



# PATHWAYS MIDDLE EAST SYNTHESIS REPORT 2006–2011



**pathways**  
of women's  
empowerment



## **Pathways Middle East Synthesis Report 2006–2011**

September 2011

Pathways Middle East is led by the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo with partners at the Institute of Women's Studies, Birzeit University, Palestine. It is part of the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Programme Consortium (Pathways RPC).

The Social Research Center (SRC) was established in 1953. Over the last five decades, the SRC has been committed to carrying out multidisciplinary research on a broad range of subjects, engaging in capacity building of students and researchers in Egypt and the region, and striving to reach its aims and goals. The mission of the SRC is to conduct and encourage multidisciplinary social science research in Egypt and the Arab region.

Pathways RPC is an international research and communications programme made up of activists and academics that explores and seeks to affect positive change in women's everyday lives. It is collectively run by six partners: BRAC Development Institute at BRAC University; the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA), Ghana; Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK; the Nucleus for Interdisciplinary Women's Studies (NEIM) at the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil; the Social Research Center (SRC) at the American University in Cairo; and UNIFEM.

It is funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development, with additional financing from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and UNIFEM. The views expressed in this document are not necessarily those of our funders.

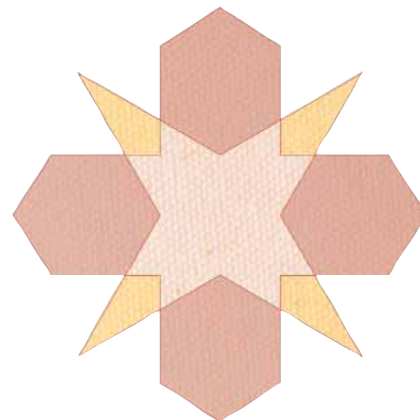
# Middle East Hub Synthesis Report

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Women in the Fayoum Desert by Lake Rayan. Photo by Karina Shalaby\*

**“We are looking for a new conceptualisation of women’s empowerment which moves upstream not downstream. We had actions already planned then other aspects emerged. People started communicating and generated new topics together.” – Islah Jad, explaining Pathways to a group of scholars/researchers who are in the process of creating an Arab women think tank for gender justice, 23 June 2010**

\* These photos were taken by participants in the ‘Changing Focus’ photography competition.

## 1 Introduction to Pathways Middle East

The initial projects undertaken by Pathways in Egypt and Palestine were selected for their promise and potential to impact the lives of women. Legal reform, welfare and social protection, access to paid work, cultural and political representation, and the burgeoning forces of new feminisms were and still are the idioms of a gender justice language and the interventions proposed by policymakers and activists. Relevance, significance, and potential for impact were the three conditions that researchers agreed to meet in their selection of research, communication, and advocacy projects and activities.

The research in Egypt and Palestine was also clearly meant to influence other countries in our Arab region. Not only is Arabic our shared language but academic and policy circles in Arab countries mingle and meet making learning and outputs in one context meaningful to others. For example, the work on social protection in Egypt has been noted and discussed with Lebanese, Omani, Yemeni, Syrian and Sudanese researchers and policymakers. The workshops on feminist storytellers have brought together Egyptians, Palestinian, and Sudanese authors and the legal reform research has entered into the debates and deliberations of Islamicist feminists and reformers in more than one country.

But the Arab region is rich in scholarship and activity so what differentiates Pathways from others? The answer probably has something to do with the sustained interest and activities in pursuing these topics and in providing critical debate and scholarship over a number of years to diverse audiences. ‘Pathways’ in Arabic translates as ‘*masarat*’; a word that invokes motion, destiny and

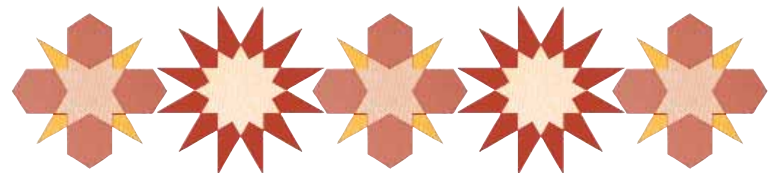
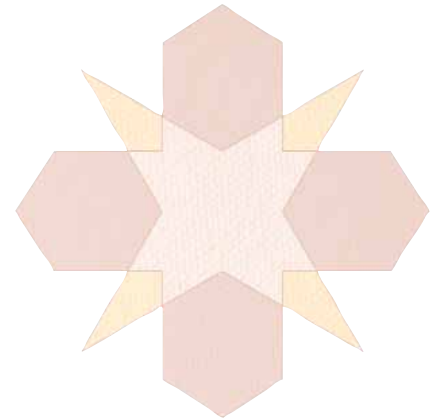
direction. Each path (*masar* in Arabic) of research and interest has been carved and created by researchers and communicators but has also meandered taking its researchers in new directions and shaping their abilities and identities.

The notable achievement of pathways in the Arab region has been its contribution towards creating a cadre of highly regarded scholars whose work is well received in policy and activist circles. The work of pathways has been adopted by the Ministry of Social Solidarity in Egypt, by feminist NGOs and by the National Council for Women. The artistic work such as the feminist storytelling project has attracted the public, and the media has taken an interest in the projects and photographs from Pathways and featured this work in newspapers and on television.

The way of pathways has been one in which academia and activism have informed our research and where action and communication have been two equally important interventions. This is rare in the Arab region where there are persistent hierarchies that render keen academics irrelevant and activists unable to influence policy.

Moreover the alienating idea of feminism and the futility of uncritical and pragmatic developmentalism have been a constant backdrop to our dialogues of empowerment and have been discussed and highlighted in most outputs. It will take more than a research programme to breed a non-alienating feminist movement/s or to make development work for women, and not just for elites, but Pathways has been a step in this direction.

**The local and global can be conflated without hierarchy of power.** There must be a move away from viewing the global as more influential and the local as the receiver. There exists an important link between the global and local but it can be one without hierarchy. There is an openness to ideas but without sacrificing the right to local autonomy and right to determine what can truly benefit communities.



