

Participation Of Women In Politics During The War (Lebanon)[☆]

What role and function did Lebanese women serve during the war? Where are they amidst the politics and the violence? What advantage did they take of the political equality that is granted to them in the State power?

Lebanese women do not participate in the making of politics. they are virtually absent from the sphere of political action! But abundantly active in the realm of reaction to violence mainly in the form of humanitarian services. Quoting Ghandi, Lawyer laure Moghaizel describes them as «non-violent servants».

Hence, these were the main points of the talk of lawyer Moghaizel at the Colloquium on **Lebanese Women As Witnesses To The War** held in Paris in October 1987^{??}. Passing through the Nairobi conference on the Decade Of Women (1975-1985), Moghaizel suggested the addition of **Participation** to the given goals of Equality, Development and Progress for women. By participation she meant the participation of women in all sectors and at all levels of society with specific emphasis on participation in politics. Moghaizel then discussed the involvement of Lebanese women in four socio-political bodies: (1) the State Power; (2) Political Parties; (3) Syndicates; (4) Non-Governmental Organizations.

The State Power

Women are virtually absent from effective positions and the decision-making power of the State structure. Thus far, only two women have been elected to parliament by proxy for a dead father or husband. There are no women in the executive branch of the state. On the other hand, the presence of women is plentiful in the area of public functions, such as teaching, and in the Diplomatic Corps. However, they do not have the power to make effective decisions about the war or state matters in general; they only represent the State.

Participation Of Women In Political Parties

Two aspects of the role of women in political parties are examined here: the adherence or subscription of women, and the effective participation in decision-making positions in the parties. The information is collected from a survey of ten political parties; in which two questionnaires were distributed to responsible personalities and to the women who are members of the relevant parties. Caution, replies were evasive and the concluding analysis is only tentative.

1. Adherence of Women to Political Parties

- a- The proportion of women has increased at a small rate during the war.
- b- The average age of female members is below 30.
- c- Involvement is provisional and is usually terminated in the event of marriage.
- d- The majority of females is students.
- e- Educational level usually centers around secondary schools or university.
- f- The women perceive their involvement with the party as being secondary to their daily professional or familial duties.

2. Effective Participation of Women in the Activities of the Parties

- a- Only one of the parties has a service of a feminine nature.
- b- Few, if any, women hold posts at the decision-making level.
- c- The presence of women is mostly symbolic.
- d- The internal regulations and policies of the parties do not discriminate against women.
- e- Yet, none of the parties have nominated a woman as candidate to represent it in the executive or legislative power.
- f- The activities performed by women have a subordinate, secondary or partial character. They act merely at executive posts, secretarial jobs, medical care, social assistants and attendants.

Participation of Women in Syndicates

participation in syndicates takes two forms and the adherence of women does not really reveal effective involvement in syndical activities. A fieldwork study was conducted to examine these two forms of participation: to know the adherence of women to syndicates and then their access to decision-making posts in comparison to that of men. The relevant data are as follows:

1. Adherence of Women to Syndicates

- a- the proportion does not vary between the sexes.
- b- Subscription increases with age and decreases after 40.
- c- Subscription is higher among married women than single women.
- d- The rate of subscription of people with lower education levels (lower than secondary school) decreases

as the educational achievements increase. Whereas, the rate of subscription of people with higher educational levels increases along with higher achievements.

2. Access of Women to the Executive Council and Syndicate Commissions

- a- Few or no women are present at this level even when they out-number the male members.
- b- The access of women increases with age until 40.
- c- The access to posts is greater among single women than married women.
- d- The access increases with educational level.

Non-Governmental Organizations

The greatest impact that Lebanese women have had on the war has been in the context of their contributions in non-governmental organizations. They have played a gigantic role in alleviating the sufferings of the people. They have offered medical help, social assistance, housing, food, clothing and funds for the maimed, handicapped and displaced.

But is this enough?! Why should they always pick up the pieces. Is it not time they took part in the making of society,...., and of peace?

A Force For Peace

One young woman took a large scale public initiative to emphasize the need for peace. In her outcry, Miss

Iman Khalifeh, a 29 year old kindergarden teacher then, united not only women but also men, children and the elderlies in Lebanon.

She said «No to the War...», and called for a mass demonstration throughout the city of Beirut cutting through its political boundaries. The call was for May 6, 1984. It was called **The Peace March*****.

The response was tremendous and thousands of people prepared themselves to take the streets. But the guns were louder. The fact remains that Iman Khalifeh tried and the people who supported her tried too.

The women, the people are united as witnesses of the war, they can be united as a force for peace.

☆ **Source:** Excerpts from the address of Lawyer Laure Moghaizel in a colloquium entitled «La Femme Libanaise Temoin De la Guerre» («The Lebanese Woman: Witness To The War»). The colloquium was held in Paris in October 1987 and was sponsored by the League of Arab States in collaboration with the Franco-Arab Chamber of Commerce and the Institute of the Arab World.

☆☆ See al-Raida, vol. III, No. 42, 1987.

☆☆☆ See Al-Raida, vol. VII, No. 30, November 1, 1984, pp. 4-5.

Peace Is A Woman

«Only women can influence men to stop the war and stop the destruction and miseries it brings to the present and the future.»

These are the words of the winner of the UNESCO Prize for Peace, Lorence Dioana. Dioana, a Swiss, has, during the last 20 years, conducted a research study on women in the peace process in the Middle East. Her research is based on field observations throughout the Arab World. Some of her pioneering field-trips are: liv-

ing the experience of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982, and visiting women who were sentenced to death in Iranian prisons.

Upon the release of her book, **The Role of Women in Bringing Peace to the Middle East**, Dioana was asked if she hoped to see peace being established in the region. «We in the book are the dreamers» she said, «We only light a candle of conscience for the conscious ones who do not really need this candle.»

Source: *Al-Shahed Arab Monthly*. Cyprus: Al-Shahed Publishing Co. Ltd. 5th year, No. 57, May 1990, p. 74 (Arabic Reference).