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Edited by

Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flaskerud



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Women Students at the American University of Beirut from the 1920s to the 1940s

Aleksandra Majstorac Kobiljski

Introduction

Feminist studies of women in the Middle East have long followed a path of deconstructing and uncovering patterns of patriarchal oppression. In attempting to examine these patterns, feminist scholars have inadvertently rendered subjects of their studies powerless victims of patriarchy and also religions and ideologies. This resulted in calls for a different approach to the study of women's status and their roles in society. Treating women as active agents of their own lives has been mirrored by a change in research strategies. Greater effort is being made to give women of the Middle East a voice and relevance in discussing their own past and present. A number of scholars have incorporated women's social experiences in histories of their communities. Thus, experience of women has been acknowledged as a valuable asset to analysis, with the cautionary remark that it "does not automatically give agency to women" (Müge Göçek and Balaghi, 1994: 4). While acknowledging the existence of detrimental patriarchal constructions hindering women's active and equal participation in the community, it is important to consider the ways women use agency to counter those constructions. In that regard, another concept of great importance is that of women's strategies when faced with obstacles posed by patriarchies, religious orthodoxies and ideologies.

The aim of this chapter is to utilize these two concepts – experience and strategies – to give insight into the lives of a very small group of elite women who studied at the American University of Beirut from the 1920s to the 1940s. The chapter is structured around three main spheres of women's experiences: enrollment strategies, access to campus space and extracurricular activities on campus. These aspects are followed separately (strategies, space and activities) and chronologically throughout three decades. Principal sources for this study are the official publication of the university: *Al Kulliyah (Al Kulliyah Review)* and oral histories. *Al Kulliyah* was published from 1920 until 1933. In 1933 it

changed format and content to *Al Kulliyah Review*, a student-produced bi-weekly paper which was an important source of students' writing. While being a source, *Al Kulliyah* is also an object of this study because it represents a virtual campus space where women asserted their presence and made themselves heard. Another source for this study are oral histories of women students conducted some fifty to sixty years after their graduation. The strategies they used to widen their choice and increase their participation in campus life are derived from the sources they produced themselves. These sources offer a perspective on issues women students faced daily. If we read these sources against the backdrop of the official documents of the university we realize that women students' discussions focused on a different set of issues than those considered by the university authorities.

While this is a limited, elite-focused investigation, I believe it offers important insight into the formation of a generation of role models who profoundly influenced their communities and societies in the twentieth century. The principal innovation of this approach is that it takes writing and oral histories of women students as the principal source and inspiration for the study of the university as the missionary institution of higher education. Both fighting against and benefiting from tradition, class and religion in a colonial setting of the Mandate period, these women strategized and worked their way through the ivory tower – the elite American University of Beirut. Their struggle, as documented in various sources, can refine our understanding of their pursuit of higher education and participation in society. As such, this contributes to the efforts of including women's experiences and role in the university's history and contributes to the larger field of social history of the region in the Mandate period. Finally, I believe that *historia est mater studiorum* and without overly romanticizing women's history, the study of women's fight for participation and recognition in academic institutions offers important insight for academic women today.¹

Historical and Institutional Context

The American University of Beirut was founded in 1866 by the Syrian Protestant Mission as a Christian American institution of higher learning for male students. Originally, it was called Syrian Protestant College and operated under that name until 1920, when it was given its present name. Education did not figure among major goals and aims of the American Protestant Mission in Arab countries. Nevertheless, educational efforts, especially the education of girls, were identified early as the pride and joy of the Mission. In view of the unsuccessful evangelization project, by the early twentieth century women became an important target group of missionary efforts through educational projects oriented to their perceived future as mothers and homemakers.

World War I traumatized all strata of society in the region and the capital – Beirut. Massive numbers died on the fronts while women and children starved at home. Three-fourths of adult male population was mobilized (2.85 million troops), and nearly 1 million died on the battlefields (Thompson 2000: 22). The elites did not suffer the horrors of famine but struggled with other kinds of challenges. Their attitudes towards female education – which became a norm – changed greatly in the years following World War I, together with the changing attitudes toward female mobility in public space. Due to the profound distress caused by World War I, many women had to fend on their own and participated in paid labor outside the home. It became obvious that education was a means of providing security and stability for the family. This was especially true for the greatly impoverished middle class, who saw it as an investment. A strong base of girls with solid high school educations, graduating from missionary girls’ schools of Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon further fueled local demand for higher education (Fleischmann 2002: 414). This made college education for women seem the next step on the Mission’s educational agenda, potentially a profitable one. However, it is important to note that education for women was largely not envisioned by the university administration as coeducation and at most times during the first half of the twentieth century it was treated quite separately – in quality and content – from education for men.

