

Study
Structures of violence against women in peace and war
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The project aimed at gathering Arab Women’s Forum AISHA and European Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI networks that conducted series of collective activities, such as regional and international interactive roundtables, seminars, and conference, etc. The two networks have elaborated and provided their feminist discourse on human security and violence against women: “peace cannot be achieved as long as women are excluded from any decision making through ultimately violence and control, both through conflict and in peace times”.

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Gender equality is both the goal and the means for social change and democracy, but there are barriers on the road. Women are instrumentalized during both peace and war and there can’t be a progress and development when women are excluded.

This study is a tool to raise the awareness on these barriers and on the importance of having civil legislation that regulates the relationships between women and men. It is an instrumental for debating peace and what it means for women living in peace and war and ultimately for women in a region like the Middle East that is highly conflictual.

Structures of violence against women in peace and war: An overview

The root cause of violence against women is in the denial of the equal worth and value of women and men. The level of violence is tightly linked to the general status of women in the society in terms of their economic, family and social role, political representation and participation. The structural gender based violence deprives women of the right to live without fear, everywhere and at each moment of their lives. Women's security is excluded from national and international policies. Violence against women occurs in all cultures and it is structural. The reports researches the continuity of violence against women in the contexts of peace and war and examines the different kinds of marginalization and control of women that perpetuate violence against them, while acknowledging the specificity of each different context: the Arab region, Europe, war and occupation. It is necessary to understand these specificities, commonalities and differences in order to know how to strategize.

Objectives of the reports

Two studies on structures of violence against women in times of war and peace focused on the Arab region (in particular Lebanon and Palestine) providing case studies from contexts of insecurity and conflict, and on Europe (France, Italy and Spain) providing case studies from contexts of peace (or the absence of war). The studies' overall objectives are to contribute to an understanding of the link between gender equality, equal rights, violence against women and human security.

The study "Violence against women in Europe, new challenges and resistances" focuses on exploring manifestations of violence against women, including its evolution, the perception of the actions and policies developed to fight it, the perception of the role and impact of the different political and social actors, including women themselves. It is important to emphasize the main aspects of the changes and developments that have taken place and their origin on the national and regional levels, as well as to provide better knowledge and understanding of the types, hierarchy and kind of justifications of violence against women in Europe today. By shedding light on the rise of conservative thought and religious fundamentalisms and its consequences on women's human rights, it aims to contribute to enriching the political debate in Euro-Med region on women's human security as a constitutive part of democracy.

Marginalization and control over women during peace increase during war and the control of women turns into control of the whole community. Violence exercised against women during the war does not happen overnight but has its roots in the permanence of structural gender inequality. The subordinated position of women and their designated role in times of peace makes them even more vulnerable during war. It comes instrumental and legitimizes the violence against them exercised by armies in military conflict. In spite of all the international resolutions violence prevails and is perpetuated.

Equally, marginalization of women is observed in security concept and policies. As the threats for national security are being identified from "outside", the security of women has been moved to the private sphere, to be taken care of the nearest: family male members, husbands, who are most often the abusers. But the security policies do not reach there.

Furthermore the study wishes to outline women's strategies to resist violence against them and to find out the perception of the evolution of violence against women by different actors involved in the work against it. It is important to explore the process of the implementation of a more relevant legislation, governmental action, NGO's action, dialogue between institutions and NGO's, obstacles, challenges and progresses.

Finally, it researches solutions to curb this phenomenon and searches to evaluate the perception of similarities in subordination between women from the Middle East and European region and

consequently the possibility and necessity of cooperation. Our belief is that the fight against violence against women occurs in times of peace (without war), as well as in times of war and conflict, and that there are numerous pathways that can and must be taken to combat its manifestations.

The report on the Arab region, “Building Dreams, Achieving Goals: Some patterns of defiance among women in Palestine and Lebanon,” bases its premise on two understandings. The first is that violence against women in the Arab region is structural and institutionalized, and is a physical embodiment of the impact of patriarchy in Arab society. The second understanding is that, although there is no shortage of interest and research into the ways in which women are oppressed in the Arab world, there is much less research documenting the ways women in the Arab region break the norm. In essence, women’s empowerment, a prerequisite to confronting and challenging gender inequality, and thus countering institutionalized violence against women, is both poorly understood and insufficiently researched. The report analyzes the ways in which Arab women do challenge these patriarchal structures.

Through a process of purposive sampling during August and September 2010, 54 women were interviewed from Palestine and Lebanon (38 in focus groups and 16 through in-depth interviews). There were 11 respondents from Palestine, either living in the West Bank or Gaza; of the remaining 43 participants living in Lebanon, 27 were Lebanese, 15 were Palestinian refugees and one was Syrian. Recognizing the non-universality of women’s experiences, emphasis was placed on ensuring geographic, age and religious diversity.

Particular emphasis was placed on gaining participants who were not in places of privilege and thus not, for example, running or employed in NGOs, nor holders of positions of authority (like high ranking jobs or academia). Moreover, only half of the participants had completed high school or entered university, and two-thirds were living in a situation of economic hardship.

Women were selected for challenging patriarchal norms in at least one of the following ways: Pursuit of higher education; Employed or self-employed; Married cross-religion or nationality; Initiation of divorce (often from an early marriage); and Time spent as a political prisoner (in Palestine).

