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THE LEBANESE COUNCIL OF WOMEN
MISSION AND EXPECTATIONS

by

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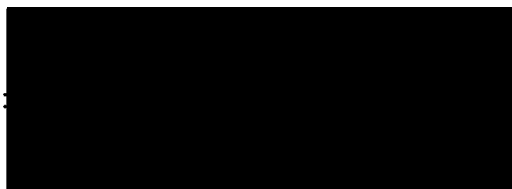
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*To my husband Najeeb, for his love, constant support,
encouragement, and understanding*

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Abstract

The Lebanese Council of Women (LCW) is a non-governmental umbrella organization for women's NGOs founded in 1952 with the purpose of unifying the actions of women's NGOs and channeling their efforts towards the realization of women's political, social, and economic rights. Historically, and until the onset of the Lebanese Civil War, LCW rose up to its role and was the force behind the achievements of the Lebanese women's movement. During the Civil War, LCW maintained its unity and through it contributed positively to the national cause. From the early nineties, following the Taif Accords, LCW as part of a democratic process that went wrong, faced the challenges of interference, corruption, and social disenfranchisement. It also had to face the emergence of new leaders within the women's movement. With the growing involvement of the agents of the civil society in human development, the subject of 'women's organizations' is becoming increasingly central, thus the importance of exploring the issue of whether LCW still has a role to play or is it an institution of the past.

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Introduction

This study is about The Lebanese Council of Women (LCW). The emphasis is about the mission of this institution, its purpose, and active role including achievements and setbacks. The historical contributions and actual relevance of LCW in the development of the Lebanese women's movement and its realization are a very important aspect of this study.

One of the dominant trends in the evolution of the Lebanese women's movement is the ongoing increase in the number of women's NGOs dealing with aspects of women's lives such as health, education, legal literacy, income generation, advocacy of rights, research and so on. However, it can be asked if this rapid recent expansion of women's NGOs has served the cause of feminism in Lebanon. Some argue that any women's organization can be called 'feminist' if it brings women out of the home into public life, while others argue that only those organizations that address specifically gender issues qualify as 'feminist'. Since 1952, Lebanese feminist leaders have addressed this thorny issue by unifying their efforts and grouping the grass root and charitable

women's associations under one umbrella organization, The Lebanese Council of Women (LCW). The purpose of LCW was not to be just another NGO. Its role was to provide direction and vision to the activities of its member organizations by coordinating their efforts and mobilizing their potential towards the realization of women's political and economic rights.

By studying the Lebanese Council of Women, its mission, and its present day role, we aim to answer the question: can LCW still play the role its founding mothers sought to achieve, and remain a leader of the Lebanese women's rights movement?

The first chapter "Early Feminist Struggles in Lebanon" covers the historical period extending from the end of the nineteenth century to the Lebanese Civil War, presenting the philosophical roots of the modern Lebanese women's movement, the early pioneers, and the institution and contributions of The Lebanese Council of Women (LCW).

In the second chapter "Defining Moments for the Lebanese Women's Movement", we review the events that were behind the major changes in the development and progress of the Lebanese women's movement with a stress on the role LCW played in these transformations. These defining moments include the Lebanese Civil War, the post war era, and the advancement in women issues on the international, regional, and national levels.

The third chapter "Present Role of LCW and its Potential" addresses the present-day role of LCW, its accomplishments and failures, and the challenges LCW needs to address in order to remain relevant at the outset of the twenty first century. These challenges include the controversial issue of feminism versus social activism, and the question of modernizing and democratizing the internal structure of women's NGOs.

Chapter One

Early Feminist Struggles in Lebanon

This chapter presents the historical and philosophical roots of the modern Lebanese women's movement. The socioeconomic setting that led to the significant changes witnessed in the conditions of women following the first Industrial Revolution and World War I. Throughout the historical period extending from the end of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, Lebanese women activists left their mark. They affected the development of events that led to the formation of a pressure group for women's rights institutionalized in 1953 under the name of The Lebanese Council of Women, the subject of our study.

The central issue that mobilized women during this historical period in Lebanon and elsewhere was the issue of political rights. Women campaigned actively to gain suffrage rights. In few countries such as New Zealand women were granted the right to vote as early as 1893, but most of the other nations of the world enacted woman-suffrage legislation around the mid twentieth century; France (1944); Israel

(1948); Lebanon (1953); and Switzerland (1971).¹ The Lebanese women's rights movement of that time was clearly in tune with the women's right movement worldwide and remained so until the mid nineteen seventies, date of the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War.

1.1. The Lebanese Women's Movement (1920s to 1950s)

1.1.1. Introducing the Movement

It is usually considered that the modern Lebanese women's movement began following World War I. However, social movements of change such as women's movements are not set in time by a beginning or an end; they represent a continuous process of small cumulative transformations that lead to a qualitative change. Sometimes, extraordinary economic and political historical landmarks such as the Industrial Revolution or devastating wars can set in motion an acceleration of the process.

The struggle for women's rights began worldwide in the 18th century during the Age of Enlightenment. The term was frequently employed by writers of the period itself, convinced that they were emerging from centuries of darkness and ignorance into a new age enlightened by reason, science, and a respect for humanity. Political philosophers in Europe began to question traditional ideas that based the rights of citizens on their wealth and social status. Instead, they maintained the then revolutionary idea that all inequalities that existed among citizens were the result of an inadequate education system and an imperfect social environment. Initially this had little impact on the legal and political status of women. The effective change started happening when increasing numbers of women began to enter the industrial labor force in the 19th century. Their status and position were affected by the physical and

¹ Encarta, 2004 edition, © 1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation

economic independence they gained from working outside the walls of their homes and the access to income and purchasing power.²

The early history of Lebanese women's contribution to society is not well documented, however we find timid yet clear historical indications of a stream of small economic and social transformations that affected the conditions of women in Lebanon and prepared for the significant developments that followed World War I. These occurrences refute the accusations of those who consider that the modern Lebanese Women's movement was purely spawned by outside influence and thus was an irrelevant movement restricted to marginal elites divorced from the rest of society.

The examples presented in this part of the dissertation are economic in nature and intended to reflect that progress would not and could not have been possible without those women that had the courage to break the chains and push their way into the male arena decades before the modern Lebanese women's movement started to take shape.

As early as 1889 and during the Ottoman period where the jobs opened for women were restricted to nursing and midwifery we notice the listing of a woman doctor, Hallum Sabra in the medical section of the Beirut register³. Another woman who practiced medicine during this period is Alya Francis (1842-1924) of Mount Lebanon who learned the trade from her father. It is important also to note that the contributions of women journalists between 1858 and 1929 cannot be underestimated.⁴

Another very important phenomenon registered as early as the end of the 19th century relates to women's first steps outside the protected walls of their homes and the tutelage of their male relatives due to economic transformations and necessity. Samira Aghacy, quoting Evelyn Shakir in

² Katrin Schultheiss, *Women's Rights: Introduction*, article reproduced in the Encarta Library, © 1993-2003 Microsoft Corporation

³ Samira Aghacy, "History Reconsidered, *Al-Raida* (Summer 1998):3-4

⁴ Shirine Kairallah, *The Sisters of the Men* (Beirut: The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1996), 235

her book entitled *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States*", says:

"Around the 1870's a number of Lebanese women both single and married began to travel westwards all by themselves. Many of them were spurred by husband or father though others seem to have been acting at their own initiative and for the same reason as men. Above all the siren calls for riches."⁵

Furthermore and on the level of the less privileged classes, women who were previously restricted to housework and agriculture started to get employed in one of the very important industries before 1914, the silk industry. "Initially the workers were exclusively male; however, with the success of this industry over the years, there was urgent need for more laborers, and therefore, girls were hired."⁶ By the early eighteen nineties, twenty-three percent of the total population of women of working age, or twelve thousand unmarried women and girls were working outside their village in the silk factories. Even though, the social acceptance of this new phenomenon was low, the fact that money was becoming the nexus of society, the earnings of a 'factory girl' translated into buying, and to a lesser extent into social power.⁷ This phenomenon translated into a shift in the balance of power within households and gave more power to women. With financial independence came to a lesser extent some sort of independence on all levels. This is not to say that women got liberated from the tutelage of their male relatives, but this could be considered the precursor of the acceptance of women's work outside the walls of their homes.

⁵ Aghacy, 2

⁶ Ibid. 3

⁷ Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home*, (London, England: University of California Press Inc, 2001), 32-34

1.1.2. Women and Modernism

The modern Lebanese women's movement came as a continuation of the changes in women's conditions witnessed during the nineteenth century and took root in the changes that affected the world following the First World War. This period witnessed in what used to be called "Bilad Al Sham" (essentially modern Syria and Lebanon) the end of Ottoman domination, the failure of the Arab revolution to achieve independence, and a Franco-British mandate that redrew the borders. Most importantly, it was the era of the Balfour declaration that laid the ground for the Palestinian question that later on became central to most national and political developments in this region of the world.⁸ The occupation of Palestine and the emergence in most Arab countries of parties and political national liberation movements drew the political scene and accordingly social reforms for decades to come.

It is true that the Arab national liberation movements that preceded the Palestinian revolution gave women access to a platform of action that helped them engage in the political arena, yet in many instances the centrality of the Palestinian question and liberation has often played a role in keeping the women's rights struggle restrained. The argument being that national unity in the face of occupation preceded the struggle for social rights.

The social and economic changes set off by World War I, together with the emergence of new nationalist movements struggling for independence are considered pivotal to the emergence in *Bilad Al-Sham* and Egypt of modernism, whether philosophical, political, or economic.⁹ It was only normal that these transformations affect significantly women's conditions in this region of the world. The waves of change gained women access to education and through it to the means of expressing themselves. They

⁸ James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties, Nationalism and Mass Politics In Syria At The Close Of The Empire*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 1998), 1-5

⁹ Ibid. 1-5

became more visible and vocal in their demands. "One cannot fail to notice when studying the history of "Bilad Al-Sham" and Egypt the qualitative and quantitative increase in the contribution of women in the field of writing, whether in literature, thought, journalism, or translation. There was also a substantial increase in the number of 'literary salons', and the emergence of the phenomenon of women's conferences on the local, Arab, and international levels. Women entered for the first time the field of upper education and the number of schools for girls increased. A number of women's organizations were founded in the cities and villages with diverse interests and aims. In parallel a number of women's publications came on the market, and women showed a new presence on the arts scene including in the fields of singing, dancing, acting, and theatre."¹⁰

Women of this era whether in the Arab world or elsewhere were strongly affected by the new philosophies that characterized the beginning of the twentieth century. They lived in an era of change, rich with new ideas of social justice and freedom. The United States of America had not yet gained fully the status of imperialism and was still the 'land of the free'. Russia was living a Marxist revolution in the making, and the ideals of Socialism were spreading across the working classes worldwide. The movements for national independence were on the rise in the Arab region, and many of them were socialist in nature. Even the movements whose ideology was based on order and subservience to the state such as Fascism and National Socialism gave women a bigger role in society and several basic rights. The essence of Fascism's segregation was based on race and color, not gender.

1.1.3. The Early Pioneers

In Lebanon, the pioneers of the women's movement were trying, as did their sisters all over the world, to redefine their role in society. They

¹⁰ The Editing Committee, *Al Nisa' al-Arabiyyat fi al-I'shrinyat* (Beirut: Bahithat, 2001):8

were a diverse group of upper and middle class educated women belonging to all religious Lebanese groups and sects. They felt that they had something to give back to society and wanted to be heard. They wanted to make a difference; each of them was an institution by itself. Their interests were diverse, touching all fields of life, whether cultural, social, economic, or political.

One should not forget that the early 20th century was the period where existentialists argued that because individuals are free to choose their own path, they must accept the risk and responsibility of following their commitment. It was also the era of the revival of the Renaissance concept of the “Universal Man”, and these early Lebanese pioneer women fitted the description of “Universal Woman”.

On February 19, 1919, a group of Lebanese women activists responded to the ideas of Woodrow Wilson, the US president of that time who “envisioned a world in which freedom and self-determination would eliminate imperialism and colonialism”. They addressed the King Crane Commission with a letter asking for Lebanese independence and protesting the Balfour declaration.¹¹¹² Among those who signed the letter was the Muslim Ibtihaj Kaddoura, a legend of the woman’s rights movement.¹³

Early on in her career, Kaddoura stressed the importance of educating women. She called for the adoption of a “compulsory education law” for all, including girls. She formed several social institutions and women’s organizations, among which: the Arab Girl’s Society for Awareness (educational grants for needy girls), Social and educational institutions to

¹¹ The King-Crane 1919 commission was appointed at the request of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 to determine the attitudes of the inhabitants of Syria and Palestine toward the post-World War I settlement of their territories

¹² The declaration of Balfour is a declaration expressing the British government's approval of Zionism and of “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people”

¹³ Iqbal M. Doughan, *The participation of women in politics* (Beirut: The Lebanese Council of Women: the Golden Jubilee, 2004), 11

take care of the orphans of World War I, the Social Organization for Muslim Women (a cultural/social organization), the Women's Society for Development (economic development and promotion of Lebanese production), the Committee for Education (pressure group to reform the official Lebanese educational program), and finally the Lebanese Council of Women (an association of women's organizations).¹⁴

Nazira Zein Eddine, a Druze wrote in 1928 a book *Al Hijab wal Sufur* (Veiling and Unveiling) calling for the removal of the veil and refusing the practice of segregation of sexes. The religious institution headed by the almighty Mufti of the time, Sheikh Mustafa Ghalayini, as expected, attacked her. This did not intimidate her; in 1929, she published an elaborate answer based on Islamic history in a book *The Girl and the Sheikhs*¹⁵. In many of her writings, she also argued the necessity to separate the matters of state and religion in order to solve the problems of sectarian divisions in Lebanon. She called for a secular unified Lebanese Personal Status Law.

Evelyn Bustros, a Christian writer and activist shared the same believes as her cotemporary Zein Eddine. She was an adept of the French revolution's principles of freedom, equality, and self-determination, which drove her to be a staunch opponent of the occupation of Palestine.¹⁶ Aside from her political and nationalist activism, Evelyn wrote two stories representing women as victims, without exaggeration or melodrama. Her books could be considered a good representation of the Lebanese society of that time with her societal divisions. They show a deep understanding of the problems of women belonging to the

¹⁴ Emily Fares Ibrahim, *Kalimat wa Mawakif*, (Beirut: Literary Heritage House and Bookshop, 1992), 65-68

¹⁵ Joseph Zaydan, *Masader Al-Adab Al Nisai Fee Al-Alam Al-Arabi Al-Hadeeth* (Beirut: The Arab Institute for Studies and Publication, 1999), 221-223

¹⁶ The Editing Committee Bahithat, 15

underprivileged classes and their needs. She fought without relent against the crimes of honor and the subordination of women in laws.¹⁷

The number of women pioneers of that era is astonishing. Sadly, due to space limitation, it is impossible to mention them all in this paper. However, one ought not to forget May Zeyade and Julia Tohme Dimachkie whose magazines and literary salons defined the agenda in that era for several discussions on subjects considered previously taboo. Anbara Salam, the first Muslim women to make a public speech bear-headed is a symbol of women defiance.¹⁸ Maude Farajallah, Laure Tabet, Najla Saab, Adèle Nakhou, and Rose Shihaa, and many others are but a few of the women who made a difference in the Lebanese Women's movement during the 1920s and 30s. Each of them courageously tried to change society in some of its aspects that discriminate against women.¹⁹

1.1.4. The Movement for Lebanese Women's rights

Many of the prominent early Lebanese activists for women's rights and social reformers who were involved in a number of social and moral reform campaigns in the early 20th century decided in 1921 to unify their efforts and form a pressure group for women's rights. These efforts culminated in 1924 with the institution of The Women's Council of Lebanon and Syria.²⁰ This was a major step forward in the organized campaign that eventually ensured women their voting and employment rights.

On March 12, 1936, the Lebanese Arab Women Council²¹ addressed a letter to the Lebanese Parliament that concluded, "The Council of

¹⁷ André Pautard, "Eveline Bustros Et Son Temps » in *Eveline Bustros, Romans Et Ecrits Divers* (Beirut Dar An-Nahar), 5-37

¹⁸ The Editing Committee Bahithat, 15-22

¹⁹ Doughan, 10-20

²⁰ Ibid, 11

²¹ The Women's Council of Lebanon and Syria took the name of the Lebanese Arab Women Council after the census of 1933 and the redrawing of the borders of Lebanon separating it from Syria.

