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# Images of career women in the Arab world

## Introduction

There are many stereotypes of women in the Muslim world. They mainly refer to their status in the Islamic law, the position in the family and the question of customs and traditions. The problem of women's activity in the public sphere is addressed relatively seldom and mostly through the prism of the barriers and limitations hindering full participation of women in the social life. For these reasons, it seems that between the concepts “Arab woman” and “career woman” can be no relationship – and if anything, then contradiction.

Studies devoted to career women in the Arab world are few and far between. Two dominant trends in literature include few publications about wealthy businesswomen living mostly in the Persian Gulf countries<sup>1</sup>. They present these women as icons of their countries, a kind of “digital Sheherezades” – an immanent proof that women's development is possible in the Arab world. The other trend relates to female leaders of local communities. It has been strengthened by the experiences of the last four years, in particular by dynamic political transformations referred to as the Arab Spring [Esfandiari 2015].

In a broader context, the problem of career women in the Arab world is covered by studies on the situation of women in the culture of Muslim countries. They present the position of women through the prism of religious standards. The analysis focuses, therefore, on the status of women defined by the sources of Islamic law and their rights and obligations resulting therefrom [Chmielowska, Grabowska and Machut-Mendecka 2001]. The position of women is sometimes analysed in the reports of international

institutions presenting the legal, economic, political and social conditions of the functioning of women in the Arab and/or Muslim countries [UNIFEM 2004; UNDP 2005; World Bank 2013]. Publications that focus on the emancipation movement among women of the Arab world and so called Islamic feminism are directly connected with the problems of career women in the Arab world [Ahmed 1992]. There are also the first empirical studies on working women: their expectations, motivation, work satisfaction or how they are perceived by the environment.

The purpose of the paper is to present the images of career women in the Arab world, and in particular to demonstrate different paths taken by them to success. An important topic is also how such women are perceived by the public. In the study, the term success is objectified and results primarily from the position occupied by women in the social hierarchy<sup>2</sup>, especially in the politics and business (including show business). So far the problem of career women in the Arab world (and in a broader sense: in the Muslim world) has not been an object of studies or analyses, the more difficult it is, therefore, to discuss the images shaped. Thus, this is a preliminary study with a research base constituted by images of twelve women.

The four spheres of social life, in which women have been gaining more and more important position, are discussed one by one below. In the world of business, these are images of Lubna Olayan (Saudi Arabia), Husna Rashid (Egypt) and Lubna Al-Qasimi (United Arab Emirates), in the world of politics – images of Queen Rania Al-Abdallah (Jordan), Nuriya as-Sabih (Kuwait) and Salwa Aysha Labban (Tunisia), and in the world of entertainment – images of Nancy Ajram (Liban), Ahlam (United Arab

Emirates) and Latifa (Tunisia). The last sphere of social life to be discussed is called the “world of men”<sup>3</sup>. It presents the images of Hanadi Hindi (Saudi Arabia), Fatima Lashin (Egypt) and *murszidat* (Morocco).

Due to the lack of scientific publications the study was mainly prepared on the basis of newspaper and website articles. Criteria for the selection of the spheres of social life and the women themselves are arbitrary also due to the lack of relevant studies<sup>4</sup>. In the case of the world of business, the Forbes ranking of the most influential women in the world, which lists 50 Arab businesswomen, has been used. Two women who occupied top positions in their countries have been selected for analysis of the world of politics. A determinant of success in the world of entertainment has been the number of CDs sold and popularity. The other women (Lubna Al-Qasimi, Queen Rania) have been selected because of how they are referred to in the media – as role models, career women.

## The world of business

Trade has always been the traditional occupation of Arab tribes. Not only men but also women were involved in trading. Khadijah, the first wife of Muhammad, who was involved in the trade as she managed caravans which transported a variety of products, is considered to be the first businesswoman. This is how she met her husband, Muhammad, whom she employed at the beginning to handle one of her caravans. The fact that he became Khadijah's husband gave him financial stability and a possibility to devote himself to meditation. Soon, he received revelations from which Islam was founded.

