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BY DEFAULT, THE HUSBAND

Lately, I met a seventy-year-old woman, full of energy, maturity and intelligence. And she told me her story. 'Actually, when I was young, I passed seven 'O' levels at a time when nobody passed his/her 'O' levels. I was a clerk and had to quit my job in order to get married. After marriage I could only gain some money as a cleaner. Today, my husband (for the sake of whom I had quit my job), never even thanks me for whatever I do at home. The people I used to work for as cleaner used to treat me much better ... And every month he gives me some of his pension so as to pull through because he is the one who gets the whole pension.'

Such a story, I have to admit, makes me sad. Although we might think that the time when women used to have to quit their jobs and give up their career is a distant one, these women are all still with us.

These women have suffered discrimination in the past and are still being discriminated against today. In reality, all the husband's wages were only gained thanks to his wife. If she weren't there, meaning, if he had to take care of his children himself, he wouldn't have had such a pay, and thus, wouldn't even have such a pension today.

Apart from that, this is total disrespect to the recognition of a housewife's work. A recent foreign study calculated that a housewife's job is equivalent to two full-time jobs and a half.

In case of such couples, the male pensioner that has enjoyed dominance all his life and who has always decided himself how much money his wife should spend, is still enjoying such dominance in the 21st century. Just because he has always enjoyed this advantage, this entitles him to enjoy today as well. In spite of all the talk about equality between the sexes.

Why isn't such a pension divided between two? Half going to the woman and half going to the man? Why does the man have to be in a dominant position in order to literally pull the reins to his wife? And why does it always have to be the wife to worry because all the money are in the husband's pockets?

These are nothing but old-fashioned administrative systems that render any legislative efforts towards equality futile.

But perhaps you'd say that these are but ghosts from the past? That it's not worth stirring the waters? An argument I definitely disagree with. But, let's say that this is a bureaucratic nightmare. Then, one can only hope that history does not repeat itself.

However, in reality, in case of modern married couples discrimination still exists. A woman who is an Assistant Director and who is happily married, told me that she cannot understand why the income tax return is on the name of her husband. Obviously, this woman has been married for a while.

I wrote to the Income Tax Department. 'When a couple gets married, on whose name is the tax return issued, please?' After about three days, I received an answer. 'Dear Ms. Vassallo, Thank you for your e-mail. By default, when a couple gets married, the tax return is issued on the husband's name.'

A humiliating answer. As I have expressed myself recently, I am against the automatic application of the community of acquests upon marriage. Such a system makes the wife totally financially dependent on her husband without having signed anything. In such a case it is the State that decides for the woman. And the husband is put at a legal and financial advantage without any discussion being made as to how the common property is to be administered. Bureaucratic systems such as these discussed above – in case of pensions and tax returns – increase the wife's dependence on her husband – who not only has all the money, but has the entitlement and possession of all the common documents of the couple.

A woman, if she would like anything to be issued on her name, has to discuss, fix appointments, survive bureaucracy and show off all her intentions before marriage. A man, is not only exempted from fixing any appointments to change things, but the less he discusses things, the more they are in his favour.

This article might seem to be against men. However it is certainly not against those men that have their sisters, daughters, nieces, grand-daughters or even mums going through separation cases and who are encountering all sorts of bureaucratic difficulties which make their life hell. The latter definitely do not wish that all correspondence was addressed to the husband and all the pension goes to the father.

When will true equality come into force?

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