On September 1 1920, the French high commissioner, Henri Gouraud, announced the establishment of the State of Greater Lebanon, a state under French Mandate. In November 1920, the American University of Beirut voted to admit women students to the university’s professional schools under the condition that there were at least three women who would be enrolled together. At the same time, the university made an effort to convince the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions and other organizations active in the region to establish a Junior College for Girls, or devise another way of offering liberal college education for women. In April 1922, Lebanon witnessed its first elections with universal male suffrage. In the same year, in response to women’s demand for education, the university began allowing auditors – of both sexes – to attend classes at the School of Arts and Sciences for a fee, without a claim to a degree. Although it was apparently not directed at women students alone, I argue that this policy was a way of containing the inflow of women candidates with valid qualifications until institutions other than the university developed a single-sex educational option. Eventually, the demand of qualified women for higher education outpaced the ability of missionaries to establish a single-sex liberal college for women. However, efforts towards establishing of such single-sex institution continued and resulted in the introduction of a college freshmen curriculum in the American School for Girls in 1924/25. But again, in 1924 the university yielded to the pressures of demand and allowed women to enter the sophomore year of the School of Arts

and Sciences. This decision was passed reluctantly only after the Syrian Mission clearly stated that it could not foresee an immediate way to develop an institution of higher learning for women alone (Faculty Minutes 1927). Passed reluctantly, it was a short-lived provision that lasted only until 1927, when the American Junior College for Girls was founded and offered academic work equivalent to freshman and sophomore years. Women students who wanted to pursue higher education were obliged to graduate from the American Junior College for Girls before enrolling in the American University of Beirut.

The gradual opening of the American University of Beirut in 1920s to women students was part of a larger context of social change at the beginning of the Mandate period. The city of Beirut itself experienced a significant physical and demographic change, with extension of the physical public space and doubling of the population of the city between 1920 and 1932. Mandate authorities viewed education as a tool of exercising French influence over the population. However, the difference in attention and budgets allocated to boys' and girls' public schools was to the disadvantage of the latter. Protestant missionary schools for girls catered to that gap and produced an important base of competent girls who wanted to continue their education. By reluctantly trying to fill in the gap between demand and supply of professional and liberal education for women, the university never intended to, nor did it in fact, encourage coeducation. It was a concession made to satisfy three demands: of women eager to pursue professional training at the university and/or liberal education, of market demand for female medical, and educational personnel, and of a generation of alumni or faculty members who wanted higher education for their daughters. Changed attitudes towards female professional engagement encouraged some women from the upper-middle class to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and pursue medicine, pharmacy and education. On the other hand, the habits of middle-class women changed in the decades following World War I. Consulting a doctor, reading the newspapers and doing shopping became part of the routine for many middle-class women as well as for the elites (Thompson 2000: 85, 175–83). This meant that the demand for and of women professionals became a pertinent and increasingly difficult to ignore.

The resulting acceptance of women to the university and consequent introduction of coeducation was an experiment and not a deliberate act aimed at advancing coeducation. The university's struggle to keep women out of the regular student body was a conscious process which was intensive in the 1920s but continuing throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Within the closed doors of faculty meetings women in the university system were perceived as an unwelcome challenge, but for the general public acceptance of women students was presented as an event marking an active effort by the university to promote regional educational development ("American University of Beirut Notes" 1921). The ambiguous treatment that women student faced and the reasons behind it are

difficult to document in entirety. However, the writing of a woman student from 1930s illustrates that this ambiguity of the university authorities was felt and well articulated by women students.

There was a time, and not so long ago, when the doors of the A.U.B. were obstinately shut to the women of the Near East – and elsewhere. There was a time when some of us ambitious women . . . had to knock repeatedly at those closed doors, pleading our cause in the most eloquent way we could to be granted the privileges of a college education. (Cohen 1936: 1–2)

The reasons behind this stance of the university merit further study. For the purpose of this work the ambiguity of the university regarding women students is important inasmuch as it sheds light on a sophisticated glass web of opportunities and constraints inherent in an environment which is apparently welcoming but intrinsically confused and uncertain about the presence of women in the regular student body.