Women requests from you to recognize women as equal citizens granting them their civic rights, and we ask you to note that women share with you the same nationality, society, and history.”²² The request was made in general terms and was not backed up by a specific plan of action including a project of law with a call for its adoption. The deputies and parliamentarians of that time were thus able to evade the issue and did not give the request of the Council of Women serious considerations. The law remained unchanged.²³

The women’s rights movement was consolidated when in the early forties women participated in the national independence campaign. In 1943, they actively took part in the strikes, took to the streets, and organized themselves in support of national figures such as Bshara El-Khoury, Riad El-Solh, and many others who were imprisoned during the struggle. About this period Najla Saab, who later became president of the Lebanese Council of Women said:

“The women of Lebanon became one united within the framework of the Lebanese question. They shared the same destiny so they forgot their differences. The crisis entered their homes and hearts and made them focused on one issue and only one: the nation is in danger, this nation where we live, this nation that our children will inherit”²⁴.

In 1949, Najla Saab formed a follow up committee that, following the independence of Lebanon, started to press that women, who proved effective during the struggle for independence, be given their social and political rights. The electoral law of 1950 came as a slap in the face to the women’s movement; the law stated, “the only persons that could elect or be elected are those stated in the civil register as Lebanese and

²² Doughan, 12

²³ Nelda Lateef, *Women of Lebanon: Interviews with Champions for Peace* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 1997), 208

²⁴ Fares Ibrahim, 73

male”²⁵. In 1951, women took again to the streets asking for their rights. By 1952, most Lebanese associations were already working under the umbrella of the Lebanese Arab Women Council and the Lebanese Union of Women.²⁶ They met and formed a follow up committee that held a national convention attended by the Lebanese Union of Journalists and all the Lebanese Political parties of that era. The Convention issued a confirmation stating that the question of women’s rights is a national issue and promised to support the demands that the women’s associations will present to the Parliament.²⁷

That same year these Lebanese feminists and leaders of the campaign for women’s rights met and agreed to consolidate their efforts under one unified umbrella organization. They formed the Assembly of Lebanese Women’s Associations²⁸ by merging the Lebanese Arab Women Council and the Lebanese Union of Women, the biggest women’s organizations of that time. A Committee of nine women was elected to prepare a brief arguing in favor of women’s right to vote. Among them was the then young lawyer, Laure Moghaizel who later on was recognized as one of the pillars of women’s rights in Lebanon. In 1952, women won the right to vote but their victory was shadowed by the fact that only literate women with a school diploma²⁹ were given the right to vote. This was still discrimination as men had the right to vote independent of their education or lack of it. The women persisted in their struggle by arguing to the legislators that the issue in this instance is not women’s rights but the constitutional validity of a law that does not equate between the sexes as is stated in the Lebanese Constitution of that time. In 1953, the movement was successful in amending the law giving all women the right

²⁵ Iman Shammass Shukair, *Nisa' fi Mara' Seerat Laure Moghaizel* (Beirut: Dar Al-Nahar, 2002), 50.

²⁶ Fares Ibrahim, 60-66.

²⁷ Doughan, 12

²⁸ Later known as The Lebanese Council of Women

²⁹ The first stage school diploma granted at that time was the “Certificat”

to vote. It was their first victory, the culmination of many decades of activism and struggle by women's rights organizations and their allies. In order to confirm their newly acquired political rights, a number of women activists presented themselves to national elections. They were not elected. Ibtihaj Kaddoura, Laure Tabet, Munira Solh, and Emily Fares Ibrahim went on running for national elections until the early seventies but were never successful in being elected. Their insistence was intended to prove and confirm their political right to present their candidature to enter the Parliament.³⁰

1.2. The Lebanese Council of Women (1950s to 1975)

1.2.1. Raison d'être

The Lebanese Council of Women could be considered the culmination and institutionalization of years of women activism in Lebanon. Its raison d'être was to unify and provide direction to the Lebanese women's movement.³¹

The Lebanese women's movement started at the onset of the 20th century as a battle of thought and ideas fought by a number of pioneer women activists, journalists, writers, poets, and artists. Women's organizations of that era were mainly religious or charitable in nature, but early on, some pioneer women started forming women associations with the definite purpose of promoting and supporting women's rights. Nazek Al-Abed established in 1923, the Working Women Association to deal with problems related to workingwomen.³²

Women heading these organizations felt, early on, the need to unify their efforts, if they were to realize practical changes in society. They started

³⁰ *Profile* (Beirut: The Lebanese Council of Women, 2004):8

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Aghacy, 4

forming women's associations and unions. The year 1924 saw the birth of the Women's Council of Lebanon and Syria that grouped several women's organizations either involved in social reforms or headed by women politically engaged in the Arab nationalist campaign or the Lebanese political parties of that era.³³

The trend towards unification was not limited to the politically active women's organizations. The Lebanese Union of Women formed in the late thirties and officially instituted in 1949 counted twenty Christian women's organizations from Beirut and Mount Lebanon, most of them charitable in nature and aimed at helping the less privileged and improving the conditions of prisoners. "Their modus operandi was quite traditional in nature, like visiting prisons and supplying the prisoners with some basic food items such as sugar and rice. They rarely went deeper to address the real issues of social reform and amendment of the laws."³⁴

Many women activists of the times such as Ibtihaj Kaddoura, Evelyn Bustros, Najla Saab, Aline Rihani, Anissa Najjar, Olga Arsanius, Emily Fares Ibrahim, and Laure Moghaizel had another vision of the role of women's organizations. They did not deny that social organizations were able on the practical side to achieve a lot by putting their family connections with the governing circles and their bourgeois background at the service of the causes they supported³⁵. However, the aim of these pioneer women was to make the transition from 'feminine organizations' to 'feminist movement'. That is, from organizations instituted and headed by a woman whose actions are befitting the traditional vision of society of the role of women as caretakers, to a group of organizations working in concert to handle the issues of women's rights, equity and equality within society, and the amendment of discriminatory conditions and

³³ Shammās Shukair, 50

³⁴ *Ibid.* 48

³⁵ *Ibid.*

laws.³⁶ In other terms, their aim was to push for the creation of a women's rights movement by grouping the efforts of a bourgeois avant-garde to support the modernization of the laws that would benefit Lebanese women of all classes and advance the concepts of freedom, equality, and social justice within society as a whole.

These ideas had matured when in the late forties, the struggle for national independence succeeded and Lebanon became a sovereign country. The formulation of the Constitution was the perfect timing for the leaders of the women's movement to propose the unification of their efforts in order to push their political rights and demand the right to vote and be elected. The culmination of these efforts was the institution in 1952, of the Assembly of Lebanese Women's Associations³⁷ (later know as the Lebanese Council of Women) that grouped all women's organizations and associations of that time.

Since its inception, the Lebanese Council of Women (LCW) has stood for the continuous basic beliefs that were clearly stated in its constitution:

"To work for the advancement of women permitting them to practice their rights and duties; strengthen the spirit of cooperation between women's organizations; give support to its member organizations in the realization of their goals; work for the welfare of individuals and society as a whole; to participate in public life; endeavor in making women equal citizens; and finally work on establishing and strengthening relations with international organizations and in particular within the Arab region."³⁸

The purpose of LCW was not to be just another NGO. Its role was to provide direction and vision to the activities of its member organizations

³⁶ Shamma Shukair, 59-53

³⁷ This Association changed legally its name and became the Lebanese Council of Women in 1963. For Convenience purpose we will be using from now on in this dissertation the name of the Lebanese Council of Women (LCW)

³⁸ The Constitution of the Lebanese Council of Women

by coordinating their efforts and mobilizing their potential towards the common goal of serving women's rights.³⁹

1.2.3. Institution and Structure

The official birth of the Lebanese Council of Women was announced during a press conference on March 14, 1952, yet the planning for its institution commenced in the late forties and intensified following the 1950 electoral law that clearly stated that women did not have the right to vote.

Since 1947, there had been two distinct factions within the Lebanese women's movement: Laure Tabet at the helm of the Lebanese Union of Women that grouped Christian women's associations of charitable nature for the most, and Ibtihaj Kaddoura at the helm of the Lebanese Arab Women Council that was formed in 1929 and grouped women associations, some of which were parts of nationalist Arab or leftist parties. Unifying them required time and efforts as when there are two opposing groups of equal importance, it becomes very difficult for one of them to concede to the other.⁴⁰

Attorney Laure Moghaizel who at that time was a member of the Lebanese Phalanges party was one of those who worked diligently on unifying the Lebanese Woman's Movement. Her efforts bore fruits when on February 12, 1950 the Lebanese Union of Women and the Lebanese Arab Women Council accepted the invitation of the Phalanges to a meeting attended by the First Lady and wife of the Prime Minister of that time, in addition to Jamale Karam Harfoush, Emily Fares Ibrahim, and other independent women activists. It was the first of a series of get-togethers that led on 15-16 June 1950 to the first general convention of

³⁹ *Strategy 2004-2008* (Beirut: The Lebanese Council of Women, 2004)

⁴⁰ Lateef, 208

women's organizations that formed a follow up committee, the Executive Committee of Women's organizations in Lebanon.⁴¹

Under the leadership of this follow up committee the Lebanese women's movement stood unified in the struggle for the right to vote. Accordingly, when by 1952 the formation of LCW was announced, the Council had proved its efficiency and usefulness. It came as a natural evolution of the women's rights movement.

The Constitution, statutes and bylaws of LCW were advanced in comparison with the criteria of that era. One could even say that they are still valid 50 years later. Yet LCW remained anchored in the realities and specificities of the Lebanese society. Even though the structure of LCW was based since its inception on electoral representation, it guaranteed the delicate sectarian balance of the Lebanese society by restricting the free electoral process and specifying that the presidency should go alternatively to a Christian then a Muslim and so on.

LCW was instituted as an independent public entity represented by its president while the "organizations member keep their full independence and are not subject to interferences".⁴²

Since its inception, membership was restricted to those organizations whose aims did not contradict the basic principles of LCW. Independent women activists were accepted as non-voting members according to a preset selection process. The representatives of the organizations member of LCW form the General Assembly. The General Assembly elects every three years an Administrative Committee constituted of a President, a vice president, a secretary general, a treasurer, three correspondents (to insure proper coordination with member NGOs), a press delegate, and four expert consultants (for legal affairs, international relations and any other subject deemed necessary by the General Assembly). The major policy decisions are taken by a majority vote of 50 percent plus one of

⁴¹ Shammas Shukair, 51

⁴² The Constitution of the Lebanese Council of Women

the members of the General Assembly, and in case of tie, the president's voice would tip the balance.⁴³

1.2.4. Early Achievements

It is agreed that technically the first achievement of the Lebanese Council of Women was when on February 16 1953, the Lebanese Parliament voted a constitutional amendment granting women the right to vote and be elected same as men. This landmark in the history of the Lebanese women's movement is in fact the culmination of the efforts of the women and organizations that grouped under the banner of LCW and not intrinsically an achievement of the newly instituted organization.

The achievement of LCW in relation to the battle for political rights was the decision by Emily Fares Ibrahim, one of its founding members to become candidate for the parliamentary elections of 1953⁴⁴. This was such an avant-garde idea that she had to fight the battle of acceptance first within the ranks of her organization and then to take it to the society as a whole. Nevertheless, her efforts brought about a lobbying campaign that resulted in the first appointment of a woman to a public position in modern Lebanon. In 1953, three members of LCW were appointed members on the Council of the Municipality of the City of Beirut; they were Ibtihaj Kaddoura, Laure Tabet, and Aline Rihani.⁴⁵

These appointments constituted a landmark. LCW went on to lead the Lebanese women's movement in an incessant battle aimed at amending the laws that discriminate against women. The priorities of LCW were stated by Laure Moghaizel in a public speech she gave in 1954 where she listed thorny issues that needed to be addressed:

“the inheritance law; the marriage statutes; rules within the laws related to commerce, nationality, and work; rules within the penal

⁴³ Shammas Shukair, 56

⁴⁴ Fares Ibrahim, 2-5

⁴⁵ The archives of LCW

code; the restriction of public education to male students; the lack of nurseries and any institutions to help women participate into active economic life; ...”⁴⁶

The first battle the Council led on the legal front was the battle for the equality in inheritance rights between men and women. It started in 1953 and ended in 1959 with the adoption of a law stipulating “Equality in inheritance rights between men and women for all non-Mohammedan sects”.⁴⁷ This was in no way the achievement the members of the Council anticipated. After years of lobbying within the political, judicial, and governmental circles and awareness campaigns, they were defeated by the religious institution.

Lebanon at that time had no common inheritance law; the Personal Status Code of the Muslim community included an inheritance law according to the Shariaa while the Church did not have a unified inheritance law. Christians and Muslims alike followed the Muslim law of inheritance. This is why it was easier to get the Christian community to accept the stated law⁴⁸. Another important reason is that the Christian practice worldwide is for the testament to take precedence over any inheritance law. For the Muslim religious establishment that does not recognize the validity of any inheritance willing, the only acceptable option is the full application of inheritance according to what is stated in the Koran.

The real disappointment was that the defeat started by a division within the ranks of LCW itself. At first, all members of LCW were enthusiastic about taking the inheritance law head on. A committee formed from Muslim and Christian members was elected to draft an inheritance law acceptable to all parties. Unfortunately, the Muslim members of the

⁴⁶ Shammas Shukair, 58

⁴⁷ *Profile-Landmarks* (Beirut: The Lebanese Council of Women, 2004)

⁴⁸ Lateef, 208

committee soon resigned under tremendous popular and religious pressure.⁴⁹

It was a harshly learned lesson, and the members of the Council realized that the time to take the religious institution head on had not arrived yet. Accordingly, the Executive Committee of LCW opted to avoid a new defeat and rather than addressing the issue of a civil law, dealing with marriage as previously planned decided to work on a law related to the nationality of Lebanese women when they get married to a foreigner. Before 1960, when a Lebanese woman married a foreigner, she automatically became a foreigner herself; yet if a Lebanese man married a foreigner, his wife automatically became Lebanese. It was a well-deserved victory when in 1960 parliament voted a law giving Lebanese women who married a foreigner the right to choose which nationality they wish to keep after their marriage.⁵⁰

Parallel to the difficult battle for the amendment of laws, the Council was all through the fifties working on promoting the rights of women through lobbying, awareness campaigns, and networking with women's movements worldwide. LCW, at that time, was the only Arab council to be a member of the International Council for Women and played a leadership role in the Arab Council for Women (ACW). Ibtihaj Kaddoura, a founding member of LCW was elected president of ACW from 1949 to 1957 and a second time from 1962 to 1967⁵¹

1.2.5. The Sixties and Early Seventies

Organized efforts by women to achieve greater rights gained momentum worldwide during the 1960s. The struggle by African Americans to achieve racial equality in the US and the political movements that called

⁴⁹ Shammas Shukair, 59

⁵⁰ Lateef, 208

⁵¹ Fares Ibrahim, 66

for social change in Europe inspired women to renew their own struggle for equality.

In Lebanon, the sixties witnessed a boom in painting and sculpture as well as the writing of poetry and fiction by women. Women novelists dominated the scene during this period and overshadowed the works of men. Among them are Layla Baalbaki, Emily Nasrallah, Hanan al-Sheikh, Balqis al-Humani, Salwa Safi, Etel Adnan, Rafif Fattuh and many others. In the field of journalism, women remained active but the vast majority occupied positions as reporters, art critics, reviewers, correspondents, and fashion critics, but rarely did they make it as editors or columnists, especially in the political field.⁵²

The sixties and seventies witnessed also more interest by women in Medicine, Engineering, Law, Pharmacy, Business, and Business Management, but this did not translate into real gains for workingwomen. The overwhelming belief remained that the place of women is at home, taking care of their husbands and children. Because of this view of the role of women in the workforce, women were underpaid and very few managed to advance in their employment to decision-making positions.⁵³

These economic and social developments gave momentum to the women's movement. They drove women to organize again in order to demand equality. This led to the participation of women in civil rights activities whether the demands of the student movement or the worker's unions. Women participated also within the framework of political parties or movements active in Lebanon until the beginning of the Civil War on April 13, 1975.⁵⁴

These developments in the women's rights movement came at a time when Lebanon was witnessing, during the early sixties a shift in the

⁵² Rose Gurayyib, *Awda ala al Harakat al-Nisaiyya al-Muassira* (Beirut: The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1988), 219-229

⁵³ Aghacy, 4

⁵⁴ Azza Shrara Baydun, *Nisa' wa Jamiyyat*, (Beirut: Dar Al Nahar, 2002), 15

function and constitution of the Lebanese civil society associations. President Fouad Chehab elected in 1958 had been working diligently on the institutionalization of the Lebanese Government. Cooperation with the civil society was an integral part of his project; this initiative materialized through the creation of the Department of Social Development⁵⁵, a government sponsored institution created to coordinate and help the work of non-profit voluntary organizations⁵⁶. This helped the transition between purely charitable organizations to NGOs partners in the economic and political development of the country.⁵⁷

These major developments in social and economic conditions affected the structure of the Lebanese women's rights movement during the sixties and seventies. New women's associations were created, each aimed at serving a specific issue concerning women's rights. Some of these NGOs became member of LCW while others did not feel the necessity of joining LCW. Despite the fact that the monopoly of LCW on women's rights gradually eroded with time, the Council maintained its leadership role and was growing constantly; by 1970, it grouped 85 associations⁵⁸.

