

Woman and her Rights in Lebanese Law

Lecture by Dr. Lamia Shehadeh

AUB Alumni, January 31, 1992

It is with ancient Greek myths describing women as devilish and needing to be tamed to obey men that Dr. Lamia Shehadeh, Chairperson of the Civilization Sequence Studies department of the American University of Beirut began her lecture about Woman's legislative rights in Lebanon. Before addressing the issue of legislation, Dr. Shehadeh defined woman as a human being and used this definition as basis for determining whether the legislations abide to women's human rights, or discriminate against them.

What is a human being? The criteria to be a human being are to have integrity, freedom and independence. . . . If a woman does not have her freedom (of thought, deciding one's own destiny), then she cannot become independent. If she does not have both freedom and independence, then she is without

integrity. Consequently, she is not a human being. Does the Lebanese Law protect these criteria for the Lebanese woman.

Dr. Shehadeh summarized six legislations which violate freedom, independence and integrity for women. 1) Contractual law (Real Estate) whereby the testimony of a woman is inadmissible, it has to be a man. 2) A woman is chosen as beneficiary of a policy, her permission is not admissible, that of her husband is. Furthermore, her husband has the right to cancel HER policy without her consulting her. 3) If a married want to conduct or have a business she must have written permission from her husband, and he is granted the right to stop her from practicing after she has began with a written denial of permission. 4) Men may get a full excuse for a crime of honor, and partial excuse if the crime was instigated by a questionable attitude. 5) A man is considered to have committed

adultery only if it happens in the marital home. Punishment, which range from one month to one year, requires the burden of proof, i.e letters he sent her. Whereas, the woman-alduress who is with him is immediately abducted and her punishment ranges between three months and three years. If her husband forgives her, then charges by the state are dropped; if he does not forgive her the state takes her to trial.

In conclusion, Dr. Shehadeh pointed out that all of the above legislations curtail freedom, independence and integrity of a woman. The existence of such legislation and image of a woman deny her basic quality as a human being.

It is unanimous that such discriminating legislations do exist in the texts of the law and should be amended as soon as the legislative reconstruction of Lebanon begins.*