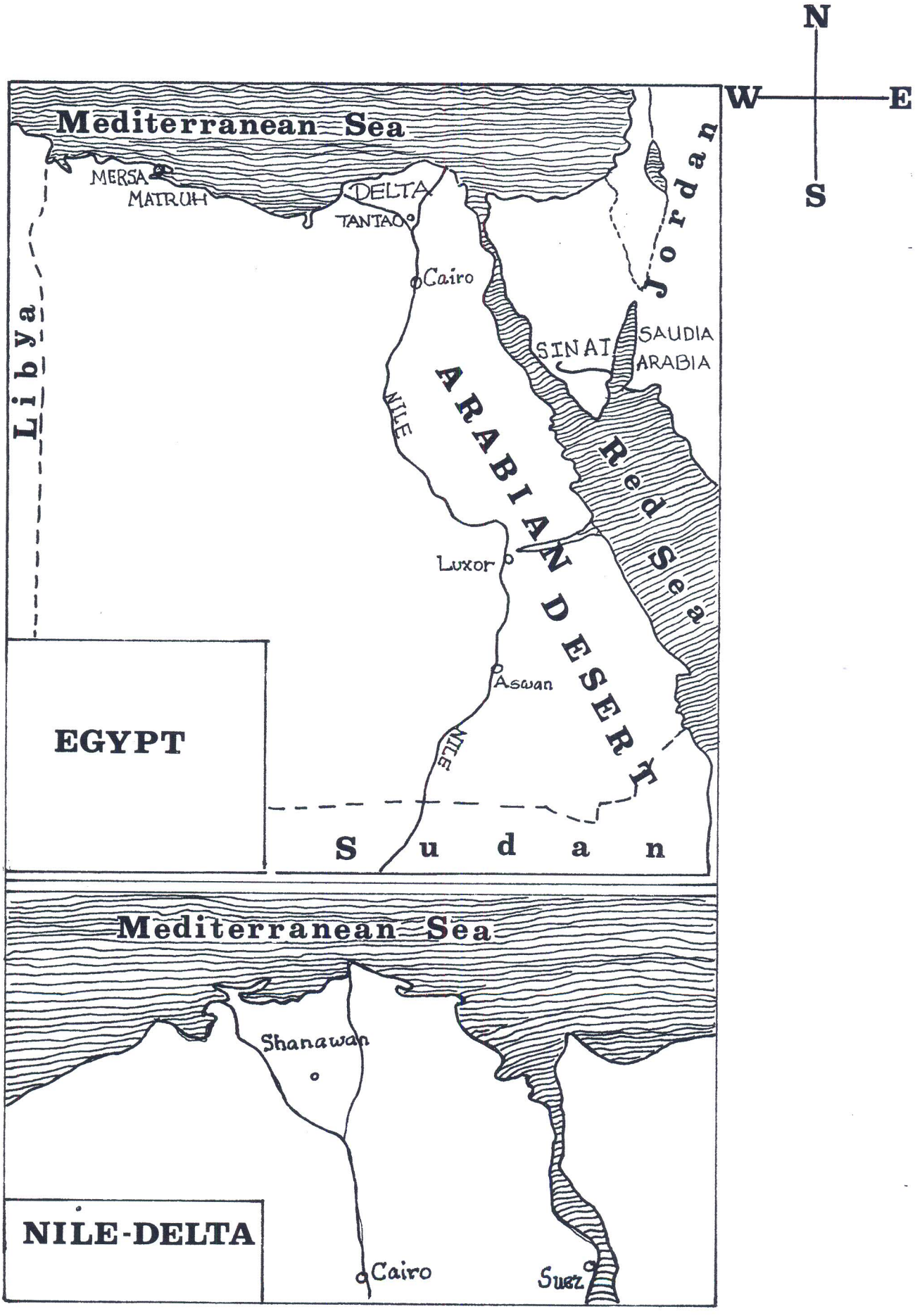
A STUDY GUIDE TO THE FILM

Elizabeth W. Fernea

1982

THE PRICE OF CHANGE



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FOREWORD

The study guide that follows is designed to help students and teachers in discussing and understanding the film The Price of Change. An opening synopsis of the film is followed by a general essay on the general topic of women and economic change.