## 2 Pathways Middle East hub projects



Writer and academic Sahar el-Mougy telling a story during the 2008 Qalet el-Rawiyeh performance at the historic venue of Wikalit el Ghouri. *Photo by Tessa Lewin*

### Conceptualising empowerment

*Ana el Hekkaya storytelling project (formerly Qalet el-Rawiyeh)*

*Lead researcher: Mona Ibrahim Aly (Egypt, Palestine, Sudan)*

This project aims to enhance the empowerment of Arab women through a rereading and rewriting of traditional representations of their roles. In the first phase, writing workshops focusing on analysing, critiquing and recreating traditional Arab folklore through a gender-sensitive lens were held in Palestine, Sudan and Egypt. The resulting stories were then used in storytelling performances and have provided the basis for a forthcoming animation short.

In Phase II we developed the project to provide training and awareness activities with journalists, writers, bloggers and poets. The aim is to build capacity amongst popular culture producers to disseminate gender-sensitive productions, through public performances and publications. We have also conducted workshops with writers in Egypt, Ghana and Bangladesh, working with them to produce powerful stories from our own research which can be a better way to convey the complexities of empowerment and women's lived experiences.

*Talking empowerment in plain Arabic*

*Lead researcher: Hania Sholkamy (Egypt)*

For ideas to have meaning and impact they have to have currency and circulation. The language of empowerment in Arab countries is English; it is the language of elites and the language of the West. There is no reason not to be expressing the ideals and debates on women's

**Instrumental approaches have a very limited utility.** This model can only go so far – at a certain point, a plateau is reached (for instance: fertility can only fall so low or education can only reach a certain level). An imported notion of gender equity that doesn't truly address the real problems that make women the victims of development is a notion with limited utility.

empowerment in plain Arabic. But there is little or no opportunity to do so. This project creates the opportunity for Arabic speakers to set an agenda of priorities in a language that they can use to communicate and give a wider currency to their ideas. We ran a series of workshops held in plain Arabic to discuss the agendas of women's empowerment and the flows that influence, set, shape, critique and communicate them.

*Tracing and measuring empowerment and change in women's lives*

*Lead researcher: Eileen Kuttab (Palestine)*

The research investigated the definition of empowerment in Palestinian women's organisations and contextualised it in Palestinian practices of mobilisation and resistance. Based on interviews and focus group discussions, Eileen found that the concept has acquired alternative meanings. Ways of understanding empowerment have emerged that go beyond instrumentalism and recapture some of its historical original associations as power and resistance.

*Communicating conceptions of empowerment*

*Real World film scheme*

The 'Real World' scheme is a collaboration set up in 2008 between Pathways and Screen South (UK Film Council). It links talented young documentary filmmakers with academics from the Pathways consortium to collaborate on a series of shorts broadly exploring concepts around women's empowerment.

*Thorns and Silk, women working in non-traditional jobs in Palestine*

*Director: Paulina Tervo (Palestine)*

*Thorns and Silk* shows four women in Palestine who are doing jobs that many regard as a male preserve, negotiating empowerment in their everyday lives in a context dominated by the experience of the Israeli occupation.



A young woman working on a maquette for model citizens, an ongoing artistic endeavour to capture stories and change in a downtown Cairo neighbourhood. *Photo by Heba Khalifa\**

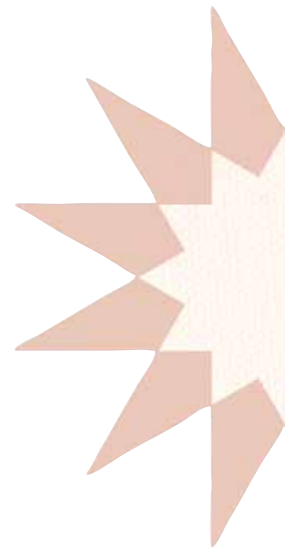






Photo still from *Khul*, a Real World documentary about no-fault divorce and personal status law in Egypt. Still by Lucy Bennett

### *Khul*, Divorce in Egypt

Director: Lucy Bennett

*Khul*, Divorce in Egypt focuses on the experiences of women who are going (or who have gone) through the *Khul* divorce process in Egypt. *Khul* is a type of no-fault divorce, whereby women forgo their financial rights in order to end their (often abusive) marriages.

### 3G – Three Generations of Women

Photojournalists: Anna Kari and Guilhem Alandry (Egypt)

3G – Three Generations of Women is an interactive multimedia project which is a collaboration between Pathways and Documentography. The aim of the project is to move beyond the media stereotypes and statistics about women, and look at their real lives. We photograph and interview three different generations of women within one family about aspects of their experience, growing up, learning, happiness, love, and more. We hope that this will give people some sense of the changes that have happened in the lives of these women over the past few decades.



## Building constituencies for gender equality and justice

*Local governments between building the Islamic nation and women's empowerment*

*Lead researcher: Islah Jad (Palestine)*

Islah's research examined the role of the newly elected local councils in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, elected in 2005–2006. The Islamic Resistance Movement – HAMAS – participated in this election for the first time and was supported by large numbers of women. Islah's research aimed to explore whether local governments in general, and those controlled by Islamists in particular can provide a constituency for women's empowerment.

*Poor women's agency in Gaza: between 'doing' and 'being'*

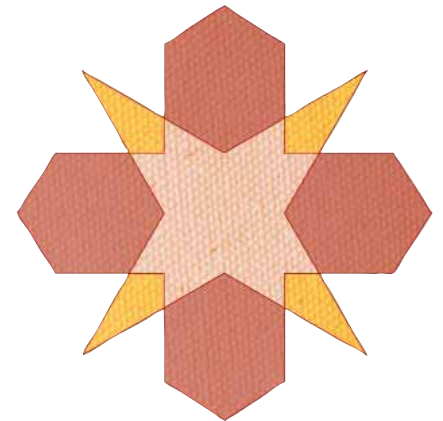
*Lead researcher: Aitemad Muhanna (Palestine)*

This research examined the complexity of gendered subjectivity in the Gaza Strip and how it is reshaped in a contradictory manner in the context of livelihood crisis and insecurity caused by the Israeli occupation. The research is unique because it attempts to deal with the reality of women's everyday life and avoids any standardised framework of gender analysis. It focuses on the contextualisation of the concept of women's agency based on the narration of women's stories and life experiences.

