paid directly to the bride or her guardian, roughly averages from 2,000 to 5,000 Kuwaiti dinars, or about \$7,000 to \$17,000. The reserve payment (mauakhar al-sadakh), which is paid in case of divorce, has a usual minimum of 5,000 Kuwaiti dinars (about \$17,000). More often, it runs higher, the usual amount being 10,000 or 15,000 Kuwaiti dinars (about \$33,000 to \$50,000). Often it is higher still. The actual amount is scaled directly to the groom's economic ability--future possibilities considered--and is deliberately set at a sum calculated to be financially ruinous. Among Kuwaitis, who have a higher pay scale, amounts tend to run higher than indicated. Over and above these sums, the bride and her family usually expect the groom to provide a fully furnished home, an expensive undertaking in Kuwait where almost everything is imported. Also, these amounts do not include child support, for which a divorced father is legally responsible, or support for the wife during the mandatory three month waiting period or the term of a pregnancy.

The rising cost of the mahr, which has sometimes worked to inhibit marriage, has led some Arab governments to set legal limits to this sum. No limits are placed upon the mauakhar al-sadakh. The back payment is considered a legal debt and is usually paid to a widow at her husband's death. This amount is removed from the estate before the religiously prescribed percentages are parcelled to the heirs, including the widow.

³See 'Abd al 'Ati's The Structure of the Family in Islam for an excellent discussion of this from the perspective of religion. The rights described in Chapter III have corresponding legal responsibilities. This is true of all individuals in Islam, men and children included.

⁴Education in Kuwait is compulsory for both sexes through the eighth grade or up to the age of eighteen. There are special evening programs for adults.

⁵The University of Kuwait extends this support to non-Kuwaiti wives as well.

⁶Turkey, or Byzantium, is usually credited with introducing the veil to the Arab Middle East.

CHAPTER V

FAMILY

The primary unit of Arab social organization is the family, not only from the perspective of the socialization of children but in terms of their integration into the wider society as well. Life is defined in terms of family relationships and the fabric of duty and responsibility which dominates existence begins here, to be carried up to the highest social levels through ever widening circles and degrees of relationship.¹ It is here that the Arab girl begins to acquire her sense of identity.

It has often been said that Arabs have a marked preference for sons. While such an attitude was condemned by Islam, some of the literature suggests that it nevertheless continued to be true (28). In such cases, this preference is usually explained by reference to the role of men in the wider society. In this sense it should be noted that Arab society is not the only one which has shown a preference in this direction. Also, it should be noted that there are several possible areas of confusion which may have led some observers to exaggerate the degree of favoritism, if any. For example, the Arabic plural of "boy" (oula'ad) is the same as the Arabic plural of "child" (oula'ad). There is a separate term for "girls" (bina'at) which is sometimes superfluous, as female children would be included in the more general "oula'ad" (children). Confusion regarding these terms may be partly responsible for

the occasional accusation that Arab men, when questioned as to the number of children they have, mention only boys. Furthermore, it is not usually considered decent in Arab society for men to speak about the women in their family, or in other's families, and reluctance to converse on this topic may also sometimes lead to an assumption of low status for woman. In fact, it is a function of their protected status and is meant to safeguard their honor and privacy.

The fact that boys may have been considered a political and economic necessity, therefore, does not necessarily mean that girls were deliberately belittled in comparison. While this may have been true in some cases, it is not within the author's experience. In fact, favoritism as such is not within this writer's experience. Children are the pride and delight of Arab families, girls no less than boys. Mothers and fathers dote upon and actively engage in play with the children. Some men may prefer to be more private than others about their relationships with children, but many are very open. The author has several times been asked by men to bring them a neighbor's baby to play with when they themselves could not properly call upon the mother. Most of the men observed showed as few reservations with regard to children. There are, however, generational differences and what is referred to here is the present generation of young fathers, which may include individuals up to the age of about forty. Their fathers or grandfathers, patriarchs in stronger extended family systems, were sometimes presented as less actively involved with the children, though no less actively concerned. National differences in this respect relate primarily to the different times that changes in this family structure began in the society. Thus, the true role of the patriarch has persisted somewhat

longer in Kuwait and Kuwaiti informants often described their fathers in such terms while Palestinians and Egyptians more often had to go back to grandfathers to find a parallel. In the younger generations there is greater consensus among the groups as to the degree of the father's active involvement with the children and Kuwaiti men are often as much inclined to read to or work with their children as are their Palestinian and Egyptian counterparts. One must allow for a large degree of individual differences here, of course, but the overall trend within these groups, as among modern Western families, is toward more direct involvement by fathers in areas which were once primarily reserved to mothers.