Some biographical information about the people pictured in the film is given, and the voice-over commentary heard on the sound track is then reproduced. A series of suggested questions for class discussion follows, and finally a bibliography for further reading. The maps on the inside of the front cover give some geographical context to the film.

The film is part of a larger educational project, Reformers and Revolutionaries: Middle Eastern Women, designed to provide information in visual and written form about social change in the Arab world from a woman's point of view. The project, a series of three films, three study guides and a book of readings was made possible in part with the aid of a grant from the education programs section of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Channel 4 Television, London, provided additional funding. Many people participated in the production of both films and study guides, in addition to those given specific credit in the film. Salah Dine Hammoud, Nermine Kamel and Abd Bibi worked on the subtitles. Diane Watts and Jenny Morter assisted in the production of the study guides. Dr. Mohammed Ali Jazayery, director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin, supported the proposal for the project. Marjorie Payne helped implement the project. Throughout the three years from the project's inception until its conclusion, Robert Fernea provided encouragement and support.

I thank them all.

Elizabeth Fernea
Project Director

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Reformers and Revolutionaries: Middle Eastern Women

I. The Price of Change. (Economic Change)

Sixty years ago, Egyptian women began to enter all sectors of the public labor force, from the highest positions (ambassadors, ministers) to the lowest (factory workers, street cleaners). Work outside the home, once considered shameful, has today become not only a choice, but a necessity. Nearly 40 percent of Egyptian women are forced by the high cost of living to contribute in some way to the family budget.

The film examines the consequences of work for four remarkable women: a member of Parliament who is also speaker for the opposition party; a factory worker with four children; a rural village leader involved in family planning; and a social worker in a traditional district of Cairo.

Women and Economic Change

The effects of economic development since World War II have been more rewarding for the countries of Europe and North America than for those of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Even so, some changes and improvements in the standard of living have occurred in the so-called Third World, of which Egypt is a part. These changes have left some people untouched and others, a small minority, have become very rich. In between, a lower middle class and a middle class are slowly struggling to improve their positions in the society.

The film, "The Price of Change", is an attempt to pinpoint the ways in which economic change is affecting some women in Egypt and to document on an individual level how women themselves are responding to such change. Further, it is an attempt to record some of the ways women are actively affecting change and adapting to the often difficult and painful transformations now taking place.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Egypt was largely an agricultural economy. Today 40 percent of Egypt's population work in cities. In the fifties, during the time of President Gamal Abdul Nasser, industrial development began on a large scale. Today Egypt produces iron and steel, and many of its own consumer goods (often under corporate agreements with foreign industries such as with Fiat for automobiles.) The shift from a rural to an urban-based economy has created great dislocation in traditional patterns of earning power. Men can no longer support a large extended family in a farming community, as they once did; they often migrate to seek work elsewhere. The Egyptian census of 1976 reported 1,425,000 workers not present and presumed abroad. The numbers have increased, for by 1979 Egyptian migrant workers in Arab countries alone sent home $2 billion in remittances annually.

Women now must often work outside the home in urban areas as well as rural areas,many for the first time. This too creates difficulties in a system where women's role has traditionally been within the home, where children are much desired, and the family is an important center of social and economic life.

Egypt is one of the poorest countries in the Middle East, with a very unfavorable ratio of population to arable land (2005 persons per square mile in 1970 as opposed to Syria with 171.4 persons per square mile). Twenty thousand acres per year are lost to urban spread. Further, Egypt's per capita gross national product was $470 in 1979, compared with $9,118 for France and $736 for Morocco. The recent population explosion has added to Egypt's problems. From a population of 9.6 million at the end of the 19th century, Egypt grew to 23.8 million by 1959 and almost 42 million in 1980. This is a staggering annual increase of 2.6 percent; it was estimated that a baby was born every 30 seconds in Egypt during 1981.