Although nowadays professional activity of women in the Arab world is the lowest in the world, there are more and more women in the world of business, especially due to the fact that it offers them an opportunity for development and fulfilment. This mainly relates to the Gulf countries, where women who intend to undertake work, are faced with many legal and moral constraints [Górak-Sosnowska and Kubicki 2005]. For this reason, the paper presents two career women from the Gulf countries – Lubna Olayan and Lubna Al-Qasimi.

**Lubna Olayan** – CEO of one of the largest financial corporations in Saudi Arabia – Olayan Financing, the holding entity of Olayan Group, which is one of the largest Saudi international concerns, has been

ranked number sixty-seven in the Forbes ranking of “The World’s 100 Most Powerful Women”. Her business cooperates with leading American corporations (Kleenex, Kimberly-Clark, Coca-Cola, Xerox). In 2004, Lubna Olayan was appointed to join the management board of Saudi Hollandi Bank and in this way was the first woman to become a member of the management board of a Saudi company. In 2005, she co-chaired the World Economic Forum in Davos. A year earlier, she was the only woman to give an address at the Jeddah Economic Forum. She began her speech with the following words:

*“My vision is of a country with a prosperous and diversified economy in which any Saudi citizen, irrespective of gender, can find a job in the field for which he or she is best qualified, thus lead to a thriving middle class and in which all Saudi citizens, residents or visitors to the country, feel safe and can live in an atmosphere where mutual respect and tolerance exist amongst all, regardless of their social class, religion or gender [Olayan: Vision of Saudi Arabia, “Aramco Ex Pats”, 30.01.2004].*

Two references to gender equality are important insofar that in 1999 women were not allowed to participate in the debates of the Jeddah Economic Forum, not to mention to express their views in public [Mitchell and Al-Jarbou 2004].

To a large extent, Lubna Olayan credits her success to her father, Suliman Olayan, a Saudi billionaire, who encouraged her to come back from the United States and take up a job in the family company as early as in the late 1980s.

Sheikha **Lubna Al Qasimi**, a member of the Sharjah royal family, is a Minister of Development and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), although for many years she was associated with the world of business. Her nomination was associated with changes to the government and appointing a larger number of royal family members as ministers (then she became the Minister of Foreign Trade)<sup>5</sup>. As a minister, Al-Qasimi not only stimulates economic development of UAE, but has also led to the situation that the country designates a significant percentage of its GDP, comparable to the leading Western donors, for the purpose of charitable activities (1.3 percent of GDP in the amount of 402 billion American dollars)<sup>6</sup>.

Lubna Al Qasimi graduated abroad: first she studied foreign languages and mathematics in Great Britain, then went to the United States, where she

received a Bachelor's Degree of Science in Information Technology at the University of California, and after coming back to her mother country, studied MBA at the American University of Sharjah. Despite numerous job offers in the United States, she decided to look for a job in the United Arab Emirates; she did not choose, however, the public sector, but a private company – Datamation.

After a few years, she found a job with Dubai Ports Authority (DPA), where she was a senior head of IT department before she was appointed by Prince of Dubai Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Rashid Al-Maktum CEO of a new government corporation from the IT sector Tejari.com<sup>7</sup>. At present, Tejari.com is one of the largest Middle East corporations that offer Business-to-Business (B2B) services.

Despite her status and origin, Lubna Al-Qasimi had to fight for recognition, especially when she won a managerial position. She reminisces about it in a unique way:

*I had to be especially careful about where I come from (...) that my intention is not to fight with their ego (...). This is not their fault. This is the way they were brought up. I would be very narrow-minded to think that my job is to change it. Then, this would be my ego [V. George, 'I have earned my desk', Womenone.org].*

As put by a well-known Moroccan sociologist, Fatima Mernissi [2005], Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi is a representative of a new type of women – the “digital Sheherazada”<sup>8</sup>. She is even said to have been appointed a minister in order to modernise this position. Mernissi compares “digital Sheherazada” to Zubaidah, a wife of Harun al-Rashid, who devoted her attention to the development of Baghdad. This was possible thanks to her husband. He held an opinion that Islam is a culture which should develop communication, hence he among other things invested in the production of paper. Contemporary monarchs of the Gulf countries think in a similar manner and rely on communication, of course state-of-the-art communication and on supporting women in their social development [Mernissi 2005].