In the question of amending laws LCW, while constituting a powerful pressure group, remained the organization capable of coordinating the efforts of a wide variety of professional and active women in order to produce and present to the Parliament valuable and convincing legal briefs. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the legal team of LCW was, according to Laure Moghaizel, working on the amendment of five laws:

1. the law that forbids a married woman from leaving the country without the consent of her husband

⁵⁵ *Maslahat Al Inash Al Ijtimai*

⁵⁶ Until today the only legal nomination adopted in Lebanon for NGOs of all sorts is *Jamiyat La Tabgha Al Ribh* or non-profit organizations

⁵⁷ Shrara Baydun, 14

⁵⁸ Shammass Shukair, 73

2. the law stating that the credibility of a women's testimony is equivalent to one-third of a man's
3. the linkage and subordination of social security pensions for married women to their husband's pension
4. the reduction of prison sentences and acquittal of men who committed crimes of honor – where a man kills to save his honor, a situation recognized mainly in Mediterranean and Arab countries
5. the law requiring a woman to secure the permission of her husband to work or engage in commerce⁵⁹

The only achievement realized before the beginning of the Lebanese Civil war was in 1974, when women gained the right to travel without spousal permission. The other laws were amended following the end of the Civil War during the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁶⁰

On the level of representation, LCW remained during this historical period the only public face of the Lebanese women's movement. It represented Lebanon in regional and international venues and meetings. The most notable success of LCW was for Lebanon to be represented at the decision making level of the International Council of Women (ICW). During the 1960 Istanbul Conference, Laure Moghaizel was elected member of the Executive Committee, in the 1963 Washington Conference, she reached the position of vice-president, and in the 1966 Teheran Conference the position of First Vice-President. In 1970, the Belgium Council of Women, proposed Laure Moghaizel as a candidate to the presidency of ICW and other national councils seconded the proposal. The candidacy of a small country like Lebanon, and its international acceptance could be considered recognition from the international community for the achievements of LCW and its leadership of the Lebanese women's movement.

⁵⁹ Shammass Shukair, 209

⁶⁰ *Profile-Landmarks*

Laure was forced to withdraw her candidacy following Israeli pressures that leaked to the media articles written by her husband in defense of the Palestinians.⁶¹ However, her decision to withdraw in answer to the appeal of the national councils that had proposed her candidacy in the first place, and the grace with which she announced it worked to the advantage of LCW. Many promised firmly to back Lebanon for the next term.

This line of international recognition was interrupted on the 13th of April 1975 when the first bullet was shot in what was about to become a destructive Civil War that will change the face of Lebanon, rip the social web, and affect dramatically the women of Lebanon.

⁶¹ Shammās Shukair, 75

Chapter Two

Defining Moments for the Lebanese Women's Movement

This chapter aims to study the development and progress of the modern Lebanese women's movement and the role played by the Lebanese Council of Women.

Women are not separate from the social, cultural, and political context in which they live. The events that affected most the lives of women in Lebanon during the last two decades were and still are of a national nature, directly or indirectly related to the Lebanese Civil War, its consequences, and the post-war era including the return to normalcy and the reconstruction period. This chapter is intended to address the causality between the events and the changes, whether in the status of women, the NGOs sector, or the future of feminism.

Another important issue addressed in this chapter is the relation between the local and international levels in the progress of the struggle for women's rights. The advancement of feminism in Lebanon was negatively affected by the fact that Lebanon missed on the international effort to promote the cause of women around the world. According to

Mona Khalaf, director of Beirut's Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World:

“When most member states of the United Nations adopted during the United Nations Decade for Women (1976 – 1985) some form of government machinery to advance the status of women, Lebanon was in the midst of a civil strife that lasted for sixteen years and shattered its social and economic fabric. In fact, when the Nairobi Conference convened in 1985, Lebanon had been in a state of war for ten years.”⁶²

The Lebanese women's movement was not able, as it had done during the women-suffragist movement of the early twentieth century, to capitalize fully on the international drive that called for age-old forms of discrimination against women to be recognized for what they are: pernicious forms of injustice that harm not only women, but ultimately, the entire human race.

2.1. The Long Term Effect of the Lebanese Civil War

The fifteen years of civil war left, 150,000 dead, 100,000 handicapped from war injuries, and 900,000 refugees within their own country.⁶³⁶⁴ It is estimated that over 900'000 persons left the country during the 1975-1993 period seeking safety and economic opportunities⁶⁵. In relative terms, out of a population of about 3 million in 1975, five percent died, 3.33 percent became handicapped, close to a third emigrated, and another third was displaced. Behind these numbers is human suffering whose effects on generations of Lebanese cannot be fully assessed until today.

⁶² Emily Swartzlander, “Women and Politics in Lebanon”, *Journals from the Crossroads of the Middle East* (2001): www.scripps.ohiou.edu/news/beirut/emily.html

⁶³ Laurie King-Irani, “Recovering Women’s Voices in Post-War Lebanon”, (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. XII, No. 70 and 72):12

⁶⁴ Wikipedia Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese_Civil_War

⁶⁵ Khatoun Haidar, “Will this be a generation lost or a generation gained?” *The Daily Star*, Wednesday, March 24, 2004

Hundred of thousands of children grew in an atmosphere where the sound of shelling and rifles became part of their daily lives. The uniformity and normalcy of life was lost. The 40 to 50 years old of today studied, started their careers and formed their families in the midst of armed conflict. The 20 to 30 years old of today lived their formative childhood years in an atmosphere of fear. It is only the 10 years old that do not remember the warring period. The Lebanon of today was definitely shaped by these fifteen years of madness. Women are an integral part of the social order. If we are to objectively assess their conditions, their role in society, and the purpose of their organizations we need to take into consideration the long-term effects of this dark period in the history of Lebanon.

2.1.1. The Implications of the Civil War on the Role of Women

The Lebanese Civil War that started on April 13, 1975 and officially ended on October 22, 1989 by the Taif Agreement touched the lives of each and every person living in Lebanon. For many years, the men and women of Lebanon lived with death and destruction their bed partners. For most of this period, women -apart from a few who fought with militias- seemed to be playing an insignificant role in the politics of the country or its military destination. Most of the literature that deals with this historical period considers that "in general women have been victims, receiving blow after blow: their families scattered, their children made homeless, their sons, husbands, fathers or brothers killed. They have remained absent from the political scene and anguished spectators to the fighting. They have not questioned men's values, or their political ideas, or their reasons for fighting the war."⁶⁶

It is true that women during all of this period were not at the forefront of the political scene and few women were at the helm of any of the fighting political factions. However, it is important here to note that women as individuals were not as innocent in regards to their participation in the

⁶⁶ Wafa Stephan, "Women and War in Lebanon", (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. VII, No. 30):2

war as it is often romantically portrayed. Participation does not need to be active participation in combat; no army can fight without logistics and the role of women was essential to maintain the internal coherence in each of the regions that became quasi independent during the war. Maha El Khalil Chalabi, daughter of the vice-president of Al Ahrar –a party that took active part in the fighting- and president of the International Association to Save Tyre, commenting on the role of women during the war said, “I think that the Lebanese woman was a party in the war and not just a spectator. She has been more involved in human problems than in political ones. She was not on the forefront of the political scene but has backed many political leaders”.⁶⁷

Women as individuals were not above the religious or national fanaticism that drove men to commit the atrocious actions witnessed during civil wars. They cheered the victories, encouraged what they called their defenders or liberators, and cried over lost battles and assassinated leaders. It is women as a societal group that played a very crucial and positive role. As violence was threatening to tear apart the structure of society everywhere, “women helped to maintain a certain coherence, and sometimes even to restructure the network of social relations.”⁶⁸ Women became in charge of insuring the elementary needs for life, from securing water during the severe shortages, to baking bread the traditional way when the means of modern life broke down, and most importantly preserve the unity of the small family unit to reach the bigger circle of society as a whole. Within this context, the traditional role of women as guardians and keepers of the family took a very modern and valuable dimension.

Other women reached out actively outside their families; some established or volunteered in free dispensaries in their neighborhoods, others contributed to the care of the handicapped or the elderly, or helped

⁶⁷ Hania Osseiran, “Interview with Maha El Khalil Chalabi” (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. VII, No. 30, 1984):19

⁶⁸ Juliette Haddad, “Testimonies”(Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. VII, No. 30):8

in the educational field. Within this context, it is considered that "the disastrous impact of The Civil War on the economy and social services was mitigated by the efforts of women who rolled up their sleeves and went into action"⁶⁹.

Maintaining the normalcy of life and insuring the continuity of services are as important political roles as could be. However, this did not translate subsequently into feminist gains nor did it result into a major alteration of the perceived role of women in society. Before, during, and after The Civil War, the role of Lebanese women continued to be a supporting role. Women remained subordinated to the men in their families and the men in their political parties. They were never given a real voice in the choices that affected their lives.

The most relevant resultant of this period was the margin of independence women gained from working outside the home. It became a necessity brought about by the tough realities of war and the related economic conditions. This period witnessed the emergence of the phenomenon of "women heads of household"⁷⁰ which on the long run was beneficial to women as it contributed to "change the image of masculinity and power in the eyes of children. The image of a strong protective male started thinning down when children saw the mother in control."⁷¹

The long-term effect of this phenomenon and the validity of the change it brought about in real term are not certain if we look at today's statistical data. The percentage of working women in Lebanon is estimated at 28 percent of the total workforce while in developing countries, the average ratio is 38 percent and in industrialized countries, the average is 44

⁶⁹ Lateef, 3.

⁷⁰ During the war, many men were obliged to live away from their families, either as fighters or as migrant workers in the Gulf countries mainly.

⁷¹ Ilham Kallab, "Women and War in Lebanon", (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. VII, No. 30):7

percent.⁷² This despite the fact that Lebanon comes on the top of the list of developing countries in regards to the rates of university-educated women. However, 27 percent of these women graduates chose to stay at home and it is expected that most of them are celibate given that only 10.6 percent of married women join the workforce while 21 percent of non-married women are employed. The numbers soar to 44 percent for widowed women.⁷³ This is a clear indication that despite the acceptance of working women as a de facto reality, the overwhelming belief remains that the place of women is at home, taking care of their husbands and children.

2.1.2. Implications of the Civil War on the Objectives and Activities of Women's organizations

In view of the change that occurred due to conditions brought about by the war, it was only expected that women activism's focal point moves from promoting women's rights to facing the savagery of the civil strife that encroached upon the lives of women in different ways.

In fact, the gradual descent of Lebanon into fifteen years of civil war had a significant effect on all organizations concerned with civil society issues, modifying their course of action and gearing them toward salvage, recovery and care activities. NGOs started acting as a replacement to government and worked to make available within their own regions the services that the government was failing to provide. Due to the nature of these activities, the majority of these organizations got isolated within their own religious regional space, and often fell, willingly or not, under the influence or control of the militias prevailing in the regions where they operated.⁷⁴

⁷² The United Nation Fund Development Fund for Women – Arab Women Report 2004 (Arabic version)

⁷³ Fadia Hoteit, "Maternal feminism: the role and discourse of housewives in Lebanon", (Beirut: *Bahithat* Vol. VII, 2003-2004):297-298

⁷⁴ Shrara Baydun, 15

Women's NGOs that were originally established for the cause of promoting development on the national level shifted their direction towards locally based social and medical services. Their actions aimed at supporting the group they belonged to, in this instance the sect and the geographical dimension of their religious group.⁷⁵ NGOs that stressed the national dimension and endeavored to work on all the Lebanese territory faced many difficulties mainly due to the sectarian polarization of society as a whole.

The Village Welfare Society (VWF)⁷⁶ is an NGO that remained active on the national level during the war period. In addition to relief programs for displaced women, VWF continued to provide social services and vocational training to women in all Lebanese regions. The Founder and President of the VWF, Anissa Najjar best portrays the sectarian polarization when she sarcastically explains:

“When I went to work for the villages in the South, where there are a few Christian villages but many Shiite villages, some (...) would say: ‘Why should we go to the South?’ I would reply ‘Why shouldn’t we? They are Lebanese too! And besides, if you help others you will never need to use Max Factor products, because you will never have wrinkles’ [laughter] I’m not sure which provided the greater motivation!”⁷⁷

The convergence in the aims of women's organizations and the rationale of the men acting in their direct environment, whether political, familial or tribal, is best portrayed by the institution during the war of NGOs headed by women relatives of warlords, or women's NGOs directly linked to sectarian parties.⁷⁸ The involvement in social work of the wives

⁷⁵ Dalal Bizri and Azza Shrara Baydun, *Al Amal Al Ijtimai Wa Al Maraa: Kiraa Fee Al Dirasat Al Arabiya Wa Al Lubnaniya* (Beirut: Bahithat and Dar Al Jadid, 1998), 125

⁷⁶ An organization established in 1951, and that perceives village women as the custodians of Lebanese culture.

⁷⁷ Lateef, 215

⁷⁸ Dalal Bizri and Azza Shrara Baydun, *Al Amal Al Ijtimai Wa Al Maraa: Kiraa Fee Al Dirasat Al Arabiya Wa Al Lubnaniya* (Beirut: Bahithat and Dar Al Jadid, 1998), 126

or sisters of political figures through the establishment of NGOs is another manifestation of this phenomenon. Randa Berri, wife of the Amal Shiite movement leader later on elected Speaker of the Parliament heads a center for the rehabilitation of war handicapped. Mona Herraoui, wife of a Zahlé political Zaim⁷⁹ later on elected president of Lebanon, raises funds for several charities she presides. Bahia Hariri, sister of a philanthropist later on elected Lebanese Premier heads the Hariri foundation that grants annually thousands of academic scholarships. Nayla Moawad, wife of the head of a political family and long-term parliamentarian later on elected president of Lebanon, heads the René Moawad foundation. Rabab al-Sadr Charafeddine, sister of Moussa al-Sadr, the founder of Amal and the modern political Shiite movement heads several charity associations.⁸⁰

The dedication and humanitarian work of these women is highly appreciated in their communities. However, this does not necessarily make them feminist activists, nor automatically implies that the NGOs they head are part of the women's movement advocating women's rights. Randa Berri, wife of Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri, founder and president of the Lebanese Association for the Welfare of the Handicapped, when asked about how she became an activist answered:

"My husband's position as a leader during the Civil War turned me into a social activist. The war left behind lots of orphans, as well as handicapped, and wounded people...even though I did not consider myself an activist; I had to do something for those who were suffering."⁸¹

Moreover, when asked if she thought that men and women are equal, her answer was directed at stressing the motherhood and caretaker side of women. As for leadership roles she affirmed that women can be good

⁷⁹ Traditional Lebanese political leader that is best translated to English by the word chieftain.

⁸⁰ The archives of LCW and database

⁸¹ Lateef, 156

leaders "with the help of men, because women have the right outlook"⁸² referring to the sentimental side of women.⁸³

This compliance of the women's movement during the years of civil war to the demands and objectives of the group they belonged to resulted in a shift of women activities from feminism to pure social activism of humanitarian nature without the ultimate aim of developing the role of women on the national level.⁸⁴ Moreover, the isolation of women's NGOs within their own regions eliminated the possibility of networking their activities, thus robbing them of common purpose. The women's movement witnessed the same type of sectarian fragmentation the political Lebanese scene suffered from.

