

Special Features

A CONFERENCE REPORT GENDER & WOMEN'S CITIZENSHIP

Women participate so much in the labor force, yet are not visible in political life, why is this so? Which factors have led to the political marginalization of women? Why are Lebanese women not full citizens? What is the difference between the citizenship of a woman and that of a man? Do women bear any responsibility for this difference? Have they surrendered their responsibilities to their husbands and sons?

Mrs. Jean Makdisi asked these questions to introduce the major themes and the general framework of the conference on "Gender and Women's Citizenship," organized by Najla Hamadeh (AUB), Jean Makdisi (Writer), and Suad Joseph (University of California-Davis), which was held on March 19-22, 1997 at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

The discussion sessions focused on three issues:

1. gender discrimination in the legal status;
2. gender participation in civil society and the state;
3. the "gendering" of citizenship through socialization, education, and the media.

On the last day of the conference, the participants announced the resolutions.

- The concept of gender. "does this concept show new



Participants in the conference

dimensions or is it merely a development of what was debated twenty years ago?"

- Other theoretical suggestions or commentaries included:
 1. that we must re-think the concept of nationalism to focus on love of other citizens rather than on mere love of the country;
 2. and that women are not included in the current concept of citizenship, for their responsibilities and duties are never taken into consideration.



From left to right: Emily Nasrallah, Jean Said Makdisi, Suad Joseph, Najla Hamadeh, Paul Salem

- Some practical solutions included:
 - having women be involved in the writing of school books;
 - founding a Women's League nominating league like the one in the USA in order to exercise pressure, to fight for equal rights, and to combat women's marginalization;
 - organizing more conferences with specific themes, so that the discussion can be more focused and thus more fruitful;
 - creating a follow-up committee;
 - studying current attitudes, encouraging empirical research, and forming a network of people who work on oral history.

"We should pull out cases. We need to find out about our grandmothers and grandfathers and come up with interesting analyses and comparisons."