Therefore, the first issue to be faced in the problem of economic change as it affects women is that of family planning. As the film shows, the public is aware of the need for family planning and the government itself is spending a great deal of money on promoting the idea. Still, the percentage of contraceptive use is very low, as little as 2 percent in some rural areas. (In 1978, 75 percent of all American women were using contrceptives.)

The first sequence in the film deals with a new experiment in family planning. The local doctor, Doctor Afaf, appointed by the Egyptian Ministry of Health to head the village health center, works with a volunteer village leader, Sadika. Sadika is one of several

village women trained for six weeks in Cairo by health personnel, and whose success is so obvious that the experiment is scheduled to be repeated in nearby villages. The message of Sadika's success, the effectiveness of a trusted local person, should not be a great surprise to Americans, since U.S. belief in the efficacy of grass roots self-help movements and volunteer workers is demonstrated daily in our towns and cities. Sadika points out that contraceptives are given free in the experimental program. Secondly, her example demonstrates that access is a fundamental prerequisite for any family planning program to succeed. Sadika's husband points out that women often cannot visit the health clinic during regular hours, for many of them work in the fields all day. Being able to pick up pills and condoms from Sadika at any time gives the women access not only to the contraceptive itself, at no cost, but to the friendly advice and interest of someone, "a sister", as they describe her, whom they know and trust. Sadika keeps detailed records of her dispensary's efforts and meets with Dr. Afaf once a week to go over the records, and to report any medical problems she has observed of which the doctor herself may not have been aware.

Although the number of women using contraceptives in this village is still not high, 30 percent, it is 15 times the national rural average of 2 percent.

Job training is another major area in which women need help during this transitional economic period. In rural areas, of course, women work in the fields, raise livestock, sell eggs, butter and milk, as they always have done. Specialists such as midwives and beauticians continue to exist, in both city and country. But the growing number of urban women, mostly illiterate, can only find poorly paying, low status jobs as servants or washerwomen.

Although there have always been many urban women who have been forced to accept such jobs, lower middle class women and middle class women did not work outside the home unless driven by dire necessity. A few women managed to work within the home and care for their children at the same time by taking in piece work: sewing, embroidery, hand finishing of such specialty garments as head scarves, elaborate caftans and gullabiyahs. Again this experience is not too far removed from that of our own mothers and grandmothers, who earned extra income with similar specialties: sewing, smocking, embroidery, quilt-making, crocheting lace, knitting sweaters and socks.

Today, however, the old rules can no longer apply. Women must work outside the home to supplement family incomes, reduced by inflation. And unless the skills of midwifery, or sewing and embroidery are handed down from mother to daughter, most women will need outside training. One of the first "job training" attempts in Egypt was that of the sewing workshop, which continues today. Similar workshops are found throughout the Middle East, sometimes sponsored by government agencies or international organizations. But in Egypt, as the film demonstrates, women have been active in organizing such workshops, both at a governmental level, and through cooperative organizations of the women themselves.

Madame Olfet Kamel, the member of Parliament pictured in the film, opened such a sewing workshop twenty years ago in her district, Gamaliyah in Old Cairo. Today four sewing workshop sessions are held each day for this one district, with an average of twenty women per session for the three-month course. Similar workshops are now found throughout many districts of Cairo, and much of the production not sold directly by women to individual customers is channeled through a central distribution agency in the center of the city. The key to the success of

such efforts lies with the women who organize and direct the classes, and with the provision of sufficient markets for those products. Bayadha, the director of the Gamaliyah center, is particularly effective, partly because of her tremendous enthusiasm and organizational ability and partly because she is a trusted local resident herself.