In part, these changes in family life reflect other changes in the social organization. Kuwait, for example, was formerly a seafaring society in which pearl diving or merchant voyages absented large numbers of men for long periods of time. Under such circumstances, the largest share of responsibility for the family's daily activities necessarily fell upon the women. The new land-based economy, with short work days geared to the Arab custom of eating early in the afternoon, allows much more time for family involvement on the part of the men. It should also be noted that the ideal of active paternal involvement in the affairs of children is a relatively new concept even in the West. Formerly, the American father who did his best to perform his role of family breadwinner considered his responsibilities fairly well fulfilled. Activities with the children were more a matter of personal discretion than an obligation. Similarly, the Arab father who concentrated his energies on performing the difficult tasks of providing for his family and fulfilling his social obligations saw this as his primary contribution. Other activities were a matter of choice. Since the extended family system

often guaranteed that there were several women involved in child care, rather than only one, the mother's responsibilities for the children were sometimes less than might be expected in the West. Also, the Arab tendency to view social ties in terms of family ties reinforced family solidarity in a way not usually available in the West. Children were and are included in their parents social activities rather than being restricted to their own separate circles defined by age and outside interests. Even the patriarch's involvement with his children was, therefore, much deeper and all-pervasive than it may seem on the surface. Thus, while primary responsibility for child care still devolves here upon women, as it does in most societies, Arab fathers have always been actively concerned with their children's affairs, a concern which is ever more often being expressed through active involvement. One Palestinian gentleman, now a grandfather, had taken enough interest to design some of his daughters' dresses, which their mother then pieced together--this in addition to the more usual contributions of helping with homework, joining in games, and roasting chestnuts on winter evenings. It is interesting to note in this respect that the aspect of American life which most appalled Arab informants was the perceived frailty of family bonds as depicted in American movies, television programs, and books. American parents were seen as being uninvolved with their children, who were left too often to their own devices and eventually turned out of the home at an early age to fend for themselves, minus the benefits of parental advice and financial support. The ideal expressed here of close family relations is as binding upon men as upon women and forms the basis of their role within the family, however it might be actualized.

Within such tightly-knit family circles children of both sexes are cherished by their parents. However, in the families the author observed the female children were usually allowed to take greater liberties with their parents. In part, this is probably due to the protected status of women in Islam and the conscientious father's desire to fulfill his obligations. Lichtenstadter (36), in her study of an Arab-Egyptian family, noted that the daughter repaid her father for his support and concern with generous and genuine demonstrations of affection. The father's moral duty to provide for his daughter, and the daughter's awareness of this fact, thus combined to forge a strong bond between them. This observation most closely approaches the author's own impressions of the intimate and mutually protective relations between the fathers and daughters the author observed. The seemingly universal affinity of fathers and daughters is thus reinforced here by the legal and religious stipulations regarding the protection of women. In the families observed there was also a concern expressed for daughters' futures, when they would marry out and no longer be able to depend directly upon their natal family for their happiness. In some families, especially in the past, it may be that this concern translated itself into an attempt to compensate in advance, to provide for the girl's happiness in the present against the possibility of future problems and to ensure that she knew she always had her family to fall back upon. In all of the families observed there remained a poignant realization that the daughters would one day leave the family circle and a belief that they should be cherished as much as possible while still near at hand. The remark, "They are my daughters," was often given in explanation by a father who overindulged his female children, or allowed them to take

advantage of him or to behave badly.

The desirability of keeping married daughters as close as possible was the consideration most often given in defense of the close-cousin marriages until recently preferred in Arab societies.² The nearer the marriage in location and relationship, the easier for the family to protect their daughter through either inter-familial pressure or overt action. Furthermore, cousins were generally acquainted with one another. In times when segregation was predominant a marriage between knowns, where an affective bond may already have existed, was reasonably considered better founded than one between strangers. Such a union also served to maintain the continuity of the girl's social relationships and to keep her position in the scheme of things clear and well-defined.

Protection was no longer an issue among the families observed in Kuwait, as the legal system now usually functions to fulfill this responsibility. Cousin marriage is primarily an ideal only, as the knowledge of its genetic dangers works to inhibit its practice. The wish to keep married children close to home, however, and the belief that a strong marriage is best based on pre-existing social ties, still leads parents to prefer that both sons and daughters choose partners from among distant relatives or close family friends. The majority of young people conform to this pattern, both out of choice and because the custom of socializing as a family, rather than as individuals, results in social contact with members of the opposite sex still being greatest within this circle. This is especially true among the Kuwaitis, whose smaller numbers and more tightly defined social groups lead to a narrower range of approved eligibles. However, an increasing number of marriages now result from contacts made at work or in the university.