It is important at this point to note that despite the fragmentation, the country witnessed during the period 1975-1990 the reemergence of a small number of organizations that crossed confessional and regional borders such as the Lebanese NGO Forum⁸⁵ and the Collective of Lebanese Voluntary NGOs⁸⁶. These organizations managed to generate a network of relations and played a leading role in the antiwar movement that started as early as the year 1975. In his book *Les Actions Collectives de Résistance Civile à la Guerre* (Beirut 1993), G. Slaiby counts nineteen NGOs that engaged in anti-war activities and reports about one hundred fourteen major antiwar events that took place all through the period of the war. What he fails to report when talking about these events and those who contributed to them is that the gender balance of contribution in this instance tilts overwhelmingly in favor of women.⁸⁷

⁸² Lateef, 159

⁸³ Ibid. 156-159

⁸⁴ Dalal Bizri and Azza Shrara Baydun, *Al Amal Al Ijtimai Wa Al Maraa: Kiraa Fee Al Dirasat Al Arabiya Wa Al Lubnaniya* (Beirut: Bahithat and Dar Al Jadid, 1998), 126

⁸⁵ Muntada Al Mounazamat Ghayr Al Hukumyyat

⁸⁶ Collectif des NGO Liban

⁸⁷ Shrara Baydun, 15

The call for peace was embodied by popular singers such as Fayrouz and Sabah who led protest marches, singing patriotic songs, yet “the raw courage of these women is epitomized by journalist May Mnessa, who, as she covered the war, fearlessly berated the fighters to put down their weapons and stop fighting.”⁸⁸ When forced to pull over a barrier, she would get out of her car and tell the young militiamen

“What are you doing with your life? Don’t you know that you are destroying our country? What is to become of you after the war? Go to school!”⁸⁹

On the level of organized activities, the first of several timid attempts at protesting the war started with the 1975 peace March organized by the most comprehensive group of women's NGOs, the Lebanese Council of Women. The two major anti war movements that followed were led by women. In 1984, Iman Khalife, a 29 year old kindergarten teacher and researcher on the effects of war on children at the Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World at Beirut University College was behind the first significant anti war protest in Lebanon following the factional fighting that started on April 13, 1975. She was awarded in Stockholm on December 7, 1984, the “Right to Livelihood Alternative Nobel Prize for Peace” in recognition of her role as an initiator of the Peace Movement in Lebanon.⁹⁰

Iman Khalife, in an effort to transfer her frustration with the violence into positive energy envisioned during April 1984 a form of collective protest. She came up with the idea of organizing on May 6 a Peace march to the Green Line, then dividing Beirut in Christian East and Muslim West parts. The slogan proposed was “No to War, No to the tenth Year, Yes to Life”. She called friends and the suggestion snowballed. Independent activists and organizations got involved and the movement

⁸⁸ Lateef, 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 256

⁹⁰ “Pioneer” (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. VII, No. 30, 1984): 4

captured the attention of the local and foreign press and was internationally publicized.⁹¹ The silent majority was finally getting a voice. Sadly, the march never took place due to heavy shelling by the fighting factions, but this was the first step in a movement that evolved from the "May 6 March" to the "Committee for the May 6 March" that organized a campaign of signatures against violence. The well-known feminist activist Laure Moghaizel played a major role in organizing the gathering of signatures.⁹²

Attorney Moghaizel went on to organize in 1985 the "Friends of May 6" and then in 1986 founded the Nonviolent Movement in Lebanon. The movement organized several events and in 1987, together with the Handicapped Association undertook a 195 km march across Lebanon, from North to South. Among the participants in the rally, fifty young men on wheelchairs, twelve blind persons, and twenty war-handicapped. For four days and nights, they marched, sleeping on the roadsides, chanting for peace.⁹³

The achievements of the Peace Movement in Lebanon may seem today quite symbolic in nature, however they represent a vision of Lebanon that is today attractive to all and that was then the dream of a few. Women's organizations here again were not able to capitalize on their leadership of the Peace Movement that became quite timid following the end of the war due to the occupation of the South by Israel and the ensuing resistance.

The end of the war did not bring noticeable gains to the women's movement. By the end of the war, the movement was fragmented along sectarian lines and despite the significant role women's organizations played on the internal regional level by providing social and medical services, they were not able to capitalize on the level of decision-making.

⁹¹ "Pioneer" (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. VII, No. 30, 1984): 4

⁹² Shammas Shukair, 128

⁹³ *Ibid.* 129

On the national level, women's organizations that acted in replacement of the government and maintained the unity of the country on so many levels were not called upon to participate in the planning of the post-war era.

The long-term effect of the war period on women's organizations cannot be assessed fully. Women during the war became engaged in greater numbers in organized activity frameworks. However, the number of women's NGOs active in the fields of women's rights significantly reduced. Few women activists rose to the upper echelons of their political parties and the participation of women in the political decision-making remains negligible until this date.

In the first parliamentary elections after the war held in 1992, 3 women won their first term. The number remained unchanged in the 1996 and the 2000 parliamentary elections. The 2005 election saw six women gaining access to parliament. This was encouraging to some, but to many women's rights activists, a women's representation of 4.6 percent of the 128 seat brings forward the obstacles Lebanese women must overcome before having a true political life, especially that the majority of women who gained parliamentary seats owe their positions to men⁹⁴ and none of them was elected on a feminist platform.^{95,96}

2.1.3. The Purpose and Strategy of the Lebanese Council of Women

LCW, being in essence an association of women's NGOs that early in the war grouped about one hundred NGOs, was affected on several levels by the conditions brought about by The Civil War and the manner in which they contributed to shape the role of women and women's organizations.

⁹⁴ Nayla Moawad is the wife of slain president Renee Moawad, Bahia Hariri is the sister of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and Gilberte Zwein is the daughter of a politician

⁹⁵ Emily Swartzlander, "Women and Politics in Lebanon" (*Journals From The Crossroads Of The Middle East*, 2001):www.scripps.ohiou.edu/news/beirut/emily.html

⁹⁶ *Concept Paper for the Gender Equity Seminar*, prepared by The Arab NGO Network for Development (Beirut: 12 October 2005)

The Organizations member of LCW, same as all other NGOs undertook independently, each in the region it is located in, to provide social and medical services to those affected by the war whether displaced persons, refugees, wounded, orphans, or widows. On the other hand, one of the major achievements of LCW -an umbrella organization representing all of Lebanon's factions- was to preserve its unity under very difficult conditions and to be actively engaged in anti war activities ranging from marches protesting the war, to sit-ins, the symbolic removal of the barriers separating the regions, and calling for protest strikes.⁹⁷

The policy adopted by the Lebanese Council of Women all through the Lebanese Civil War was to refuse the violence and the ensuing de facto fragmentation of the country along sectarian lines. This course of action was clearly adopted by LCW at the very early stages of the armed confrontations and was pursued unrelentingly throughout the fifteen years of the Civil War through the active participation of LCW in civil society activities calling for the preservation of the country's unity.

On May 31 1975, a meeting was held at the home of Ms. Zahiya Salman, attended by those who could physically reach the meeting place as the fighting was preventing the free movement of people. In attendance were women of all religions that were active within LCW and some of its founding members: Zahia Salman, Nahiya Gholmiyeh Edde, Zahia Kaddoura, Laure Moghaizel, Asma Diab, Abla Khoury, Ihsan Mahmasani, Emily Nasrallah, Noor Sawaya, and Aida Farhat.⁹⁸

They ended the meeting with a call for a rally on June 2, 1975 at the headquarters of the Lebanese Press Order, to be followed by a protest march. In a statement of three points, they refused the use of violence as a means of solving political problems. Called on the authorities to take measures to impose security, and demanded the speedy nomination of a

⁹⁷ Shrara Baydun, 16

⁹⁸ Michel Layyoon, *Nahiya Gholmiyeh Edde* (Beirut: Shamaly and Shamaly Press, 2004), 101

follow the example of Parliament that was one of the few Lebanese institutions that preserved its unity during the fifteen years of strife.¹⁰³

During a public statement issued on January 9, 1979, Emily Fares Ibrahim, evaluating this period, said:

“At that time, the Council grouped women's organizations, representing all religions and political direction...living together and cooperating to face the whirlwind of violence that was sucking Lebanon to the eye of the storm day after day. The Council tried to face the bullet with the word...it succeeded in some instances, and failed in others. The Council failed to protect itself from the effects of the war and was not able to escape from the mass madness. LCW whose ranks were never sorted on the basis of sectarian or factional belonging had to suspend its activities in order to preserve its unity for the purpose of protecting itself from the random arrows of division”.¹⁰⁴

In 1983, following the Israeli invasion of Beirut and during the brief period of peace that followed the Israeli withdrawal, the Council proved once again its capacity at preserving its unity and gearing itself towards an active role in promoting women's rights. On April 22 1983, LCW held its first General Assembly since 1974 in the presence of the representatives of the President of the Republic and of the Prime Minister. This was the first time in the history of LCW that representatives of the government were invited to attend a General Assembly. The aim was to involve the authorities and force them to face their responsibilities in regards to women issues. A full program and strategy of action with a timeframe was presented during the Assembly. The importance of this event is that despite the political polarization of the period, LCW was able to unite the country under the umbrella of women issues. Shortly after came the April 17 peace accord with Israel

¹⁰³ Shammass Shukair, 79-81

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 78

and the country fell again into a split that escalated into armed confrontations. Once again, elections were suspended and the Council entered into a new phase of freezing its legal procedures.¹⁰⁵

The decision to preserve the status quo and suspend elections was wise both times, as it gave Emily Fares Ibrahim and the Executive Committee members, together with the previous presidents of LCW and the activist members of the General Assembly, the opportunity and liberty to pursue their activities and represent the Council at local, regional, and international venues. When the war ended, LCW was still one body, united and was able to hold elections in 1991 and fully resume its mission.

On the national level, and despite the fact that with the war and the government being dismantled, people stopped focusing on women's rights, LCW did not stop its struggle for the amendment of laws that are discriminatory against women. The battle was difficult and complicated given the conditions prevailing in the country. The Parliament rarely met, and it was difficult to mobilize the public -even women- to support a cause related to the amendment of laws when there was no central authority in the country. Nevertheless, the women's movement remained focused and was able to realize two major amendments to the articles of the Lebanese law: 1983-the annulment of all punitive statutes with respect to contraception; 1987-the unification of the age of retirement at 64 years for both men and women.¹⁰⁶

On the international level, LCW took part in the International Council of Women's (ICW) conference held in Chantilly-Gouvieux- France, in May 1980. The delegation was able to push for the passing of a resolution whereas ICW in its consultative status¹⁰⁷ recommends that the United Nations organizations support LCW's national projects aimed at

¹⁰⁵ Shammass Shukair, 82-84

¹⁰⁶ *Profile* (Beirut: The Lebanese Council of Women, 2004):9

¹⁰⁷ ICW holds a consultative status at the United Nations and maintains permanent and accredited representatives to the UN.

furthering the education of women, improving alphabetization levels, and bettering the image of women in the media.¹⁰⁸

The Lebanese Council of Women represented Lebanon during the same year at Copenhagen's United Nation Conference for "Equality, Development, and Peace". The delegation this time faced hostility and attacks for its position in relation to the 1978 Camp David Peace Accord between Israel and Egypt¹⁰⁹. This experience drove the Council to increase its networking efforts in order to promote the cause of Lebanon with the international community. Lebanon witnessed during this period a failure in communication with the rest of the world due to the breakdown in services and the destruction of the infrastructure that resulted from years of warring activities, not to mention the repetitive closures of Beirut international airport. By 1985, Lebanon was in the midst of sharp divisions, and no official delegation was sent to participate in the United Nation's conference held in Nairobi, Kenya. Among the subjects to be discussed by more than 156 countries attending the conference was the assessment of the progress done worldwide under the UN decade-for-women agenda, and to set the agenda for the coming decade.¹¹⁰

The Lebanese Council of Women was adamant to participate in the conference in spite of the material and operational difficulties. It was decided that a small delegation of five attends the conference. In an effort to demonstrate to the world, the determination and resilience of the Lebanese civil society and its commitment to the principles of the conference "equality, development, and peace", LCW worked on insuring the symbolic participation of representatives of other NGOs in the delegation despite the material difficulties involved. Lebanon presence was not only symbolic as Laure Moghaizel presented in the name of

¹⁰⁸ Laure Moghaizel in a report to the Council about her mission to ICW May 1980, the Archive of the Lebanese Council of Women

¹⁰⁹ Shammas Shukair, 85

¹¹⁰ Gurayyib, 240

LCW several interventions stressing the legal side of women's rights including a comparative study and pinpointing the laws that still need amendment.^{111 112}

The escalation of the crisis and the deep divisions that the country lived during the second part of the 1980s hit very hard the Lebanese Council of Women. It became impossible for the Executive Committee to hold regular meetings, many new regional NGOs were formed, and a number of NGOs were dissolved. The active NGOs member of LCW was reduced to a skeleton of twenty-eight organizations. It is during those very difficult circumstances that Emily Fares Ibrahim accompanied by Laure Moghaizel decided to attend in 1986 the periodic meeting of the International Council of Women held in London -UK. The aim was to try to place Lebanon on the forefront of public opinion. The Council was also present at the 1987 seminar organized by the Arab League in Paris-France. The paper presented by LCW was titled "The Lebanese women, witness to the War".¹¹³

All of the efforts of LCW during these last years of the war that ended officially in 1989 were geared towards trying to unify the civil society organizations against the war. In 1989 and 1990, the last throws of the war were especially destructive. LCW, expressing the frustration of the Lebanese silent majority, published on February 15, 1990 a very strong public statement adopted by all of its members:

"We, the members of voluntary civil society organizations upon which falls most of the responsibilities of dealing with and healing the tragedies and horrors of war, have the reason and right, even the duty, to declare at high voice our refusal of this war and any war on any part of Lebanon. Our organizations collect blood drop by drop and they (the fighting factions) spill it on the roads. Our

¹¹¹ Shammas Shukair, 84-86

¹¹² The archives of LCW

¹¹³ Shammas Shukair, 87-91

organizations care for the handicapped while they scatter human remains (the victims of shelling) in the squares...Enough! How many orphans, handicapped, needy, homeless, displaced and deprived persons are enough to quench the blood thirst of the fighter or bring them to their senses?"¹¹⁴

The armed conflict concluded after the intervention of the Syrian army against General Aoun on October 13, 1990. According to Laure Moghaizel, by that time "women's rights were no longer a priority; the war forced us (the Lebanese Council of Women) to shift our struggle to the necessities of mere existence and survival."¹¹⁵

The long-term effect of fifteen years of armed conflict on the purpose and strategy of the Lebanese Council of Women cannot be easily assessed. LCW came out of the war as the leader of the Lebanese women's movement on many levels. It maintained its unity throughout a period where sectarian and tribal divisions affected the fabric of Lebanese society and through it proved that women are united and rally behind their specific causes. LCW furthermore proved the universality of women issues by maintaining a presence of Lebanese women on the international scene. LCW main course of action during the fifteen years of armed conflict was to build on the vast refusal of Lebanese women the consequences of warring on their families and translated this phenomenon into a Peace Movement. Behind these achievements are the concerted actions of Emily Fares Ibrahim and a group of exceptional women activists, some of them pioneers of the Lebanese women's movement.

The women, who joined social activism during the war and the new NGOs that became member of LCW, were mainly concerned with care and charity voluntarism given that women's rights and issues had taken second stage at that time. The long-term effect of this phenomenon may

¹¹⁴ Shammas Shukair, 92 corroborated by the archives of LCW

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 89

be critical for the future of the feminist movement. With the normal age-related retirement of the pioneer activists approaching, the Lebanese women's movement may find that the new generation of women leaders of the movement are removed from the principles of feminism. Their experience and formation was during an era where the focus was voluntarism versus feminism.

The actual strategy of LCW, in the opinion of many is flawed ensuing the gearing of its activities towards voluntarism that was a direct resultant of the war period. Lamia Shehadeh, author of *Women and War in Lebanon*, published by University Press of Florida, 1999 claims that the shift from political to social focus started with the Lebanese Council of Women. Shehadeh considers that although the organization is still in effect, it does not focus on feminism or women's rights anymore, but concentrates on volunteerism.¹¹⁶

2.2. The Post War Era

We discussed in the first part of this chapter the role of women during the war and the importance of their contributions in preserving social cohesion as well as their contribution to the peace movement. "Women's voices have been relatively quiet in post-war Lebanon. (...) Whether they are activists in non-governmental organizations, scholars, lawyers, artists, writers, educators or physicians, very few women occupy positions of power in the decision making ranks of post-war Lebanese society or government. Considering the sacrifices they made, the hardship they overcame, and the experiences they gained during the war, women's exclusion from power in the post-war period is a waste of their talents and a loss for Lebanon as a whole."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Swartzlander,

¹¹⁷ "Recovering Women's Voices in Post-War Lebanon", (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol.XII, Nos. 70 and 71):12

On the other hand, women made certain gains. We have to recognize that there is a change, even though minimal, in the political power structure. Women entered parliament and their numbers increased from three in 1992 to six in 2005. It is true that their majority came into politics the traditional way as wives or sisters of politicians; however, they have paved the way for others to follow.

A survey commissioned by the Lebanese Council of Women during the last week of 2005 confirmed not only the Lebanese society's respect for women, but also its keenness to let them take their role in public issues. The field study was conducted in the five regions: North Lebanon, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, South Lebanon, and Beirut. The number of surveyed persons was 2,513, and the results indicated that 76 percent of the Lebanese population approves of women running for parliamentary elections.¹¹⁸

The same survey showed that 60 percent of men and 80 percent of women agree with the idea of women working outside the home. However, the most relevant result to our discussion is that 91 percent of the Lebanese population approves of women engaging in social activities through their work in women's organizations.¹¹⁹ This could be considered one of the most indicative long-term effects of The Civil War on women in Lebanon.