Such workshops, plus child care centers for working mothers, marriage counselling centers, family planning clinics and literacy classes, were originally initiated and funded by public figures like Madame Kamel, to serve their own political constituencies. The model has been adopted by the Egyptian government, and the workshops are partially financed by the Ministry of Social Affairs, which also administers a government exam to the graduates of the sewing and embroidery classes. This certificate is now accepted by employers both in Egypt and abroad as evidence of a woman's skill.

However, sewing at home or even for hospitals and schools on a regular basis may not be enough to make ends meet in Egyptian families today. Many women must work full time outside the home, even if they are married, with a working husband; many women are becoming heads of households as well. Matilda, featured in the last sequence of the film, is the principal breadwinner for her four children and disabled husband. Matilda and Shawki are Coptic Christians, who comprise 7 to 8 percent of Egypt's total population. For Matilda, her job in one of the country's new factories is a godsend, though by general standards, her salary is low. The employment of women in industry is relatively new in Egypt, dating only from the fifties. According to Nadia Youssef in Women and Work in Developing Societies, in the 1960's, Egyptian women comprised only 3.5 percent of the toal public work force. At that time, women

filled 25.2% of the positions in public and professional services and 64.4% of the domestic service jobs.[1] Their participation in all other areas was very small. But by 1981, Egyptian women in the industrial work force alone comprised 18 percent of the total work force. The 18 percent is an official figure, again probably lower than the actual unofficial totals, for the working woman is still not totally accepted in the society and families tend to discount the fact that wives and mothers are working full time.

For married women like Matilda, a factory job eight hours a day in addition to family duties means double responsibility. As she herself says, "unless one has a good degree, it is better to stay home and care for one's children", implying that education offers a better-paying and more satisfying position. For single women, an industrial job offers new areas of social interaction, a guaranteed wage, and health and pension benefits, something not available to women in Egypt a generation ago.

Thus, for better or for worse, in Egypt as in the western world, women are taking positions in the public work force, as wage-earners outside the home. Economic necessity is the motivation behind this change, in most cases. Since the fifties, a small percentage of Egyptian women have achieved university educations and entered the professions, holding jobs in government bureaucracies, banks, shops, schools, and even in the foreign service of their country. But the majority of working women in Egypt, like women in America, work outside the home to help themselves and their families survive in a world radically different from that of their mothers.[2]

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[1] Nadia Yousef, "Women and Work in Developing Societies, Berkeley, 1974.

[2] A conservative estimate of American women in the full time public work force is 52 percent. Of that total, 2 percent are estimated to hold "creative career" jobs.

Cast of Characters, in order of appearance

Sadika Farahat	Volunteer woman leader in Shanawan village, Menoufia governorate in Delta agricultural area of Egypt, about 1½ hours from Cairo. Secondary school graduate, married, born and raised in Shanawan, member of a large family. Decided, with school teacher husband Saad Farahat, to have only three children (2 girls and 1 boy). One daughter and one son in secondary school in Shanawan, one daughter in medical school in Tanta University. Pioneer in family planning education in Shanawan. Organized and works with women's sewing workshop in the village, one of the projects of the Ministry of Social Affairs integrated social centers. Primary responsibility involves distribution of contraceptives from her own home, a job she performs in cooperation with the village doctor. Largely through her work, 30 percent of Shanawan's women are using contraceptives. (national overall percentage in rural areas is 2 percent.)
Dr. Afaf	General practitioner, graduated from medical school in Egypt. Head doctor in Shanawan clinic, she works on the family planning program with Sadika Farahat, lives in Shanawan, and is married with four children. Works on family planning program with Sadika Farahat. Her husband, also a doctor, stationed in a nearby town.