As social identification has expanded to include a much wider circle than was formerly the case, these marriages are usually accepted and the new in-laws and their contacts incorporated into the family's social grouping.

There are, of course, exceptions. Marriage between the nationalities is not encouraged and the couple wishing to contract such a union will probably meet with resistance from their families who may, however, acquiesce in the end. Within cultural groups things are somewhat easier, as parents who may not have made the original choice may still find acceptable social or kinship ties with the other family which will ease their acceptance of the match. The Palestinians, especially, seem to be open to such arrangements, perhaps because their situation as refugees has led to a scattering, and therefore somewhat of a loosening, of family and village associations while strengthening the sense of national identity and providing a pool of bitterly shared experience. They are also well travelled, often without parental accompaniment, and thus have greater opportunities for establishing more diverse ties. Even here, however, one occasionally encounters a family unwilling to loosen parental authority. One couple of the author's acquaintance, having met and married while working in Kuwait, were angrily ostracized by the husband's family. Such a reaction was especially interesting in this case, as the parents were themselves partners in a more unconventional union, the mother being both Jewish and German. Ten years and three grandchildren later a reconciliation was effected which has now been complete for several years. The couple have been returned to the family fold and now live and work with the husband's parents in another country. It should be noted that the parents went to considerable

expense and effort to make amends, providing the couple with a home and setting their son up in business in their attempt to seal the breach.

The more general tendency in such cases is for families to discourage marriages for which they cannot establish satisfactory social ties but to accept them when they occur or are insisted upon. One Palestinian young man, for example, returned from a university in the United States and announced his desire to marry his American girlfriend. His parents voiced their strong disapproval and he was eventually dissuaded. At almost the same time, however, this young man's brother, still in the U.S., wrote home expressing his unshakeable intention of marrying an American girl--adding that he hoped to do so with his parents' blessings. He received the blessings, married the girl, and returned with her to Kuwait where she was readily accepted by the family. The degree of determination expressed was the deciding factor here, as the family had no choice but to accept the second son's decision or severely damage family unity.

Parents are also influenced by their children's wishes. In another case a Palestinian girl, with her parents' approval, married an Iranian boy--a very unusual match. His parents, who had already found a girl to their liking, were not at all pleased with the proposal but accepted it because their son desired it so badly. However they define it, most parents' reactions to such developments are based upon what they perceive to be their child's welfare. It should be noted that choices made within the acceptable social circles are also often disapproved due to the proposed partner's undesirable personality traits, lower social status, or poor education. Finally there is also a realization that marriage into a different circle serves to enlarge a family's social

ties, often with beneficial results.

Previously, lineage and property considerations were other important factors encouraging the practice of cousin marriage, as it tended to keep assets within the family and to reinforce clan solidarity (10, 11, 20, 46, 48). Women, obviously, were key figures in these affairs and were well aware of the importance of the roles they had to play. The change to a modern economy and a cosmopolitan social arrangement has worked to largely eliminate such concerns among the families of the author's acquaintance. While lineage considerations are still somewhat more important in Kuwait than within the other groups the general emphasis now is upon women--and men--as more independent carriers of assets and attributes rather than as links in the chain of clan alliances.

Finally, cousin marriage, like many other social practices, can have unintended as well as intended effects. It has been noted that marriage to a cousin sometimes negatively effected a woman's chance of obtaining a divorce, as the good of the group--maintaining family unity--could take precedence over the predicament of one individual (24). Conversely, this same arrangement could work to a woman's advantage. The author knows of one case in which a woman's rather flagrant adultery was covered, and thus abetted, by her husband--a cousin--who could neither expose nor divorce her without bringing shame upon their family. In times when penalties for adultery were severe such factors could well have worked to protect women, a thought echoed by several of the author's informants.

Family relationships, then, remain of vital importance. For the young girl, her protective relationship with her parents carries over to

her brothers as well, and brother-sister relationships among the Arabs are among the closest to be found anywhere (36, 28, 54). From an early age a boy is charged with his sister's welfare and even in families where the brothers are at odds they will usually unify in defense of their sister. In those cases where a girl's marriage or dowry was used to obtain a wife for her brother his responsibility to her was increased by his indebtedness, as it was also if she forfeited her inheritance to him (10, 40, 54). In the past, it would have been to her brother that a woman would turn in disputes with her husband and in his house that she would live if widowed young or childless.