The world of business is mostly the domain of female residents of the Gulf countries, but it is worthwhile to present a single representative from a different Arab country. An Egyptian, **Husna Rashid** has been ranked number nine in the “Forbes Arabia” ranking. She has also had some experience

in Internet technologies – in 1997 she opened the first Internet café in Alexandria. In the 1970s, she graduated with a degree in economics and after the death of her father, a well-known businessman Muhammad, she took over the family business. Husna faced a difficult task – she had to learn how to run the company and, at the same time, maintain a high position of her family, which is one of the most eminent families in Alexandria. She reminisces:

*As early as in the childhood, we learnt that each member of the family has a role to play, thus we all contributed in proportion to our abilities. We saw the efforts taken by our mother to ensure education for us and create favourable atmosphere at home for our father so that he could pursue his career [A. Doss, Une énergie à toute épreuve, «Al Ahram»].*

Husna Rashid not only took over the business in Unilever Mashreq (which is part of The Rachid Mashreq Group) but also engaged in activities for her community and charitable campaigns. She is also a Honorary Consul of Mexico in Alexandria (the function, which she also inherited from her father), a member of the National Council for Women and CEBA (Confederation of Egyptian European Business Associations). Last year, the latter opened an office in Alexandria, in connection with which Rashid pins hopes on the further development of the city [Rasromani 2006].

Despite different ages and nationalities, the three Arab businesswomen have a lot in common. They are all graduates of Western universities. All of them deserve their positions to male family members, who offered them a job at the right time – in the case of Lubna Olayan it was a family company in the private sector, Lubna Al-Qasimi took over management of a government company, while Husna Rashid took over her father's company. Each of the women seeks to contribute to the development of her country in her own way. Lubna Olayan is an advocate for women's rights, calls for equality (with respect for Muslim values), and greater participation of women in the labour market. She appeared without hijab [headscarf] at the Juddah Economic Forum in 2004, which brought about a violent reaction of the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia<sup>9</sup>. As a “digital Sheherazada”, Lubna Al-Qasimi leads her country on the path towards modern technologies, and in addition, is engaged in education and charitable activity. Husna Rashid also conducts

a wide scale charitable and social activity – acting in the Muhammad Rashid Charity Association<sup>10</sup>. It should be noted that the women adapt their activity to the local circumstances – on the one hand, typical of the conservative and rich Saudi Arabia, and on the other hand, of the wealthy United Arab Emirates that create themselves as new technology leaders, and poor Egypt, where nearly half of the population lives on less than 2 dollars a day and the same percentage cannot read or write [UNDP 2005].

## The world of politics

The tradition of women's participation in politics is as old as in the case of business and dates back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad. His wife Aisha actively participated in politics – she stood out against claims of Ali Ibn Abi Talib to assume the caliphate after the death of her husband. Nowadays, the participation of women in politics in the Arab world is negligible. In accordance with the data of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, women constitute merely 17 percent in the legislative bodies of the countries of the Middle East and Northern Africa, by five percentage points less than the world average<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, women play a more and more important role in the political life – in all countries, with the exception of the Saudi Arabia and Qatar, they may be elected to the Parliament, and in certain countries (e.g., Mauritania, Morocco) quota systems have been introduced to support female candidates in their efforts to gain a foothold in politics. The two women presented in this paper assumed the portfolio of ministers, whereby one of them – Salwa Aysha Labban – in the country with a long tradition of women's participation in politics; and the other one – Nuriya as-Sabih – as the second woman in the history of her country.

