

## **Years of Struggle: The Women's Movement in Jordan**

### **A panel with Rana Hussein**

Summary of Event, March 28th 2022

This event was realized through the cooperation of the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship and the Women and Gender studies at the American University of Beirut. The director of the Asfari Institute Lina Bou Habib started off the event with a small introduction after thanking the efforts of Kathryn Maude from the Women and Gender Initiative at AUB for organizing this event.

This panel with Rana Hussein included Kathryn Maude, assistant professor Vivienne Baadan, and undergraduate student Lynn Ezzedine.

Kathryn Maude gave a brief introduction of the guest speaker Rana Hussein, citing her extensive work in feminist activism in Jordan. Rana Hussein's groundbreaking investigation into honor killings in Jordan has made her a major contributor to feminism in the Arab context.

Her book, *Years of Struggle: The Women's Movement in Jordan*, is based on her interviewing 35 Jordanian women, extrapolating from their experiences, fears and concerns; telling their stories.

In the discussion Hussein talked about documenting these stories. In the course of the discussion, she first stressed on the communal aspect of her work. Hussein mentioned the nationalistic aspect of previous activism in Jordan. The Jordanian women's movement in the 50s was intrinsically part of the global nationalist movement in the country.

Hussein continued to describe how the activism scene has changed. The form of activism has morphed in the past decades.

She stressed on the focus in her book on the struggles of the people she interviewed. She recounted on her personal activism in Jordan through passing controversial laws which included sexual harassment, AIDS, and other issues many considered illicit in Jordanian culture.

As the talks advanced with questions from the other panelists Vivienne and Lynn. Rana stressed in her discourse on the cultural impact on feminism. She delineated how education in the Arab world and specifically in Jordan has deeply influenced the global perception of women for generations. Furthermore, she expounded upon the necessity to address these attributes institutionally through national curriculums and culturally through media. Women, she believes, ought to appear in roles that fall extrinsic to the normalized binary faces of submission and degeneracy in Arab media.

Rana's commitment to change is evident in her advocacy for communal initiatives. She believes change will happen through deliberation and taking action by interested agents of feminism.

Considerably, political foreign conflicts have been manipulated to "legitimize" indifference towards women's concerns in the Arab world. Rana trusts that, through women's cooperation amongst themselves, obstacles can be surpassed.

Vivienne Baadan is an assistant professor in social and political psychology in AUB, she expressed how, in Rana's book, there's an overt rebuke of religious context in restricting women. Hussein delves into political and religious Islam in contradicting the zealous manipulation of women's roles in the Islamic rite.

Rana ends the panel on a positive note. She gives her advice to present-day activists, describing the obstacles they may face. However, she recounts on how their efforts would be remunerative in the future, as they were in her case.