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## **INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE**

**'Changing Gender! Research, Theory and Policy  
for Gendered Realities of the 21st century'**

**June 2-3, 2005  
Panteion University  
Athens, Greece**

### **ABSTRACT**

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#### **Women doing good: The Armenian story.**

One of the more remarkable aspects of religious charities in the history of Middle Eastern cities is that several charities were founded by women who used their wealth or qualifications to become founder or patrons of religious foundations.

Drawing on our background in history and anthropology and our research in Jerusalem, Cairo and Aleppo we will engage with the historical and ethnographic dimensions of women 'doing good' in the Middle East. According to traditional paradigm, history is essentially designated as the "big events", a notion which is inherently gendered, since, as usually defined, the big events consist entirely of the activities of men - those in the domain of formally organized politics, wars, the economy and the like. Yet, the developments that precede and follow the major events -- what the French historian Fernand Braudel dubbed the "longue duree" -- are often what are most significant in affecting and shaping people's lives. The single, major event may be what caused these longer lasting developments, but how people experience the dramas of social change is arguably more significant than the event itself. The entrepreneurial role of charitable societies and their story of the battle against hunger and the protection of children is part of this kind of history.

In positioning the charities we concentrate on two types of works: soup kitchens and orphanages. The paper will explore charities as a chapter in Middle Eastern women's works during emergencies, and as part of the history of religious charities and poverty in the Middle East. Studying the role of charities founded by women is an engagement with the dynamism, variations and uniqueness of women's experiences in the Middle East.