

Women Leading Against All Odds



By Ola Awad

Leadership remains the main talent in demand in the midst of all the technological advances in organizations and management styles. A leader's mission is full of challenges and responsibilities, but it can also be extremely rewarding on a personal level. A good leader is not only an efficient manager but also a humane team player, a communicator, and an influencer who genuinely believes in people and seeks to create lasting, positive relationships within the work environment. This delicate balance between firmness and flexibility, creativity and efficiency can be very tricky to maneuver, but it is a key quality in the profile of a good leader.

Some studies suggest that there are indeed differences in the way men and women perceive leadership, and these differences affect their leadership styles. Some authors state that women tend to place more emphasis on nurturing and communication and are more "people-oriented," whereas men tend to focus on the organization's goals and are more "task-oriented."ⁱ Other studies suggest that leadership styles are not correlated to gender at all but are only a matter of personal style, regardless of gender.ⁱⁱ

The observation that leadership positions are dominated by men cannot be made only in Palestine or the region, it is applicable worldwide. Even today, the stereotyped role of women is still very much alive in people's minds, and we subconsciously perform daily tasks based on this stereotype. Because it is rare to find women in senior leadership positions anywhere in the world, there's a lack of data that compares their behavior to that of men in such positions. Although there has been a substantial increase in the number of women in leadership positions during the last decades, it can still be considered a work in progress.

Major changes and progress have been made throughout the Arab world in terms of women's rights, specifically in communities that have become accepting of women in leadership positions, but Palestine presents a unique case. Despite the fact that Palestine features a tribal community structure and a conservative and patriarchal society, women in Palestine have historically always been responsible for a huge portion of the work. Women have been and still are expected to take full responsibility for raising children and managing home matters as well as doing numerous other tasks. Women in Palestine have traditionally been the economic managers of the household.

Women's associations in Palestine were established before *Al-Nakba* in 1948; their main task was to support families within the community by performing a charitable role. After *Al-Nakba* and the displacement of Palestinians and the fragmentation of families, the role of women took a dramatic turn. The priorities shifted towards protecting families, supporting families who lost their main

Palestinian women are society's heritage keepers. Like our grandmothers, they are the storytellers that form the memory of the young, so that when the old pass away, the young will never forget. And we will never forget!

breadwinner, providing services within and outside the refugee camps, and supporting needy children to continue their education, in addition to gaining an education for themselves as a weapon and a tool for survival. This is clearly reflected in the 2017 census data that show that the illiteracy rate in Palestine is among the lowest in the region.



Arab Women's Union Meeting in Jerusalem on September 14, 1944. Source: Matson Photo Service, photographer - Congress Library.