*Reforming Egyptian personal status laws: a study of legal changes since 2000, court room practices, and gender justice*

*Lead researcher: Mulki Al-Sharmani (Egypt)*

In this project Mulki researched the reforms that have been taking place in Egyptian personal status laws since 2000. She examined this unfolding reform story and what it has entailed in terms of successes and challenges for women's rights activists in their pursuit of justice and equality in marriage and divorce rights, and for Egyptian women at large who seek legal redress in family courts. The focus of the study is on two aspects of the reform story:



**Stress on politics and representation shouldn't ignore the process of building capacity** and support on gender issues between elections and beyond legislative bodies.



Om Ramadan selling gas canisters, traditionally considered a male job.  
Photo by Amanda Kerdahi Matt\*

1) the process of mobilising for the new laws, building alliances, choosing strategies, and making concessions, and 2) the implementation of the legal reforms in the new family courts that were introduced in 2004.

### *Women's political participation in Egypt* *Lead researcher: Mariz Tadros (Egypt)*

In June 2009, the Egyptian parliament passed a new quota law adding 64 additional seats, for which only women can compete in the 454-seat parliament. This project looked at the various instruments to support women's political participation in Egypt, including the National Council for Women's political empowerment training programme, and asked how effective have these been in challenging power hierarchies and empowering women politically?

### **Empowering work**

#### *Conditional cash transfers in Egypt* *Lead researcher: Hania Sholkamy (Egypt)*

The conditional cash transfer (CCT) pilot in the Cairene slum of Ain es Sira started in May 2009 and was scheduled to last for two years. The Social Research Center (SRC) of the American University in Cairo has provided technical assistance to the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity (MOSS) in designing, implementing and evaluating this pilot to inform national social policy decisions. Within the pilot, 380 most vulnerable families with children have been registered to participate, receiving monthly cash payments in exchange for fulfilling child development goals related to health and education.

#### *Working group on women's work* *Lead researchers: Ragui Assaad and Hania Sholkamy (Egypt)*

The researchers use the Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey (ELMPS) to foster both qualitative and quantitative studies on various aspects of gender and work in Egypt, as well as building research capacity in this area.



Analysis of gender and work-related demographics has created a repository of data that is being cross-examined along with similar data from other Pathways hubs. This allows for the compilation of information on the economic role of women within Egypt as well as a comparative global south context. This research provides an insight into women working in formal and informal markets.

### **Changing narratives of sexuality**

*Unmarried in Palestine: embodiment and (dis)empowerment in the lives of single Palestinian women*

*Lead researcher: Penny Johnson (Palestine)*

Using topical life stories, focus groups, data and discourse analysis, Penny explored the experiential diversity and thematic commonalities in the lives of Palestinian unmarried women of two generations, in the context of a society experiencing prolonged warlike conditions, political crisis, and social disruption. While Palestine's relatively high proportion of single women over time may be related to war dynamics, significant generational differences emerged where women from an earlier generation often found meaning (and indeed empowerment) in participation in the nationalist project of liberation, while unmarried young women in today's Palestine, in the context of family and society's prolonged insecurity, political crisis and social fragmentation, often found themselves (and their bodies) as a locus of moral panic and moral danger.

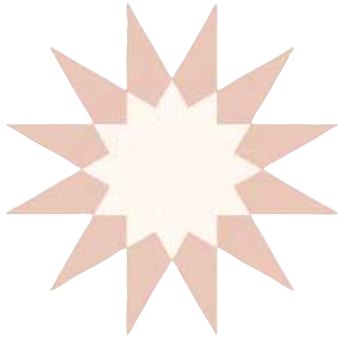
This project examined dynamics of choice, embodiment, responsibility, and survival, and attempted to identify structural, social, political and economic factors shaping Palestine's rather unique pattern of early, but not universal marriage, with a relatively high proportion of never-married women (but not men) over time. A focus on public debate – both locally and regionally – that



On Dahab Island, Awatif, the mother of a large family, is dancing with swords in the same way men do. Photo by Pauline Beugnies

**“Really, we are bored from always having the same subject, communications workshops, democracy. Learning about our bodies would be better”, young woman from Dheisheh, in a focus group for the ‘Unmarried in Palestine’ project.**

**Empowerment is not linear, there are gains and losses.** Social and spatial location matters to a great degree – this can be the difference between experiencing a more fulfilling empowerment or not.



frames unmarried women as a “problem” is of particular concern, and the project encourages alternative public discourses on the contributions and rights of unmarried women in various settings. Despite restrictions on their mobility, young women negotiated boundaries and enacted choice in the context of social fragmentation, war and political crisis. A main policy concern that emerged is to develop an integrated approach: education, work and support from civil associations were avenues of change, but often only in a strong combination. And young women expressed the need for knowledge, particularly about their bodies.

Men and women gather in Tahrir Square in Cairo, chanting for the removal of the governmental regime. *Photo by Amirah Sami*



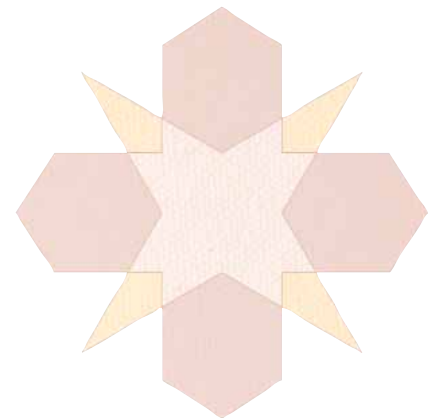
### 3 Analysis of selected research

#### Conditional cash transfers in Egypt

Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) are a social protection tool used widely internationally (especially in South America) designed to help poor families break out of the intergenerational cycle of poverty by giving them cash in exchange for the fulfilment of child health and educational conditionalities. Within the Pathways Middle East Hub, Dr Hania Sholkamy and her research team at the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo have helped the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity with the design, launch, monitoring and evaluation of a pilot CCT in the Cairene slum of Ain es-Sira. The Egyptian CCT was created with the aim of developing a feminist social protection scheme oriented toward poverty alleviation and engendering a relationship between the government and vulnerable citizens based on trust and rights entitlement. As of May 2009, over 300 families in Ain es-Sira began receiving the monthly cash transfers marking it as the first programme of its kind to be launched in the Arab world.