None of the families the author observed ever withheld a portion of their daughters' dowries and considered it morally reprehensible in the extreme. Some found it impossible to believe that it could ever have happened anywhere unless the father was "a very wicked man." Nor did the author encounter any cases involving a marriage exchange, although informants confirmed that they sometimes still occurred if all parties were willing. The one example of inheritance forfeiture encountered was represented as strictly voluntary. As the informant, whose parents were still living, put it: "If my father tried to give me any money now I would not take it. I am a teacher, I can work. I have a husband to support me. My brothers, though, must pay their dowries and support their wives. They need to take care of their children and of our parents when they are old. Believe me, I do not want this money and I will not take it when it comes." In return, this woman expected to be able to rely upon her brothers' help and support at all times, an exchange well illustrated by her other comments: "You know, I think you cannot go to your brother like we can. If you need something you are slow to

ask for it. Myself, when I want a thing, I can take it, whatever it is-- their food, their clothes--anything. Whatever they have is mine, and I can take what I want from them."³

Such an attitude toward brother-sister relationships was almost universal and both young girls and older women, whatever their circumstances, continued to turn to their brothers for emotional, and sometimes financial, support. Men's obligations in this respect are also evident in patterns of gift giving. For example, during the feasts marking the end of the pilgrimage season and of Ramadhan, brothers have always been expected to give gifts to their sisters (fathers, also, will do this while they live) (44). It is also traditional to bring gifts when returning from a journey. Most of the young men of the author's acquaintance are extremely generous in this regard and often spontaneous at other times as well (they also routinely include their mothers and often aunts and nieces in their gift giving). Many of the author's female acquaintances owe large parts of their wardrobes and personal treasures to their brothers' generosity. The ideal that women be supported and protected by the men in their families is, therefore, perpetuated and reinforced, even for the working woman. In cases where the woman obviously doesn't need such support there can be no doubt that the giving is sincerely spontaneous. The affective result of this is that most women see at least one, if not more, of their brothers as the embodiment of the ideal man. Young men tend to have an equally idealized picture of their sisters. In the past, a man's loyalty to his sister sometimes took precedence over his loyalty to his wife. The depth of such relationships can only serve to enhance a girl's self-esteem.

While growing up within such a tightly-knit and protective family

the young girl learns also that her privileges carry with them certain responsibilities. She must show proper respect for her elders and help with household chores. Her compliance with these expectations is amply rewarded by the praise and acknowledgement of her parents and their friends. Like her brother, she also learns that she has a responsibility to uphold the family's good name by acting honorably in all things. Along with the other standards of good conduct this requires of a girl that she retain her virginity until her marriage. In the past, punishment for transgression of this limit could be severe, sometimes costing a girl her life at the hands of the father or brother who was her sworn protector (8, 19, 22, 28). It should be noted, however, that Antoun (8) suggests that such events took place only in the most extreme circumstances when alternate courses of action (such as marriage) were an impossibility. Granquist (28) notes that the Palestinians of Artas believed the killing of an innocent girl brought misfortune upon her family. The author's informants believed the normal course of action was to pretend to kill the girl while actually spiriting her away to relatives in a distant village. Such murders are outlawed in most Arab countries and are a rare, aberrational occurrence. Needless to say, however, girls learn to take themselves very seriously in this respect. They can even learn to use it. Two young women of the author's acquaintance repeatedly managed to force their wills upon their family by threatening suicide, an action which would have been a public admission of guilt and a consequent disgrace to the family.

It should also be noted that a woman's inhibitions regarding pre-marital sexual activity are based on more than the threat of past external sanctions. Most are very religious and accept adherence to the

rules as a religious duty. Their occasionally expressed bitterness at the double standard is directed towards the hypocrisy involved rather than the restrictions. Men are also expected to refrain from sex outside of marriage but have greater opportunities for involvement and a lesser chance of discovery, if only on the basis of physical evidence. This is a pattern found in many societies, as is the emphasis upon male virility which leads to a greater tolerance for male transgressions of the moral code. It is this inconsistency in application which the women find objectionable. Within marriage, sex is considered a joy for both men and women and is positively extolled, the satisfaction of sexual desires being seen as a major function of the marital institution (1).