2.2.1. The Role of the Lebanese Council of Women¹²⁰

The Lebanese Council of Women was one of the few national Lebanese organizations that during the civil war period did not split along sectarian lines into two organizations, one Christian and one Muslim. This was true on paper, however the reality of the matter was that due to the

¹¹⁸ A survey of 1500 samples spread over the Lebanese territory. LCW is distributing copies of the complete survey report free of charge to NGOs, the press, educational institutions, and researchers.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ The information included in this section is taken from an interview (December 2005) with Dr. Aman Shaarani, corroborated by the archives of LCW.

danger of crossing from one region to another, there was no way for the NGOs member of LCW to meet at the central offices, that at that time were situated in West Beirut. Emily Fares Ibrahim, president of LCW during this period had to concede to the Executive Committee members residing in West Beirut to use the locales for their meetings. Soon the locale was hijacked by the women member of the parties prevailing in West Beirut and their meetings lost any legal significance to LCW and its member organizations.

When the war ended, a number of feminist activist members of LCW, together with the president, met to discuss their options. Among them were Dr. Aman Shaarani, Laure Moghaizel, Emily Fares Ibrahim, Nour Salman, and many others. They met in LCW offices among dusty boxes full of documents. The organization had no funds, some of the forty organizations still member of LCW had not communicated with each other for years, and the country was still suffering from a psychological divide between the Christian and Muslim regions. The movement of people from one region to another was still reduced to a minimum. The picture was not rosy except for the will of these women and their belief in the unifying dynamic that women issues can play.

The most pressing issue was for LCW to regain its legality and legitimacy by organizing new elections. The last elections took place before the Civil War. The reigning president and administrative body had lost their democratic legitimacy, though technically they were still legal according to the bylaws of LCW. Many of them were deceased and some were too old to carry on. Any resolution taken by Emily Fares Ibrahim and her Executive Committee could be seriously challenged without the legitimacy of the democratic process.

However, prior to the election and following a serious discussion of the developments that stemmed from fifteen years of civil war. It became clear to the activists that met that day in the locales of LCW that it was necessary to amend the administrative structure of LCW in order to be able to cope with the decentralization that resulted from the isolation of

each region from the other during the war period. There was an urgent need to add to the Executive Committee a representative for each of the Lebanese regions in order to insure a better communication and synergy with local NGOs. Some other amendments were suggested in order to have a better distribution of tasks in order to involve a bigger number of women in the restructuring process. Amendments were drawn adding to the Executive Committee representatives for each of the six Lebanese districts, four vice-presidents, and a Secretary General. The suggested amendments also increased the number of specialized committees to six committees with the chairpersons of these committees becoming members of the Executive Committee.

This is how in 1992 a new administrative structure for LCW was voted. Until today, LCW is managed according to the same formation that was born out of the ashes of a long period of strife.¹²¹

Following the amendment of the administrative structure at the Ministry of Interior, the preparation for the elections started. The most difficult task was to reach the NGOs member of the General Assembly and to group the electoral body in one locale. Dr. Aman Shaarani and Zahia Kaddoura presented their candidature for the presidency. Dr. Kaddoura, a pioneer of the feminist movement was quite old at the time. She withdrew her candidature the day of the election when she realized that her chances of winning were quite low.

Following her election Dr. Shaarani had two priorities: to reach out for the organizations member of LCW in their own regions and to recruit the new women's NGOs that had formed during the war. Between 1992 and

¹²¹ LCW has a simple structure based on electoral representation. The General Assembly groups the elected presidents of the member NGOs. They elect every four years an Executive Committee (EC) consisting of: a president, four vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer, a representative before the government, and a representative for each of the six Lebanese districts (Beirut, the Bekaa district, Mount Lebanon, Nabatyeh, North Lebanon, and the South). A chairperson for each of the six following committees are also members of the EC: the Committee for Arab and International Relations, the Financial Committee, the Legal Committee, the Committee for Media and Culture, the Committee for Planning and Studies, the Committee for Social Affairs. The Executive Committee in turn appoints an Advisory Board.

1993, Dr. Shaarani and her Executive Committee traveled from region to region promoting the importance of the role of the Lebanese Council of Women. For some women and women's organizations, these visits constituted an introduction to LCW and the Lebanese women's movement. They knew little of the history of the feminist movement. For others it was just an introduction to women from other regions and to their problems. By the end of the period, the Council increased its membership list and counted 120 women's NGOs and associations, and by the end of Dr. Shaarani's presidency, the Council counted 136 members.

Remembering this first year, Dr. Shaarani evokes some emotional experiences:

“You cannot imagine how we were received in Zahle. It was very touching. A young woman told me that she had never interacted in depth with Muslim women. She was amazed to realize that they had the same opinions and goals. At each meeting and stop on our tour of the Lebanese regions, I became more and more convinced that women issues transcend religion and tribal divisions. Women are united in their struggle for a balanced society.”¹²²

It became clear to Dr. Shaarani and her team that LCW was facing a new situation quite different from that of the pre-war period. Most women's NGOs were social in nature, geared towards relief and social services. Few had a feminist agenda per se.

It was quite important to find common grounds and to coordinate the efforts of various NGOs, and not only in relation to women's rights. Dr. Shaarani and the Executive Committee came up with the idea of establishing a Lebanese Artisan selling point in order to help all NGOs market their products. The first year was quite difficult as there was no governmental or international funding. The idea worked and the second

¹²² Interview with Dr. Aman Shaarani conducted by Lamia Osseiran, Beirut, Dec 2005.

year the Ministry of Social Affairs started funding the “Artisan Libanais” and later on took over the full administration of the project.

This was a very interesting experience as it succeeded to put in contact NGOs that for years were operating within their own regions without getting in touch with any person from another sect or religion. Women met, shared their skills and experiences.

“Through their interaction, they realized that they belong to a wider sisterhood that extends to the country as a whole; they were Lebanese women, presenting the Lebanese cultural heritage through the works they were producing, whether knitting, carving, weaving, or jewelry design.”¹²³

Finding a common unifying cause for women's NGOs member of LCW being a priority, Dr. Shaarani, together with the administrative committee saw the need for an empirical assessment and evaluation of the specifics and aims of the NGOs member of LCW. They saw the necessity to proceed in an organized and practical manner. Accordingly, the Council undertook a thorough field study that covered all of Lebanon. This survey took two years to be concluded. The results were published partially in 1994¹²⁴ and in the form of a complete database for the Council in 1996¹²⁵. This database became the basis needed to assess the real impact of the war on the NGOs member of LCW, and a starting point for the reunification of the Lebanese women's movement.

The results of the survey having indicated that only 33 percent of LCW's NGOs were concerned primarily with women issues, 41 percent being social in nature, 13 percent educational, and 9 percent concerned with

¹²³ Interview with Dr. Aman Shaarani conducted by Lamia Osseiran, Beirut, Dec 2005

¹²⁴ Fredrich Ebert Institution in cooperation with the Lebanese Council of Women, *Amal Al Nisaa fi Al Haya't alAhliyya*, (Beirut: 1994)

¹²⁵ The Lebanese Council of Women in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, *Aamal alJamyyat wa alMuassassat al Muntasiba ila alMajlis AlNisaaee ALubnane*, (Beirut: 1996)

health issues.¹²⁶ It becomes evident that following the war, the women's rights movement was geared toward social work and volunteer efforts.

LCW efforts to unify and revive the Lebanese women's movement were not limited to the reorganization of LCW internal house. Involving a big number of women in events and conferences was essential at that time if LCW was to bolster the cause of women's rights and close the ranks of Lebanese women around the issues related to the amendment of laws and the improvement of women's conditions. As soon as LCW resumed its activities in 1992, the Council revived the tradition of celebrating March 8 –the international woman's day- by organizing an event in which the wider public can participate.¹²⁷

The Council went further to renew its cooperation with international and regional organizations. In 1992 they organized, in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, a conference around the role of women in the political decision making process.¹²⁸ In 1993, once again in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, LCW organized a conference about the role of women in development.¹²⁹

It is through this relation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation that LCW came to know about the Fourth International Conference of Women (the Beijing Conference) held under the theme of "Equality, Peace, and Development". Nobody in Lebanon was concerned with the issue after such a long period of being totally cut from the rest of the world.

The first women's conference had been held in Mexico in 1975, and was heralded the start of the UN decade for women. This same year Lebanon fell into a state of civil war and missed the event that marked the beginning of an international movement for the recognition of women's

¹²⁶ The Lebanese Council of Women in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, 18

¹²⁷ The Lebanese Council of Women, *The Achievement of LCW 1992-1996*, (Beirut: LCW publications, 1996), 5

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 6

needs, perspectives and rights. Furthermore, Lebanon had been absent from the third women's conference held at Nairobi in 1985. It is at this conference that the "Forward Looking Strategies", due for review during the Beijing Conference were originally drawn.¹³⁰

The initiation of the process leading to the participation in the Beijing Conference and LCW efforts and input that made the Lebanese participation possible can be considered an extraordinary achievement in the history of LCW, and one of the most important modern testimonies about its unifying role as a leader of the women's movement.

2.2.2. The Beijing Conference

As soon as Dr. Shaarani became aware of the Beijing Conference, she saw an opportunity to unify women associations around a subject dealing with the bolstering of women's rights. It was a golden occasion to involve the wider public in a women's issue and to help LCW to regain its role as a leader of the Lebanese women's movement.

The first step was to prepare the documentation necessary to send to the conference commission in order to qualify for participation. The registration was entered in the name of the Lebanese Council of Women who was accredited as a national commission of NGOs.¹³¹ Dr. Shaarani saw the necessity to involve all the civil society sectors involved in women issues. A new entity was formed under the name of "The National Committee for Follow up of Women's Issues"¹³² (hereinafter referred to as the NGO Committee). The NGO Committee was formed from the NGOs member of LCW and independent activists under the presidency of Dr. Shaarani.

¹³⁰ The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing 1995 was called by the General Assembly of the UN to review the "Forward Looking Strategies" drawn up ten years earlier, at the third women's conference held in Nairobi.

¹³¹ The preparatory committee for the conference had encouraged the formation of national civil society entities for each of the participant countries

¹³² Al Lujna Al Ahliyyat Li Mutabaat Kadaya Al Mara'at

The second logical step was to contact the government and urge them to participate in the conference. "It was necessary for Lebanon to present a unified face to the world after such a long absence from the international arena due to 15 years of civil war."¹³³ The suggestion was to form a National Committee¹³⁴ where NGOs and the government could work together to prepare a unified Lebanese report and recommendations. Given that in Lebanon there is no ministry of women, the appointments were made from several ministries and independent personalities. Sadly, many of those appointed by the government were persons with no connection or history with women issues. There was a real attempt to highjack the commission from the NGOs, Dr. Shaarani held firm. Given that, the registration had been initiated by LCW,¹³⁵ the final compromise was that "the National Committee, which was formed by a Council of Ministers' decree, included seven members of the NGO Committee. Thus, the National Report for the Beijing Conference had both an official and an NGO dimension and was the outcome of concerted efforts between both committees."¹³⁶ Out of the seven representatives of the NGO sectors, five participants were members of LCW.¹³⁷

The two years preparation for the conference created an opportunity to involve a number of women in related activities and to regroup Lebanese women around a feminist agenda. The NGO planning committee held seminars, discussion panels, and simple meetings in universities, to get the opinion of the wider public in order to come up with a representative report to be presented at the conference. In addition, the NGO Committee organized in 1994 a conference under the title "Increasing awareness

¹³³ Interview with Dr. Aman Shaarani

¹³⁴ The preparatory committee for the conference had encouraged the formation of national commissions grouping the governmental and non governmental sectors for each of the participant countries

¹³⁵ Interview with Dr. Aman Shaarani

¹³⁶ Mona Khalaf, *The Lebanese national Women Machinery, Where does it stand?*, EGM/National Machinery/2004/EP.6 (Rome: 31 January 2005)

¹³⁷ *The Achievement of LCW 1992-1996*, 34

about women's rights". In the year 1995, the Committee organized several events in preparation for the Beijing Conference. These events included: a conference under the title "The Participation of Women in the Political Decision Making Process"; an educational workshop in Tripoli; a seminar about the role of NGOs and governmental organization in the bettering of women conditions on the national level; a seminar about the effects of armed conflicts on women; and a seminar about working women, and a seminar about women in the media.¹³⁸

Dr. Ilham Kallab, a professor and a researcher on women's issues and a member of the official delegation to the Beijing Conference explained during an informal gathering at the Institute of Women's Studies in the Arab World entitled "Beijing and After" that "the Lebanese national delegation was composed of members who served on both the governmental and NGO planning committees. Consequently, the Lebanese report was the result of coordinated work between both groups. This cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations was a new and very good experience."¹³⁹

The actual participation in the Beijing Conference, and what followed, came as an anticlimax to what was hoped to be a revival of the Lebanese women's movement. The NGO Committee delegation in which 60 members of LCW participated attended the NGO conference held at Huairo. They organized six workshops and showed a video presentation about the Israeli aggressions against Lebanon. However, the delegation was frustrated by organizational issues that neutralized their voices and interventions. They were allocated residences very far from the formal delegation. "Even those members of the NGOs who were official consultants, and hence obliged to be directly connected with the formal delegation, were not able to perform their job as well as they should, because of the difficulties in transportation. Moreover, the NGOs did not

¹³⁸ *The Achievement of LCW 1992-1996*, 6-7

¹³⁹ Ghena Ismail, "Beijing and After", (Beirut: *Al Raida* Vol. XII, Nos. 70and71):9

have the opportunity to take part in the lobbying at the political conference.”¹⁴⁰

The real problem was at the level of the Lebanese official delegation. The official conference that lasted a week had assigned for the Lebanese official delegation an attendance of four members. The First Lady, Mona Herraoui presided the delegation and chose the members without any real consideration of the role they were to play. She designated as members the Lebanese Ambassador to China and another Lebanese ambassador. She disregarded the president and members of the National Committee. The only member she chose with feminist credentials was Laure Moghaizel. According to Dr. Shaarani:

“Mona Herraoui attended only three days of the conference during which she organized social activities and did not attend any of the important meetings. She left after three days and put in charge the Lebanese Ambassador. He had no clue about the subject, the plan of action, or the report to be presented. Nour Salman, Linda Mattar, and I (Dr. Aman Shaarani) did our best to help and fill in, however we were undermined by the fact that the official Lebanese plan of action was not clear.”¹⁴¹

2.2.3. The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW)

After the return from Beijing, the Council of Ministers, in line with the Beijing conference recommendations approved the formation of a national committee for women affairs – “the National Committee for Lebanese Women (NCLW)” – under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister’s Office, with special funds allotted to it in the budget of that office.”¹⁴² The relation between the non-governmental sector and the Government deteriorated further following governmental efforts to

¹⁴⁰ Ismail, 9

¹⁴¹ Interview with Dr. Aman Shaarani

¹⁴² Khalaf, EP.6

sideline the civil society sector. This trend continued until 1998 when NCLW became a body controlled by government employees and officials. The only feminist activist was Dr. Shaarani who soon resigned as she felt that her presence was becoming useless.¹⁴³

The end of the year 1998 was a turning point in the history of the NCLW. A legislative law (No. 720) was promulgated in November 1998, altering its name from a "committee" to a "commission". According to the Constitution Under law no. 720 5/11/98 (the Constitution of the National Commission for Lebanese Women) specifically Article 3, the President of the Republic together with the Prime Minister are the only persons in charge of nominating the members of the General Assembly. All decisions have to be approved by the President of the Commission, who is appointed by the President of the Republic. The actual President of the Commission is the First Lady, the vice-president is the wife of the Speaker, and the wife of the Premier is a member. There is no stipulation for seats reserved to the NGO sector or clear criterion for the selection of the other members.¹⁴⁴ This is not to say that some very competent professional women and well-known researchers are member of NCLW. However, the fact that all members are nominated by the Cabinet and the President of the Republic with no democratic process in place and no participation of NGOs as was planned when the Commission was first formed has undermined its role as a representative of Lebanese women and their interests.

The formation of the National Commission for Lebanese Women was supposed to promote women's rights through a close cooperation between the government and non-governmental sector. The outcome is a total disengagement from the civil society and the creation of yet another governmental institution not subject to the rules of democracy or competence.

¹⁴³ Interview with Dr. Aman Shaarani

¹⁴⁴ NCLW website <http://www.nclw.org.lb/>

Mona Khalaf, quoting one of the members of NCLW, considers that the National Commission is facing difficulties in achieving its targets because of several factors, among them the structure and composition of the general assembly. Although the members of the general assembly are prominent and educated women, most of them were not active in the Lebanese women's movement and are not concerned by the feminist discourse. Furthermore, all decisions have to be approved by the appointed President of the Commission except for budget allocations that are fully under the control of the Council of Ministers.