Under this framework, the programme gives the cash transfer to the female head of household and provides monthly visits by a social worker who can help families to access state services and discuss any problems or issues the household may be facing. Key to this programme is raising awareness about citizenship entitlements and rights. Participants are required to sign a contract stating that they will fulfil the programme conditions, but also acknowledging that they are owed services and cash from the state as citizens. This is particularly pertinent for mothers participating in the programme, who are the recipients of the cash and who regularly access state services for their family's wellbeing. Additionally, the

**“Feminist social protection should be a fact not a fiction if so many women living with their families and working for their welfare are still so poor and disenfranchised.” Hania Sholkamy at a Meeting with the UN special rapporteur on Gender and Social Protection, Geneva, 17 June 2010**



Women and children go about daily life in the neighbourhood of Ain es-Sira, where Pathways has worked to implement a social protection scheme based on cash transfers. *Photo by Heba Gowayed*

**Implementation issues can make the difference between empowerment and burden.**

The implementers (such as social workers or frontline bureaucrats) form important links in chains of providing services and represent mediators through which women can recognise and secure their rights. They must be taken seriously and receive support in their roles. Written consent forms and social contracts can serve to strengthen emphasis on all women as citizens and equally deserving of government recognition and support. Ongoing monitoring mechanisms ought to be built into programme design, encouraging people to look into the practice and make changes when elements are not working. There ought to be information sharing between implementers and beneficiaries, state and civil society. Collective ownership is given less and less importance as there is a push for privatisation and this can have disastrous effects on community cohesion and well-being.



programme is gender aware in giving higher transfers to girl children for attending school than boy children, and holding monthly awareness sessions targeted towards increasing knowledge about gender issues such as FGM, contraception, and domestic abuse. Focus group discussions are also held with female beneficiaries and offer a forum to discuss their realities and reactions to the programme.

The pilot has also allowed the research team to study the process of implementing a conditional cash transfer programme in Egypt. An experimental model of the programme has been designed with the Ministry of Social Solidarity and is due to be launched in 65 villages in Upper Egypt in the autumn of 2011.



### **Ana el Hekkaya (formerly Qalet el-Rawiyeh) storytelling project**

*Ana el Hekkaya* or *I Am the Story* (formerly *Qalet el-Rawiyeh*) attempts to deconstruct the stereotypical images of women inherited in Egyptian popular culture, and to create more gender-sensitive stories. In Egypt and the Arab world, most locally produced cultural materials such as literature, media and cinema productions have presented gender discriminatory concepts that disadvantage women and limit their potential roles within the community in both the private and the public spheres. Additionally, the recent conservative movement has emphasised the misconceptions about women and their contribution to society, which strengthened the dominant masculine discourse. The scarcity or sometimes complete absence of cultural materials providing more positive images of women emphasises their subordination and marginalisation; which becomes easily internalised and adopted by new generations.

Under the direction of Dr Mona Ibrahim Aly, in its Pathways capacity *Ana el Hekkaya* works on raising public awareness on gender related issues, especially among journalists, writers, poets and bloggers, being the main players in producing popular culture and thereby extremely influential on the public consciousness. Given the great impact of such cultural materials in producing and emphasising gender roles, *Ana el Hekkaya* addresses these cultural constructs through producing and disseminating alternative cultural materials. Under its original title ‘*Qalet el-Rawiyeh*’, developed at the Women and Memory Forum (WMF), the *Ana el Hekkaya* project has involved writers, academics and activists who facilitated three gender training workshops held for young Palestinian women, Sudanese mid-career men and women and a group of Egyptian youths. These workshops focused on revisiting and rewriting “source” texts that were chosen from among popular folktales, using a critical feminist



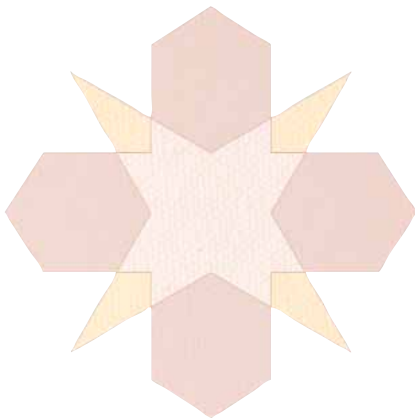
Soha Refaat performing with Qalet el-Rawiyeh in 2008. Photo by Tessa Lewin

**Stereotypes and images need to be diversified not replaced.** Representations of women need to be less definitive about what women are and are not. Channelling information and the imagination can be a liberating process (thus freeing women from their existential condition), through fairytales and fantasies, and is also an important component of empowerment. Projects encouraging the use of traditional and new forms of oral and visual communication can give weight to women's stories, lives and ambitions.





Storytellers from the 2008 Qalet el-Rawiyeh performance. Photo by Tessa Lewin



lens. To disseminate this work, several public performances were held in different spaces, such as Beit el-Harrawy, the Spanish Cultural Institute, Bibliothica Alexandria and the Cairo Opera House.

Through its different activities, *Ana el Hekkaya* represents an interactive model of women's empowerment. Unlike other conceptions of empowerment, *Ana el Hekkaya* allows the space for empowering discourses to be locally developed and not imposed by external players. Conceptualising empowerment through creative materials is a special focus for *Ana el Hekkaya*, as it works on empowering women through a gender-sensitive and artistic production of knowledge. It allows women the space to deconstruct the inherited thoughts about their bodies and sexuality and provide them with the opportunity to exercise control over the different representations. This alternative body of knowledge will be developed through the different literary productions from *Ana el Hekkaya*, and synthesising and dissemination activities.

*Ana el Hekkaya* has also worked directly with Pathways' research using a cross-hub approach. Recent workshops have drawn on case studies analysed from the research work in Egypt, Ghana and Bangladesh.

### **Local governments: between building the Islamic nation and women's empowerment**

Classic literature perceives local governments as an important path for decentralising the often centralised state power, thus involving people at the grassroots level in power sharing. Women, in this context, are perceived as better served and more empowered. The universal call for quotas is predominantly seen as crucial for women's empowerment.

However, Islah Jad's research on local government in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, based on a national

survey of local women councillors, focus groups and individual interviews, revealed that in conflict countries and politically unstable and divided societies, quotas cannot do much for women's empowerment. They could even add to existing polarisation and fragmentation in the public arena, and thus increase the marginalisation that women face. In these circumstances, political will, national consensus and conscious and supportive women's movements are more fundamental factors for women's empowerment.