**Salwa Aysha Labban** was the Minister of Women, Family and the Elderly in the Tunisian government under President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In terms of morals, Tunisia is considered one of the most liberal Arab countries, among others it is the only country in the region which has prohibited polygamy. Women appeared in the Tunisian Parliament in 1959 (earlier they had only been present in the Parliament of Egypt) and for many years they have constituted approximately a fifth of all Members of Parliament.

Perhaps for this reason, most media reports on Salwa Aysha Labban only included information on her present work, among other actions promoting the rights of pregnant women, improvements to the social security scheme, higher quality crèches and kindergartens, as well as higher participation rates of women (in particular from rural areas) in the social and economic life of the country. Salwa Aysza Labban tackled problems associated with the situation of women on the Forum of the Pan-Arab region, however she did it from the point of view of the country which is referred to as (and considers itself) the most progressive in respect of gender equality issues<sup>12</sup>.

**Nuriya as-Sabih**, the Minister of Education and Higher Education of Kuwait, who assumed this office in early April 2007 as one of two women, for the first time in the history of the country, is in a totally different situation. She attended the cabinet swearing-in ceremony without the hijab, which provoked a protest of several Members of Parliament<sup>13</sup>. A "Kuwait Times" journalist summarised the situation in the following manner:

*Let us consider what is on the minds of our Members of Parliament: Nuriya's hijab. Is it not a serious problem that deserves to be discussed? We must not underestimate the Nuriya's hijab, because apparently this is the source of all the problems of the country. (...)*

*Mr [D. Buramia, who protested the loudest – KGS footnote] did not discuss the qualifications of Nuriya Sabih. He did not pay attention to the years she had served in the Ministry of Education. He only focussed on the fact whether she would enter the Abd Allah Salim hall wearing a hijab or not. I wish Nuriya good luck and want to say to her: stay what you are. Enter the hall with confidence and with your head up [B. Darwish, Nouriya's scarf, "Kuwait Times", 2.04.2007].*

The Kuwait minister has worked in her sector all her life. In the 1970s, she graduated with a degree in pedagogy from Kuwait University. She started her career as a teacher, then headmistress, supervisor and, finally, head of department and under-secretary of state in the Ministry of Education<sup>14</sup>. As-Sabih is not a member of any political bloc and is known for her liberal views.

Finally, it is worthwhile to present one of the First Ladies of the Arab world, who has become even more famous than her husband. This is Queen

**Rania Al-Abdallah**, a wife of the King Abdallah II of Jordan. As a graduate in management from American University in Cairo, she had worked for Citibank and Jordan Apple before she met her husband. She describes her role as follows:

*Many people are impressed when they hear the word "queen", but for me this is a job that includes several functions. First of all, I should be a partner for His Majesty and support him in the actions taken by him to improve the quality of life of all the citizens of Jordan. In addition, I engage in actions associated with taking care of the children, protection of the families, empowerment of women, improving opportunities for youth, culture and tourism. A lot of work? Yes. Impossible? No. In principle, these tasks give me strength [Rania Al-Abdallah, <http://www.queenrania.jo>].*

Queen Rania is not only known for being the most beautiful and the youngest queen in the world. What makes her famous is, first of all, her charitable and social activity, both in Jordan and at the international level. In this manner she complements her husband, who is primarily involved in the economic and political issues. In addition, Queen Rania seeks to promote a positive image of Islam and fight with stereotypical notions of the religion and its followers. It is hard to say which of these tasks is more important – to be a role model for young women or an advocate for the Arab world [Macleod 2000].

In the case of women representing the Arab political scene, it is much more difficult to indicate the similarities. The implications of local considerations in individual countries are too important. The Tunisian Minister did not have to convince the other members of the government that a woman can hold this position. This results from a relatively long tradition of women's presence in the Tunisian Parliament and the manner in which this country is presented as the most liberal one in the region. Nuriya as-Sabih was in a totally different situation. She had to fight for her status because Kuwaiti society is very conservative, on the other hand – which is equally important – the fact that she comes from a fairly well-known and respected family guarantees her such possibilities<sup>15</sup>. Queen Rania on the other hand, being the most famous First Lady of the Middle East, may take care of women's issues in the international arena and undertake an intercultural dialogue between the Arab and the Western worlds.