Specificities of the Arab region and Europe

There is a consensus among analysts, scholars and UN Agencies that the Arab region lags behind other regions in human development due to the structural obstacles created by the entrenchment of patriarchy within its societies and its public and private institutions. There is also agreement that the proliferation of war and civil conflict in the region plays a significant role in hindering progress in Arab countries, most notably the continued occupation of the WBG and the invasion and occupation of Iraq, along with the states of insecurity in Sudan and Somalia.

In the Arab region inequality is institutionalized through the sanctioned co-habitation between civil and religious laws bolstered by the constitutional codification of patriarchal religious values and reinforced by structural factors like class, ethnicity and sectarianism. Arab women’s human rights are legally, institutionally and socially obstructed. Women face inequalities in their access to and control over resources, they are under-represented in decision-making positions.

Patriarchy in the Arab region is rooted in the authoritarian social relations of kinship, clan, and religious and ethnic groups. This affects all aspects of women’s lives from the pursuit of education, to their choice in marriage, and their ability to work. It results in the de-valorization of women within the family and society. The persistence of patriarchal structures in Arab society legitimizes women’s control by male members of the family and stigmatizes them when they break social rules.

If the constitutions of most Arab countries guarantee equality for all citizens, in practice, however, women face discrimination through personal status codes or family laws that are under the jurisdiction of religious courts and that regulate marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance depending on sectarian affiliation, whether Muslim or Christian. Personal status codes enshrine the superiority of men over women.

The recurrent external military interventions, culminating in the invasion of Iraq and the continued Israeli occupation of Arab land, with the denial of self-determination and Statehood for the Palestinian people, have often occurred in collusion with Arab governments and leaders. Arab countries also instrumentalize the absence of peace to justify authoritarian rule in the name of State security. As such, human security, a prerequisite for human development, is absent from the region and women's security encounters hermetic obstructions.

Due to a slow economic growth in the Arab region, compounded by a range of structural difficulties, living standards have been declining and unemployment is on the rise: it is estimated that 68 million persons are living in poverty. Despite the narrowing of gender gaps in education, not only do women have to compete with men in a shrinking job market, but they are disadvantaged by pervasive social norms which underrate women both in the home and in the work place. Discrimination against women that is legally and socially institutionalized enables the perpetuation of violence against them.

Human development in the Arab region lags behind most of the developing world, with human security prerequisites largely unfulfilled. The second class status of women and their socio-economic exclusion emerge as principal factors impeding progress in the region. At the same time our review shows a gender shift in key development indicators; there is gender parity in basic education, more women are pursuing higher education and their participation in the labor force is increasing.

Women's life in Europe is far from being free from violence. Despite legislative improvements this last decade, the patriarchal structures remain powerful and fundamental women's right to leave in security is not guaranteed. The Council of Europe estimates on the basis of various studies on prevalence of violence against women, that across European countries, one out of five to one out of four women have experienced physical violence in their immediate social environment, mostly by their husbands, partners and ex-partners at least once during their adult lives and more than one-tenth have suffered sexual violence involving the use of force. The eradication of all forms of gender-based violence was among the six priority areas of the Roadmap for Equality between women and men (2006-2010). Women interviewed refuse to view peace as an absence of war. The first threat that European women have to face each day is a long lasting war against violence perpetrated against them and for physical and psychological survival that is still largely ignored.

Violence against women is spread in all the categories of population, therefore migrant women are the ones most threatened by violence since they are facing at the same time religious fundamentalisms of their country of origin and the consequences of ultra-liberal policies and raising of the conservative trends in their country of residence. Migrant women are not protected from the racist ideology growing in Europe which hurts differently men and women and due to bi-lateral State agreements some of them stay submitted to the law of their country of origin or deprived from their basic rights.

This takes place in a context of global regression of women's rights due to the economic crisis and the weakening of the social welfare system and protection. This has been taking place in a tight interconnection with an increasing militarization, the raising of the conservative thought and movements and the increasing intervention of religious authorities in the political and social development and in the lives of women. Finally in a context of weakness and division of the democratic movement, the feminist

movement has also weakened. All these elements in an international context of global militarization are standing on the way to gender equality and social development and have created an environment of fear and threat to the gains that women at global and local level struggled so hard to obtain.

In the European countries knowing peaceful times, the patriarchal violence has also other names as exclusion, precariousness, economic insecurity, trafficking and prostitution. Despite alarming figures, the majority of the studies underline the persistence of universal social tolerance towards this violence. The concept of human security promoted by the United Nations ignores the fact that the threat against the safety of women is also within their circle of partners, husbands and relatives. Violence against women has no boundaries of age, class, time and nationality. In all its different forms it exists everywhere and everywhere it is still considered as a second rank problem. The patriarchal way of political thinking is reflected in the EU economic and security policies. Patriarchal policies based on liberalized economy, competition and profit and defence policy based on armament and militarization are possible to be implemented only at the expenses of and through further subordination and discrimination of women.

Commonalities of the reports

Violence against women in all forms is widespread in Europe and in the Arab region, as it is in most parts of the world. In the Arab region as in Europe, it is the all-pervasive impact of patriarchy that presents the greatest obstacle to the achievement of human security and development.

The structures of violence against women in war and in “peacetime” are tightly interconnected. Deeply rooted in the patriarchal structures themselves, this violence is extremely costly both to women and to societies all around the Mediterranean area. The deteriorating of the situation of millions of women, from Lebanon to Spain, from France or Italy to Palestine, gives clear indication of the universality of the patriarchal system built on domination and control of women.

