The issue of women’s place in society, and their rights and duties are some of the principal contemporary concerns that provokes a debate, passion, and annoyance or even anger. The world of ideas seems to simplify, divided into two camps along very political but also religious lines. The West, declaring itself the legatee of a ‘lay Christianity’, boasting hastily of its own openness, prides itself for what it offers women, if not perfect equality, then at least a position unprecedented in the history of humankind; and it is true that the second half of the Twentieth Century was rich in progress, legislation protecting not simply human rights, but specifically women’s rights. The East, defending an Islam roughed up by Western propaganda, flatters itself in claiming to continue to offer women respect and protection, guaranteeing them invaluable shelter, while the consumer society, under the pretext of individual freedom, has transformed the female sex into objects of desire of commercial or even pornographic value.

The two ‘camps’, whatever the case, defend moral or certainly social values that have been absorbed by politics. Serious debate is thus stifled: that of defining universal values to which women of all backgrounds would adhere were it not for national, regional, ethnic and religious barriers - or allegiances.

Without doubt the West’s instrumentalisation of discourse about women in the aftermath of 11 September 2001 has reinforced the antagonism between two simplistic visions. Moreover, the West, even from the time of the first Gulf War that occurred as the world was still watching - in amazement - the collapse of the Soviet Union, seems to have followed a deliberate strategy: the re-appropriation of the concept of civilization. This, at least, was the scarcely disguised message that western media spread, to the point whether one might suspect a hidden hand or hands were directing matters.

A whiff of the ‘White Man’s Burden’, even as the decolonisation movement had denounced the exploitation of subjugated territories. The discourse that the West adopted after 11 September 2001 was self-congratulatory about western values… to which all other states hoping to progress should submit themselves. In the East, lay political groups, doubtless aware of their weakness, opted for a cautious approach, allowing religious groups to seize the initiative in a debate to which they are perhaps even more hostage than the West. The latter must, it is true, oversee the ‘forgetting’ of the dramatic consequences of military foreign policy that it has pursued. One should add that such a ‘process’ is but superficial, as evidenced with the adoption by the USA on the eve of presidential elections of a Global Gender-Based Violence Policy. The White House, neglecting to mention the consequences of all conflicts on the lives of women and America’s role in this respect, declared:

"This is a historic moment. The United States is making a commitment at the highest level of our government to launch a strategic, multi-agency effort to end violence against women and girls globally. The White House today made clear that violence against women and girls not only is an immoral and repugnant scourge, but also is an obstacle to fulfilling our nation's top international priorities for fostering greater security, democracy, and economic development globally. It recognizes that ending violence against women and girls is an achievable goal and requires a concerted, multi-sectoral approach." (White House Order 2012)

It will fall to researchers, equipped with the necessary perspective that only the passing of time allows, to evaluate the period considered here. But without doubt it is also necessary to examine the ‘conflicting female and feminist identities’ that emerged after 11 September 2001 highlighting more specifically one issue: the quest for political and human rights. Researchers are invited to try to outline the identities that existed prior to that event, their subsequent
evolution, as well as identities that developed and asserted themselves after the events briefly mentioned above. They will also look at the coming two to three decades for which the prospects on the global, regional and national levels are worrying. We wish to give free rein to the thoughts and debate (perhaps stormy) that the subject gives rise to.

Reference:

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