

Arabic culture



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Status of Women in the Arab culture In the Arab culture, women are treated as second citizens and are chiefly oppressed by the laws and constraints imposed on them. There are also traditions and customs some of which are internalized -even naturalized- that give rise to gendered inequalities that are produced and reinforced through 'relationships that are intrinsically gendered' within the household. In Arab culture, the household is the core institution where the women spend most of their time. It is where gender-related rigidities and inequalities are produced and reproduced. The gender division of roles, responsibilities and resources within the household play an important role in shaping what men and women are able to do beyond the household.

Islamic texts and traditions lie at the heart of Arab cultural conventions. Critics have seized upon the way that the exact interpretation of religious doctrines varies from state to state, and stress that it is important to reflect on who is making the rules for gender roles and activities, namely men, and how little real choice women have. The definition of what is a matter of culture and religion, and what is a matter of human rights is contentious. Handrahan, for example, compares the human rights offences which occurred in apartheid South Africa with the treatment of women in Arabian culture and describes the Arabian situation as "gender apartheid" (Handrahan 9) The absence of equal voting rights for women is quite obviously matter of serious discrimination and it attracts condemnation from critics both inside and outside Arabia.

A woman's identity in Arabian culture and society is constructed, in the very first place, on the basis of men's superiority. Such discriminated gender growth is justified on both cultural and religious basis. In a rigidly religious

society, men's superiority and women's dependency on men are ratified by the following verse of the Holy Quran: " Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husbands) absence what Allah would have them guard" (Quran 4: 34). Indeed this verse is one of many from the Holy Quran that the clerics of the society manipulate to enact rules, regulations and laws that slaughter women's equality to men. Some of these rules and regulations are male guardianships, Namus, Purdah, Dress codes, sexual segregation, etc. One of the common aftermaths of these restrictions is that they discourage and segregate women from any outdoor activities and at the same time inspire women to be tied with indoor activities such as child rearing, cooking, performing duties to husbands as well as other family members. For example, even though theoretically women are permitted to own business, running business is often difficult since it is in a number of ways depended on the involvements of the male guardians. An instance of these difficulties is that if the male guardian does not agree to accompany a woman in activities that require a woman to interact with male business partners, running such business is difficult. The effects of sexual segregation through purdah and dress codes are tremendous on the employments, education and other outdoor activities such recreational sports, etc.

Due to the fact that mixing of men and women are prohibited, women's employments in public workplace are negatively affected. Indeed Arabian gendered society is full of paradoxes. On one hand, it permits women to have rights such " having their own bank accounts", " having their own

businesses”, “ owning properties”, “ making investments”, etc that are equal to their male; on the other hand, they are overwhelmingly depended on the male monopoly. This paradox often tends to confound most of the common Arabian women to differ between male pity and women’s rights. What most common Arabian women consider male guardianship as “ protection and love” as in an interview with the New York Times some women claim, “ I demand to have a guardian. My work requires me to go to different regions of Saudi Arabia, and during my business trips I always bring my husband or my brother. They ask nothing in return—they only want to be with me” is considered as male pity and slavery, as a Saudi activist Wajeha Al-Huwaider says that the male guardians have the “ same kind of feeling they have for handicapped people or for animals. The kindness comes from pity, from lack of respect.” (Salimi 23). Indeed the common identity of a woman in the Arab culture has been stylized within the “ rigid regulatory framework” of the Arabic patriarchy and therefore, it thinks of the guardianship in the way patriarchy thinks of it.

Obviously women currently own business and are involved in decision-making in business issues. Indeed this scenario consists of handful number of upper class business women who inherit ancestral property by birth and invest their wealth in new sector. Even if these women run business and enjoy a less restrictive lifestyle, the socio-economic scenario of the commoners is totally different. Even though the commoner women inherit wealth and property, they are endowed with fewer scopes of running business or other economic activities since they are hindered by the lack of education, lack of familial inspiration and by the male monopoly. Therefore a culture that inspires the construction of a decision-making and bargaining

gender identity never flourish and among the mass women and the hegemonic gender relation continue to exist.

Works Cited

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