## The world of entertainment

Women's activity in the world of entertainment has also a very long tradition, although for years it was confined to the privacy of harems. Women's participation in the world of entertainment was faced with moral barriers. Nevertheless, Arab actresses and singers have made their mark in the history and present of the Arab world.

One of the first singers performing Arab pop is **Latifa**. She comes from a Tunisian family that was not very well-off. At first, she was a student at the faculty of philology, but soon dropped out and joined the Arab Academy of Music in Egypt. A well-known composer heard her voice on the radio and that marked the beginning of her national and international career as a singer. Her first pop album *Aktar min ruhi* was created in 1986, the first international one entitled *Inszallah* in 1999. In the 20 years of her career, she has sold over 20 million records, which was crowned with the World Music Awards, which she won in 2004 for best selling artist in the Middle East and Africa<sup>16</sup>.

Latifa was the first Arab pop<sup>17</sup> singer to break the taboo by singing about love. In 1993, she recorded the song *Hobbok hadi*, in which she complains about lukewarm feelings of a man, and in another hit – *Kerehtak* – she directly sings about hatred towards men. The singer is also engaged in political activity – while receiving the prize at the World Music Awards ceremony she said that freedom in Iraq and Palestine needs to be ensured before she could be truly happy<sup>18</sup>. In the face of the conflict in Lebanon, she urged other Arab artists to organise a joint campaign for the benefit of its victims.

Career of a much younger (born in 1983) Lebanese, **Nancy Ajram**, began when she had won the main prize in the entertainment show *Nujum Al-Mustakbal* (Stars of the Future) in the *taarab* category. Since that time, she has sold over 20 million records. She achieved success thanks to her third album *Ja salam*, and in particular the hit *Achasmak ah* (I sulk at you) accompanied by a provocative videoclip. Nancy Ajram is a shocker and, therefore, gains popularity. She was called "the most spontaneous Arab kitten" for good reason [Stack 2006]. Kuwaiti authorities refused Nancy Ajram permission to perform during the *Id-Al-Fitr* festival because of the improper style of this performance, inconsistent with moral values, and provocative clothing<sup>19</sup>. In August 2006, one of the Egyptian MPs issued a proposal to ban performances in

Egypt for two Lebanese singers, including Nancy Ajram. The politician changed his mind when both singers ceased any performances for the duration of conflict in their country<sup>20</sup>. What is more, the mayor of Marrakech banned performances by Ajram due to the fact that various incidents had taken place during the previous concert – excessive alcohol consumption, cases of sexual harassment, violence and many people lost consciousness. The singer was found guilty of the incidents by fundamentalist circles<sup>21</sup>.

**Ahlam**, representing the Gulf countries, who is a citizen of the United Arab Emirates coming from Bahrain, is much more even-minded. As a girl, she sang at wedding ceremonies and receptions. During one of her performances, she was noticed by a Kuwaiti composer and this launched her career. Ahlam is mainly popular in the Gulf countries due to her characteristic timbre of voice. Perhaps for this reason, she is an advocate of singing in her own dialect – especially that more and more singers from the other Arab countries choose songs in the “Gulf” dialects in order to win the market<sup>22</sup>.