NCLW, according to the same source has failed to establish proper and direct communication between the NGOs of the Lebanese women's movement and the NCLW. This has resulted in the absence of any impact of NCLW in the public field. In fact, most of the NCLW activities do not differ from those carried out by any other NGO dealing with women's issues.¹⁴⁵

The failings of NCLW had a negative effect on LCW and the NGO sector. NCLW started diverting governmental and international funds from the civil society sector. Furthermore and most importantly, NCLW became the legal authority on women's issues in front of international organizations.

The Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly -often described as an international bill of rights for women- are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Khalaf, EP.6

¹⁴⁶ The UN Division for The Advancement of Women
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

NCLW presented a report in the year 2000, another in 2005, and is actually in the process of preparing the third report. The reports have been compiled by competent researchers and professional women. However, despite the insistence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on involving the non-governmental sector, the process of preparation of the report is purely academic. Non-governmental organizations are not consulted and when they are asked for their input, it is on selective basis and on marginal issues. As an example, LCW was contacted in the process of preparing the third report due to be presented during May 2006 on a single issue. NCLW has asked LCW to provide information on the subject of women's health¹⁴⁷. There were no discussions or consultations on issues involving women's rights, strategies, or any other relevant matters. This happened despite the fact that LCW during 2005 led the campaign greater participation of women in the political decision making process¹⁴⁸; a subject that the commission asked NCLW to improve on.

This total disengagement from the NGO sector undermines the real purpose of these reports. They are supposed to be a mechanism aimed at designing a global strategy whose final purpose is to promote women's rights. The report setting process is supposed to be the culmination of years of planning, discussions, and the redrafting of a coherent women strategy in full partnership with all of society's sectors. This process is designed to create a momentum that could lead the women's movement in each country towards achieving the goals and ideals of eliminating age-old forms of discrimination against women. The National Commission for Lebanese Women has failed to create such a synergy.

¹⁴⁷ NCLW's letter to LCW, ref 2281/2005 dated 21/12/2005, LCW archives

¹⁴⁸ LCW conducted a campaign calling for the introduction of a clause within the new election law guaranteeing women representation in parliament. The campaign involved a TV advertisement spot passed on four Lebanese TV for a whole month, a survey on the whole of the Lebanese territory whose results confirmed the aims of LCW, panel discussions, and a lobbying campaign. LCW has also presented a draft law to the national commission in charge of preparing a new electoral law.

Chapter Three

Present Role of LCW and Its Potential

This chapter intends to present the factors that determine the present day role of the Lebanese Council of Women and to assess the challenges LCW needs to address in order to once again, play the role its founding mothers sought to achieve; a leader of the Lebanese women's rights movement.

To mobilize and effectively promote the objectives of the Lebanese women's movement on the national level is the role of LCW as defined upon its institution. These objectives as stated in the strategy of LCW include working towards the modernization of laws that discriminate against women; promoting the ratification of laws guaranteeing gender equity; working on social awareness and changing the stereotyped image of women, and finally working for the empowerment of women financially and politically.

In order to assess the successes and failures of LCW, it is important to look at the achievements and setbacks of the Lebanese women's movement in realizing these objectives. Exploring the amendment of the

Lebanese laws during the last decade and looking at the laws that still need amendment is one valid approach to this evaluation.

The chapter is also intended to address the challenges and problems LCW needs to concentrate on and to evaluate whether the issues that stand behind these problems are inherent to the structure of LCW or a manifestation of the challenges the wider feminist movement is facing on the national and regional levels.

3.1. Achievements and Setbacks at the outset of the 21st Century

The Lebanese Council of Women is today the largest and most representative umbrella group for women's NGOs in Lebanon, which gives it the potential to play a role of leadership in the Lebanese women's movement. It groups 153 women's NGOs whose geographical spread is representative of the Lebanese population and the levels of activism in each region. According to the updated database of LCW, 55.33 percent of the NGOs member of LCW are situated in the greater Beirut, 18.67 percent in Mount Lebanon, 16.67 percent in the North, 6 percent in the South and 3.33 percent in the Bekaa. Comparing this to the estimates of the number of residents of each area and not the number of registered voters, together with the levels of activism in the civil society we notice the representative value of LCW.

It is important here to note that the NGOs member of LCW comprise, beside the small grassroots NGOs that are active in their regions such as the Women's Association of Deir El Ahmar that was in the year 2000 the winner of the "Dubai International Award for Best practices to Improve the Living Environment", as well some of the largest Lebanese women's NGOs such as the Lebanese Union for Child Welfare, The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering, The Lebanese council to Resist Violence Against Women, and the League of Lebanese Women's Rights.

Another important factor that gives LCW its legitimacy is the religious and unique sectarian mix that one finds in the composition of the NGOs

member of LCW. This diversity gives LCW a representative legitimacy in a system where, regrettably, religion and sects are major players in determining the identity of individuals. The actual elected Administrative Committee counts three Shiites, three Sunnis, two Druze, four Christians, and six Sunnis married to Shiites or vice versa and one Sunni married to a Christian. The interesting factor here is that there is no written or unwritten rule that specifies any sectarian quotas in the composition of the Executive Committee. As for the presidency, the unwritten rule is that it should alternate between Christians and Muslims.

3.1.1. CEDAW and Civil Rights

Few are the achievements of the Lebanese women's movement regarding modernization of laws since 1996. They do not address the laws that constitute the most blatant discrimination against women such as "the citizenship and naturalization law" and the "family laws".

On July 24, 1996, Lebanon ratified The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, known as CEDAW. Lebanon is one of the first Arab countries that ratified the convention. This is a positive landmark in the history of the Lebanese women's movement, "as CEDAW constitutes an ideal legal argument and basis for the modernization of laws"¹⁴⁹. Sadly, Lebanon placed a reservation on Article 16 of the Convention that deals with marriage and the family. A second reservation was placed on article 9 of the Convention that deals with the citizenship issue.¹⁵⁰

3.1.1.1. Family Laws

The reason Lebanon placed a reservation on Article 16 of the Convention dealing with marriage and the family "stemmed from the country's reliance on religious, rather than civil, laws and courts"¹⁵¹. Lebanon is

¹⁴⁹ *Strategy 2004-2008*, 4

¹⁵⁰ CEDWA 33rd session February 9 2005 - CEDAW/PSWG/2005/II/CRP.1/Add.8

¹⁵¹ United Nation release WOM/1514 dated 12/07/05

made up of 19 denominations each having its own personal status codes, as well as courts and laws. Because of this, there is no applicability of the same personal status law to all women concerning divorce/dissolution of marriage and grounds for divorce, property rights, custody of children, and maintenance for the divorced wife. Furthermore, men and women do not have in this regard the same rights and responsibilities during marriage.

LCW has been constantly calling for the removal of these reservations and the implementation of CEDAW in its entirety.¹⁵² There is a deep belief that Lebanon cannot evolve into a truly democratic society if this problem is not solved. However, apart from an occasional declaration here or there, no real actions or determined campaigns by LCW have seriously addressed this issue. The religious and political pressures related to the subject of the “eternalness” of the personal status code are such that LCW has cleared away from addressing the subject in order to avoid an internal split. This failure to address a subject of such importance to women’s rights is even more pronounced if we realize that the last time the family laws in Lebanon changed was in 1959 when LCW succeeded in producing an amendment in the Inheritance Law for non-Mohammedans.

Furthermore, LCW today has no concerted plans to reintroduce the failed draft law on voluntary civil marriages or even discuss the subject, even though many consider that the country must overcome this hurdle on civil marriages in order to evolve into a society of civil laws. The well known activist Linda Mattar¹⁵³, who considers that “there is discrimination between women, men, and women and men of various sects due to the reliance of the country on religious dictates in regards to personal code status, sees the necessity of amending family laws, at least on a voluntary basis”. She does not see any problem in LCW not being able to insure a

¹⁵² *Portfolio*, 15

¹⁵³ President of LCW from 1996 to 2000

consensus on the matter and suggests that women's NGOs concerned with the issue together with activists should unite their efforts, independent of LCW, to address this issue.¹⁵⁴

3.1.1.2. Citizenship Laws

Lebanon placed a second reservation on article 9 of the Convention that deals with the citizenship issue. The actual Nationality Law is one of the most controversial laws that the Lebanese women's movement has been working on modernizing.

While the Lebanese Constitution affirms gender equality, “the citizenship and naturalization law of 1 November 1960 does not grant citizenship rights to children of Lebanese women married to non-nationals while granting those rights when a Lebanese man marries a non-national”¹⁵⁵. Lebanese women by themselves cannot pass citizenship to their children while Lebanese men are automatically eligible to extend their nationality to their wives and children. This inequality denies women their right as citizens and children their basic rights as human beings. An attempt had been made in the mid-1990s to allow citizenship through a Lebanese mother, but non-governmental organizations had rejected the draft law, due to the restrictive conditions attached to it at the time¹⁵⁶.

The issue in this instance is not national consensus. Few are against the amendment as a matter of principle. The problem lies in the unjustified fear of the Lebanese public from opening the door for the naturalization of a large refugee population, in this instance the overwhelmingly Muslim Palestinian refugees. There is an irrational underlying fear in the Lebanese society from a sudden shift in the highly sensitive religious balance of the country. The challenge facing women's organizations is to

¹⁵⁴ Discussion panel on feminism reported in “Asahafiyun Shabab” *AnNahar*, 25 Jan. 2006: C2

¹⁵⁵ CEDWA 33rd session February 9 2005 - CEDAW/PSWG/2005/II/CRP.1/Add.8, article 9-13

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

address the question of how to circumvent these fears. LCW has been again avoiding the problem instead of finding the solution. The question has not been on LCW's priorities list until the year 2004, when the new elected executive body referred to it in their strategy for the coming period, however until today no campaign has been launched in relation to this subject.¹⁵⁷

Early March 2006, MP Ghinwa Jalloul submitted a draft law to parliament that would allow women to pass on their nationality to their children and spouses, giving them equal citizenship rights with men. Jalloul said pressing security concerns and Parliament's National Dialogue make it difficult to give the issue the attention it deserves, but that we will not wait forever; Mothers' Day is on the 21st, if we could not do it for Women's Day, it could be on Mothers' Day.¹⁵⁸

LCW did not initiate or take any action in support of this initiative. The absence of LCW from the panel discussion, "My Nationality, a Right for Me and My Family," hosted at AUB on Wednesday, March 9, 2006 by the Women's Rights Club and the Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action (CRTDA) was hardly felt.¹⁵⁹ Also LCW failed to play any significant role in the national conference on nationality law that took place at the Beirut UNESCO Palace on April 3, 2006. A special follow up committee was launched under the title "The National Commission for Equality in Citizenship: My Nationality, a Right for Me and My Family."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Information about the recent works and priorities of LCW are due to my position as vice-president of LCW elected for the period 2004-2008

¹⁵⁸ Meris Lutz, "International Women's Day underscores citizenship rights proposal", *The Daily Star*, 9. Mar. 2006: C

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ The Lebanese Republic Ministry of Information National News Agency, <http://www.nna-leb.gov.lb/> /03/06 GMT 15:23

3.1.1.3. Labor Laws

The main important amendments of laws witnessed from 1996 until today are related to the very late ratification and implementation of the International Labor Organization Convention Nr 100 (Equal Remuneration) signed by Lebanon in 1951, and Nr. 111 (Discrimination in Employment and Occupation) signed in 1958. It is only in 2000 that an amendment to the National Labor Law prohibited gender discrimination by the employer. This was followed in the year 2001 by the ratification of a clause related to the equality between female and male employees concerning among other matters the "Retirement and dismissal procedures"¹⁶¹. And it is only in the year 2002 that the amendment of the stipulations of the article 14 of the National Social Security bylaws confirmed that the word "the insured" includes equally the female and male employees without discrimination and that the benefits granted to the (female) insured are considered one of hers and her children's undeniable right.¹⁶² Yet until today, the National Social Security bylaws do not equate between the female and male employees. Even though women's contributions are equal to men's, the spouse of the male insured benefits automatically from all Social Security remunerations while the spouse of the female insured can benefit only if proven to be incapacitated or handicapped¹⁶³. Here again, aside from the actions of individual NGOs or activists¹⁶⁴, there is a failure from the part of LCW to join efforts with other NGOs in order to organize an effective lobbying group that could demand the full implementation of the ratified conventions. In this instance, the main obstacle is not the lack of consensus. This issue seems less pressing and attractive to the members

¹⁶¹ Iqbal Doughan, president of LCW 2000-2004 had been instrumental in this campaign

¹⁶² *Portfolio*, 11

¹⁶³ Article 3 of the legislative decree No. 3950 of the Employment Act and article 46 of the social security law as stipulated in the bylaws- CEDAW/PSWG/2005/II/CRP.1/Add.8, article 11 - 22

¹⁶⁴ Linda Mattar president of LCW 1996-2000 and one of the founders and president of the League of Lebanese Women's Rights has made this issue one of her priorities.

of women's NGOs than other subjects do maybe because the majority of those who volunteer in these NGOs are homemakers rather than working-women.¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, the issue of equality in labor laws does not seem to be of interest to young women. During a panel discussion held in January of this year, none of the young women who addressed the failings of women's NGOs in Lebanon mentioned issues related to labor laws.¹⁶⁶ This indicates a real failing on the part of the leaders of the feminist movement. Discrimination within labor laws need to be explained and conveyed to the wider public in order to generate awareness of their importance.

3.1.1.4. Political Rights

In 1953, women in Lebanon gained the right to vote and be elected on the national and municipal levels following a campaign led by the Lebanese Council of Women. Yet until this date, women form only 4.7 percent (6 out of 128) of the Parliament and it is only in 2004 that two women were appointed for the first time ministers. One of the feminist movement's constant objectives has been to call for the ratification of laws promoting a more active participation of women in political life and a bigger role for women in government decision-making. LCW has played and still plays a leading role in this campaign, constantly calling for women to be considered as a minority whose rights need to be protected by a system of proportional representation in administrative and elected bodies the same as other Lebanese minorities; in another word, a temporary quota system. This has been a priority issue under the presidencies of Linda Mattar 1996-2000 and Iqbal Doughan 2000-2004. It even gained a greater momentum in the actual strategy of LCW for the period 2004-2008. The activities organized by LCW under this title are multiple and it would be difficult to mention them all in this study due to space limitation. They

¹⁶⁵ LCW database updated in 2005

¹⁶⁶ *AnNahar*, 25 Jan. 2006: C2-4

include lobbying¹⁶⁷, follow-up meetings, vigils, press releases, press conferences, workshops, seminars, and conferences, all in coordination with its member NGOs. Following is a listing of some of the national campaigns, LCW launched in support of the quota system:

1. LCW organized in 1998 and 1999 two international conferences on the quota system
2. In 2003 and in cooperation with the European Union, LCW launched a national campaign for the promotion and involvement of Lebanese women in political life. The campaign included a research component and training workshops all over the Lebanese territories. The campaign included also the production of a publicity spot in which LCW involved university students through a competition to choose the idea that best expresses the ambitions of women
3. Prior to each of the municipal elections, LCW organized on the national level workshops aimed at preparing women interested in running for the municipal elections to the tasks ahead
4. Prior to each of the parliamentary elections, LCW held workshops and seminars on women's participation in political life and in parliamentary elections.¹⁶⁸

Furthermore, the Lebanese Council of Women prides itself with having played a pivotal role in the designation of the first women ministers in 2004. With the nomination of a new Ministerial Cabinet in October 2004, LCW pursued its campaign and continued exercising pressure on the new designate Premier to nominate women ministers. These efforts concerted with all women's NGOs and independent activists led to the nomination of two women ministers for the first time in the history of Lebanon.¹⁶⁹ It

¹⁶⁷ lobbying with parliament members, ministers, heads of media, political parties, foreign embassies and civil society organizations in the different Lebanese regions

¹⁶⁸ *Profile*, 11

¹⁶⁹ The archives of LCW, *Annual Report 2004 Abstract*, (Beirut 2005):2-4

was the culmination of years of lobbying and campaigning. Many considered this nomination a political stunt by the new Premier to circumvent difficulties he faced in the formation of this cabinet. Whatever the reason, it is fair to say that if years of pressure by women's organizations had not prepared the ground for such a decision, it would not have been possible.