In traditional society, the major expectation of the married woman was that she would produce children. For both men and women the birth of the first child signified their full emergence into adult society and sons were the parents' insurance against deprivation in their old age. Today, parents are still addressed as the father or mother of their eldest child or son more often than by their given names. Even childless couples are often called by the name which they would have given their first son. This should serve to indicate the strength and importance of the parent-child bond. The female parent is especially cherished, as was mentioned earlier, and people of both sexes tend to idealize their mothers. In the past, a woman attained her greatest position of authority when her sons married and she became the head of an extended family (54). Today, respect still increases with age and greatest deference is given to both men and women in their later years. Adult children continue to bow to their parents wishes--or at least pretend to do so. Parents-in-law are accorded the same respect. There

is less pressure, however, to produce large families and the middle class tends to be content with a smaller number of children. In fact, family planning for many of the author's informants began as long as 20 to 30 years ago, as soon as information and techniques became available to them. This was especially true of the Egyptians and Palestinians, who had earlier access to modern methods of birth control. For many of these women, such techniques became available only after they already had large families. Most were quick to seize the new opportunities and seem to have met with little resistance from the men. One middle-aged woman said the only pressure she encountered came from her other children, who wanted new babies to play with (she was not moved by this argument). A woman working for the Organized Family Planning service club in Egypt recalls being besieged in towns and villages with requests for help and information (49). She described problems for family planning as predominating in rural areas where ignorance and isolation led to a slow acceptance of new ideas--an acceptance quickened considerably by efforts at education. Among the urban middle class problems seem to have been fewer and the advantages of limiting family size well understood. Among the younger groups of all the nationalities the desired family size was usually given as two or three children and most young women were encouraged by their mothers to stay within these limits. Mothers-in-law, on the other hand, often tended to encourage daughters-in-law to produce more children. Fortunately, family planning decisions are usually jointly made and most young men also prefer smaller families, regardless of what their parents want. Also, pressure to have larger families is seldom overt and tends more to the "when are we going to have more grandchildren" variety--a pressure easily ignored in favor

of the social and economic factors arguing otherwise. Thus, while the dominant ideal of a close family life still ensures that most couples will produce some children the trend is toward having only two or three--and occasionally only one--even if this means going without sons.

Within this context it should be noted that most young women no longer seek to establish themselves as matriarchs, but rather pursue authority at work and status within the wider community. The young teacher or physician does not rely solely upon her performance of family roles for self-validation. However, both sexes see family responsibilities as an important part of their social status and the fulfillment of these responsibilities, therefore, remains an important part of the self-image. Since the middle class working woman in Kuwait can usually either afford household help or fall back upon her extended family for assistance, many of the conflicts which often arise from these dual roles have been somewhat lessened, at least in the families observed.⁴ Also, allowing for a large degree of individual differences, there is among those families who have no one to help them a slowly growing tendency for the men in two-career families to take over some responsibilities within the home, openly or otherwise. Grocery and household shopping, usually associated in the West with women's activities, is traditionally done by men in Kuwait.

It can thus be seen that the family remains a major focal point of an individual's activities. For women, this means that the role of mother continues to be revered and accorded special consideration and respect in the society. Another important aspect of the mother's place in the family becomes apparent when one considers the wider range of blood relationships. Despite the formal emphasis on patrilineality the

Arabs do, as Peters (48) has noted, reckon kinship bilaterally. Equal respect is accorded the maternal side of the family and relationships with these relatives are usually very close. Traditionally, the mother and her kin are assumed to reflect the gentle, affective aspects of family life while the father and his relatives are associated with authority and discipline (6, 40, 36). The mother's family thus becomes a refuge where all is assumed to be understood and forgiven, and where no pressure is applied to live up to family demands and expectations. This division is most often expressed in describing relationships with the uncles, wherein the 'amm, the father's brother, is seen as a figure of authority and potential financial support while the khal, the mother's brother, is represented as a loving, comforting figure spontaneous in his generosity (6, 40). Most of the families observed had, at the very least, relationships with their matrilateral kin which were as warm as or better than those they had with their father's relatives. One family had gone so far as to break off relations entirely with their patrilateral kin and only the father himself ever had any dealings with his family.

Legal attempts to maintain a balance between the two types of kinship ties are expressed in the child custody laws which come into effect in case of divorce. Boys until age 7 and girls until age 9 remain with their mothers in order to benefit from the close affective ties young children are believed to need.⁵ In case of the mother's death or remarriage they usually go to her parents or to other close maternal relatives. When they reach the specified ages they are transferred to the care of their father or, in case of his death or remarriage, to close patrilateral relatives. At puberty the children are allowed to decide

for themselves with which parent they prefer to stay. At all times, the father is responsible for their financial support.

