

Feminism and Army: Different point of Views

And How to overcome the consequences of these differences

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The Lebanese army was founded on August 1, 1945, with the well-known motto “Honor, Sacrifice, Loyalty”. After looking into this motto, I can understand the meaning of sacrifice which is to give up something valued for the sake of other considerations or people. Everyone has sacrificed something at some point in their lives even the very tiny sacrifices such as not eating the last cupcake and leaving it for your mom. Also, I can understand the meaning of loyalty which is to be faithful to your commitments or obligations and to give constant support and allegiance to a person or institution. As sacrifice, everyone is loyal to someone and something in their lives. And, if you told me to sacrifice and be loyal, it makes sense to me. However, the main question is: What is honor? How can you honor someone or something? Someone may say “it is high respect and great esteem”; then you ask for the person or institution who deserves this “high” respect, and the reasons to deserve this admiration from you. Thinking deeply, honor isn’t just an act of respect, honor reflects the individual and societal perception of our actions and thinking.

In any discussion, people can be addressing the same term such as honor, but every group is imposing on this term a different meaning reflecting variation in perspectives. So, understanding different views is crucial for the clear flow of ideas in any discussion and will

result in a fruitful conversation. For instance, two groups can stand side by side protesting for justice; however, each group adopting a different meaning for justice, and recognizing this difference is indispensable to comprehend any conflict which may arise in such encounters. In a brief statement, the army's philosophy is based on honor, and feminism and every human rights activist's philosophy is based on freedom and liberty, and honor is something you create rather than being imposed on you.

First, the army's philosophy is more based on the question "Who deserves what?"; it is related to Aristotelian honorific views. For Aristotle, you need to figure out the telos (purpose, finality, and end) in order to define the rights, and once you define the right based on the telos of any social practice, then achieving the telos of practice entitle you with honor as if it is a form of moral desert where there are vice and virtue, and being virtuous give you honor. To give an example to clarify this point of view: suppose there only one guitar that you need to give to someone, then the question is "who deserves this guitar?". An Aristotelian will give the guitar to the best guitarist, not because this person plays the best music and make us happy, but because a guitar is made to be played in the best way; the telos of the guitar is to produce good music. And, being a good guitarist entitle you to the honor of playing guitar. Going back to the army's philosophy, being honorific is about performing your telos/ purpose like fighting in battle, stopping a terrorist attack, and defending your country. Once you perform your telos, you are granted the honor of your act. When talking about the army, you always need to keep in mind terms like honor, obligation, commitment, and so on. By examining all of the Arab Armies' mottos, the word "honor" appears to be less prevalent than the "hierarchy" where the mottos of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar armies contain

explicit, obvious hierarchies such as “God, then the king/ prince”. And, it is important to note that honor and hierarchy come in the same package together; honor leads to hierarchy and then hierarchy demands honor in a vicious cycle.

On the opposite side, feminist and human rights activist’s philosophy is more focused on liberty and freedom. The main aim of this philosophy is to gain autonomy over your life and to create your own personal values, meaning, and purpose in life. Women have been suffering for a long time because of the roles the patriarchal societies impose on them such as women are only birth givers or women is no more than a wife or women need to dress in a specific way. If you stick to those roles, society will honor you. And, any resistance to these imposed roles is depicted as a tendency to vice and disgrace. However, the honor for feminist is something that you are free to create rather than receive. Thus, feminism is liberating power against any societal norm championed under the name of honor.

Then, this divergence in perspectives between the army and feminism is a reason for conflicts in misunderstanding each other. To make clear to our minds: one of the main roles for any army is to protect the civilian from any danger and to be a protector the soldiers need to be physically strong to sustain the battle in addition to all other martial skills such as the ability to use weapons. By following this line of thought, the soldier will start to honor these skills, and dishonor the opposite skills such as the lack of physical strength or inability to use a gun. Then, since our society depicts women as the weakest part and as a burden on male fighters in any war, army soldiers will start to look down on women. This example demonstrates how the “culture of honor” creates a deformed perception of women. Also, this example isn’t just a false accusation or hateful speech against armies rather than it is a reality where many Arab Armies' mottos and

songs describe their soldiers in masculine terms. Taking Algeria's Army motto as an example, it describes the army as “lions, male hawk, male shark, men”. It is obvious this degree of sexism will inevitably be reflected in the army’s practice and perception of women.

For sure, there are potential solutions that can compensate for conflicts that arise from the difference between the army and feminist points of view. Before making any re-structuring of the army, women need to leave victimhood forever. For centuries, patriarchal societies and cultural norms have been teaching women to be the victim, to be the submissive, to be the dependent, to be subordinate, and accept weakness and oppression as a condition for their existence. Education is one of the most effective tools to counteract the patriarchal society; education enables us to change the mentality of the whole society. Another crucial aspect for any approach to liberate women is to start now and resist any procrastination; do what you can at this moment even a very simple task like writing a two-line tweet advocating women’s rights on the bus on your way back home. Feminists should resist any urge to delay any activity, talk, or protest under the reasoning that “Now, it is not the suitable time”. For instance, by surveying Lebanon history, there has always been a civil war, war with Israel, famine, explosions, terrorism, economic crisis, and if you are going to wait for the appropriate time, I assure you is not coming soon.

Going back to the army, I would suggest requesting to increase the percentage of women in the army, especially in critical significant positions. I am not talking about just increasing the percentage of women in the army; my point is recruiting women in army positions that are crucial in decision making. This act will prove that women are capable of playing an effective role in army-sensitive positions; male soldiers are going to look up to women. Secondly, women need to be included in fighting battles in order to destroy the idea that women are weak or

women are fragile. Getting women in battles is going to flip the table upside down since women will move from being protected by society to become the protector of the society. The best example of the reliability of this proposal is the Kurdish women fighters.

In addition to all the above solutions, women need to be a part of peacebuilding, especially during conflict and post-conflict. When a society is in conflict, there is a lot of changes and restructuring of the society for women to invest. Society pre-conflict is different than the society post-conflict, and women can work to gain from this difference.

In conclusion, my main point is reconciliation between any different point of view starts with adequate understanding in order to reach good solutions. So, you need to understand the mentality of feminism and the army to solve any problem that may arise between them. After that, any problem that might arise can be solved in an educated manner rather than a trial-and-error approach. And again, women need to leave victimhood now and forever.