

## Azizah al - Hibri Talks About Women and War In Lebanon

Azizah al - Hibri is the editor of *HYPATIA: A JOURNAL OF FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY*. She was born and raised in Beirut and currently lives in the U.S.A.

Last year, she was interviewed by the *AFSC Women's Newsletter*, (Vol. 4, Number 1, 1983) a publication of the *Nationwide Women's Program of the American Friends Service Committee*. Although a year has passed since this interview was published, Al - Raida finds it still topical to include this abridged version.

**Q: What is the impact of the current situation in Lebanon on Women?**

A: «I never thought that war was particularly good for women. In fact war is a situation where men start fighting and using their guns against each other, and speak a language from which they have eliminated women.

War itself is a kind of situation where authoritarianism becomes rampant and that always means a sacrifice in the status of women. The long term effects of the war will be the most serious and at the moment we can only guess at those. The short term are obvious: many people are dead, families have been torn apart and members of families have been lost, all causing serious psychological damage... I think the psychological damage is severe and pervasive. A major problem now is finding physicians who will give people artificial limbs to save their lives and also their psyches».

**Q: What types of roles are women occupying in the current situation?**

A: «I believe that the difference between the roles of Christian and Muslim Women in Lebanese society is merely cosmetic. The traditional Muslim woman covers her head, the Christian woman does not. The traditional Muslim woman cooks and stays at home, the Christian woman

may not. She may go out and work but so does the modern Muslim woman. In fact, the modern Muslim woman is hardly distinguishable from the Christian woman in Lebanon today. However, with the exception of the feminist movement, women in Lebanon are mostly playing very traditional roles. They usually recognize the husband as the boss and they work only if they don't shortchange him at home».

**Q: Do you have any idea how strong the feminist voice is in Lebanon?**

A: «I have seen Lebanese feminist literature as good as what I've read in the U.S. I am referring to feminist novels. For example, a novel which surprised me was the *Story of Zahra*<sup>(\*)</sup>. Zahra is a young woman from Southern Lebanon whose life is affected by patriarchy and war. She is being used as a commodity by man regardless of her ideals and sensitivities. She is even shot by the lover she gave her heart to. He discovered she was pregnant and didn't want the mess so he shot her. You can do that during war and nobody would know who shot her. This novel is a very good self - criticism from the inside which is honest, outspoken and uncompromising».

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(\*) The *Story of Zahra* was written by Lebanese novelist Hanan el Sheikh. This title in Arabic is *Hikayatu Zahra*. It was published by the author in 1980.