

Steering change in support of women rights

By Kamal Artin

In her article on the abuse of women published in KurdistanObserver, on June 12, 2007 , Pam Steer intends to steer our society with her critical and courageous words.

Interestingly her name fits her objective. To my limited understanding of English words, "Steer" could mean a young ox castrated before sexual maturity, giving an advice, to pursue an action, or to head in a forward direction.

Steer's words reminded me of a journalist I met in a flight who wanted to hear my view on women and their rights. After making sure that my ring was visible, I told her why I am an advocate of gender equality. She was surprised and started to complain about her opposite experience in our society during a six month assignment. Apparently the cheerful and outgoing aspect of her personality and profession had been misunderstood by some of our men that she is in love with them until she had put them in their place with the confident, righteous, and emancipated part of her character that they could not expect in women.

Possibly Steer has had a similar experience that made her confront our men so strongly in her article. To please some of our politicians in power, she would have it easier to focus only on the positive aspects of our society. However, she seems to be skeptical, determined, value honor, but rightfully attack honor killing and similar crimes against our mothers, sisters, and daughters. Steer might be seen as antagonist of our men, yet in fact she tries to guide our society to improve and stand out among the conservative and dictatorial countries in one of the most troubled region of the world.

Some of our men might be freighted by Steer's words and mark her as an impractical idealist with no connection to real life of our people, and one that humiliates us so we lose confidence in our ultimate objective. They might argue that we need to focus on demanding our national rights instead of women rights at this critical stage. They might question that since we as a society have not had an opportunity to stand on our feet, how could we talk about running or even walking? Such arguments remind me of the outdated arguments of self serving nations that expect oppressed people prioritize the territorial integrity of the oppressing state over their own national rights. It is similar to the argument of a promiscuous man that expects every woman be pleased with existence of harems, temporary and underage marriages, and other forms of male polygamy.

While Steer rightfully attacks dishonorable aspect of the culture of our people, she forgets to mention that honor as an honest and fair attitude of people with integrity has been part of their culture regardless of their faith and ethnic background. She forgets to mention that the whole troubled region has been politically mislead or religiously misguided by various patriarchal emperors, kings, sultans, sheikhs, ayatollahs, priests, and rabies for centuries. She forgets to mention that honor killing and other crimes against women are global matters rather than local.

Steer deserves to know that she is not alone in her fight against backward aspect of our society. Many of us have talked about it over and over and been partially helpful in promoting some changes. I hope Steer's words are more productive, since some of our leaders might need to be steered by an outsider to believe change is needed.

Dr. Artin maintains www.art-in-mind.net and hopes the readers sign a petition on the site in support of the stateless people of his origin

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