Women.

Reading:
- Holmes-Eber, *Daughters of Tunis*.

Status and Rights. The status of women in the Arab world is by most measures worse than in most other regions of the world. Fewer women are educated, fewer are employed, and they have more legal impediments and social restrictions to overcome. Levels of gender segregation vary in the Arab world, but overall they are very high in comparison with what one finds in other regions of the world, and this has many consequences for society. It is easy, however, to exaggerate the difference between the West and the Arab world. It should always be remembered that although women may be equal to men under the law in some Western countries, they are still not equal in terms of employment, pay, or power. Arab women were always been illiterate, deprived of rights, and oppressed in Arab societies before modern reforms. An important factor that is overlooked is class. A woman of elite status was often very powerful in the pre-modern Arab world. Muslim women owned property in their own names both when they were married and after being divorced or widowed. They could dispose of this property independently of their husbands and even against their will; it was not combined with their husbands' assets upon marriage, and the husbands had no right to use it, even to pay for the upkeep of the family. While many women in traditional society could not write, a large percentage were taught to read in order to fulfill their basic religious obligations of prayer. A small but significant percentage gained more substantial education, especially girls who had access to education through their fathers, brothers, or other male relatives. Even in a patriarchal system, women are not utterly powerless. In many ways, women in subordinate positions can exert power in various ways. In addition, mothers-in-law often have significant power in traditional systems, and a grandmother or great-grandmother who survives her husband by many years and has a number of sons may become an extremely powerful figure in a family.

Legal and Social Restrictions. Islamic law accords certain rights to women that appear to be a handicap. A woman may inherit wealth, but generally half as much as her brother would. Men can divorce a wife without cause and at will, but a woman generally cannot if her husband refuses to grant a divorce in return for payment (*khul`*). Men can take additional wives without a first wife's consent. Blood money for a free man is 100 camels, whereas it is only 50 for a free woman. The testimony of one man is equivalent to that of two women. All this suggests that a free Muslim woman is assigned a value of one half of a free Muslim man. The problematic status of women in the Arab world, however, often has to do with the neglect of Islamic law rather than its application. In many Arab societies, particularly in rural areas, when a man dies his brothers confiscate all his property, and the women in the family, including the deceased's wife or sister, get nothing. This obviously puts women in a weak economic position, but it is the result of a blatant violation of Islamic law.

Discrimination. Nawal El Saadawi points out that the current social systems in Egypt and other Arab countries have tremendous negative effects on women. Segregation of the sexes, the value attached to male children, the importance attached to female virginity, and the dependence of a family's honor on women's chastity result in many oppressive measures, including the seclusion of women, the favoring of brothers over sisters in medical treatment and education, honor killings, and clitorectomy, which is called "circumcision" and practiced widely in Egypt and the Sudan. The taboos of dating, premarital sex, and masturbation create tremendous sexual frustration, which results in a high incidence of sexual abuse of young girls by family members. Girls are controlled not only by their parents but also by their brothers, including their younger brothers. Girls' and womens' movements outside the house are often severely restricted, and women must often be accompanied by a brother or other close relative to go out of the house. Many husbands do not allow their wives to work outside the home. Families and societal circumstances thus stunt the educations, careers, and aspirations of many Arab women. El- Saadawi's portrayal is shocking and bleak, but is nevertheless based on important facts. However, a wide variety exists in the Arab World with regard to the social restrictions on women. Holmes-Ebers' work provides many real-life examples of Arab women in a particular setting—the city of Tunis, Tunisia's capital—that illustrate the restrictions they must negotiate in their daily lives. While not all Arab societies and circles are the same as the ones she investigated, her examples represent fairly well the norms that govern a large percentage of women in many Arab nations. In particular, her book describes many rural families that have migrated to the capital, something that is representative of large segments of the population in many Arab countries.

Arab Feminism. Feminism, the political struggle to attain more rights for women, began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the Arab World. Qasim Amin (1868-1908), a student of Muhammad Abduh, perhaps at

his teacher's urging, wrote a number of influential books regarding the emancipation of women, especially *The Liberation of Women* (1899), arguing that the emancipation of women was necessary for the advancement of society. He wrote in impassioned and blunt terms, "A good mother is more useful to her species than a good man, while a corrupt mother is more harmful than a corrupt man"; "It is impossible for there to be successful men if they do not have mothers capable of raising them to be successful"; "The number of children killed by ignorant women every year exceeds the number of people who die in the most brutal wars"; and "There is no doubt that the man's decision to imprison his wife contradicts the freedom which is the woman's natural right." He an others argued against the practice of veiling and the seclusion of women. The nationalist parties that were active before and after the independence of Arab nations were generally secular and modernist, and worked toward universal education and employment in order to strengthen the nation. Women entered the professional workforce in larger numbers, they were educated for more years, the average age at marriage for women increased, and the total number of babies per woman decreased. Now many of the same forces affecting the West are affecting the East, and the nuclear family is replacing the extended family as the dominant living arrangement, though the extended family is still very important in the Arab world. It is typical to find, for example, that a father has built an apartment building and expects all of his children to live there when they get married, one or two nuclear families on each floor (a very convenient arrangement for babysitting).

