Women in South Yemen

Recent studies on Arab women have shown the existence of two factors in bringing about a change in their status. One is evolutionary and attributed to the spread of Western culture. The other is revolutionary and imposed by leaders with leftist or anti-capitalist tendencies. According to Maxine Molyneux, author of the article here condensed, the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) is the only Arab country attempting to implement a policy of revolutionary socialist development, in contrast with those states in the Muslim world which have attempted to improve the position of women while retaining a capitalist economy.

Since 1967, the Republic has been governed by the National Liberation Front (NLF) which in 1968 declared itself committed to the goals of Marxism and Leninism and to the complete support of the principle of sexual equality.

During the guerrilla struggle against the British Army, women played an active role. In the post-independence period, the General Union of Yemeni Women (GUYW) was organized as a political arm to the Party. The Yemeni Constitution included its commitment to the mobilization of women to participate in development and the raising of their political consciousness.

The Family Law of 1974(2) directly confronted traditional and religious practices, removed the worst in equalities which they contained without openly attacking religion itself. Maxine Molyneux summarizes the most important changes introduced as follows: 1) Prohibition of polygamy except under certain circumstances such as the disablement or barrenness of the first wife; 2) Abolition of divorce by repudiation and of men’s exclusive rights over property and children; 3) Limitation of the bride-price; 4) Prohibition of compulsory marriage and of the marriage of minors.


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cially from the working and commercial classes, are apt to experience the clash of modern and traditional pressures around them. In school, they enjoy complete freedom of adaptation, but outside the school, the impact of the past is more pronounced.

Conclusion

The transitional period which Algerian society is presently going through, imposes on Algerian young women the confrontation of contradictory influences. The school education of Algerian girls does not affect them in a uniform manner. It tends to be modified by the cultural influence of their families.

Two categories are likely to emerge from this double confrontation. The first is the more westernized type represented by the daughters of the intellectual or middle intellectual elite. The second is the more traditional type including the daughters of those social groups who received a more or less exclusive Arab culture, which also has its own character.

The response of these girls to the complex cultural types to which they are exposed depends on the historical and socio-economic conditions surrounding their acculturation. Conservative groups like merchants, craftsmen and magistrates do not usually favor the modern economic system or the ethics derived from it, while the working class is largely made up of an «up-rooted» population recently engaged in radical change.

In spite of cultural heterogeneity, the schooling of young Algerian girls marks a break with tradition and remains the most efficient and rational means for the emancipation of Algerian women which is a decisive condition of economic reconstruction.