Olfat Kamel

Member of Parliament since the early 60's. Middle-aged, married at 17, four grown children, educated in French convent secondary school. Speaker for opposition party in Parliament. Of 34 women members of Parliament, 30 were appointed by President Sadat to seats reserved for women. Four were elected in open elections against men; Madame Kamel is one of the four. Represents Gamaliyah district (Al Azhar University area) one of the oldest districts in Cairo, with a population of 500,000. Concerned particularly with issues that affect women, such as housing, family planning, child care centers, economic improvement. Member of Jemaiiyah (cooperative association) responsible for many social work activities in Gamaliyah district. Believes in grass roots participation by people in district, and works to help foster such participation.

Abla Bayadha

Paid director of cooperative projects in Gamaliyah district initiated by Olfat Kamel 22 years ago. Widowed eight years, brought up 7 children alone, 3 children still at home (2 boys, 1 girl). Responsible for women's training workshop in sewing (4 groups, 2 shifts) that she herself first attended 22 years ago (salary of $30 per month). Also responsible for kindergartens, personal help to people in district (problems with school registration, marital problems). Secondary school education. Has lived in Gamaliyah district all her life, and a brother and a sister live there as well. Sews at home to make extra money.

Matilda	Full-time factory worker in twisting room of a private sector textile factory in Cairo. Married, Coptic Christian, four children. Husband crushed his back in accident at foundry, now receives small government pension, cares for children at home so she can work. Earns about $35 per month for 7 hour day (8 a.m. to 3 p.m.) Mother did not work outside home.

THE PRICE OF CHANGE

Commentary

An engagement party in the heart of Cairo.

In Egypt, like everywhere else, weddings and engagements are family celebrations.

This newly engaged couple are being launched into future marriage with a traditional party, much the same as their parents and grandparents had.

But their life together may be totally different.

Inflation and overpopulation are changing traditional family patterns,

and women must meet the challenge of these changes.

The family has always been the centre of Egyptian life

and the woman the centre of that family.

In the past the ideal woman produced many children.

This confirmed her femininity

and her husband's virility.

Children were a source of labor, and provided security for their parents in old age.

But Egypt's population has doubled in the last 30 years

and although people still want large families the country can no longer support them.

In the countryside hard labour in the fields and constant child-bearing are still real burdens.

But so far, government schemes to promote family planning have done little to alter traditional family attitudes.

Sadika has lived in the Delta village of Shanawan all her life.

She continues to live much as her mother did.

Every day she bakes bread for her family of three children, and her husband, who is the headmaster of the village school.

But in one very important way

she and her family are considered pioneers by the rest of the community.

Sadika was the first woman in Shanawan to take the pill.

Sadika's home is always 'open house' to her neighbors,

but when they visit it is often for more than a social call.

Dr. Afaf runs the Health Centre in Shanawan.

The government has added family planning units to basic maternal and child care clinics like this one,

and, to encourage better attendance,

has employed more women doctors.

Even so, the number of women using contraceptives is still very low,

as little as two percent in some rural areas.

Increasing the numbers is a major problem, but Dr. Afaf thinks she may have found a solution.

As many as forty women a week call at Sadika's home for contraceptives and advice,

and she sends them to the doctor if they have any problems.

This unique experiment has been a great success.

Since Sadika has been working with Dr. Afaf the number of women using contraceptives in Shanawan has increased from three to thirty percent.

In her work as a volunteer village leader Sadika is doing much to help the women in her country area, but over the years

thousands of people have moved from the countryside to live in the overcrowded city of Cairo.
Country women like these can only find work as washer-women or servants, as they are often illiterate.

In the poorer districts where they tend to live problems of overpopulation and poverty are far worse than in the countryside.

But here too, women are helping each other to adapt to modern city life.

One of them is a member of Parliament,

Madame Olfat Kamel.

Madame Kamel is one of 34 women members of Parliament and she has represented the people here for almost twenty years.

By talking to women in their homes

Madame Kamel was able to find out what they needed to make life easier.

She set up family planning centres, kindergartens to help working mothers, marriage counselling services,

literacy classes and sewing workshops.

She visits the workshops regularly ...

and women continue to come to her for help and advice.