LCW has also been quite active in 2005 and 2006, actively taking the lead in promoting the adoption of a quota system in drafting of the new parliamentary electoral law. Following a national media¹⁷⁰ and lobbying¹⁷¹ campaigns calling for a fair representation of women in parliament either through a temporary quota system or through a system of proportional representation, the national commission in charge of preparing the new electoral law incorporated a 30 percent quota for women in the proposals presented to the Cabinet this May. Remains that the Cabinet accepts the proposal and that the Parliament votes it into law. Whatever the developments that follow, LCW was able in this instance to mobilize the civil society, and put the proposal of a temporary quota system for women representation in the Lebanese parliament on the agenda of political parties and most importantly to generate public debate and acceptance for the proposal. An independent survey published recently in *AnNahar* Newspaper indicated that 67 percent of those surveyed are for the inclusion of the quota system for women in the new electoral law.¹⁷²

On the issue of political rights, LCW has succeeded in fulfilling its potential and playing a leadership role. The reason can be attributed to

¹⁷⁰ LCW commissioned Leo Burnett Lebanon the production an advertisement 30" spot that was broadcasted on LBC, NEWTV, NBN, and TL Liban three times a day during the whole month of February 2005

¹⁷¹ LCW organized in December 2005 a national polling campaign (1500 representative sample) on the issue of women participation in politics, and distributed the full survey results to the national commission in charge of setting the new electoral law, NGOs, parliamentarians, Ministers, the Media, and international organizations. Moreover, LCW organized during March 2006 a panel discussion on the subject.

¹⁷² "Istitlaa lil nahar," *AnNahar*, 3 Apr. 2006: C7

several factors, the most important of which is the consensus among women on an issue that does not touch the sectarian political system of the country and does not put LCW on a collision course with the religious establishment.

3.1.2. Pluralism and the Proliferation of NGOs

The Lebanese Council of Women emerged weakened following the Beijing conference of 1995 and the developments that followed. For the first time since its inception, it could no longer claim to be the sole representative of Lebanese women and their cause.

The National Commission for Lebanese Women formed in 1996 became the official spokesperson for women reporting to the follow up Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. LCW is not represented in this commission anymore even though "it participated in the Beijing conference and drafted the NGO report on the progress made after the conference along with other NGOs and United Nations agencies. The Council also participated in the first official national report on the CEDAW convention."¹⁷³

On the level of the civil society and the Non-Governmental sector, 1996 witnessed also the establishment of The Non-Governmental National Committee For The follow-up of Women's Issues (Post Beijing). This association came as an offshoot of the National Committee of NGOs that Dr. Shaarani formed during the preparation for the Beijing Conference. "The National Committee was established in 1996 following the Beijing conference. It aims at coordinating a network of various non-governmental organizations dealing with women's affairs in order to promote women's participation in social, political and economic fields and to abolish discrimination against her."¹⁷⁴ The program of the National Committee morphs the purpose and aim of LCW. It is

¹⁷³ Lebanese NGO Forum - <http://www.lnf.org.lb/windex/brief3.html#a1>

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

worthwhile noting that the main drive behind the National Committee and its institution was Dr. Shaarani following the end of her tenure as president of LCW. Unfortunately, following a disagreement on representation and leadership, LCW withdrew its membership in the National Committee, thus leading to the establishment of two entities that aim at serving the same purpose: grouping the efforts of the non-governmental sector around the promotion of women's rights.

During the same period, the Lebanese women's movement saw also the establishment of women's specialized NGOs focusing on women's rights in specific fields of work. The Working Women's League (WWL) in Lebanon headed by Iqbal Doughan¹⁷⁵ was founded in 1994 with main goal to improve women's rights in the field of work and trade unions. WWL established with some volunteer lawyers a free legal consulting office with hotlines to resolve women work problems. The League also supports women in litigating cases concerning social benefits, and personal status cases.¹⁷⁶

The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence against Women was founded March 1997 with the aim of providing legal and social support to the victims of violent acts against women in Lebanon. The Council groups professional women, mostly volunteers, who work towards the common goal of helping the victims of domestic violence, rape and all other forms of violence against women.¹⁷⁷

Besides the rise of parallel NGOs representing women's rights, a clear indication of the diminishing role of LCW as a leader of the Lebanese women's movement is reflected in the many independent initiatives aimed at the establishment of official and non-governmental monitoring mechanisms aimed at implementing women's rights. LCW did not play a

¹⁷⁵ Elected President of the Lebanese Council of Women from 2000 to 2004

¹⁷⁶ Lebanese NGO Forum - <http://www.lnf.org.lb/windex/brief3.html#a1>

¹⁷⁷ The Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women- www.lebanesewomen.org/

leadership role in the initiation of these programs; it was just another player, same as many other women's organizations.

The Lebanese Non-Governmental Organization Forum (NGO Forum) established in July 1991 to coordinate the activities of Lebanese NGOs concerned primarily with relief and development (social, health, and educational) issues took the initiative in 1996 to set up a permanent monitoring mechanism entitled "Women's Rights Monitor Project". This network aimed at establishing, through the Internet, a set of baseline data and elaborating a permanent reporting mechanism.¹⁷⁸ This mechanism consisted mainly of producing an online, regularly updated, report on the latest developments and setbacks concerning the state of women in the country. The Participating NGOs¹⁷⁹ were supposed to contribute reports, books, studies, expertise and findings. The website has not been updated since the year 2000 due to the lack of support from the participants in the network, among them LCW who failed to play a motivating role to this quite innovative initiative.

Another initiative was launched March 1999 by the League of Lebanese Women's Rights¹⁸⁰ under the title "The National Meeting to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women". The aim of this group, according to the League, "are to seek the implementation of the principles stated in the Lebanese Constitution and in the CEDAW convention and to work on the amendments of the Lebanese laws that are still discriminating against women".¹⁸¹ Again, an initiative that should have been launched by LCW, especially if we consider that it occurred

¹⁷⁸ Women's Rights Monitor - <http://www.lnf.org.lb/windex/>

¹⁷⁹ The participating NGOs were The Lebanese Union for Child Welfare; The Lebanese Women's Council; The Working Women League in Lebanon; The Lebanese council to Resist Violence Against Women; The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering; The Non-Governmental National Committee for the Follow Up of Women's Issues Post Beijing; OPAC; The Lebanese Family Planning Association; Caritas; Dar El Sadaka; René Moawad Foundation; Imam Al Sadr Foundation

¹⁸⁰ Founded in 1970, its president, Linda Dib Mattar was elected president of LCW from 1996 to 2000.

¹⁸¹ Lebanese NGO Forum <http://www.lnf.org.lb/windex/brief3.html#a1>

during the presidency of Linda Mattar, one of the founders and president of the League of Lebanese Women's Rights.

This proliferation of NGOs, initiatives and networks concerned with women's rights and issues that followed the Beijing Conference could have constituted a positive landmark in the history of the Lebanese women's movement and that of The Lebanese Council of Women. Pluralism is intrinsically neither good nor bad, it very much depends whether resources and energies are put to good use. LCW failed to capitalize on the momentum and give direction to the movement. The end result is what we see today if we study the work of the various women's NGOs in Lebanon: a number of noteworthy initiatives that duplicate each other without reaching anywhere. Each group would engage in a project without researching the previous work done in this field and thus cannot build on the work done by other groups.

There is a clear indication of this phenomenon if we explore the work and research that has been done around the question of the amendment of laws that discriminate against women.¹⁸² Yet, despite the academic and scientific value of these projects, they remain in the drawers of the various NGOs that worked on them. The reason is the lack of cooperation that prevents the institution of special interim committees with the sole purpose of promoting these amendments through parliament. This model of work proved successful in the early campaigns of LCW when the Committee for Political Rights of Lebanese Women (1949 - 1953) was formed to lead the battle for women's voting rights, and the Committee for Equality in Inheritance (1955 - 1959) was created for the specific purpose of amending the inheritance law.¹⁸³

¹⁸² During 2005 alone, The Non-Governmental National Committee For The follow-up of Women's Issues (Post Beijing) published a booklet on the subject, the League of Lebanese Woman's Rights presented a draft amendment, and the Lebanese Council of Women presented several papers.

¹⁸³ Joseph and Laure Moghaizel Foundation
<http://www.kleudge.com/moghaizelfoundation/lauremoghaizel.htm>

Many of us who have any dealings with the Lebanese women's movement would agree with Najde Al-Ali, women activist, and lecturer in Social Anthropology at the Institute of Arab And Islamic Studies at the University of Dexter when she says:

"It would be fantastic if there could be less rivalry and competition, and more solidarity and co-operation'."¹⁸⁴

The scarcity of the recent accomplishments by the Lebanese women's movement and the part played by LCW in these achievements can be considered in part a manifestation of this phenomenon.

It is important to note at this point that the trend of NGO proliferation during the nineties was not particular to Lebanon; it is part of a wider international trend that is often considered beneficial to the formation of an active citizen sector that enhances democracy. The *Yearbook of International Organizations* states that the number of international NGOs (those with operations in more than one country) increased from 20,000 in 1990 to 26,000 in 1999. The *Economist* maintained in a December 1999 article that the United States alone has about 2 million NGOs, 70 percent of which are less than 70 years old. India has about 1 million grass-roots groups, while another conservative estimate suggests that more than 100,000 sprang up in Eastern Europe between 1988 and 1995. The *Economist* furthermore attributes the rapid growth of the citizen sector in these countries and worldwide to the exponential rise of non-governmental organizations.¹⁸⁵ The failure of LCW here lies in its inability to attract or motivate the new NGOs to join its network. During the period 1996 - 2006, only eighteen NGOs became members of LCW while the sector witnessed a very significant increase in the number of NGOs established during this period.

¹⁸⁴ *Al-Raida* Volume XX, No. 100 winter 2003: 55

¹⁸⁵ "The Non-Governmental Order: Will NGOs Democratize, or Merely Disrupt, Global Governance?" *The Economist*, (Dec 9, 1999):2.

In 2003, a rival institution was established under the name of The Lebanese Women's Network (LWN). At its institution, it grouped fourteen NGOs. The founding document stressed on the issues that LCW has been for long avoiding taking head on such as the citizenship law and “the adoption of a unified law for civil status equating genders”. The establishment of a network presenting itself as an avant-garde replacement of LCW, represents a real challenge to LCW, pushing it to adopt more radical positions in its struggle to further women’s rights.¹⁸⁶

3.1.3. Representation and International Relations

The Lebanese Council of Women has always been at the forefront of representing Lebanon at regional and international events. As an active member of the Arab and international women's movement, LCW took part from 1996 to 2004 in a number of Arab and international conferences. LCW organized and hosted two regional conferences on the subject of political rights and the quota system in Beirut, 1998 and 1999. In October 2002, LCW organized and hosted in Beirut the “Arab Women’s Solidarity Conference To Confront The Challenges Facing The Arab Women In The Present And Future Especially In Palestine And Iraq” and a follow up committee was formed to overview the implementation of the resolutions.¹⁸⁷

The Executive Committee elected for the period 2004-2008 has given special attention to the presence of LCW at Arab and international events. Extraordinary efforts were taken for revitalizing LCW’s relations with international organizations. A well-designed and professional website helped open new windows of opportunity for networking with organizations worldwide. The president, Faikaa Turkiyeh stresses the importance that LCW presents at the various venues it attends professional and valuable interventions. In February 2005, LCW

¹⁸⁶ The Lebanese Women's Network Founding Document English version

¹⁸⁷ *Portfolio*, 10-11

participated in a conference in Teheran, organized by the International Muslim Women's NGOs under the subject of Muslim women and globalization. The research paper presented under the title "The Challenges of Globalization and Its Economic Implication on Muslim Women" presented an innovative approach to the subject. April 2005 LCW presented a research paper on "The Centrality of Women In The Process of Development" at a conference organized by the International Council of Women (ICW) in Rabat- Morocco. LCW presented a research paper on "Women and Violence" to a conference organized by the "Ni Pute Ni Soumise" movement in France during September 2005. LCW presented a contribution to the Knowledge Network of Women in Politics Consultative Session, held in New York on March 3, 2006.¹⁸⁸

During 2005-2006 LCW took active part in two workshops and a conference for Middle Eastern NGOs working on Women's issues held in Amman Jordan. LCW also attended two seminars on the civil society in Turkey, two cultural events in France, the 50th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, three events in Yemen related to women and human rights, and a workshop in Tunisia about women in politics.¹⁸⁹

LCW has also been working on activating the presence of Lebanon in the International Council of Women (ICW) by preparing and presenting well-studied reports and pushing for resolutions on subjects of interest to Lebanon. The resolution presented under the title "Dialogue and Tolerance in Conflict Resolution" in preparation for the General Assembly to be held in Kiev September 2006 has¹⁹⁰ been deemed by the Secretary of ICW a very important one.

LCW has been the voice of Lebanese women on the regional and international scene since its inception. After some disruptions during the

¹⁸⁸ The archives of LCW

¹⁸⁹ LCW Annual Report 2005

¹⁹⁰ Radosveta Bruzaud, Secrétaire Générale, ICW-CIF - Sent: Tuesday, March 28, 2006 11:20 AM - Subject: Re: Résolutions

Civil War period, LCW today is fulfilling this representative role in a satisfactory matter. The main obstacle that LCW is facing remains the lack of resources. LCW is answering the invitation to international events only when the costs of travel and participation are covered by the hosting organization. It is very difficult for the members of the Executive Committee to participate in important events when the cost has to be covered from their private accounts. LCW needs the backing of the government, if it is to continue representing Lebanon on the Arab and international scene.

3.2. The Main Challenges

Any assessment of the recent achievements of the Lebanese Council of Women and its leadership role of the feminist movement in Lebanon should compare to the achievements realized throughout the history of LCW and the Lebanese women's movement. This comparison will help us better define the challenges LCW needs to address in order to reclaim its leadership role, and justify its continuation.

Today the main problem facing LCW is to regain the initiative regarding the main issues of concern to women. A lot has been achieved, yet there are still four major issues to address: 1) the modernization of family law, 2) the criminalization of domestic violence and other forms of violence against women including a tightening of the loose ends still ruling the so called "crimes of honor", 3) women's right to pass their nationality to their children, 4) greater access to participation in political and economic decision-making.

Without addressing these four issues, it will be very difficult for LCW to revitalize and add momentum to the women's movement by attracting professional competent women and the younger generation.

The Lebanese women's movement in general and LCW in particular are struggling against old and new obstacles. A major priority, as stated before, is the amendment of all laws that discriminate against women and

in particular 'family law'. However, LCW should not neglect to implement in parallel realistic and well-planned campaigns that address the concerns of women at the grassroots level. LCW needs to find the proper balance between feminism and social activism.

3.2.1. Social Activism Versus Women's Rights

The opinions differ about the 'why and how' the shift from Women's Rights to Social Activism occurred within the Lebanese women's movement. Mona Khalaf, director of Beirut's Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World¹⁹¹ considers that with the war and the government getting dismantled, people stopped gearing things toward women's rights, while Paul Salem, a retired professor of political theory at the American University of Beirut considered that after the war, the women's rights movement began to gear itself toward social work and volunteer efforts. He said more Lebanese women participate in non-governmental organizations than in political organizations, and women do not connect women's rights to political rights. Lamia Shehadeh, a professor of classics at the American University of Beirut and active feminist blames LCW's 140 NGOs that are geared towards voluntarism instead of women's rights.¹⁹²

Whatever the analysis, it remains that LCW today is formed of a number of organizations headed by women without necessarily being women's rights or feminist organizations. Many are service organizations, worker-based organizations, professional organizations, or women-in-development (WID) NGOs. The scope of activities of the organizations member of LCW vary from Human Rights (pushing for the ratification and implementation by Lebanon of all international agreements and treaties without reservation, especially those related to the rights of women and children) and Women's Legal Rights (working and

¹⁹¹ Mona Khalaf retired in the year 2005

¹⁹² Swartzlander

campaigning for the modernization and amendment of the laws that discriminates against women) to Education (educational grants for female students, libraries, housing for female students, preparing students for official exams, educational awareness seminars, vocational schools), Social Services (support group for the handicapped, vocational training for the handicapped, old people's homes and soup kitchens, orphanages) and Medical Services (medical awareness campaigns, dispensaries, blood bank, nursing school, cornea transplant networking). Some NGOs deal with very specialized subjects such as the preservation of traditional artisan work, and reforestation¹⁹³.

