

## Lebanese Women Came out of the War Stronger, More Self Confident and Assuming More Responsibilities

The transfer of a large number of families from the village to the city by default, contributed to the change of image, first of the Lebanese woman and second of her role in society.

The war, in spite of its odds, was for some a rich, progressive and developmental experience, as much as it was a tormenting and traumatic one. It certainly left its mark on every Lebanese and taught each one of them, especially women, hard lessons of survival and the ability to overcome all kinds of hardships: physical, emotional, economic and political. At the same time, the war was an opportunity that opened new horizons for many women and motivated them to take a new turn in their lives.

The toll of the war was great on all, and particularly on women. She was left, in her capacity as a housewife, with the job of cleaning the debris of shelling and shattered glass that hit the homes. She was the siren who could sense the danger and gave orders to her family to rush to shelters and safe corridors. It was the duty of the women and still is to cope with living in economic hardship. It was mostly women who would exploit any temporary lull in the fighting to run to the bakery, well and supermarket to get bread, water and food for her family.

The war entrusted some women to become decision makers and bread winners following the loss or incapacitation of the husband, or his emigration to foreign lands. Many women were widowed and left bereft looking after their children and managing their households at the most crucial times. Many were driven, to enter the work force by sheer necessity and economic need to become: teachers, clerks, secretaries, telephone operators, hospital orderlies, factory workers and saleswomen in boutiques and supermarkets.

Because of the war and its long duration many young girls, whose families were forced to leave their villages and sought refuge in Beirut and its suburbs, were able to continue their education. A large number were able to enter the university and pick up a career. Others whose

means were more limited entered night schools and learned secretarial skills, computer, advertising, etc... As a result of their exposure to urban living or modernism — so to speak — thousands of Lebanese women entered the job market for the first time in their lives.

Although the overwhelming majority of Lebanese working women are classified as seasonal workers who carry menial jobs in factories, hospitals, agriculture and domesticity, still they became earners for their living and often for their families as well.

The war, as such, represented a breakthrough in the launching of a new generation of an economically independent woman. Like other societies, stricken with wars and conflicts, few are the families in Lebanon that can live on a single breadwinner. The defacto influx of women into the job market, precipitated by force of circumstances and economic need, came suddenly and abruptly and often lacked proper training skills and educational preparedness and guidance.



The thrust towards employment, long or short term, drove hundreds of married women and most of single girls to work. The problem that Lebanese women and men are facing is that there is not enough work for them. There is definitely more supply than demand at times of severe economic crisis. Dispossession and high inflation affected all strata of society.

Lebanese women showed a remarkable sense of management and direction. They were able to pull themselves and their families together, as bravely as possible following the many traumatic experiences many had passed through. Countless are the mothers, wives and sisters in Lebanon who are still mourning and weeping over the loss of their loved ones. No wonder many are still in black and often seen visiting cemeteries and graves. Needless to mention the multifaceted performance of women, who often looked after the old and the sick, nursed the wounded and looked after their comfort as well as their moral and physical rehabilitation.



The role of Lebanese women during the war and after any tragedy that befell the family should be recognized and respected. Time and time again women proved to be better survivors than men. Often women would be driven by instincts and intuition to pull their families from the ashes. Many stood to the challenge and turned to be the pillars that put the house back in order.

Women's contribution as "home builders" proved best among the displaced and dispossessed families who were forced to change their residence and become refugees in their own country. Although women are known to be attached to their homes more than men, it is often the woman who would solace the husband over the loss of property and restore confidence in the children and their ability to start all over again.

Women proved to be extremely efficient in creating warm homely atmospheres for their families even in the most difficult circumstances, in their temporary lodgings, which often are in schools, convents or basements. Mothers proved over 13 years of a cruel and violent war that they are a great moral force who hold confidence in a better future no matter how dark the present conditions are. Women's dynamism and perseverance could rival a tireless engine often working endlessly day and night to soothe the pride of a hurt husband and meet the demands of young children.

Always driven by affection, patience and hope, Lebanese women carry with dignity and style their war crosses. It is mostly women, be they mothers, technicians or social workers who cater to the handicapped and look after their physical and emotional therapy. Women play an important role in improving the lot of refugee families.

To start a home from scratch for families with limited means, where the husband is nearing retirement age and the children are too young to work, is not an easy task.

The war in Lebanon set a new course for women. Improvement of their status, inside and outside the home, should be carried a step further to improve their status on a national level. This is yet to be seen.