The workshops started by Madame Kamel have succeeded largely because of grass-roots enthusiasm. They are run as cooperatives by the local women themselves.

The city has its Sadikas, too, and Bayada is one of them.

Bayada is a widow who has lived in Gamaliyah all her life.

She has run this workshop for the last twenty years

and she sees herself as far more than a mere manager.

To Bayada 'getting things done'

means training women in a skill that will earn them money.

Boys have always been able to become apprentices and learn a trade.

But in the past, girls had no such opportunity. Now, workshops such as these are providing similar chances for girls.

The girls train for three to six months and then take a government exam.

Success means a certificate and a better chance of employment.

Although education is free for everyone in Egypt,

the population explosion has stretched the system to its limits.

If you aren't registered before you are six you don't get a place in school.

Many girls slip through the net,

and so the women of this cooperative have set up literacy classes for them.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of women
like Bayada, Olfat, Sadika and Afaf,

girls like this young bride may look
forward to a better life than their
mothers had, with fewer children and
a measure of economic independence
from their husbands.

But as Egyptian women strive to improve
conditions for their families and
themselves, patterns all too familiar
to Western women are beginning to emerge.

Matilda is the sole breadwinner for her
family of four children.

Her husband, Shawki, crushed his back
in an accident and can no longer work.

He gets a small pension but it's not
enough to keep them all.

Being a breadwinner is not new to
Matilda. Her own mother was forced
to support the family, by sewing at home,
when her father died.

Matilda works as a twister in a textile
factory.

She earns only 35 dollars a month
for an eight hour shift, six days a week.

The number of women in industry has
doubled over the past ten years. Most
are in textiles, which is a natural
transition from sewing in the home.

Forty other women, both single and
married, work here alongside two
hundred men.

Although they receive equal pay for
equal work,

women work shorter shifts on fewer
machines, and so take home less money.

Not all factories are as good as this
one, but new laws are providing
some health benefits and pensions, and
attitudes towards working women are changing.

Shawki used to be a foundry worker
But since his accident

he has been confined to the house
as he can only walk a few steps.

To help make ends meet Shawki
assembles costume jewelry at home.

When there is no school,

his daughter Fifi is expected to
help out.

The finished products are peddled to
Cairo jewelry stores by his brother.

Women in Egypt do have more choice
than their grandmothers had.

But for the poor and badly educated
that choice is a mixed blessing.

For them, work does not always bring
personal dignity along with financial
rewards.

More often it brings double
responsibilities.

And work for low wages in poor
conditions

does not necessarily offer women
liberation from anything.

Egyptian women, like Western women,

are learning that change has a price.

"THE PRICE OF CHANGE"

Questions For Class Discussion

1. Did your mother work outside the home? Did your grandmother? What were people's attitude toward them? What was your father's, grandfather's attitude? Why did your mother, grandmother work?

2. What prevents women in Egypt from participating in family planning?

3. Why is Sadika and Dr. Afaf's work so successful?

4. What kinds of family planning clinics exist in your town? What are local attitudes toward them?

5. Do you want to have children? If so, how many? Why or why not?

6. The pill has certain side effects. Compare the risk of these possible side effects with the risk of bearing 10 - 12 children in rapid succession.

7. Does your community have grass roots cooperative organizations to help women economically like Egypt does? Literacy classes?

8. Why is literacy important for women who are not working outside the home?

9. What role do women play in political life in your community? How many women members are there in your local community government; at the state level, in the federal government?

10. Egypt has 34 women members of a 319 member parliament. The USA had, in 1982, 2 women senators and 19 women representatives. Why do you think this is the case, since Egypt is often described as "under-developed"?

11. How often do you talk with your government representatives?

12. Fifty two percent of U.S. women are in the full-time labor force outside the home. (This figure does not count part-time work, farm migrant labor or women who work at home.) In your community, what are the generally approved working hours for women? What are the provisions for child care, maternity leave, health benefits and pension that they enjoy?

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