The singers presented have a lot in common. Similarly as Latifa, who established her own foundation in 2005, Nancy Ajram also engages in the charitable and political activities. In connection with the conflict in Lebanon, she recorded a song *Lebnan ja habibi el-umor*. Although to a much lesser degree, Ahlam also engages in the Palestinian affairs – she performed at the Jerash Festival of Culture (Jordan), where one of the blocks was devoted to the Palestinian uprising in the West Bank and Gaza<sup>23</sup>. All singers from an early age had been keen on singing and their talent was noticed by renowned composers who enabled them to start their careers. What is more, all of them are related to *taarab*, i.e., classical Arab music genre. At first, Latifa sang classical Arab music, Ajram won a competition in the *taarab* category, and Ahlam was proclaimed the queen of *taarab*. Finally, all the singers, and in particular Nancy Ajram, who is the biggest pot stirrer, must deal with rumours that are spread about them. It is worthwhile to add that the amount of information on singers available on the Arab websites is strongly and repeatedly larger than the amount of information on any other professional group. What is more, the signers themselves take care of their image – each of them has her own professionally designed website<sup>24</sup>.

## The world of men

The truth is that in all the previously discussed spheres, women enter the world dominated by men. In the patriarchal Arab culture, many places are still inaccessible to women. This sub-chapter presents images of three women, who became pioneers in their respective countries entering the domains designated exclusively for men.

Approximately 30 women were sworn in as judges in Egypt in late March 2015. Until now it was impossible for religious reasons – the role of a judge is prohibited for women under the Islamic law. In accordance with one Quranic verse, in the court a testimony of one male witness equates the testimony of two female witnesses. Opponents to the reform argue that if a woman cannot be a full-fledged witness, all the more so she should not be a judge. Moreover, any talks held by women judges with men behind closed doors are inappropriate and any potential pregnancy will affect the authority of the office [Sung 2007].

In 2003, the then President of Egypt Husni Mubarak appointed a woman to the position of a judge, although she could not adjudicate criminal or civil law cases<sup>25</sup>. Ten years earlier, an Egyptian lawyer, **Fatima Lashin**, fought for the right to pursue a position of a judge. Her candidacy was ruled out exclusively on the grounds of gender. The lawyer accused the commission of discrimination but she lost the case. Soon after, Egyptian authorities appointed another woman to the position of a deputy state prosecutor – for the first time in the history of Egypt [Apiku 2003]. An “Al-Ahram” journalist summed up, “Fatime Lashin’s dream (...) has finally come true” [Leila 2007].

In Morocco, women may become judges, but until recently could not be preachers (*murishdat*). In 2006, 50 women completed a twelve-month course for preachers. They may teach in mosques and provide moral assistance and support to Muslims in need, especially those from lower levels of society. It was the Moroccan Monarch King Muhammad II who came up with an idea to appoint women mourchidates. After a terrorist attack in Casablanca in 2003, the King decided that moderate Islam should be promoted among others by women. Despite religious studies, Moroccan preachers do not intend to assume the role of imam, as it is reserved exclusively for men [Chakir 2006].

Finally, it is worthwhile to mention efforts taken by women from the most conservative Arab coun-

try, who want to have the right to drive vehicles. In Saudi Arabia women are not allowed to drive. However, one woman is a pilot – **Hamadi Hindi** signed a contract with private airlines owned by Saudi Prince Al-Walid Ibn Talal, a grandson of King Fahd, who is considered to be a reformer. Hamadi's father played an important role in her success – although criticised by the relatives, he had sent her to the Mid East Aviation Academy in Jordan. Her mother kept criticising her decision, both because of the profession chosen and the fact that she was in Jordan without a male relative (*mahram*)<sup>26</sup>. That is why, her employer hired her father as well, otherwise Hamadi would not be able to travel<sup>27</sup>.

During the period of her studies, Hamadi had to learn not only the skill of flying but also how to function in a much more liberal Jordan society. She recalls that it took her a long time to get used to freedom prevailing in Jordan, as well as to flights with a man who was her teacher<sup>28</sup>. Now she believes that women are capable of taking up any type of work even those monopolised by men and that Saudi Arabia offers women more and more opportunities<sup>29</sup>.

All the women are pioneers in areas until now reserved exclusively for men, and for this reason only, they have a lot in common. Moroccan women are the first *mourchidates* in the world of Islam. Although women judges practice in many Arab countries, the fact that they are employed in Egypt sets a precedence. In Saudi Arabia on the other hand, flying the plane in a situation when driving a car is forbidden is perceived as unique.