Strategies of Enrollment to the University

During the turbulent social and political conditions of 1920s Lebanon, several generations of women students entered the Main Gate of the American University of Beirut as regular students and earned their degrees. The first women enrolled in the professional schools in 1921/22 were Fortune Azriel and Sara Levy from Palestine and Aida Goldenberg from Russia alongside two Americans, Katheryn Hulber and Winfred Rouse, teachers at the American Community School who intended to pursue graduate work at the university (Cohen 1936: 1–2). While Levy enrolled in the School of Pharmacy, Goldenberg and Azriel entered the School of Dentistry. These five women were part of the 524-member student body at the university proper. In general, records are scarce regarding this first generation of students and it is not clear from the records what strategy they employed for entering the university. What is known is that Aida Goldenberg dropped out after the junior year, leaving Fortune Azriel alone in the School of Dentistry. The latter, together with Levy, maintained occasional contact with the Auxiliary Alumni branch and participated in the annual women’s luncheons. On the occasion of her graduation from the School of Pharmacy in 1925, Sara Levy addressed the audience of the luncheon as the first woman graduate from the university’s professional schools. The following year, Azriel became the university’s first woman graduate from the School of Dentistry. Alumni records indicate that by 1930 she married Dr. Samuel Appelrot, professor of physiology at the American University of Beirut and continued to live in Beirut. Little is known about the

specific housing arrangements or the use of campus space by these early women students. University sources reveal that in 1920, faculty suggested allowing women students to perform anatomical dissection and microscope work separately from male students; as well as to be assigned a lounge and toilet on the lower floor of the Medical Building (Minutes of General Faculty 1920).

Records are more informative about the second generation of women students in the 1920s. These were the generation of women to whom, in 1924/25, the university gave permission to enroll to the sophomore class of the School of Arts and Sciences. Although it was a short-lived opportunity, several women took advantage of it and enrolled as the first regular students of the School. Adma Abou-Shedid, Munira Saffuri, Gladis Chanklin, Henriette Hakim and Beatrice May Yoly joined women students in the professional schools and those enrolled as auditors. Local middle-class communities' and missionaries' changing attitudes towards female employment marking the decade after World War I (Fleischmann: 2002: 425). Among the first generation of students in the School of Arts and Sciences, there was a marked presence of women educational migrants indicating that the change might have had a regional character. Two of the women students enrolled in 1924/25 were from Egypt. Only a year later, two teen sisters from Damascus and Olga Wahbe from Palestine joined the women's student body along with Beirut women. This was only the beginning of a steady and ever increasing flow of women students from the different parts of the region parallel to well-established tradition of male educational migration to the university.

Studies of missionary educational institutions often assume the influence that missionaries had on their students and the power they had in arranging further education for their protégées (Okkenhaug 2002). However, it is also important to consider women's own strategies for accessing university education as regular students. Some women students enrolled without prior relations to the university or missionary education, like Adma Abou Shedid (BA in medicine 1926, MD 1931) and some were daughters of faculty members, like Salma Khouri Makdisi (BA 1929) and Wadad Khouri Makdisi (BA 1930). Others had relatives graduating from the university and/or were accompanied by their husband like Ihsan Shakir (BA 1929), or more conventionally by their brothers (Anisa Rawda, BA 1936). The following brief examples give insight into a wide variety of means women employed in order to gain access to the university.

Adma Abou Shedid was the first woman doctor to graduate from the School of Medicine of the American University of Beirut. She did not have any immediate relatives or siblings at the university prior to or at the time of her enrollment. In the summer of 1924, after petitioning for admission, she was required to pass an exam equal to the content of the sophomore year, as a prerequisite for enrolling in the School of Medicine. In the autumn of the same year, she was informed that even though she passed the exam she would only be allowed to study at the School

of Arts and Sciences, as there were no other women candidates for the School of Medicine. While waiting for a woman companion – at least one – for the study of medicine, she graduated from the School of Arts and Sciences with a BA in medicine in 1926. In 1926/27 she was finally permitted to enroll in the School of Medicine as its only woman student. Further research is needed to determine what influenced the faculty to change their initial position.

Ihsan Shakir (later known as Ihsan el-Kousy) came from Cairo, Egypt. She got to know about the university through her male cousin who was enrolled in the School of Pharmacy at the time. Ihsan was the first Muslim woman to enroll (1924/25), the first Muslim to graduate (BA 1929) and the one who needed her husband's approval for the project. Mr. Shakir was persuaded to follow his wife from Cairo to Beirut in pursuit of education. Both of them lacked adequate English language skills and so were not eligible for direct admission to the university. Thus, they initially enrolled as special students for two years before enrolling as sophomores in 1926/27.