Incidences of violence against women are drastically under-reported and under-researched. Domestic violence is often remaining in the dark and does not go out of the private family sphere. This violence even if less socially tolerated is often denied by the society and the victims themselves. In addition, economic dependence deprives women of the capacity to resist.

The legal and institutional separation of religion and the state is imperative for equal citizenship. The rising fundamentalism is occurring everywhere on the expenses of women and should not be ignored. It has for consequences the compromising of women’s rights on all levels and strengthening the patriarchal structures which are manipulating women’s resistance and the interpretation of their rights.

Militarism in Europe has been steadily increasing, and the Arab region has witnessed protracted conflict for a century, leading to strengthening of the privileged position of men and the military in decision making, contributing to the limiting the space and access of women to political influence. Militarism is crucial in maintaining male dominance in society and governs the political priorities. Even if there is a developed academic feminist discourse and critique on security, women’s feminist organizations are lacking antimilitaristic approach in their work addressing violence against women.

In Europe, migrant women are the ones most threatened by violence since they are facing at the same time religious fundamentalisms of their country of origin and the consequences of ultra-liberal policies and/or of the conservative trends in their country of residence. More over migrant women are not protected from the racist ideology, which hurts differently men and women. In the Arab region, patriarchal oppression of women is intensified at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder by class oppression in the form of economic struggle.

Resistance of women

Women are actors and not passive victims – despite the stereotypes. More and more women are engaged in activism, instigating a certain degree of legal reforms as well as increasing awareness on women's rights. The two parts of this study underline the refusal of women to be imprisoned by traditional patterns and the necessity of a common action to widen the space of women's resistance.

Arab women do come up against and confront patriarchal structures on a daily basis, both inside the home and as institutionalized in the public sphere, facing violence perpetuation through gender-based violence, discriminatory laws and unequal access to opportunities and services, exacerbated in times of conflict yet manifest in times of peace and demonstrated through women's unequal participation in decision-making mechanisms and roles of authority. Women use multiple, overlapping strategies from defying family and institutional authority and overturning societal norms to negotiation and compromise. They face societal and religious opposition, threats and violence, sacrifice and loss, including the loss of children and isolation due to familial and societal rejection- a high price to be paid to get some achievements that have never been gained without the involvement and struggle of women themselves.

Women are resisting the multifaceted manifestations of patriarchy. They are confronting patriarchy and gender discrimination every day. However, despite the successes of their struggle against patriarchy, the road ahead remains long: normative and structural barriers prevent women from the Arab region from achieving their potential, and much of the challenges and changes wrought by the women's movement have not often led to substantive, transformational change.

In Europe, the claim for security as a basis for all human rights on the one hand and the high prevalence of violence against women on the other is perceived as seriously questioning the European democracies, national or human security models and lifts up the gap between formal and real rights. Although guaranteed by the Constitutions and legislations of the States, many rights still remain inaccessible to women, such as the rights to a life free from coercion, fear, violence and insecurity. The feminist movement is a necessary force in the common effort to counter women's rights violations across borders, over the diversity of cultures and historical backgrounds, in the respect of their differences.

Opening ways for change

Awareness raising, economic support for civil society to advocate for and monitor the implementation of the laws, involving and enabling more women in politics, supporting women's NGO's, preventing intrusion of religious precepts in the public sphere are some important steps that need to be taken.

The promotion and change of national laws is crucial. However, it is only a first step. Their implementation requires always and everywhere further mobilization and pressure of women's organizing in order to put gender equality in a higher place on the agenda of the governments, both in terms of goals and means. The universal rights stated in the laws must be translated into everyday life of women in spite of strong and universal patriarchal resistance to their implementation.

International resolutions and frameworks are a necessary prerequisite. However they are not enough. Common frames and binding texts with significant sanctions are needed. Further on, if the principles that these conventions are based on are not shared on the grassroots level, through education and awareness raising, upbringing and media, it is illusory to think achieving transformative change.

It is important to mobilize and empower women. However it is not enough. We need to organize and politicize them. Feminists are called upon to develop their strategies and address the needs and the potential of women who break the norm and challenge patriarchy in their individual lives.

The presence of women in the political sphere is a democratic necessity and a needed contribution to the promotion of their rights. Democracy requires an equal power of action for women and men on the decisions that are shaping their lives. Among these is the crucial right to live a life free of violence. The under-representation of women on all levels in the political sphere is an obstacle for the implementation of the women's rights and questions the traditional notion of democracy.