Unfortunately, in Western literature this practice is often described as the mother "losing" the children in case of divorce rather than being understood as an attempt to handle justly what is, at best, a very painful problem. The author was familiar with only two custody cases while in Kuwait. In one the father sought to remove a young child from the mother's care on the grounds that she was a Christian and would not raise the child according to Islamic law. The court refused his request, specifying that the mother was not bound by Islamic law and that whether or not she followed it her rights were inviolable. In the second case, a mother was granted guardianship of her 13-year-old son when he declared in court that he preferred to be placed under her care.

One other attempt to maintain and reinforce the sanctity of matrilineal ties can be seen in the custom of a deceased woman's sister marrying the widower if the couple had children. Such a marriage cannot be forced but devotion to the children is such that women are often willing to make such an arrangement in order to keep the kinship ties intact.

Most of the other aspects of the family relationship have already been discussed under the headings of religion and society. What should be obvious here is the intensity and importance of family bonds in Arab society. They are the central unit to which everything else is eventually related. Given this, and a girl's protected position but many responsibilities within the family, it should be clear that many women are here imbued with a strong sense of their individuality and importance. Interpersonal skills are highly developed and within the family girls learn both how to protect their rights and to speak up for

themselves in a sympathetic circle. Even in times when they may not have been allowed this liberty in their husbands' homes a pattern had been set whereby they had learned to be straightforward, open, and confident in their own perceptions. Since the Muslim marriage contract is primarily a legal document binding the partners to their mutual duties and responsibilities, such an openness of expectations is a definite asset. A decision of the Hanbali school of legal thought which has been incorporated into the civil codes of Jordan, Syria, and Morocco permits a woman to obtain an annulment of her marriage if the husband refuses to honor any preconditions she has had written into the contract (7, 1).

In the absence of such legal safeguards a husband will still face the wrath of his wife's family if he violates the verbal agreements they have reached before the marriage. Even at the very least, both partners can only gain when each has a good idea of what the other expects from a marriage. The young women of the author's acquaintance, therefore, tended to be extremely candid in dealings with potential marriage partners, rather than flirtatious or accommodating. Even those who chose to follow traditional patterns and leave the preliminary searching to their parents made their expectations quite clear and scrutinized prospective bridegrooms accordingly. Many of the older women recalled going through a similar logical selection process when contemplating their own marriages, although they tended to rely more heavily on their parents' advice than did the younger generation--a logical course of action given the greater degree of segregation many of them experienced. Thus, despite the fact that opportunities for romantic involvement are now much more numerous than previously, young women seem nevertheless to assess prospective partners with the same practical turn of mind with

which their parents once approached the task. Such presence of mind would not be possible for weak or childish personalities.

NOTES

¹The modern state is sometimes an exception.

²The term close-cousin marriage is used here to distinguish between the ideal and the more often encountered reality of cousin marriage among the Arabs. The expressed preference is for patrilateral parallel cousin marriage but in practice any type of cousin marriage is likely to occur, beginning with a preference for first cousins and moving outward towards more distant relations.

³Cases of inheritance forfeiture were extremely difficult to locate, in part because informants always insisted, quite correctly, that they were guaranteed an inheritance (as opposed to actually receiving it). The woman quoted here is Palestinian. Other Palestinians expressed surprise at her information and declared that this custom did not exist in their communities. One went so far as to suggest that the woman's experience might be only a family custom. Since her extended family is, in fact, the only Muslim group in a predominantly Christian town, this explanation merits some consideration. What seems to be apparent is that inheritance forfeiture may always have been a matter of place, social group, or family, and may now be dying out. It also may never have been widespread. Most informants expressed shock at the suggestion that it may ever have occurred.

⁴Some have interpreted the legal stipulation that a man must support his wife in the manner to which she is accustomed as requiring him to provide her with a maid if she is used to having one (1).

⁵The actual ages relevant here may vary from place to place. In Egypt children remain with the mother until the age of 12 or 13. However, the traditional, and usually cited, ages are those given here.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: PERCEPTIONS, PERSPECTIVES, AND REALITIES

The purpose of this paper was to explore some of the major factors involved in the socialization of Arab Muslim women. This was done by examining the role played in socialization by the religious, social, and family organization of the culture. Of these factors, primary consideration should be given to the protected status of the daughter in the Arab family as it not only holds constant over most of the area but also begins to have its effect long before the influence of the local variations in legal or social organization are felt. However, as explained, religious law and social patterns also contain many elements which can contribute to the development in the women of a strong and positive sense of self. The many possible variations deriving from the interplay of the three influences should always be borne in mind.