When remembering Adma and Ihsan, Wadad Khouri Makdisi-Cortas (BA 1930) writes:

I still remember the vehemence against the past, the conviction in the present, and the idealism in the future which animated her [Ihsan Shakir] personality . . . She was in this sense our spiritual leader. The memory of one other person stands clear in my mind and that is of the first Lebanese lady to take up medicine. I mean Dr. Abouchedid . . . Our fears of not being able to cope with the intricate subjects, and to brave the challenge of a male atmosphere of study, dwindled when we compared our simple studies with hers. In this sense she was our academic leader. (Cortas 1947: 4–5)

During the 1930s, the trend of the enrollment of daughters of the faculty remained stable. In addition, there was an increased enrollment of daughters of the alumni and a steady stream of women students enrolled from neighboring Syria, Jordan and Palestine. The trend of women's educational migration from countries other than neighboring emerged and women students started coming from Iraqi and Iranian and from as far as Mecca – like Princess Msubach Al-Haydar, daughter of the Sharif of Mecca, who graduated from the university's Institute of Music in 1931 and taught at the institute until 1935.

The war-scarred decade of the 1940s in Beirut was marked by apprehension brought about by the memories of the suffering of World War I. On campus, the decade was marked by the presence of Polish refugees. They formed a separate and poorly integrated group on campus. "The Poles . . . act slavishly among themselves and japonically with the A.U.B. people" (Druby 1946: 19–20). The first refugee students came to the university in 1941 but the largest waves were in 1943/44 and 1945/46 and in 1947 they numbered 83. In 1945, a special sophomore class was formed for Polish women students. Later, some of these students entered

Schools of Pharmacy and Medicine as well as other fields of study. But by virtue of their refugees' status, some of them did not stay long enough to graduate or they dropped out for other reasons. For example, although sixty-one Polish student registered in October 1947, thirteen had dropped out by February 1948 and a number of others were expected to leave in the course of the academic year ("Around the Campus" 1948: 8). With the increasing influx of Polish students, the women student body witnessed a market diversification from both social and class point of view. Polish girls practiced European values and on campus there was a sense that they "brought in an element, because they were more available to go out with boys than the local girls . . . and a lot of young men that I know, dated Polish girls" (Da Cruz 2004). However, the cross-influence of various migrant groups and local women student population merits a further separate study beyond the scope of this discussion.

Women Students' Spaces

Women students' use of traditionally and dominantly male campus space was closely related to their extracurricular activities. The way in which women students strategized to obtain access to both space and activities changed during the three decades. The patterns of space usage and activities can be considered twofold and are not at all times absolutely separate issue. Activities in the virtual campus space, such as journalism and, on the other hand, activities in real space such as parties and athletics form the twofold fabric of space usage. The extracurricular activities of the early women students during the 1920s were largely restricted to the departmental activities such as speech contests and visiting faculty members and their wives in their homes. The relationship between women students and faculty wives was strengthened by the fact that the president's wife was considered to be in charge of young women's guidance. Other senior faculty's wives were deemed responsible for socially supporting and guiding the students. When in 1925/26, the Women Students' Organization (WSO) was initiated by Ihsan Shakir and with the subsequent inauguration of the women's lounge in January 1926, inviting wives of the faculty members for tea became a well-established social event on campus. Being "at home" for the faculty wives occurred frequently and it took place in the women's lounge.²

The claiming of the campus space in extracurricular activities was part of an ongoing assertion in the public space by women outside of the university walls but it was mediated by the relative fragility of the ideas of coeducation and higher education for women. On the one hand, in order to reach the university, women needed to walk the streets or ride the trams, thus challenging the notions of female presence in the public space at the beginning of the Mandate period. On the other

hand, once attending the university, women students, at first, downscaled their participation in campus public space. In the second half of 1920s and throughout the 1930s, the women's lounge remained the base from which they occasionally ventured into activities outside classrooms and library: "The first thing we did was either go to our class directly or go to the lounge . . . It was relaxing" (Abu-Izzedine 2003). During the 1930s, the lounge largely remained an exclusively female space³ By the end of the academic year 1937/38, the Women Students' Organization petitioned and obtained permission to hold two tea parties to which men students could be invited. However, women students did not use this permission but instead organized a flower ball in West Hall, asserting their presence in another dominantly male communal space.