Recommendations

1. Zero tolerance towards violence against women is a common policy, needed to be designed and implemented according to the different contexts, in order to raise awareness and to ultimately accumulate more opportunities for more women to enter the political and public sphere, traditionally reserved for men, in order to make their voices heard.
2. Addressing informal codes, social norms, customs, traditions, but also religious pressure and interferences in the civil life is required for sustainable changes. The separation of religion from the state is a precondition for preventing traditional understandings that threaten women's security and freedom and which can prevent change.
3. Common actions based on solidarity in addressing similarities with other feminist movements internationally are essential to be able to address patriarchal structures. Violence and discriminations against women have "local" expressions, but their roots are common.
4. A priority is to address the roots and the causes of violence against women in all the spheres of the women's lives, both private and public and not only their consequences.
5. Institutions dealing with violence against women must have the human and financial resources for their policies and the action among the different services and actors must be coordinated.
6. Awareness programs by governments and civil society on the issue of violence against women must address boys and girls, men and women, including upbringing education and media.
7. The qualification and education on violence against women and gender equality of the professionals in contact with the victims must be improved.
8. In order to fight violence against women with efficiency, European Union and Euro-Med States should adopt a common definition of violence based on the universality of women's human rights. They should develop common data base on violence against women using reliable and well known systems of collecting data to make violence visible. These steps are necessary to adopt a common and binding legislation such as exposing and condemning violence. An adoption and implementation of a protection order to guarantee women's physical integrity should be a common tool.
9. Specific measures must be taken to tackle violence against migrant women who are facing the consequences of domestic, social, cultural and institutional violence from both the country of origin and from the host country.
10. A real democracy means women are equal in law and are full citizens. There is no real peace if women are living without dignity and there will be no sustainable solutions of the question of violence against women if this issue does not become a political priority.

11. In order for human security to be comprehensive framework for ensuring peace of the society, violence against women in the public and private sphere should be incorporated and specially stressed.
12. Feminist organization need to adopt/develop antimilitaristic approach in their work, uncovering military budgets and challenging the domination of militaristic values imposed onto the civilians and state politics by means of religion and tradition.
13. Feminist and women's groups are also called upon to: Develop their strategies and address the needs and the transformative potential of women who break the norm and challenge patriarchy in their individual lives; Not merely to mobilize women but to organize them and politicize them; and To understand that structural change does not come merely from challenging or modifying the laws, but from ground-up by challenging patriarchal structures (from the family to the public sphere).

Violence against Women in Europe

New Challenges and Resistances

“Each violence is gratuitous, but this one is even more gratuitous than any other. [...] Violence against women is exercised on women for the mere fact that they are women: in order to subject, dominate, or only to hurt them”. (S)

Study realized by Lilian Halls-French

In collaboration with Magali Gay-Berthomieu

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INTRODUCTION

The dream of living in a world with peace, security and respect to human rights can no longer be “deferred”. Elahe Amani The 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

27-11- 2008

1. Background

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon, present in all regions, countries, cultures and social classes, affecting millions of women worldwide. It is defined by the United Nations as one of the most widespread violations of human rights and one of the most serious health problems in the world. Yet, it is actively tolerated in both public and private sphere. Due to its large extent, violence against women is perceived to affect not only women's lives but the whole society. The silence that surrounds this violence contributes to its persistence. Shame and fear of reprisal lead to leaving the perpetrators unpunished. One of the strongest support of this impunity is the widely spread social perception that violence against women is a private matter. Even if in Europe the women's organizing has brought a light on the root cause and has pushed for improved legislation, governments have not been able or willing to create effective policies addressing violence against women on the ground. The gender power structures still sustain gender inequalities across divisions as ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation and get their legitimization by cultural or/and religious gender norms and standards that are deeply institutionalized and carry on the subordinated position of women. Herewith the patriarchal gender power order remains preserved as men continue to keep their privileged position in the society by ultimately exercising violence against women: from psychological to physical, through sexualized and finally murder.

The subordinated position of women and their designated role in times of peace, make them even more vulnerable during war. It comes instrumental and legitimizes the violence against them exercised by armies in military conflict. In spite of all the international resolutions violence prevails and is perpetuated. Marginalization and control over women during peace increase during war and the control of women turns into control of the whole community. Violence exercised against women during the war does not happen overnight but has its roots in the permanence of structural gender inequality.

Equally, marginalization of women is observed in security concept and policies. As the threats for national security are being identified from “outside”, the security of women has been moved to the private sphere, to be taken care of the nearest: family male members, husbands, who are most often the abusers. But the security policies do not reach there.

In this context, Association NAJDEH has undertaken a study on violence against women and its consequences on the lives of women and on the society as a whole. The study's overall objective is to contribute to and bring to light the link between gender equality and democracy building, violence against women and human security. By shedding light on the rise of conservative thought and religious fundamentalisms and its consequences on women's human rights, it aims to contribute to enriching the political debate in Euro-Med region on women's human security as a constitutive part of democracy.

2. Objectives

The study wishes to bring knowledge of the perception of this phenomenon today, its evolution, the perception of the actions and policies developed to fight it, the perception of the role and impact of the different political and social actors including women themselves. It is important to enlighten the main

aspects of the changes and developments that have taken place and their origin on the national and regional levels as well as to provide better knowledge and understanding of the types, hierarchy and kind of justifications of violence against women.

Furthermore the study wishes to outline women's strategies to resist violence against them and to find out the perception of the evolution of violence against women by different actors involved in the work against it. It is important to shed a light on the process of the implementation of a more relevant legislation, governmental action, NGO's action, dialogue between institutions and NGO's, obstacles, challenges and progresses.

Finally, it researches solutions to curb this phenomenon and searches to evaluate the perception of similarities between women from the Middle East and European regions and consequently the possibility and necessity of cooperation.