The success of these women is to a large extent dependent on the consent of political or religious leaders. In Morocco, *mourchidates* were taught at the initiative of the King, while in Saudi Arabia Hanadi Hindi was employed by the Saudi Prince. Meanwhile in Egypt, religious leaders (similarly as the society) are divided. Religious context is important as well. Islam provides a point of reference not only for the opponents but also for those who are in favour of the reforms. This is especially noticeable in Egypt – in addition to fatwas under which women are not allowed to become judges, there are other ones stating that there is no contradiction between being a woman and a judge. However, Islam also sets certain standards, which even the women concerned do not want to exceed. *Mourchidates* have clearly stated that they will never assume the position of the imam. Seeing the constraints experienced by women in Saudi Arabia, Hamadi Hindi empha-

sises that she is not an advocate of full equality, because a woman is only a woman and she cannot be a man<sup>30</sup>.

## Summary

Many factors shape the images of women presented in this paper. First of all, it is necessary to mention social background – important particularly in the case of career women in the world of business or politics. With the exception of the Tunisian minister, of whose decent little is known, and Queen Rania, who is mentioned as the First Lady rather than a politician, all these women come from eminent families. These families often have a material impact on the economic and political life of the country, while other members of these families occupy important positions in the state. Whether conformists (Husna Rashid) or rebels (Nuriya as-Sabih), women derive legitimacy for their actions from the high social status. The social background seems to be unimportant in the case of women from the other two categories, in particular show business. This, or perhaps the specific character of the profession, could account for the fact that the three singers in question attract more media attention, especially as far as their private lives are concerned. Women from the world of business and politics are presented solely through the prism of what they do in the professional sphere.

Secondly, the images of the women presented are to a large extent shaped by their attitudes to religious issues. This mainly applies to the Gulf countries inhabitants and women who enter these segments of social life which have been traditionally reserved for men. Most reports relating to Nariya as-Sabih and Lubna Olayan include a religious theme associated with hijab – an important external marker of religiousness. In the case of the singers the religious theme is presented indirectly – it is included in, often controversial, information on their private lives. It should also be noted that Islam sets a kind of framework that these women do not want to exceed. This applies to *mourchidates*, Hanadi Hindi, as well as all the other women from the world of business and politics, perhaps with the exception of the Tunisian minister because in the case of this country religion to a lesser extent affects social life and the system of government (republic).

Finally, it is worthwhile to point out that all the women act for the benefit of their communities.

Lubna Olayan and Nuriya as-Sabih fight for greater rights for women and behave in the same way as did Nawal as-Sadwai – one of the first Arab suffragettes. Husna Rashid, Latifa and Nancy Ajram undertake a charitable activity for the benefit of their communities, and Queen Rania internationally. This activity has an important impact on their image – of career women, who are nevertheless concerned with the problems of people in need of help. This harmonizes with the role model of a good Muslim as a person who distributes his or her assets. Lubna Al-Qasimi, on the other hand, leads her country on the path towards IT technologies.

All these women may be referred to as career women, even if only because of the positions that they have managed to achieve. An issue to be discussed remains, however, to what extent they perceive themselves in this way, thus what is their subjective dimension of success. Some of them (e.g., Lubna Al-Qasimi, Hanadi Hindi, Mourchidates) seem to be fulfilled and satisfied with their role. Others (e.g., Nuriya as-Sabih, Lubna Olayan, Fatima Lashin) can feel unsatisfied to some extent. They are pioneers, reformers, thus play an extremely difficult role – in particular in a patriarchal Arab society.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. e.g. Arab women leadership outlook 2009-2001, PricewaterhouseCoopers 2009.

<sup>2</sup> For the definition of success see [Gładys-Jakóbiak 2006].

<sup>3</sup> Several years ago, all of these spheres were almost exclusively the domain of men, however women have managed to take a foothold therein. It should be noted that today some jobs are still inaccessible to women. This sub-chapter relates to women who have managed to overcome this barrier.