West Hall, unlike the women's lounge, was built as student activities space at the time when women were not part of the student body. Beginning in the second half of 1920s, the university community witnessed a rise of interest in drama. West Hall became the epicenter of this wave, since most performances were given by Dramatics Club and performances took place in its auditorium. Women students were not allowed to perform in plays with male students (co-act) but by the mid-1930s they were occasionally allowed to perform for the university community (faculty and alumni) audience or have their act as a section of the University Night variety show, several times a year. In 1937/38, the English Department offered a course in the history and development of drama. In the first year, six male and six female students took the course, though the rules of the university still did not permit them to co-act. Nevertheless, women students attended the performances of the Dramatics Club and constituted the audience for performances and entertainment events of other clubs. Thus, they acquired social experiences such as attending social functions in mixed setting other than the immediate kin group, and not readily available to them outside of the university. In addition, the 1930s were a decade of great interest in music. The Institute of Music was located in the West Hall itself and its students were mainly women. Thus, some female students did join male students on the stage of the West Hall since early 1930s by providing musical accompaniment for various clubs events and during the performances given by the institute.

West Hall was not only the venue of performances and other social events but also part of the everyday routine of many male and female students. It housed a cafeteria where students of both sexes went for sandwiches, muffins, juices, coffee, tea and fruit. It was a place where "everybody knew everybody else, especially girls" (Abu Izzedine 2003). But to go to the cafeteria was an adventure and not an easy one for the novice to the campus. It usually took women students some time to muster the courage and start going to the cafeteria. However, as in all other activities they carefully watched each step. Often they would buy a snack in the cafeteria and eat in the women's lounge. In sum, in the 1930s, the West Hall

gradually became the principal place for association between male and female students and according to the university authorities there was “no indication of a lack of propriety, respect or responsibility demanded from all concerned in these activities” (“Co-acting” 1937: 1).

The chapel was also part of the everyday routine for a great majority of students from 8:30 to 9:00 a.m. Monday through Friday. The attendance was considered mandatory and was a common practice among students of different religious backgrounds. Initially, women were seated at the back of the chapel’s middle section, where two rows were designated for women students. At the same time male students were seated alphabetically with their schools and departments. In the university’s male jargon the women’s section used to be called “the harem” (Abu Izzedine 2003). The wife of the president – Mrs. Dodge, whose presence in the chapel was perceived as very supporting – would sit together with women students in the special section. In 1938/39 the seating arrangement of women students was changed and they were seated alphabetically with their classes. It is difficult to establish the cause and the way this change took place as well as to answer the question whether it was partly due to Mrs. Dodge’s influence.

In the fall of 1939, the university inaugurated its first formal arrangement for women students’ lodging by establishing a hostel. The hostel housed eighteen students out of a total of fifty-two enrolled that year. This housing arrangement put an end to migrant women students having only two housing options, either boarding with the students of the American Junior College for Girls or staying with relatives in Beirut. The hostel had a sitting room on the first floor where women students were allowed to receive visitors, including men students. At the same time the women’s lounge remained an exclusively female space. Although some commandos among the student residents of College Hall claimed to have traversed the “unknown,” the lounge was a peaceful campus retreat for women and was off limits to male students.

Women Students’ Activities

Mainly because of the efforts of the Women Students’ Organization the use of campus space by women students expanded during the 1930s. The organization continued to host tea parties in the lounge but they greatly widened the scope and physical perimeter of their activities. By 1933/34, the organization started offering orientation tours of campus for women students. Although some of the women students were familiar with the campus prior to the enrollment, they had little familiarity with the inner campus space, with the possible exception of the library.⁴ Organized at the beginning of each academic year, orientation tours were of great importance because they facilitated familiarity of the campus for

women students who were excluded (by virtue of not entering the university in the freshman year) from the week of activities – organized and sponsored by the university for male students. Aimed at acquainting them with professors and the campus, women students had no such opportunity. Using WSO, women students found a way to transmit knowledge of physical campus space from seniors who were familiar with it to a new groups of women students.

During the second half of the 1920s, outside the lounge and departmental functions women student's activities were devoted to the organization to fight against illiteracy, the Boy Service Club, which was organized within the Brotherhood.⁵ In the beginning of the 1930s, WSO increased the intensity of its cooperating with the Brotherhood. In addition to the fight against illiteracy, women students started helping with organizing receptions and other social activities of the Brotherhood. By becoming more closely involved with the Brotherhood, women students and the WSO slowly gained access to its welfare activities, which in the 1930 included work with poor urban youth and summer village welfare projects. By 1934 welfare activities of the Brotherhood branched out and formed the Civil Welfare Society (CWS) with two branches: city and village welfare. Women students largely turned towards CWS with occasional direct involvement in the Brotherhood activities. Although this seems to follow the general pattern by which earlier generations of women of the middle classes and elites would engage in welfare work in the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries, in order to get out of the domestic realm young female university students in interwar Lebanon do not fit that pattern.