3. Methodology

The study examines violence against women in two regions: the Middle East that has been torn by various conflicts and occupation, with samples from Lebanon and Occupied Palestinian Territories and Europe, with samples from countries living in "peace and democracy"- France, Spain and Italy. As it researches the continuum of violence against women in peace and war, the report strives to contribute to tackle the issues of peace and what it means for women. It addresses the concept of peace and questions its meaning for women whose daily life is determined by violence. (Terms of Reference of the study)

The present report is related to the European part and researches the "peace" zone of the study in order to explore communalities and common patterns of violence against women and to enlighten the continuum of violence through peace and military conflicts and occupation. The European part focuses on three countries- Spain, France and Italy as these demonstrate various situations regarding the issue of violence against women in terms of political and social contexts and legislation. Spain has an advanced position in Europe since it was the first country to adopt a frame law in 2004. France adopted last year its own frame law and Italy has no law yet. The diversity between the three countries is also important in terms of historical backgrounds, weight of the Catholic Church on the daily lives of women as well as issues concerning women migrants' situation and migration policies.

This report has been developed in two phases:

- ❖ Initial phase of a desk study: Studies, reports, documents about violence against women in Europe as well as in the three countries, international studies and resolutions.
- ❖ Second phase: a qualitative phase of in-depth interviews.

Thirty five women from different activist background, leaders and members of women's human rights organizations and networks and women, who in their professional field or voluntary involvement have been working in different ways on the question of violence against women, were selected to be interviewed. The purpose is to get a thorough knowledge of the evolution of the situation during the last decade and to examine the main challenges; the link made by women between violence against women and security issues; the link between the security concepts, policies and institutions and the security of women in their daily lives.

The in -depth interviews were structured around a set of questions about:

- ❖ perception of violence against women, global approach and definitions;
- ❖ evolution of this phenomenon;
- ❖ its causes and roots;
- ❖ its consequences;
- ❖ evaluation of the national policies;
- ❖ evaluation of the European policies;
- ❖ priorities and urgencies to be solved;
- ❖ resistance and capacities of women;
- ❖ solutions to eradicate violence against women;
- ❖ perception of communalities and common action with Middle East women in the field of violence against women.

4. Definitions

4.1 Violence against women

“Violence against women is a will of destruction and symbolic death “(F)

Different expressions are used to talk about violence against women and to qualify it. “Patriarchal violence” underlines the link of violence with the dominant power structures. “Male violence” is used in accordance to the World Health Organization data showing that 90% of the perpetrators are men. Gender-based violence is refused by the majority since it is not identifying the victim and the perpetrator.

“ Violence against women is the most prevalent discrimination against women existing in the world” (S)

In the frame of this study, based on the principle that women’s rights are an integral part of human rights, we use the definition established by the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and adopted by the Beijing Women’s Conference in 1995 which defines the term violence against women (VAW) as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm, suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. We also refer all along this study to the declaration of the specialized group on VAW in the Council of Europe (1997) “Gender specific violence is directly structural and symbolic. Every manifestation of violence at women relates to the universality of the human rights.”

“Violence is the negation of “otherness”, the denial of human” (F)

As for the interviewed women, violence is generally defined as the tool of patriarchy to keep women in a position of subordination and as the negation of the “other”. Almost all of them put forward the idea of a worldwide spread phenomenon with a very wide spectrum of expressions of physical, sexual and psychological harm towards women and girls, whether occurring in the private or in the public sphere.

“Violence against women exists in all the countries as a means of control of women by society “(F)

VAW is described as one of the strongest bases of the patriarchal structures of the societies, still most often not recognized as violence via social tolerance, surrounded by persistent silence and exacerbated in times of armed conflicts or economic crises.

4.2 Security

The traditional concept of security refers to the safety of States protecting their borders by their armies, who are acting in the nation's best interest. A human security approach has emerged the last two decades, linking security with people rather than with territories and discussing a security based on the fulfilment of the essential human needs.

Violence is defined by the interviewed as the antithesis of security. Security for them is the capacity for all to move, to talk and to think freely; the possibility to have control over one's own body and life; the possibility to live in a safe space without places where women are prohibited, threatened or not welcome; in a safe space free of physical risks, social reprobation or verbal harassment. Security means that the public space would be no more a male zone but a neutral space.

"It means the possibility to fulfil oneself, so quiet, security help achieve personal development" (S)

"Security means freedom, quiet, respect of human rights, freedom of movement" (S)

4.3 Peace

In coherence with the above definitions, peace, that is traditionally perceived as "absence of war" is viewed as everything but the absence of war. All interviewed question the common understanding of peace.

"Many women are not living in peace. They are living insecure and they do not enjoy peace at home. We are living under threat" (S)

Inequality is defined as the first source of violence. For the major part of the interviewed, if you don't question the causes of violence there is no hope for solving its consequences. Since peace presupposes equality and the end of any relation of domination between human beings it is something which does not exist. Peace is utopia. From the very start all the interviewed describe violence, its causes, its consequences, its expressions as a universal problem; not linking it with a particular geographical context but connected with a global system of domination.

LEVEL AND FACES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN EUROPE TODAY

1. European Union and Violence against Women

❖ **A high level of violence and urgent security needs of women**

The official data are never providing the reality of the phenomena of violence, especially when it comes to domestic violence. Violence in the family, behind the walls of the home is a widely underreported social problem affecting millions of women all over the world.

Even if the data are different according to the used methodology, the Council of Europe estimates on the basis of various studies on prevalence of violence against women, that across European countries, one out of five to one out of four women have experienced physical violence in their immediate social environment, mostly by their husbands, partners and ex-partners at least once during their adult lives and more than one-tenth have suffered sexual violence involving the use of force¹. About 12% to 15% of all women have experienced domestic abuses after the age of 16 and much more continue to suffer physical and sexual violence after the separation from their perpetrator.

