

MY FEMINISM

By *Lina Alameddine*

In this article I would like to put forth my perspective on feminism. I do not claim to hold a universally acceptable vision nor do I claim to hold the solution to the undeniable gender gap that exists in many dimensions of our daily life. I simply want to present my ideas concerning this multi-dimensional issue as they stand today within the framework of my personal experiences.

As a result of the Lebanese civil war, my Lebanese identity is not as pristine as it should be, and many of my ideas have been borrowed from the 'west'. However, wherever I find myself, feminism to me, never ceases to mean: equal rights and equal treatment. If you believe this, then you are a feminist, whether you are a man or a woman. In my opinion, it is that simple. I do not understand why so many people here and in the United States cringe at its mere mention. Feminism, on its own, carries no political, religious or economic statements. There is nothing to be afraid of in being a 'feminist', and yet I have talked to so many who ridicule it, run away from it, or give it none of their daily attention. I am aware that with the feminist question, there exist complex issues in relation to the prevailing cultural, economic, and political conditions. However, equal rights for all humans should have the strength to surpass these details.

In the United States, I attended an all woman's college. There, I was quickly taught the value and necessity of women supporting women from all spheres and from all walks of life. Despite our many differences, we share one commonality that we all need to embrace: that of our gender. I strongly believe in diversity. However, I think we should be aware of its danger in dividing us into smaller weaker factions. In the case of the feminist quest for equal treatment, I believe that strength is attached to numbers. Despite our race, religion, sexual preference, class, age, nationality, cultural experiences, political persuasions or favourite animal, as women, we need to learn to come together to form a cohesive, and thus stronger voice. There is a certain underlying irony in the fact that we notice all the inevitable differences about ourselves but are oblivious to the most visible similarity: that we are all women!

Furthermore, I believe we need to extend this 'feminist' voice to the public world where men exist. The battle is not intended to be heard solely by those who are aware of its intentions. There is no point in preaching to the believers. More than anyone else, we need to work on educating, and raising awareness amongst the males in our

lives. In order for women to succeed on a macrocosmic scale, they need to assume individual responsibility in upholding their view points on a microcosmic level. Men need to know what it is that we are aiming to change, rather than allowing them to perceive us as angry women lacking any substantial cause. I have found that the most effective way of addressing women's issues to men is by approaching the subject on a more personal level. Men are more likely to pay attention to issues such as rape or eating disorders if they personally know of a woman related to them who has endured such a fate. Unfortunately, such examples are only too easy to find. In order to mutate the system, we need to educate those who are unaware of their situation and present to them alternative scenarios. I believe that it is very important not to impose values on others who hold a different perspective or that are not ready to change. To be loud-mouthed and unrelenting in our point of view is counter productive, and may be more harmful than beneficial. I have learned not to be discouraged by the idea that change in the current situation of women is not going to occur overnight.

I believe that feminism should work towards attaining a 'peopleism' level. In order to mutate the prevailing patriarchal system, men and women need to join hands to establish a more equal society. Feminism should no longer be the sole concern of liberal women. There should be room for equality between genders in all societies, regardless of class, culture, religion or political affiliation. Both men and women need to be given the freedom to choose their actions. If a husband would rather stay at home and take care of the children, then that is a personal choice he should be allowed to make without feeling the shame imposed on him by neighbours. As women, we also need to free men from the responsibility they carry of being the 'bread bearers'. By this I am not saying that I believe women should always be the ones providing for themselves, but I do believe that men are as much victims of the patriarchal system as we are.

In my opinion, feminism will never achieve anything if it remains solely in the hands of those who know what it means. We need to educate everyone, men, women, children and all must join hands together for the most basic human cause: equal treatment, equal choice and freedom from all shackles. So, once again I urge everyone of you to re-consider your notion of feminism because it is no longer 'cool' to mock it or run away from its mere mention. All it means is that there is some humane feelings within your soul, so express them —
- PLEASE!