The author also made a conscious effort to challenge some of the Western stereotypes pertaining to Arab women. This was done by occasionally contrasting the stereotype with information which contradicts it, or with observations of Western society which suggest that many judgments may be self-righteous or based upon a cultural double standard--one basis of comparison for the West, another for the East. The author used the West's fascination with Islam's legal polygyny as an example, explaining the religious inhibitions to the practice and

pointing out that violations of the mutually exclusive, ideal spirit of monogamy, circumvented affairs and successive divorces, may be more common in the West than in the Middle East, and are perceived that way by many Arabs. Also, many Western impressions of Arab life are based on manuscripts now well out of date and Arab society in 1900 or 1930 cannot really be compared to present day Western realities. It would be well to remember the positions of many Western women at the time these works were written before comparisons are made.

In light of this approach, it should be understood that the author did not set out to produce an "apology" for Arab society. Rather, the work has attempted to provide a perspective which has been too long neglected in studies of the Middle East. The perspective itself is borne out by observation and research. What some may have seen as a partisan approach may thus be better understood as a lack of the usual and accepted biases associated with the subject, and as an attempt to regain a balance of perceptions. With regard to women, for example, it is not the intention of the paper to imply that violations of ideals have never occurred, but rather that they have not necessarily had the inhibiting effect upon the personality which is often assumed. Even in "traditional" society the interwoven fabric of religious ideals, social organization, and family life combined to accord women status and respect within the community. Moreover, women were often able to manipulate the system considerably and to have a significant effect upon it.

Within this context, the author wishes to caution the reader against assessing the protection accorded to women in Arab society and reducing it to simple "protectionism," especially with regard to the modern era. Many Arab informants were fond of reminding the author that

many of the rights traditionally held by Muslim women were not until recently available in the West, and that Western women often suffered accordingly. They had no guaranteed property rights, their holdings passed to their husbands at marriage, and they could--and in some places still can--be disinherited at will by husbands or parents. "Protection" under the law should thus be seen for what it is--an attempt to establish justice and forestall exploitation--and not be confused with condescension.

Attempts to assign a relative status to women's activities, as opposed to men's, would be likewise mistaken. In traditional, segregated Arab societies one is dealing with two separate, complementary spheres for which efforts to assess priorities are precluded. In a society based upon a male-female division of labor the work of one sector is vital to the survival of the other. Arab men were and are aware of their dependence upon the activities of women. In the modern middle class the entrance of women into the work force has blurred distinctions somewhat between "men's" and "women's" activities, but the continued emphasis upon the home as the major center of activity maintains the respect accorded to the traditionally female sphere.

The author made extensive use of the literature, and of interviews with Arab women from many backgrounds, to broaden the base of her research. However, most of the personal observations recorded in this paper are urban and middle class. The author believes that they are also, for that reason, probably indicative of future directions in Arab society. Some writers have mentioned the body of liberal opinion in the Middle East (7, 41). Nevertheless, such thought is usually still treated as something out of the ordinary, as an extreme view existing

only on the fringes of the society. It should be noted, therefore, that the most liberal religious and social ideals presented in this paper, taken together, represent the perceptions and expectations of the author's informants in Kuwait--representatives of three distinct national and cultural groups. One cannot overemphasize the necessity of viewing society, and society's legal thought, as an ongoing, developmental process. That this process is alive and well in the Arab World should be obvious in this paper. Nor does it show signs of slowing or atrophying in the near future. During the writing of this thesis Jordan announced significant changes in its family status law, already one of the strictest in the Middle East, which are intended to further inhibit men in their use of the right to divorce. Jordanian men who wish to divorce their wives must now pay to the women, above and beyond the stipulated dowry and whatever alimony or child support the court decrees, an extra, specified sum of money which increases dramatically with the number of years a couple has been married. This is expected to further decrease the rate of divorce in the country.

It should also be noted that such changes are going on everywhere in the Arab World, not in only a few isolated places. Saudi Arabia, generally considered the greatest bastion of conservatism in the Arab Middle East, has for years been going through a slow but steady transformation in policies pertaining to women. One of the most important of these is in the area of education and the Saudi government has been quietly encouraging the expansion of women's opportunities in this respect for some years. One of the methods used in this endeavor was an attempt to encourage men studying abroad to allow their wives to return to school at the same time. In order to facilitate this, the government

offered to pay full tuition costs for the women, thus relieving their husbands of the financial burden. This resulted in an increased enrollment of Saudi women in foreign schools. However, the response proved to be less universal than had been hoped. The government therefore increased the incentive by offering to give the women full scholarships, including generous salaries and living expenses equal to those drawn by the men. This had the desired effect of sending large numbers of Saudi women back to school at all educational levels. It would be naive to assume that these women, and those now being educated within Saudi Arabia, will have no effect upon future developments in the society.