Surprisingly the research also revealed that men, families and the local community played a role in supporting women's route to public office. These groups are usually perceived in Middle Eastern gender studies as 'traditional' forces that obstruct women's advancement. In addition, women's 'reproductive' role, which is seen as impeding for their empowerment, is not preventing their political participation. On the contrary, children were providing essential support to their mothers and female relatives.

Lessons from the research show that:

- Governance decentralisation and quotas for women should be applied in the context of national consensus building
- International organisations need to tailor training packages for women in politics to suit the specific context. Training packages that do not touch upon the power structures prevailing in the society end up by dealing with technicalities void of any specific content
- Women in local councils in conflict torn and fragmented societies cannot be accountable to their constituencies unless supported by a strong and vigilant women's movement

The research was useful in producing important knowledge on women in local councils that goes beyond numbers and generic measurements. It provided an



A woman enjoys watching a football match among male peers at a local coffee shop. *Photo by Ahmed Rady\**

**"The outcome of an institutional arrangement is never a foregone conclusion. The road that should lead to gender justice can lead its travellers astray", Hania Sholkamy (2010a: 46)**

opportunity to consolidate links between researchers at the Birzeit Institute of Women's Studies and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. A joint press conference was convened to announce the survey results.

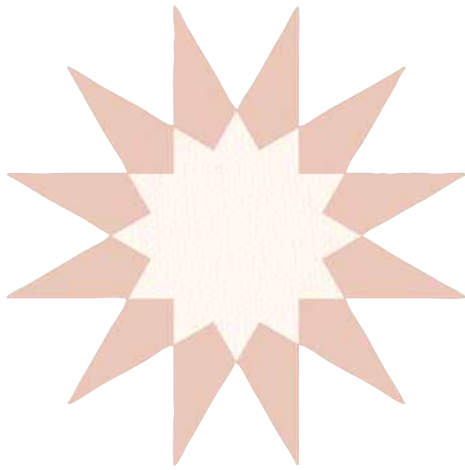
The Ministry for Local Government held a national conference in March 2011 at which the research findings were discussed with a view to providing policy recommendations for both the Ministry and NGOs working to support the local government sector.

### **Reforming Egyptian personal status laws: a study of legal changes since 2000, court room practices, and gender justice**

In the last decade, a number of pieces of new family legislation (i.e. personal status laws) have been promulgated in Egypt, with important ramifications for women. Laws granting women the right to obtain no-fault divorce (*khul*) in exchange for giving up their rights to dower and alimony were introduced and new family courts were established introducing a mediation-based and family-sensitive legal process. Furthermore, another law was passed, which set up a government fund through which female disputants are paid court-ordered alimony in addition to a law which extended divorced mothers' right to child custody up until her children (whether boy or girl) reach fifteen. Mulki Al-Sharmani and her research assistants conducted multidimensional research on this reform story to take stock of its successes and challenges both for: 1) Egyptian women seeking to overcome injustice and suffering through the pathway of litigation, and 2) women's rights activists who are pursuing gender equality and justice by mobilising for the reform of the institution of family laws and courts.

The research team interviewed female and male litigants, lawyers, judges, court personnel, women's rights activists, legislators and journalists, in an effort to assess the new family courts and their ability to provide women with

**Agency and identity are essential elements in women's economic empowerment.** A human rights approach to entitlement is the infrastructure of economic empowerment. Income is important but it is the nucleus of a more important organism that you assume or are recognised in.



swift and just legal recourse. Having analysed the data, it became clear that the process by which legal reform comes about matters greatly. Reformers, their agendas, their strategies, the debates, contestations, alliance-building, and concession-making through which the new laws have been legislated are all intertwined and important factors that have influenced the outcome of the reform efforts in mixed ways for women. The new court system has the potential to provide speedy legal redress to female plaintiffs through its alternative mechanisms of dispute resolution and new judiciary structure, however, the benefits that family courts are currently providing to female plaintiffs are diminished due to a number of gaps and shortcomings in the legislation, mechanisms of implementation, resources, and the capacity and the training of court personnel.

Dr Al-Sharmani suggests that *khul* is relatively beneficial (albeit with a cost) and represents a frequently used option for poor women though they tend to have similar kinds of reasons for seeking to end their marriage regardless of whether they file for *khul* or other kinds of judicial divorce. State welfare policies and the criteria used by NGOs for provision of services to marginalised and poor women also motivate the latter to end their marriage through *khul*. Although winning a *khul* case is fairly straightforward and guaranteed for most female litigants, there are a number of legislative and implementation gaps that either lengthen the process for some or may even act as a barrier to winning the suit. It is apparent that husbands file for obedience ordinances to derail their wives pursuit of *khul* divorce.

