

Media is not a platform for abusing and intimidating women

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The Feminist Civil Society Platform in Lebanon strongly condemns, and deeply regrets, the growing and largely unchallenged use by some men working in the media of their platforms and media spaces to target women in public life through insults, personal attacks, mockery, humiliation and defamation, without any meaningful engagement with their positions, performance or roles in public life.

Criticism and accountability are an essential part of media work and democratic debate. But there is a clear difference between professional criticism and turning a media platform into a space for settling personal and political scores, particularly when women are targeted through insulting or demeaning language, or through terms that strip them of the respect, legitimacy and standing they deserve as participants in public life.

This is not an issue concerning one particular woman, nor does it depend on our position regarding her political or public choices. The issue is broader and more serious. It concerns the normalization of a media discourse that allows some men to misuse the authority, visibility and influence they hold to attack and publicly humiliate women, while presenting such behaviour as opinion or as media boldness.

Women's presence in politics, the media, academia, civil society, and in different positions of decision-making and public life does not make their dignity fair game for abuse. Women can, and indeed should, be held accountable and their positions and performance subject to criticism, just as men are. But this must happen without resorting to verbal violence, humiliation or defamation, or using a media platform to intimidate them and push them out of public life.

We also believe that responsibility does not fall only on those who engage in this kind of discourse. Responsibility also lies with media institutions that allow and normalize it, and with public, political and media figures who treat it as a normal and acceptable part of the media landscape. Appearing, participating and remaining silent in the face of the public humiliation of women contributes, intentionally or unintentionally, to granting such behaviour legitimacy and allowing it to continue.

Nor can we ignore the silence of studio audiences and participants when such humiliation takes place on air. We do not hold audiences responsible for the words of a presenter, but the absence of objection and the treatment of such abuse as though it were simply another normal segment contribute to its normalization. Expressing rejection, even with a single word, helps affirm that women's dignity is not a matter for ridicule or entertainment.

We reject the use of ratings and reach as justification for violating human dignity or normalizing verbal and gender-based violence against women. We also reject the portrayal of humiliation as a media style, or the use of the power of a media platform as though it were a form of journalistic courage.

We call on security, judicial and media institutions, unions representing media workers and journalists, and public figures to assume their responsibilities in confronting these practices and to establish clear standards that protect public debate from insulting, degrading and gender-based discourse.

Media is a public space and a public responsibility.

A media platform is not personal property.

And women's dignity is not an acceptable price to pay for ratings and reach.