European lawyers, experts and human rights activists have come now to the conclusion that the physical and sexual violence and psychological abuses against women can be compared to torture in both nature and severity.

All forms of violence against women appear to be widely spread. Women experience violence and injustice perpetuated by State and non-State actors. The economic, political, social and religious injustice and impunity are major barriers to women's human rights and an attack on the women's integrity and dignity. Women experience violence that harms their health, safety and security and that is a clear violation of women's ability to enjoy their basic human rights.

❖ A plague spread in all the categories of population

"Not a single woman is protected whatever her social frame is. The more the social context is privileged, the more violence is hidden "(F)

The most spread idea in Europe is that the "normal citizen "is not beating his wife or partner but that the perpetrators are deviant, unemployed, uneducated, alcoholics, ex-offenders or belonging to "non-western" cultures.

"The fact that violence can affect any woman no matter her social class is an argument that has succeeded in gaining ground. And yet often we still find the stereotypical idea that gender violence affects first immigrant communities, people without resources, from a certain religion..." (S)

A national study carried out in Sweden in 2002² and the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women report³ showed that the major part of the perpetrators were originally Swedish, working and without any alcohol addiction. Almost a quarter among them had a university degree diploma. Therefore,

¹ COUNCIL OF EUROPE, Administrative Data Collection on Domestic Violence in Council of Europe member states, 2008

² National Council on Crime Prevention, Violence against women in intimate relationships. An overview 2002

³ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Mission to Sweden, Yakın Ertürk, Feb 2007

there is the often expressed idea, that talking about the origin of the perpetrators and the victims is a way of veiling the situation and moving away from the reality of violence, by suggesting that it only concerns a category of women.

❖ But a double violence against migrant women

This is not contradictory for the interviewed, with the acknowledgement of the fact that migrant women are the ones most threatened by violence since they are facing at the same time religious fundamentalisms of their country of origin and the consequences of ultra-liberal policies and raising of the conservative trends in their country of residence. More over migrant women are not protected from the racist ideology growing in Europe which hurts differently men and women.

Many women associations underline the fact that violence is harder to prove when the victims are ignoring the legal procedures. The simple fact that a measure of expulsion can be pronounced against the perpetrator may lead women to give up and not to complain. Fear of the police, ignorance of their rights and fear of reprisal are keeping many migrant women silent. Besides, the members of women's rights associations declare to have difficulties to reach them.

"Migrant women, in addition to the violence they experience here, are dragging this violence from their country of origin. The majority of women we are helping come from countries where gender-based violence is not considered as a crime. As soon as their birth they are suffering from violence. Therefore, when they arrive here, in addition to problems related to the problems of language, they have no way out. [...] As a result, they do not complain and consequently they do not receive any help. If you do not dare to lay charges, nothing can be done, and women remain in the background. We're talking a lot, but actually, our work does not reach these women". (S)

In some countries, like in France for example, due to bi-lateral agreements between the State of origin and the State of residence, some migrant women remain submitted to the law of their country of origin or deprived from their basic rights by the migration policies. As pointed out previously, several interviewed insisted on the fact that to mention the nationality of the perpetrator can be a way to "de-localize" the phenomenon of violence, making it appearing as a phenomenon due to cultural customs and not a structural one, and with this to prevent to understand the social basis and the roots of violence in the European societies. Moreover the governments are said to set up on purpose the confusion between violence and migration to justify and give legitimacy to their anti-migrant policies.

"The confusion between migration alert and violence alert did not help to spread knowledge about a citizenship respectful of men and women. The governmental focus on migration in the safety debate is slackening the debate about education to respect that should be initiated as soon as school." (It)

In Greece, but also in France and other European countries, in the context of financial crisis, governments and employers have agreed not to give any kind of legalization to the migrant workers. This decision actually means that a lot of migrants after having been hardly working for many years in European countries are thrown out of Europe. In 2007 only eight member states had legislation against specific expressions of cultural/religious practices (Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and the UK). Legislation against protection and prosecution of FGM is the most prevalent. Only some countries report that they have legislation against forced/early marriages for example.

1.1 EU policies in the field of VAW

In 1993 the third European Ministerial Conference on equality between women and men was devoted to the issue of violence against women as a human rights abuse. Since 1997, the European Parliament addressed the issue of violence against women in many resolutions and reports. The European Parliament's decision-A4 250/1997 - wanted member states to introduce specific legislation to protect victims of gender-based violence within the family in criminal law. In 1999-2000, the European Commission conducted an awareness campaign "Zero tolerance for violence against women" and in 2004 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the current situation of the fight against violence against women (2004/2220 (INI), and called on the member states and the European Commission to consider violence against women as a violation of human rights and to adopt policies and measures to improve legal protection of women against all forms of violence. This resolution also urged the EU to address the issue of crimes committed in the name of honor and asked the Commission to declare a European Year against violence against women. In July 2008 the European Parliament asked the European Commission and European Council to establish a clear legal basis to fight against all forms of violence against women, including trafficking.