Questions:
1. Describe the prevalence and effects of endogamy as evident from Holmes-Eber's research in Tunisia.
2. What percentage of marriages in the Arab world involves polygamy?
3. What are the factors that determine one's class or status in Tunisian society?
4. What are the important networks for women in Tunisia, how do they function, and what benefits do they bring?
5. Do males have such networks? How are they similar or different?
6. It is often claimed that modernization involves a shift from the extended family to the nuclear family. Is this true in Tunisia or elsewhere in the Arab world? How might such a claim be missing important information?
7. What are women's roles in popular religious celebrations, and what does this tell us?

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Men.

Reading:
Gilsenan, Michael. *Lords of the Lebanese Marches: Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society.* London: I.B. Tauris, 1996.

Rural Life. Until recent times, the arm of the central government rarely reached directly to rural areas except those quite close to the major cities. Control was maintained indirectly through local chieftains, village headmen, tax collectors, landholders, governors, or minor rulers. In the medieval Middle East, regimes such as that of the Mamluks farmed out control of rural regions to military commanders as fiefs termed *iqta`*. These worked in ways similar to a feudal system, but they were temporary holdings rather than inheritable lands. In Morocco in the nineteenth century, the territory was divided into two parts, *bilad al-makhzan*, essentially crown territory, the coastal plains and the regions of Fez, Miknas, and Ouijda, which were under the direct control of the king, and *bilad al-siba* uncontrolled territory, which consisted of mountainous interior regions that the king did not control directly, and this system was inherited and perpetuated under French colonial rule. In many regions, peasants often did not have recourse to the central government to redress corruption, abuses, or oppressive practices such as forced labor on the part of local landholders, who maintained control through henchmen and threats of violence. In the twentieth century, the independent Arab nations worked to dismantle such systems by breaking up large holdings of land and distributing it among the peasants or other owners, improving infrastructure for communication and transportation, and establishing a stronger institutional presence in rural areas. Despite such efforts, elements of the old pseudo-feudal systems continue to exist in some rural areas.

Lebanon. Beginning shortly after the Crusades in the early 12th century, the Catholic church established ties with Christians in the region and the Maronite church was formed. A faction of the Syrian Orthodox Church that broke off and affiliated with the Catholics, while retaining their distinct traditions and Syriac liturgy, becoming a Uniate Church. The relationship continued even after Acre (Akka), the last Crusader outpost was conquered by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars in 1291. In the sixteenth century, a college for Syrian Christians was established in Rome. The French king assumed the mantle of the protector of Catholics in the Middle East, and also maintained contact with the Maronites. During the First World War, Britain and France signed the Sykes-Picot agreement, according to which the Arab territories that the Ottoman Empire was destined to forfeit after the war would be split up as follows: Syria would go to France, and Palestine, Iraq, and Arabia would go to Britain. These territories were not called colonies but mandates after the Peace Conference at San Remo, on the grounds that they were temporary colonies being prepared for independent rule. France divided Syria into two parts, Lebanon and what is now Syria, expressly in order to create a nation in which the Christians were a majority. A confessional system of government was created in which power was divided among Christians, Sunni Muslims, and Shiite Muslims, and the Christians clearly had the upper hand, for the president had to be a Maronite, while the Sunni Muslims chose the Prime Minister, and Shiite Muslims, the Speaker of the Parliament. Despite many problems and a long civil war (1975-1990), this system is still in place.

Lords of the Marches. Michale Gilsenan's excellent ethnography sheds light on village life in an agricultural region of northern Lebanon, revealing patterns that are typical of economic, social, and political life in rural regions in many parts of the Arab world, whether in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, or Morocco. The particular setting is `Akkar, a district at the northwest corner of Lebanon, bordering Syria and the Mediterranean coastline. `Akkar is inhabited primarily by Sunni Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians; Gilsenan completed his fieldwork in 1971-72 among the Sunni Muslims. Local society is divided into three main groups: peasants, *aghawat* or the overseer class,

and beys or the landholding class. The power of the central government seems quite removed from this society, intervening only occasionally, but the *bey*s, by virtue of their ability to coerce or muster the locals into voting for them, often held important offices in the national government. Gilsenan describes the complex relations between men in this society and their everyday performances of masculine roles in the course of hierarchical, factional, and familial contests for power. Violence, threats, the use of weapons, boasting, joking, taunts, debates, formal exchanges of politeness formulae, flattery, shows of deference, and vendetta are all involved in the negotiation of reputation, influence, relationships, and politics. The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and subsequent events have significantly changed the organization of society in `Akkar, but Gilsenan's work remains important both for its explanation of the workings of this agricultural community and for its insightful description of everyday interactions between males in an Arab culture.

Questions:
1. Define six of the following terms:
   A. Bey.
   B. Agha.
   C. Fellah.
   D. Jaqmarah.
   E. Kizb.
   F. Daght.
   G. Fashr.
   H. Hamasa.
   İ. Karama.
   J. Mistilim.
   K. Manzul.
   L. Murafiq.
   M. Qabaday.
   N. Sheikh ash-shebab.
   O. Tafnis.
   P. Tamthiliyya.
2. How do the great landholders maintain control over the peasants?
3. What are the rules that govern revenge or vendetta?
4. What other methods besides violence can be used to coerce others or establish domination over others?
5. How are boys trained to be men in this society?
6. What role do weapons play in this society?
7. How is reputation established? How is it lost?
8. What role does lying play in social relations?

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