Women students were already venturing out of home every day to attend classes; some of them migrated to Beirut for the purpose of their studies and thus did not need to engage into welfare to get out of their homes. What seems as a more pertinent need was a socially appropriate framework to gain access to social events on campus. Although the activities of the Brotherhood had an important welfare component, women students largely chose to venture into CWS thus gaining participation and access to a great number of campus events that were undertaken in the name and for the benefit of the CWS causes. Engaging in campus events within the framework of welfare efforts offered an appropriate way of engaging with the mixed social and public space of the campus. Thus, gaining experience and social skill for participating in the male-dominated social environment of the university. This experience was later capitalized on in the way women engaged in non-welfare activities on campus. I argue that by choosing CWS activities over the Brotherhood, women students made the choice of prominence – engaging in social functions and activities within the broad framework of the welfare as a means to gain wider experience range and larger exposure on campus.

By the second half of the 1930s, women students were deeply involved in all CWS activities, on and off the campus. During the first half of 1940s the

efforts in the field of civil welfare increasingly took on a form of relief work. Although women students were, more than ever before, expected and needed in the CWS, they turned towards other clubs to which they gained access using CWS experience. Clubs like Debating and International Relations prospered in the period and became the agoras of the University. Women students increasingly took an important part in the debates around these two clubs. Some of them became members of the clubs' administrative structure becoming secretaries or vice-presidents in these organizations. By the mid-1940s female secretaries on club cabinets (including sports) were not uncommon. The International Relations Club was the first to elect a female president in 1943/44, Polish senior political science student Felicia Fedorowich. Debates and lectures on topics such as the new alumna, the future of Near Eastern woman, and their political rights supplemented those on the League of Nations, the postwar reconstruction. Two large-scale Arab women's conferences in Cairo in 1944 and in Beirut in 1949 which were known to the university community, and many other smaller conferences held in Beirut, provided additional staple of controversial topics for campus debates. In addition the end of the 1940s was marked by informal debates of the question of Palestine which became crux of social and political events in the following decades.

With the introduction of the course on journalism in 1933/34, the American University of Beirut opened a new chapter in documenting its history. Starting from December 1933, the magazine *Al Kulliyah Review* became a bi-weekly publication produced by all the members of the class. Although it was not the first student publication, it became one of the most important sources of information about campus life.⁶ From its inception, the journal was a venue where women students' participation in campus life became visible and traceable. In the very first issue of *Al Kulliyah Review* there were two women students among sixteen members of the staff, Aviva Lerner and Rose Ghurayib. Due to the nature of the writing assignments and events they had to cover, journalist – including women students – had a unique pretext and a secured doorway for participation in campus-wide events. In addition, women journalists retained exclusive access to reporting on the WSO and the American Junior College for Girls which made them an indispensable asset on the editorial team.

In the realm of virtual or intellectual space of campus, *Al Kulliyah Review* was important for expressing views on various issues, including those specific to women students. They used the space of the *Review* to address and actively attempt to change their condition. In 1934, Aviva Lerner (BA 1934) wrote in an article on the attitude of male students towards women playing tennis:

As soon as a girl is seen playing on the tennis court, be she student or a visitor, several students instantly appear, form groups and begin mocking, criticizing and jeering. The remarks are made loud enough to be heard by the players, and the impression of it is not

at all very pleasant. They interfere with the game and make the player, already somewhat self-conscious, more so. The girl begins to feel uneasy and timid. Her movements become awkward and her balls go wrong. The game is simply spoiled for her, and the next time she has the opportunity of playing on the AUB courts she will think twice before she places herself once more in a similar unpleasant situation. (Lerner 1934: 4)

The pages of the *Review* also served for the criticism of the faculty by women students. In 1938, one women student wrote a lengthy article in which she not only articulated the awareness of the problem of the way some faculty members addressed their classes but also revealed women students' reactions and actions to counter it:

It was hard for the old professor to adopt himself to the new rules of coeducation! He, a professor of one of the old European universities, did not recognize nor consider the women students who attended his classes. He daily came to the class, greeted his students saying "Good morning, gentlemen!" and began his lecture addressing the gentlemen only! ... Irritated as they were, they [the women students] asked their class-mates not to attend classes on a certain day ... The professors made a good step. All of them addressed their classes "gentlemen and ladies." Now the ladies were acknowledged as a real part of mankind! (Shukair 1938: 12)

The *Al Kulliyah Review* also served as an important and potentially anonymous space for women students outside of the class of journalism to express their opinions. One example is an anonymous woman student's article asking why women students were expected to cheer for the football team. Importantly, the article demonstrates how aware women students were of their numbers in proportion to the student body and how they used this argument well to defend themselves from criticism:

It has come to our ears that the women students are being criticized for not attending the athletic matches and cheering on the Varsity to victory ... Why don't critics stir up a little normal enthusiasm among the men students? Foot ball [*sic*] is your game not ours! ... As a group we are a very very small percent of the student body. The percent of on-lookers at the matches from our group is high. When the same percent is duplicated among the men students we will make an extra effort to raise ours. Until then. ("Who Cheers for Veracity" 1936: 1)

From 1939 to 1943, *Al Kulliyah Review* was forced to change drastically its format. From a bi-weekly it became a monthly magazine and included the Arabic and French sections. The early 1940s saw only a few shortened issues of the *Review* published, with blanks during 1942 and part of 1943. In 1943 the class of journalism was suspended and students edited subsequent issues from 1944 through 1946

with assistance of the Alumni Association and the student committee of the School of Arts and Sciences.

The irregularity of the *Review* does not allow a continuous view of campus life in the first half of the 1940s. Therefore more research is needed using oral histories in order to fill in the gaps and add new perspectives. Nevertheless, *Al Kulliyah Review* remained an important avenue for promoting women students' writing. In 1946 the *Review* kept the same format but became a more regular publication with a noticeable rise in student participation. Women students not only were regularly on the editorial board but also very often had the privilege of interviewing senior faculty members for the *Review*. A regular section on women students was featured in the *Review* from 1944 to 1946. One student even writes sarcastically about the rising voice of women and suggests the distortions and limitations of their participation in campus life.

Besides filling the library [*sic*], as someone commented, the women students are participating in all the University activities. Four of the most important committees, namely West Hall Clubs Cabinet, Debating Club, Scientific Society and – this *Review*, have ladies as secretaries. Dramatics and Badminton – have lady chairmen Also permit me to suggest the assignment of a male secretary for the Women Students' Committee as a compensatory measure. (Zaphiriadis 1946: 10–11)

Although *Al Kulliyah* was the dominant example of women's involvement in student journals it was no the only one. In 1934/35 a woman student, Anisa Rawda, was elected the editor of the magazine of one of the largest student clubs of the time – the Arabic society *Urwat' ul Wuthka*. During the 1930s, journalism in general and *Al Kulliyah* in particular were activities in which women students participated disproportionately to their total number. They used the virtual space of the *Review* and means of journalism as much for the practice of the writing skills as for the acting upon their own drives and issues. The virtual space of the *Review* was a particularly important means of expression when the physical campus space was sending ambiguous signals. In the 1940s, despite its shrinking in size, the pages of the *Review* remained a place where women kept expressing their opinions and acting on the issues they faced.

Sport was another arena in which women students gradually started participating. Although tennis, ping-pong and bowling were not unknown to some women students in 1930s, in the beginning of the 1940s, the interest in "ladies' athletics" increased. This marked a considerable change and enlargement of campus space accessible to women students. Athletics were mandatory for freshmen and sophomores. It was also popular among the upper classes. The Field Day was the major sporting event of the season when university-wide competitions in athletic disciplines and team sports took place. Women students were not enrolled as

freshmen and sophomores and thus did not participate in the Field Day, but could participate in other tournaments and sporting events during the year. With the appointment of Mrs. Kerr in 1945 as the advisor to women students, the issue of women's athletics was for the first time given special attention. Arrangement was made to have one hour twice a week of exercise in the West Hall. The president and his wife – Mr. and Mrs. Dodge – had offered women students free use of the tennis court reserved for the president of the university. Swimming was popular and during the second half of 1930s women students engaged in swimming occasionally. The faculty beach was at their disposal twice a week in addition to the regular access they could have to the student beach. In 1940s the faculty and student beach merged and started serving increasing number of swimmers from the university community and by the end of 1940s most Beirut girls attending the university regularly engaged in swimming.

Another developing sport in the 1940s was skiing, and chaperoned ski-trips to resorts became increasingly popular. By the second half of 1940s, several trips per season were organized by the Athletics Department in cooperation with a local sportswear shop. Although skiing demanded substantial financial, transportation and time resources, which were scarce in this war-marked decade, skiing was an opportunity for women student's to try their hand at a developing sport which later become very popular in the country. In addition, women students participated in several other sports in the form of mixed doubles. These sports included bowling, archery, ping-pong, badminton and tennis – by far the most popular sport of AUB alumni and alumna.