<sup>4</sup> Thus, the study ignores many other spheres in which women can be successful, in particular those associated with the traditional role of women (e.g. woman as mothers, wives).

<sup>5</sup> J. Wheeler, UAE to get first woman minister, BBC, 2 November 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi on Forbes Lists, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/sheikha-lubna-al-qasimi/?list=power-women>

<sup>7</sup> Her Excellency Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi, UAE Minister of Economy and Chief Executive Officer, Tejari, <http://www.zu.ac.ae/leadership2006/sheikhalubna.apxs>

<sup>8</sup> Other “digital Sheherazedas” are Maha Al-Ghunaim from Kuwait and Sheikha Hanadi Nassir Ibn Chalid At-Tani from Qatar.

<sup>9</sup> Unveiled women anger Saudi cleric, BBC News, 21 January 2004.

<sup>10</sup> The Association has operated since 1994 in the suburbs of Alexandria. It has organised Quranic courses in the Abd Ar-Rahman Mosque, equipped the Muhammad Rashid School, provided children with school supplies, established a crèche and an out-patient clinic and also conducts reading and writing courses for illiterate, vocational training for women, computer club, drawing and sculpture classes for the youth and a ballet workshop. Cf.: The Mohamed Rachid Charity Association, <http://arabinfomall.bibalex.org/En/OrgData.aspx?orgid=178&sectionid=5>, 14 April 2007

<sup>11</sup> Women in National Parliaments, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Cf.: L'approche avant-gardiste de la Tunisie exposée au Caire, La Presse, 31 March 2007.

<sup>13</sup> The video from the swearing-in ceremony is available at YouTube.com. You can hear that while she was being sworn-in some of the MPs were tapping and shouting and one stood up and kept fingering. Nuriya as-Sabih never stopped reading out the oath and when she finished, reasonably loud applause followed. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNiiQvLgBFI>, 15 April 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Profiles of new cabinet members, “Kuwait Times”, 27 March 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Among other things, Barrak as-Sabih is general manager of Kuwaiti Vodafone.

<sup>16</sup> Latifa wins World Music Award, Albawaba.com, 13 September 2004.

<sup>17</sup> She was not, however, the first woman in music to take up this theme. Another famous Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum had sung about love before her as early as in the 1940s.

<sup>18</sup> Latifa reminds the world of Palestine and Iraq, Albawaba.com, 21 September 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Ajram and Elissa’s silky attire stops them from singing in Kuwait, Albawaba.com, 19 October 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Egyptian Parliament will not ban Haifa Wahbi and Nancy Ajram, Albawaba.com, 15 August 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Ajram accused of blasphemy against Islam, Albawaba.com, 17 May 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Ahlam crowned Queen of Tarab, Albawaba.com, 2 February 2003. The Arab world is characterised by diglossia – in addition to one literary language of all the countries, which is mainly used in a written form, there are dozens or even hundreds of dialects of spoken language. Differences between individual dialects are sometimes so huge that people who speak different dialects are unable to communicate with each other.

<sup>23</sup> Jerash Festival to Reflect Arab and Palestinian Pride, Albawaba.com, 15 July 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Respectively: <http://www.latifaonline.net>, <http://www.nancyajramonline.com> and <http://www.ahlamvoice.ws>

<sup>25</sup> Women appointed as judges in Egypt, WantedInAfrica.com, 23 March 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Hanadi: first Saudi woman pilot, seeks to work in Saudi Arabia, ArabicNews, 26 May 2003.

<sup>27</sup> First Saudi woman pilot to fly as driving debate rages on, op. cit.

<sup>28</sup> Hanadi: first Saudi woman pilot, seeks to work in Saudi Arabia, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Saudi women take to the skies, BBC News, 26 November 2004.

<sup>30</sup> Hanadi: first Saudi woman pilot, seeks to work in Saudi Arabia, ArabicNews, 26 May 2003.



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