

Why a Women's Liberation Movement?

When asked about her opinion regarding the Women's Liberation Movement, one of our Lebanese social leaders said: «I do not think we need it here. Our constitution gives women equality with men in all fields».

From a scientific point of view, this answer may be called a generalization or a sweeping statement which requires revision.

In the first place, the Lebanese constitution, according to an experienced woman lawyer, contains 13 articles which disadvantage women, including article 562 of the penal code which allows a minimum penalty for men committing «honor crimes» but excludes women from the same right. In the second place, laws which have been officially ratified are not always readily enforced nor do they consider all women's needs. A recent study on the employment status of women in Lebanon⁽¹⁾ reveals the high rate of illiteracy among working women, their lack of vocational training, their need for child care centers and for opportunities of promotion. Rural women and those who head households need special attention and help from both the public and the private sectors.

In the third place, the personal status laws, including inheritance and family-laws, are unfair to women and incompatible with the needs of the times. They require up-dating which favors the establishment of civil marriage and the promotion of unity and understanding between the various communities which constitute Lebanon and other Arab countries.

Discrimination against woman is not limited to the legal field. Traditions imposed by society on her upbringing and socialization encourage her treatment as an object. They require her to be good-looking and to try to lure others by her looks, her dress and her smooth manners. Any talk or discussion relating to woman spontaneously brings out the following questions: «Is she pretty, or ugly? young or old? well-dressed or shabby-looking?» This kind of attitude on the part of the public is apt to create in her a morbid self-consciousness and a painful anxiety regarding her appearance. Her physical charm seems to be the primary condition required by a prospective husband or employer. It is the *carte blanche* ensuring her success in society and in any occupation. «Beauty contests» which have become a confirmed tradition in our civilized world are a flagrant proof of the deficient amount of progress achieved by women since the start of their liberation movement 200 years ago.

This movement has yet a long way to go. Those who criticize it or regard it as futile or unnecessary are sadly misinformed. They need to be more enlightened and less superficial in their judgement.

(1) Women and Work in Lebanon, Monograph Series of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, No. 1, 1980.