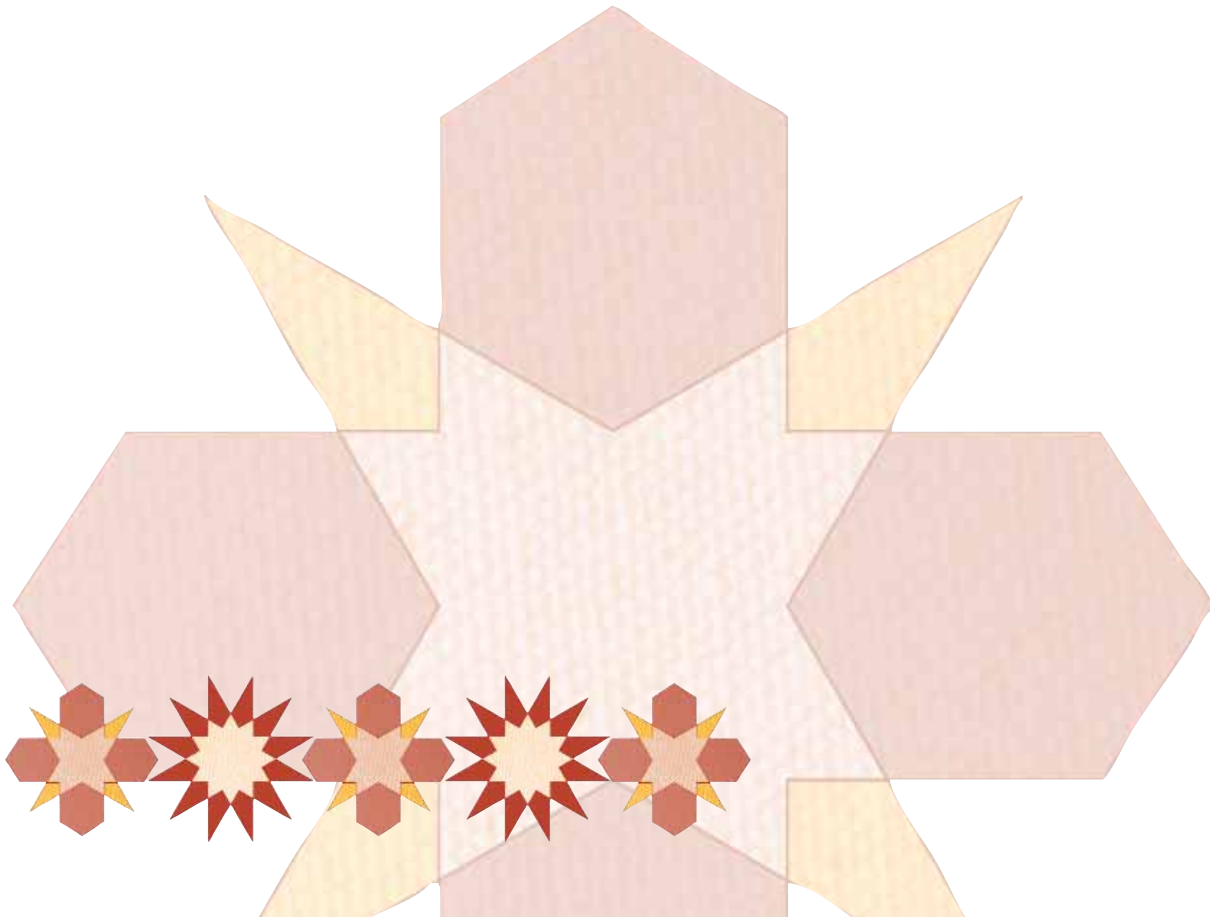
There are multiple issues driving the contestations and struggles for/against new family codes that are based on gender equality. These issues include struggles among different religious discourses for legitimacy; the contradictions of seeking gender justice through state institutions such as the law in a context where citizens



Girls and boys play on the streets of Ain es-Sira. Photo by Heba Gawayed

**"I feel like a bird who has found its community of like minded peers." The Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr Ali Goma'a at a meeting co-organised by Pathways in Cairo to re-visit Muslim personal status laws. Marriott Hotel, 10 January 2009**

have been suffering from state oppression and its failure to ensure their citizenship rights; and disagreements among different actors who seek (or endorse) gender justice in the family domain about the suitability of global feminism (inspired by international conventions) as a credible framework for advocacy and action. Despite the new reforms, women continue to be legally marginalised and discriminated against in marriage, divorce, and parental rights. Dr Al-Sharmani suggests further legislative changes around the legal obligations of married men and women to each other as well as a greater effort by policymakers and activists to educate the wider public about the work and purpose of new family courts are needed.



## 4 Hub highlights

### Gender and anthropology/sociology reader

Under the direction of the Women and Memory Forum, Dr Hania Sholkamy was asked to collaborate on the creation a gender and anthropology/social reader. This was part of a larger set of gender studies readers that also included seminal texts about gender in the fields of religious studies, political science, history, literary criticism and psychology translated into Arabic. With the increase in women and gender studies university departments in the Middle East, the gender readers are intended to address the dearth of translated foundational texts about gender in the Arabic language. They will serve as an important tool for students and academics in the region. The readers were launched at a day-long symposium hosted by the Center for Translation Studies and the Institute for Gender and Women's Studies at the American University in Cairo. The symposium featured panel discussions about gender studies across multiple disciplines and the issues of translation and knowledge production in Arabic.

### International Women's Day newspaper supplement

Using International Women's Day (8 March 2010) as a platform for discussing women's lives in the Middle East, the Pathways communications team worked with researchers to write articles for newspaper audiences about current research and analysis on women's empowerment and agency in the region. The pieces were then collated along with other creative Pathways outputs, such as feminist folkloric stories from the *Ana el Hekkaya* storytelling projects and photos of women working in non-traditional jobs, and published in news supplements in the Egyptian independent daily *El-Shorouk* and the



After learning how to drive from a neighbour, Om Karim began driving a microbus to support herself and her children. *Photo by Amanda Kerdahi Matt\**

**Disagreement is important.** Not necessarily dismissive disagreement but debate and contestation in the place of rigid definition. It is crucial to create an environment in which people can choose and understand that options are available to them.

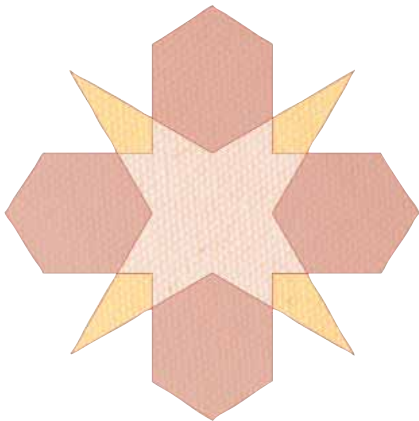
Palestinian *Sawt el-Nissa* (distributed in the *Daily Al-Ayyam*). The supplements served as a rich source for the contemporary and innovative projects that work to understand women's everyday realities and reached tens of thousands of readers in both countries.

### **Birzeit Institute of Women's Studies conferences 2009 and 2010**

It was no surprise that the very first annual conference of Birzeit University's Institute of Women's Studies was held in March 2009 with the support of the Pathways of Women's Empowerment programme. For Pathways has not only given material support, the conference was inspired by the dialogue among feminist and gender scholars from across the globe experienced in Pathways' meetings and by the sustained scholarly inquiry into policy – or an even better word, public – concerns.

The roundtable with women ex-prisoners that ended the 2010 conference on "Formations of Violence in the Palestinian Reality", was a telling reminder that violence can also be embedded in social indifference or failure to understand and learn from those who have experienced colonial or other forms of violence. The Institute's conference was an attempt to break this isolation in practice and in analysis. Our context is clearly sited in the colonial. Conference organisers thus aimed for an integrated approach where colonial violence, national violence and domestic violence could be brought together, while not ignoring their specificities. Conference presentations by Pathways participants, Islah Jad (on women of the Hamas movement) and Penny Johnson (on crime, gender and punishment) were continuations of the themes explored in their research. The forum the conference provided for interaction between activists, political and government figures, and international and local researchers allowed for the open and urgent discussion that Pathways has continually promoted over the course of the programme.