Conclusion

In 1947, the American University of Beirut – which reluctantly opened its doors to women in 1920 – marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of coeducation. Although the jubilee was a product of “the experiment of allowing women to enter Upper Classes of the School of Arts and Sciences, as well as the professional schools” (Report of the President 1947: 3), officially the university was proud of its achievement – the championing of coeducation. However, the first twenty-five years of coeducation at the university setting presented its women students with numerous challenges.

In order to brave some of these challenges, only one of which was the male atmosphere of study, women students at the American University of Beirut began to organize in the mid-1920s. The Women Students' Organization proved to be particularly useful in the beginning, during the consolidation phase. During the first two decades of its existence it served as a liaison with the rest of the university community and opened opportunities for women students to participation in

campus life. In the late 1920s, WSO created a liaison with the only club accessible to women students – the Brotherhood – and strategized the way to participate in the welfare activities of fighting illiteracy. In so doing they took advantage of decreased male students' interest in issues of poor youth and night school expansion projects desired by the university authorities. During the 1930s, women students and WSO made the prominence choice – taking up the social events and activities within the broad framework of the welfare as a means to gain wider experience range and larger exposure. Thus, they asserted their role under the realm of welfare activities while gaining more of social exposure and experience and also venturing into new fields of activity such as journalism and music. Additionally, they maintained a strong involvement with their base – the Women Students' Organization – and related social activities. During the 1940s, the university further promoted civil welfare and social work. It was expected that women students would continue their strong engagement with the Civil Welfare Society, where their place was essential and guaranteed. However, women students gradually drifted away from the CWS and followed their interests, becoming prominent and active in Debating Club and the International Relations Club. Although a number of them continue to participate in welfare activities, these activities ceased to be the dominant and marking component of their involvement on campus. The Women Students' Organization stopped being the only means and way by which women students could gain access to the campus life. In addition, participation in CWS did not serve to contain women students' participation in sharing of campus space but rather facilitated access to other clubs and campus activities in pursuit of participation. In this sense, women students capitalized on the tradition of women's involvement in welfare to widen the scope of future possibilities.

Over the three decades, women students grew from rarities on campus to form a significant and active – yet still small – segment of the student body, although even in the 1940s their presence occasionally caused freshmen to fall from the university wall, as male students sought a glimpse of their female colleagues. Women students used various strategies in acting upon their drive to change the realities they faced on campus and responded critically both to the university authorities and to their male peers, navigating through the glass web of possibilities and constraints. Thus, they were not mere recipients of administration's good will opening the university gate for them. Instead they were active agents of changes within the missionary educational institutions they were enrolled in. By participating in the limited campus space and building a bigger one, they actively solicited and facilitated changes. By writing their experiences they left a significant historical and social document which illuminates the struggle for inclusion on the academic and social environment of the American University of Beirut.

This study contributes a first step towards pointing out the importance of reading sources other than those produced by missionaries, university administration and

faculty – conveniently found in missionary archives outside the region – when discussing women students in the missionary institutions of higher education. The writing of women students left a strong imprint of their presence on campus and are important documents for further study. In addition, oral histories, could lead to further enriching of our knowledge of the Mandate period. Integration of students’ writings during the time of their study into studies of the educational experiences in the missionary schools opens new topics for further exploration such as women’s participation in sport, music and male students’ views of their female colleagues. The use of sources other than those produced by missionaries or mission-related personnel dislocates the study from the framework of medium – message – recipient. Such diversification of frameworks will enhance our understanding of the women’s agency in the coeducational university settings positioned between the constraints and opportunities offered by tradition, class and religion in a colonial setting and beyond.

Notes

1. The Latin phrase means “History is the mother of [all] studies.”
2. In the second half of the 1920s it became a practice to ask most faculty members to set aside a time and a day when they are “at home” for the students. These were a kind of office hours in professors’ private residences. Women students inverted the concept and decided to be “at home” for the wives of the faculty members.
3. With the exception of janitors, who could and had to enter and direct the cleaning of “the sacred precincts,” and carpenters, electricians and plumbers came when needed.
4. Library facilities were at the disposal of the student of the American Junior College including the borrowing privileges. Thus, students coming from that school were generally acquainted with the library.
5. The Brotherhood was one of the oldest societies on campus. It was aimed at offering an opportunity for coming together and discussing social problems of various countries. The society included all of the religions represented on campus but was not irreligious and aimed at the betterment of character.
6. *Al Kulliyah* has taken the place of the *Students’ Union Gazette*, which was a source much less rich in the content and less regular in publishing. From 1911 to 1932 there were nine volumes of the *Gazette* and they are now available online from the website of the Libraries’ section on Archives and Special Collections’ section of the university’s web site: <http://www.aub.edu.lb>.

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