However, one cannot conclude with certainty that the proliferation of women's NGOs in Lebanon and the increasing trend of these NGOs to provide a variety of services, from social work, to free health services, research or legal counseling is a negative factor in the determination of the role and purpose of the Lebanese women's movement. All women's NGOs do contribute to a certain extent to the development of the civil society. Although women's rights NGOs may be the most significant contributors to citizenship and civil society as they target women's subordinate status within the legal system, yet Women in Development NGOs (WID NGOs) have an important function in fulfilling the development objectives of the civil society: decentralized, participatory, and grass-root use of resources.¹⁹⁴

Social activism versus feminism and women's rights is a controversial question. There are those who think that involvement in such projects is a sign of fragmentation and loss of purpose and fear from the "domestication" of the women's movement by diverting the attention from the political arena and public domain. On the other hand, there are those who believe that this phenomenon is a sign of progress and that the only way for the women's movement to gain credibility is to deal with

¹⁹³*Profile*, 4

¹⁹⁴ Valentine M. Moghadam, "Citizenship, Civil Society and Women in the Arab Region" (Beirut: *Al-Raida* Volume XIX 2002):13.

the urgent needs of women of different background. Valentine Moghadam, director of Women's Studies Program and Associate Professor of Sociology at Illinois State University, author and editor of numerous books on gender in the Middle East, presents an interesting viewpoint. When asked about her opinion in the fact that Arab Women's Movements are increasingly engaging in activities other than women's rights, she answered

"If Arab women's organizations within the broad Arab women's movements are undertaking social work, adult literacy, research, legal counseling, etc. towards the goal of enhancing women's status and promoting their empowerment, then these diverse activities complement each other and have a positive cumulative effect. If, however, these activities are carried out in a routine and bureaucratic fashion, as a substitute for social-service delivery by the state rather than a political act to empower women, then the activities serve to foster the state rather than women's empowerment."¹⁹⁵

LCW, being the umbrella organization that groups 153 women's NGOs of different types has the capacity to insure that the potential of all of its member NGOs are directed towards women's rights despite the fact that various organizations undertake different activities at the grass-root level. Whether women's NGOs or WID NGOs, they are participating in all projects and activities related to lobbying campaigns that LCW launches, and through their participation in LCW's monthly general assembly meetings and networking activities, their agendas and strategies include a women's rights dimension. The main problem remains that LCW, given its structure, has been avoiding the major issues on which it could not insure a national consensus such as family laws. Yet, it is important to note that the same factor that hinders LCW's ability to

¹⁹⁵ Interview published in *Al-Raida* (Beirut: *Al-Raida* Volume XX, No. 100 winter 2003):83

address divisive issues, gives it its legality and strength as a pressure group.

Having explored the potential of LCW to group and give direction to the activities of NGOs headed by women; it remains to be evaluated whether this message and direction are relevant to the Lebanese society of today, and if feminism as it was defined in the early sixties can still constitute a focal point in today's Lebanese society. In fact, one needs to assess if the struggle for women's rights addresses the issues of concern to the modern Lebanese woman.

3.2.2. The Relevance of Feminism

The concept of feminism as relayed to the wider public through the message and activities of women's NGOs and in particular LCW, might seem badly formulated, vague, and sometimes distorted. In some cases, the terminology of "women's NGO" in itself provokes a controversy. Razan Yihya, a 22 year old young woman concerned with women's issues refuses the terminology and considers it a discrimination in itself (...) In her village there is an NGO where men are active so the women of her village are active in a women's NGO situated in the neighboring village¹⁹⁶ Razan is not a rare example, there is a misconception about the meaning and purpose of women's NGOs. Some see in them a means of segregation between women and men missing the whole point of an NGO dealing with specific issues related to women where men are welcomed to contribute.

On another level, there seems to be a lack of awareness about the problems women still face today in our society. Rasha Zein, a 21-year-old young woman looking for an environment to fulfill her activism considers that the subjects women's NGOs address are of no concern to her. For example, they discuss the issue of the right of women to work outside the house, and the issue of domestic violence. "I feel that these

¹⁹⁶ *AnNahar*, 25 Jan. 2006: C3

problems are no more current. Today a woman that faces violence can resort to the law.”¹⁹⁷ We do find often this type of misconception and misinformation about women’s conditions among young women belonging to the middle class. According to the Arab feminist, Nawal Al-Saadawi the picture of the women’s condition is quite bleak. She considers that as time goes by, it is becoming clear that the recognition of women’s political rights does not on its own make any fundamental change in the situation of women belonging to the working classes. Whether women vote or abstain, succeed or fail in getting into parliament, the position of a woman belonging to the poorer classes of society does not improve except in minor ways. She remains a prey to exploitation and oppression, a vassal to her husband and a prisoner of the class to which she belongs. Saadawi considers that "even when there is a strong woman’s organization that can reap the benefits of new laws, and a sweeping movement towards social change, the progress that women can attain remains limited.”¹⁹⁸

This universality of the condition of women and the discrimination women face all over the world, and more particularly in Lebanon and the Arab region, is a message that seems to be lost within our society. The role of LCW and women's NGOs is not to reinvent feminism; they just need to go back to the basics by launching innovative awareness campaigns explaining the relevance of the problems that feminism addresses. It is important to stress that despite the fact that at first glance, the women’s rights movement in Lebanon seems light years ahead of other Arab nations women are still discriminated against and especially in relation to some archaic laws still governing their lives today in Lebanon. ¹⁹⁹ These are not theoretical issues; women in Lebanon are subjugated to men in all aspects of their lives related to marriage,

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¹⁹⁸ Al-Saadawi Nawal, *The Hidden Face of Eve* p178, reproduced in *Al-Raida* (Volume XIX, Nos. 97-98 Spring/Summer 2002): 111.

¹⁹⁹ Swartzlander, html

divorce, the custody of children, adultery, rape, abortion, and citizenship rights. In fact "Feminism is eminently political. It is about changing relations of power between men and women in society. And in doing so, it is about changing the terms of politics at large."²⁰⁰ There is no way for LCW and other women's NGOs to become relevant if they are to shy away from this aspect of feminism.

Laure Moghaizel, one of Lebanon's most eloquent feminists and one of LCW's most prominent activists, ended her life believing that feminism as practiced by today's LCW is outdated. She started her activism in the early fifties and most of her life was dedicated to single out those laws and go after them one by one using international instruments such as the United Nations Conventions and the Declaration of Human Rights. She achieved many victories, yet in an interview conducted with her in 1996, she confirmed her belief that the women's movement was no more in keeping with the aspirations of the younger generation. She said:

"Now, at the end of the twentieth century, I think women have outgrown feminism. We should no longer be feminists but humanists. It is very important that we work with trade unions and political parties because women concerns and issues are an integral part of the human problem."²⁰¹

Indeed, it is very important for women to work through political institutions, and it is true that women issues are an integral part of human rights. Yet it is equally very important to note the specificity of women's conditions and their concerns. The way to build an equitable and fair society has to pass by the rule of law. Accordingly the most important objective of the women's movement has always been the amendment of the laws that discriminate against women and the ratification of laws that empower women and give them the opportunity to be part of the decision

²⁰⁰ Fawaz Traboulsi, "Feminizing politics" (Beirut: *Al-Raida* No. 92, 2001):2

²⁰¹ Lateef, 206

making process. Moreover, it is through political empowerment that women will be able to change the balance of power within society.

This would benefit society as a whole on the long run according to Dr. Fawaz Traboulsi, associate professor at the Lebanese American University, and an expert on the subject:

“A feminist perspective on politics would render it more humane and indeed democratic. Not necessarily because of any inherent characteristics attributed to womanhood, but because those who have long suffered from oppression and inequality, and struggled for equality and justice are deemed capable of imagining new forms of social life. Thus enfranchising half of the society cannot be reduced to a mere quantitative change and would hopefully open up qualitatively new horizons for the conception and practice of politics as liberation”²⁰².

Within this context, feminism as defined within the strategy of LCW remains relevant to the conditions and concerns of the Lebanese modern women. The problem may reside in the focus and application.

3.2.3. Democratization and Internal “Governance”

Zeina Joma'a, a Lebanese activist, who was member of the editorial board of *Al-Muntalak* magazine and whose work involves reviewing the theme of women in Islam, considers that the precondition for change in the women's movement, “would be to give the opportunity to younger generations to participate and have an active role... to infuse some new blood into these movements which are suffering from stagnation.”²⁰³

If as stated in the previous section, feminism is still relevant to the concerns of the Lebanese modern women as discrimination is still relevant to their everyday lives, why are they not showing interest in

²⁰² Traboulsi, 2

²⁰³ Interview with Zeina Joma, (Beirut: *Al-Raida* Volume XX, No. 100 winter 2003): 75

joining the NGOs working on changing the status quo? One of the most direct reasons is the lack of real democracy within these organizations. Most of the presidents of the women's NGOs have been in their position for quite a long period, reelected mandate after mandate. This is not to say that these presidents are not competent. Linda Mattar has been president of The League of Lebanese Women's Rights since 1978, and under her leadership, the organization has achieved a lot, yet several competent young activists in her organization have the potential and necessary competence to be presidents. Young women joining NGOs need to feel that their dedication and competence can give them the opportunity of reaching decision-making positions, and this need to be on all levels within the NGOs. In LCW, the presidency mandate is four years not renewable. The ex-presidents remain honorary members of LCW. However, this has not solved the problem. The members of the executive committee are not subject to these limitations, and we notice that some of these members renew their mandates in different positions within the executive committee.²⁰⁴ Here again, it is very difficult for ambitious young women activists to find a role to play within an institution where possibilities of advancement are blocked by an older generation that refuse to give up.

For LCW to attract the new generation, we should envision a future in which a primary goal of leadership is to further the democratic process by willingly passing the torch to others who are dedicated and empowered to act on behalf of women's rights. However, it is not certain that restoring the democratic process to the Lebanese women's movement in general and LCW in particular will necessarily lead to a comprehensive solution to the challenge of revitalizing the movement and attracting the younger generation of women activists.

Another hurdle is to reinvent the Lebanese concept of volunteer work. According to the dictionary definition, voluntarism is "the principle of

²⁰⁴ The archives of LCW

supporting a religious system and its institutions by voluntary association and effort rather than by state aid or patronage²⁰⁵. By extension one can say that voluntarism in NGOs is to support these organizations by voluntary association and effort rather than by contractual work. Voluntary work is unpaid, yet by definition, voluntarism does not involve additional expenses that the volunteer has to incur in order to complete the task. The volunteer should not be asked to contribute a monetary value in addition to the value of his time and work. This is a concept that is foreign to LCW and most Lebanese women's NGOs. Transport and other expenses are not covered by LCW, which makes it very difficult for middle class women, students, and workers to engage in the projects organized in support of women's rights. On the decision making level this becomes even more pronounced as the tasks required from the President and the Executive Committee of LCW require intensive commuting and telecommunication costs in addition to other miscellaneous expenses. LCW does not pay representation compensation to its Executive Committee members. This automatically limits the candidates to administrative positions to those who can afford it, and limits the contribution of those who cannot afford to pay their representation expenses. It might be the reason why it is often said within younger circles that LCW is an organization of society women rather than women activists despite the fact that LCW today groups a number of women activists that contributed to many of the achievements realized by the women's movement during the last few decades.

Voluntarism as practiced by LCW is leading to a scarcity of professional women willing to engage into feminist activities. When and if they do, the time they can give to the organization is limited. Most of them are working women that juggle their careers with their family responsibilities. The time left for activism is limited. Involving these young professional women in the activities of LCW would entail giving

²⁰⁵ Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary copyright 2000 incorporated version 2.5

them a sort of replacement income in compensation for the time they provide as volunteers.

These professional women are badly needed, as the administrative and managerial tasks required from an organization that prides itself for being a leader of the feminist movement in the present time are complex. This is because today any human activity assumes the existence of a world of knowledge and information. It would be impossible for a single individual to master. To handle such complexity leaders capable of advancing wide-ranging visions and projects are needed.

What compounds this problem of leadership is that most of the members of the executive committee of LCW are either presidents or members of the executive bodies of their own NGOs²⁰⁶, which limit the time they can give to the tasks required from them to LCW. The day-to-day workings of LCW are run by two assistants. The members of the Executive Committee meet once a week and hold a General Assembly once a month. They do participate in the projects and activities when need be, while they are present on daily basis in the locales of their NGOs.

Furthermore, this duplication in posts and commitments generates a hidden competitiveness that exists between the members of the Executive Committee of LCW. NGOs these days compete for the same funding sources. Here we have to take note of a sensitive point, which is that the programs of many of the NGOs are subject to the donor's agenda. Indeed many of these organizations have established their priorities and projects according to this agenda, regardless of whether it complies with the people's needs or not, and whether this agenda duplicates the work of other NGOs or not. Cooperation between the NGOs member of LCW has suffered from this recent phenomenon.

It has been argued that the phenomenon of competition that sometimes cripples the role and purpose of LCW is inherent to the idea of assembling, in less developed countries, a number of women's NGOs to

²⁰⁶ LCW database updated in 2005

work towards a common goal. It appears that the NGO structure creates actors with parallel powers (...) This creates a competitive dynamic between NGO directors that makes it hard to compromise or agree on common goals, since the one who compromises may be seen as the weaker among power equals.²⁰⁷

Again, this problem of competition arises from the unilateralist decision-making processes in LCW and other Lebanese women's organizations. It is important for them to adopt democratic structures and practices if they are to become a real force of change within the larger society and existing political process. One has to recognize that "one of the defining features of women's organizations in the West has been their non-hierarchical structure and democratic form of decision-making"²⁰⁸. This may also be one of the main reasons for their success.

The democratization of LCW is possible given that its internal structure was intended to encourage a process of sharing in the decision making process. The distribution of tasks and responsibilities between the six specialized committees and the presence of regional representatives within the executive committee is conducive to the decentralization of power. This is also intended to encourage young professionals who wish to volunteer time to be active within committees of interest to them and to participate in the planning stage and not only the execution of campaigns or projects. There is no real need to amend the internal structure of LCW, the challenge is for the electoral process to bring into the executive committee those who can best serve in the position they are elected to. Then, this is the same challenge that the Lebanese political system as a whole is facing; building a culture of democracy and accountability.

²⁰⁷ Islah Jad, "The NGOization of the Arab Women's Movement" (Beirut: *Al-Raida* Nr. 100, 2003):45

²⁰⁸ Interview with Valentine M. Moghadam reported in (*Al-Raida* Volume XX, No. 100, winter 2003):83

Conclusion

The Lebanese Council of Women has been challenging the institutionalization of women's second-class citizenship ever since the early twentieth century. Today LCW is but among many women's NGOs engaging in all sorts of activities. Women engaging into activities such as social work, education, promoting the arts, ecological awareness, and other services reflect positively on society and the civil sector. However, it would be a mistake not to distinguish between this kind of work and the women's movement in general. Women's participation in activities involving social services should be welcomed, but the women's movement ought not to be identified solely with these efforts. In order for the women's movement to reach anywhere, it must rally behind a unifying specific ideology, to which they all adhere and from which they develop a strategy with clear defined objectives and specific plans of action detailing how to achieve these objectives. The aim of the women movements since their inception has been to introduce positive change in culture, policies, and laws that are detrimental to women and their rights.

However, we should stress that pluralism is not only good, but it will happen regardless of our judgment, and it would be worrying if we advocate the institutionalization of an "activity police". Women must work wherever they feel they can and want to. Who could possibly be the

judge of the long-term impact of the various kinds of work? What might appear to be simple acts, can have far-reaching and important political consequences.

Hence, the importance of an umbrella group such as the Lebanese Council of Women who throughout the history of the Lebanese women's movement has managed to constitute a rallying point for women NGOs, unifying them and directing their efforts towards forming a pressure group aimed at getting women their full political, social and economic rights. Today LCW is facing the challenge of reinventing itself in order to remain relevant.

On the ideological level, LCW ought to go back to the feminist discourse that characterized its beginnings. Feminism is a set of ideas concerning problems facing women such as oppression, inequality, discrimination, and second-class citizenship. It is also the means to achieve equality, empowerment, and expanded right such as educational attainment, paid employment, legal equality, women's organizations, and political representation.

On the practical side, this involves raising public awareness, including governmental understanding, of women and gender issues especially as regards nationality rights, family law, honor killings, domestic violence, and political participation.

The greatest failure of LCW since the end of the Civil War has been the lack of coordination, cooperation, and coalition building within the country, and lack of participation in national and transnational networks. In order to create a strong women's movement LCW should work towards a wider participation of its member NGOs in the strategy setting and the decision-making together with a policy of partnering with other women's NGOs and association on critical areas of concern such as women's economic, social, and political empowerment.

Lack of transparency and accountability is a problem LCW shares with most NGOS, parties, and associations of the civil society. The weakness

of democratic practices and the absence of accountability is a problem plaguing the Lebanese society as a whole. However, this does not give any excuse to civil society organizations, especially those that are calling for change and setting the example, more so in the case of LCW. The constitution and bylaws of LCW, if applied, would insure a good level of transparency and accountability. Members of the Executive Committee should accept questioning and be accountable on all issues that are raised during the monthly meeting of the General Assembly. A system of checks and balances should be introduced and regularly applied.

Setting non-hierarchical structures and democratic forms of decision-making would attract the younger generation that is today refraining from joining women's organizations due to the ever-widening gap between old and young leadership.

The Lebanese women movement is not a unified set of institutions, so it is illusory to believe that changing one of the constituents, even if it is an important one like LCW, will magically transform the movement. However, the modernization of LCW is necessary if we want to take full advantage of the UN and global meetings of the 1990s where "women's issues" were finally taken up into the mainstream global discourse. LCW in its actual form might be able to play a role in advocating Lebanese women's rights on the international scene, provide services, propose new policies and visions, generate and disseminate information, but in order to achieve comprehensive sustainable change and democratization, a different form of organization is needed.

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Interview

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