**"Through power and knowledge sharing, I learned a lot. The [Pathways] RPC is an eye-opener for me, a new way to do research, a new way to exchange ideas and aspirations...", Islah Jad, 2007**





Mona, following in the footsteps of her father, became a mechanic to provide for her family. *Photo by Amanda Kerdahi Matt\**

### **Women and work cross-hub analysis meeting**

The women and work cross-hub analysis meeting gave Pathways researchers from Egypt, Ghana, and Bangladesh the opportunity to review data and statistics on women's work and empowerment (measured through dimensions of mobility, political participation, opinions about work, the attitudes and opinions of others, mental well-being and decision-making ability) gathered in each country. Employing many of the same questions to measure these indicators across the hubs allowed for a comparative cross-hub discussion of the data. The meeting also gave researchers the chance to explain the narratives behind the numbers to one another and prepare to write a set of articles for publishing in an international journal.

### **Changing Focus photography competition**

The Changing Focus photography competition invited local photographers to visually present their visions of the exchanges between women and their communities and to capture their representations of women's empowerment and agency. The project addresses a Pathways commitment to working with various modes of communication in an effort to grasp a broader and fuller idea of how women experience empowerment in their local contexts. Photographers were asked to submit sample images and, chosen on the merit of their submissions, to participate in a day-long workshop about gender and representation with artist and historian

**"That's the thing about empowerment: people try to apply absolute indicators but empowerment is about change from the past."**

**– Naila Kabeer, work theme meeting in Cairo, 5 October 2010**



Dr Huda Lutfi. Following the workshop, participants were asked to capture new images and present them alongside small-scale proposals for projects they would like to carry out about gender and photography.

### 3G – Three generations of women

The 3G – Three generations of women project ([www.3Gwomen.org](http://www.3Gwomen.org)) traces the lives of sets of three generations of Egyptian women in the same families, aurally and visually charting their opinions about themselves and the world around them. Photographers Anna Kari and Guilhem Alandry conducted interviews with three women in three different families (nine women in total), discussing their views about their lives as well as the lives of their daughters, mothers and grandmothers and photographing the women, their environments and their favourite objects. The photos and accompanying audio recordings were put on a website which allows you to compare their answers across families or generations in Egypt. The site is designed to incorporate more stories from multiple generations of women from the UK, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, and potentially others, allowing web users to investigate how these women's lives have changed over time.

Women played an active and crucial role in the 2011 protests, demanding political reform and the ousting of then-president Hosni Mubarak. *Photo by Amirah Sami*



## 5 Introduction to the team



**Dr Mulki Al-Sharmani** is an Assistant Professor at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo and is currently a Fellow at the University of Helsinki. Dr Al-Sharmani's recent work has focused on personal status law and divorce law reform in Egypt. Dr Sharmani is also an affiliate faculty/researcher at the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program at AUC. She received her doctorate in cultural anthropology from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland (USA) in 2004.



**Dr Mona Ibrahim Aly** is a writer and Associate Professor in the English Department at Cairo University. She leads the *Ana el Hekkaya* (formerly *Qalet el-Rawiyeh*) Storytelling project and serves as the editor-in-chief for *Tiba*, the theoretical magazine of the New Woman Foundation. She received her Masters and PhD degrees in American Literature.

**Dr Ragui Assaad** is a Professor of Economics at the University of Minnesota. Within Pathways, he has provided data analysis on statistics about women, work and empowerment from the Egypt Labour Market Panel Survey. Dr Assaad's research interests include the informal economy and labour policy and analysis in developing countries. He received a Doctorate in City and Regional Planning from Cornell University.

**Mona Bakr** joined the Social Research Center in the American University in Cairo in 2005 and has worked on the Egyptian Conditional Cash Transfer Pilot in Ain Es-Sira and the Pathways of Women's Empowerment Research Project Consortium. She graduated in 1993 from the American University in Cairo's Economics Department. She joined the Anthropology Department in 1995 as a graduate student.

**Lenka Benova**, currently a doctoral student in Demography at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, is a researcher on the health and nutrition component of the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo. She has worked with Doctors without Borders in Nigeria and Sudan.



Lenka Benova, Heba Gowayed and Kristina Hallez

**Rania Elsebaie** graduated from Cairo University with a degree in Political Science. Rania joined the Social Research Center as a research assistant in 2002. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in Political Science. She has worked with Dr Heba Nassar on the "SRC/CIDA Research Programme on Gender and Work" project.

**Heba Gowayed** is a researcher on the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo. Having received her Bachelors degree in Political Science from the American University in Cairo, Heba is interested in issues of gender, particularly as they relate to conceptions of social justice, citizenship, poverty alleviation and social policy design.

**Kristina Hallez** served as the Communications Officer for Pathways at the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo. She graduated from Wesleyan University with a Bachelors degree in psychology and began work at the SRC in 2007. Kristina worked to set up the Changing Focus photography competition dedicated to capturing and discussing representations of gender and empowerment.

**Mohamed Hassan** is Programme Manager of the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo. He is responsible for field logistics and operations as well as data collection and analysis.

**Dalia Hassanien** serves as a Senior Financial Accountant and Coordinator at the Social Research Center. Dalia acts as assistant manager of funding, grants, disbursement, and the Pathways purse. A 1992 graduate of Cairo University's Commercial Department, Dalia worked at the AUC Controller's office before joining the SRC in 1996.

**Dr Islah Jad** is the Director and founding member of the Women's Studies Institute at Birzeit University. Dr Jad is an expert on gender issues, and she advised a number of departments of the Palestinian Authority on the issue of women's involvement and gender awareness. She is also a research theme convener on the Building Constituencies theme for Pathways. She received her PhD from the University of London.