Similar processes of gradual change and a variety of accommodations to local social or religious custom are going on in all parts of the Arab World. For example, a matter of ongoing concern in Muslim thought has been the question of obtaining a woman's consent to marriage. It is not legal in Islam to give a mature woman in marriage against her will. However, it has generally been considered permissible to marry an underage girl with the consent of her guardian. This permission is based upon the assumption that the guardian, usually the father, has the girl's best interests at heart and is in a better position to make the decision. It is also representative of a conflict between two legally specified rights and responsibilities--the girl's right to a consensual union and the father's responsibility to discharge his duties to the best of his ability. Some legal schools of thought have allowed women to repudiate such a union after attaining maturity, usually defined as the onset of puberty. Others have held that the marriages are binding. Many of the national legal codes, however, have effectively sidestepped the question altogether by setting civil, minimum ages for marriage,

ages which take a woman beyond the religiously applicable definition of maturity. The issue is thus being resolved.¹

That the West has yet to understand that such changes are occurring, and have always been occurring, in the Middle East is evidenced by the continued lag between perceptions and realities. A commonly encountered view of Islamic marriage laws holds that a Muslim man is allowed "four wives and as many concubines as he can support." The restrictions applying to the four wives have already been discussed. An even more serious misunderstanding is evident in the reference to concubines. On a very technical level, the statement is true. However, as it ignores restrictions to polygyny, so it also ignores fundamental realities regarding the legal and moral restrictions to concubinage. A man may only take a concubine if he can afford her. He can also only take one if he fears that failure to do so will drive him to an immoral and illegal act. Also, the pool of possible concubines is very restricted. A concubine must be a slave captured in a defensive war legally declared by the Caliph. It is not permissible to enter into an offensive war for the purpose of obtaining slaves or concubines. Slaves and concubines must be permitted to buy their freedom if they so desire and offered the opportunities to do so. A concubine who bears her master a child is elevated to a higher status as "the mother of a child" and her owner is expected to set her free. If he dies before doing this, she automatically becomes free at his death. The children of concubines are born free and are the legal, legitimate heirs of their fathers. Given the pride of some Arab groups in the purity of their blood, this in itself may sometimes have acted as a check to concubinage.

Since concubinage is intimately related to slavery it is also

necessary to understand Islamic law on this point in order to fully realize what is involved. The restrictions to slavery have already been mentioned. Beyond this, it was believed that one of the most virtuous acts a man could perform was to free a slave. Penance for many transgressions involved freeing a slave. So did the fulfillment of many oaths. Celebrations also often led to the liberation of slaves. Since wars could not continually be fought to obtain slaves, and since the only other source was the children of slave couples, many Muslims believe that these restrictions and the many requirements for freeing slaves were intended to lead to an ever declining supply and the eventual end of slavery in Islamic countries. The fact that a technically illegal slave trade continued for many years should not disguise this point. Slavery was eventually declared illegal in all of the Arab countries and the process described above is cited as justification for the outlawing of a previously permitted institution.² And this leads to the major error involved in the statement on concubines--concubinage has been extinct in the Arab World for as long as slavery. It is no longer an issue. The term is not synonymous with "mistress" or "girl friend." The continued tendency to see it as a permissible institution reflects on a large scale the same reluctance one finds more subtly expressed in some of the professional literature--a reluctance to recognize or acknowledge the effects of social processes, as opposed to static social facts.

The purpose of this paper was to describe the influences of religious, social, and family factors in the socialization of Arab Muslim women. The use of a multi-dimensional approach and of descriptions of "traditional" societies as represented in the literature and in

interviews with Arab women from many backgrounds was meant to add a deeper perspective to the study and to emphasize the dynamic, ongoing processes in Arab society. It is therefore hoped that some of the changes taking place in the Arab World should be evident here and that the important role which Arab women have always played--and will in new ways continue to play--in this process will be recognized and acknowledged. Most importantly, it is hoped that this new configuration in the society will be placed in its proper perspective as something which is a part of, and not opposed to, Arab and Islamic tradition.

NOTES

¹See 'Abd al 'Ati (1) for a more detailed discussion of this issue.

²See 'Abd al 'Ati (1) for a more detailed treatment of slavery and concubinage.

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