The institution which has been the most active on violence against women is the Council of Europe. One of the primary aims of this Council is to safeguard and protect human rights and to bind together European states to uphold the rule of law and democracy. The recognition of violence against women as a form of human rights violation is the main contribution of Recommendation Rec (2002) 5⁴. It places States under the obligation to exercise due diligence "to prevent, investigate and punish all acts of violence, whether those acts are perpetrated by the state or by private individuals, and provide protection to victims". Member states have to recognize violence against women as a human rights violation that needs to be responded to accordingly. This recommendation stating that "violence against women runs counter to the establishment of equality and peace and constitutes a major obstacle to citizens' security and democracy in Europe" is a major achievement.

Later in 2005 the CoE member states decided to establish a Task Force to Combat Violence against Women including Domestic Violence, made up of eight international experts in the field of preventing and combating domestic violence and to conduct a campaign to combat VAW. This campaign was launched in November 2006 and ended in March 2008. The core theme of the Campaign was to Prevent and combat violence against women occurring in the family or domestic unit (domestic violence) and more precisely

- to raise awareness across all 46 CoE member states that violence against women is a human rights violation and encourages citizens to challenge it.

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Mission to Sweden, Yakin Ertürk, Feb 2007

- to urge states to demonstrate political will by providing adequate resources to deliver concrete results in ending violence against women.
- to promote the implementation of effective measures for preventing and fighting against violence against women, through legislation and national action plans for implementation of Recommendations Rec(2002) 5 and to regularly monitor the progress achieved.

The recommendations of the Task Force include the drafting of a new legally binding instrument, establishing a European rapporteur on violence against women and setting up « femicide watch ». The member states are further urged to make significant progress in legal and policy measures, support for and protection of victims, data collection, awareness raising.

European Union seems to have focused its work on the field of gender equality, mainly in areas such as employment, occupation, social security and more recently also in access to goods and services. The directive 2002 / 73/EC of the European Parliament and European Council prohibits sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination. The member states are encouraged to prevent all forms of discrimination based on sex, including sexual harassment on the working place.

Despite the intervention of the European Parliament as early as 1986 with the publishing of a report and resolution of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on the basis of this report, having gender-based violence on the EU's agenda took quite a while. The adoption of the Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties created a new political space for issues such as violence against women where EU has acted in encouraging ad hoc policies in its member states and has taken initiatives aiming at building capacities, mainly through the Daphne program. The eradication of all forms of gender-based violence is among the six priority areas of the Roadmap for Equality between women and men (2006-2010).

A resolution adopted in February 2006 recommends that member states adopt a « zero-tolerance » approach towards all forms of violence. One of the latest EU resolutions, in November 2009, asks the member states to recognize sexual violence against women and rape, including within marriage and intimate informal relationships and/or where committed by male relatives, as a crime in cases where the victim did not give consent.

The Spanish Government chose the fight against gender-based violence as one of its priorities for its EU Presidency. It made several propositions to improve the EU action on that issue: a European protection order for victims of violence. In addition, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Spain organized an international seminar on the best practices in preventing and protecting women victims of gender based violence. This seminar gathered experts in gender-violence and police officers from different member states and was concluded by the presentation of a manual of best police practices.

1.2 EU perceived as a world far from citizens

In spite of all these measures and developments, European Union is said to have been mainly useful to promote through the media the issue of violence against women, thanks to the coverage it gave to this question. There are very few expectations towards the EU from the women's organizations working on violence against women.

“Concerning women's issues, we are not expecting more from Europe.... than about the other issues”(F)

Improvements at the European level have been slow in this field, mainly because EU resolutions are not binding and allow a huge gap between words and action. In other words, if equality between women and men has been a longstanding concern of the EU, where are the concrete actions? Without intending to limit the importance of the EU resolutions and directives, we must stress that their publication is only the first step on a road full of obstacles and that their effective implementation remains most often a challenge if not supported by concrete policies and action. This situation led Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the Commission, responsible for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship to declare in November 2010: “We have for many years worked under different EU policies to combat various forms of violence against women and girls [...] I am convinced, however, that it is now time for the EU to step up our action and develop a clear and coherent policy response to tackle this huge problem in Europe. To maximize our impact, we will focus on concrete actions in areas where we have clear legal basis to act in the Lisbon Treaty. That is why in our Gender Strategy the fight against violence is one of the five key priorities. Now we will concentrate on actions that can bring concrete results.”

However, the role and the impact of the European Union on matters related to violence against women are straight forwardly questioned. Most of the interviewed point out the lack of commitment from the EU institutions regarding the severity and the global character of violence against women but also the lack of coordinated policies, the lack of binding legal instruments condemning gender-based violence and an “economical” conception of gender-discrimination.

“European Union is working on these issues, but it could be much more proactive (...) we are lacking stronger policies. All member states are not making violence against women a political priority” (S)

As it is pointed out by E. Lombardo that the EU policy on gender is mainly based on a strategy for equal opportunities (positive discrimination measures and gender mainstreaming) and one of the main limitations of this perspective is that it addresses the symptoms rather than causes of inequality: « If the equal opportunities policy has had the merit of targeting some of the symptoms of sexual inequality, it has, on the other hand, failed to effectively address core issues of sexual discrimination such as the sharing of family and work responsibilities between the sexes, violence against women and reproductive rights.»⁵

The critics are related also to the lack of common elaboration of indicators or methods of gathering data to tackle efficiently what is now known as the first cause of death for the European women aged of 16 till 45.