Dalia Hassaniien, Joslyn Massengale, Heba Gowayed, Hania Sholkamy, Gunilla Soliman, Mulki Al-Sharmani, Mona Ibrahim Aly and Mona Bakr

**Penny Johnson** is an Associate Researcher at the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University and co-editor of the Institute's *Annual Review of Women's Studies*. She is a member of the Arab Families Working Group and her research interests focus on women's narratives of the Palestinian present, gender, and the second Palestinian intifada, violence, kinship and Palestinian household and family dynamics.

**Dr Eileen Kuttub** is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University. She is a member of the Arab Families Working Group. Her research interests include feminism and nationalism and the role of women in the Palestinian intifada.

**Dr Aitemad Muhanna** is an independent researcher from Palestine. Her areas of research interest include gender and poverty and women's agency in Palestine. She received her PhD from Swansea University in Wales.

**Dr Heba Nassar** is a Professor of Economics at Cairo University and received her PhD in Economics from Cairo University in 1983, through the channel system with Cologne University. She joined the Social Research Center as Associate Research Professor in 1993. Having acted as a consultant for WHO, UNFPA, UNESCWA, UNICEF, and the Ministries of Health in Egypt, Kuwait and Bahrain, among others, her research interests include human resource development, gender, migration and economic integration.

**Dr Randa Nasser** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Birzeit University. Her research interests include feminist consciousness, women's movements and gender dynamics in Palestine.

**Dr Hoda Rashad** is the Director and Research Professor at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo. She is a member of the Senate (El Shoura Council), one of the two parliamentary bodies in Egypt. Dr Rashad also serves on the National Council for Women, an assembly that aims to improve the situation of women and their participation in the development of Egypt. She received a PhD in Population Studies from the University of London in 1977. Her current research interests include development studies, gender issues, reproductive health, demographic analysis and evaluation of the impact of health interventions.

**Dr Sawsan Sharif** is a research assistant at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo and has been working for 15 years in different fields including social development, women and children issues. She has also designed research projects, (she is a specialist in qualitative research), carried out data analysis, training, monitoring and evaluating, and fundraising. Dr Sharif received her PhD in Education from Ain Shams University.



**Dr Hania Sholkamy** is the primary investigator for the conditional cash transfer project being carried out in Egypt and serves as an Assistant Professor at the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo. Her research interests and publications focus on reproductive health, social protection and citizenship, gender, population and qualitative methods. She received her PhD in Anthropology from the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, University of London.

**Gunilla Soliman** coordinates funding and grant transactions, manages finances, and maintains records for projects in the Social Research Center, including Pathways. Her participation in Pathways is especially unique because she is involved with donor relations. Gunilla is of Swedish and German heritage, but has made Egypt her primary home since 1975.

**Mariz Tadros** is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Sussex. She has worked as an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the American University in Cairo and as a journalist for *Al-Ahram* newspaper. Her research interests include gender and development, civil society and sectarian violence in the Middle East.

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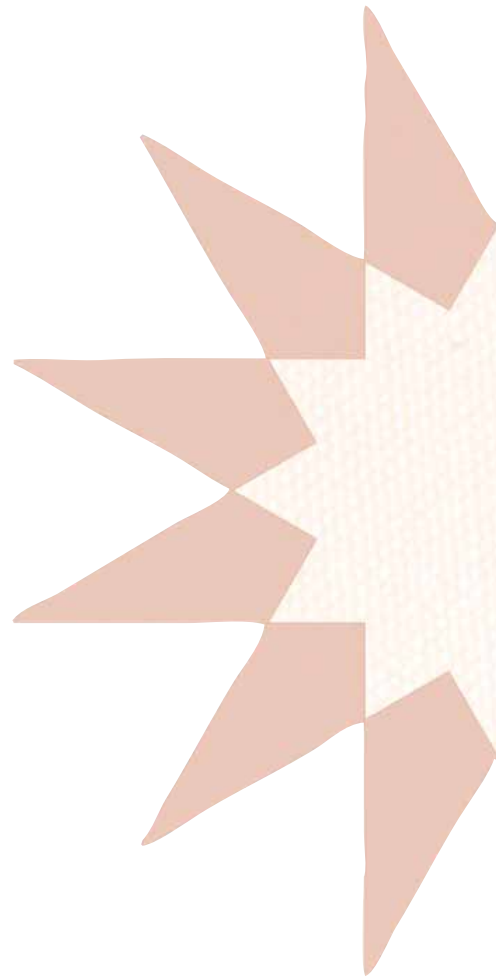
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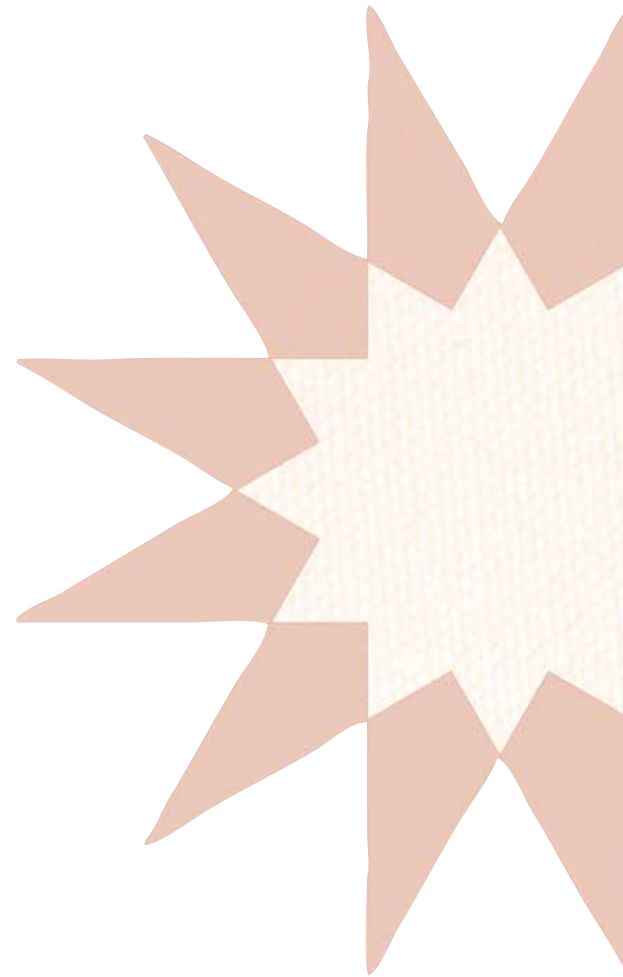
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