Although the Commission declared in 2006 that they would provide comparative statistics on crime, victims and criminal justice and would monitor progress of EU and NGOs in their efforts to eradicate gender-based violence, such work is still needed. The relative passivity of the European Union is perceived as a severe issue since violence against women must be tackled broadly over diverse boundaries and borders. The genuine ground of the EU political will to end the plague of violence is often

⁵ E.Lomùbardo op cit.

questioned, especially after the “Euro-order” episode. Namely, in 2010, one of the Spanish EU Presidency's priorities was to propose protective measures for women victims of violence. The first concrete proposal was the creation of a European Observatory against Gender Violence to collect and share reliable information and a unique number 116 to support the victims, (116 as similar to 112, the number for general emergencies). The second proposal was related to the creation of a protection order for victims on the European level. The purpose was to promote a common tool issued in one of the European countries and then recognized by the others, in order to avoid that the protection of women is depending on administrative divisions. The Commission refused this proposal for the reason that the important differences among legal systems would give more work for lawyers and lead to more uncertainty for the victims. This refusal was severely condemned in Spain and it was perceived as an indicator of a lack of political will to question the structures of violence by the European Union. « EU gender policy should adopt a more holistic approach that considers how the socially constructed difference between women and men negatively affects women in all areas of society. This approach should explicitly target patriarchy, focusing on the multiple interconnected causes which create such an unequal relation between the sexes to the disadvantage of women in different areas, i.e. family, paid work, politics, sexuality, culture, male violence. It should aim not only at introducing measures ‘for women’, but also at targeting the existing consolidated spaces of male power at all levels.»⁶

Generally, the European Union is not associated to be in touch with the reality of women in the different national States. According to the survey previously mentioned, very few European people (14%) declare to be familiar with specific measures taken by EU to tackle the problem of violence against women . 81% of them declare that they do not know any EU policies on this issue⁷. It is also the opinion of the local women's associations: EU is described as very far from their daily work. It is well known by all that a lot of associations can never have access to the EU grants.

Besides, more sources of violence connected with the economic development of Europe and a noted decrease of social protection are described by the interviewed: the dismantling of public services that prevents women to work, to be economically autonomous or to take responsibilities in the public, professional and social life, as well as the fact that women represent the majority of the precarious or part-time workers.

Even if women are taking a more active part in the public sphere, the traditional social model still expects them to bear full responsibility for domestic and family care. This has an impact on the full participation of women in the professional and political life which is considered by several interviewees as violence in itself.

2. The national contexts

1.1 France

“We can't forget that France is the country of the Salic law, the courtly love and the “French Cancan” - women have to play this game to stay feminine” (F)

⁶ E Lombardo op.c.

⁷ Eurobaromete

Violence against women went out of the shadow very recently in France thanks to the first national study year 2000 about all kinds of violence against women⁸. This study showed brilliantly the link between the different types of violence and how the “little ordinary” violence are preparing and facilitating the heaviest ones. The results of the study helped the women’s organizations to intensify their advocacy work in order to improve the national legislation. The study underlined the major concept of “continuum” of the violence over its different expressions.

This legislation in France marked several evolutions since the 70ies. Under the pressure of the women organizations violence against women could be recognized as a crime and punished. The rape came in the penal code in 1980 and the sexual harassment became a crime in 1992. The last years several measures have been undertaken: a triennial plan of action was adopted in 2005 in order to facilitate the access to lodging for the victims and to improve the health services. A help line was set up in 2007; heavier sanctions have been passed against the perpetrators, raising of awareness and training of judges, policemen and other professionals took place. Furthermore, a national campaign against domestic violence was launched at the end of 2006 and a study on the victims of domestic violence was realized by the national Observatory for delinquency. Several years of strong awareness raising campaigns and demonstrations by the women’s organizations, driven by the National Coordination for Women’s Rights (CNDF), led to the adoption of a frame law in 2010. This is a great achievement for women’s rights. The recognition of violence against women by law gives now to the victims the possibility to say “NO”. Furthermore several other steps have been taken: creation of a protection order, introduction in the Criminal Code of the concept of psychological violence, new definition of sexual harassment at work, provision of training for the professionals in contact with the victims, assistance in relocation, as well as new rights for foreign women.

Unfortunately the Senate adopted some modifications to the law that limit its impact:

- The area concerned by the law is limited to violence inside the couple.
- In spite of situations of emergency that faced in most of the cases, the victims must bring a proof of the violence they have been submitted to before getting protection.
- The right to visit and accommodation of children from a violent parent is decided by the judges and depending on their perception of the situation.
- The definition of “psychological violence” neglects the devastating effects of insults, verbal threats and humiliation by being limited to the «acts» and not including the «words».
- The penalization of sexual harassment at work is suppressed.

« The approach to violence in our country is limited to domestic violence. The other types of violence are silenced; economical violence for example is not perceived, and when you say that precariousness is a violence, you are not understood, we are still in the infancy of fight against violence against women. »(F)

Moreover, the law does not take into account the fact that migrant women can be victims of gender-based violence in their country of origin (aggression, violence, sex trafficking) and denies them the possibility to obtain a political asylum in France for this reason. France is acknowledging, via bilateral agreements with the three Maghreb countries, the codes of personal status of these countries, even if these codes are

⁸ ENVEFF National study about violence against women in France, March 2000

notorious for the unfair treatment of women before the law (marriage, divorce, polygamy). Migrant women have often no other status than to be wives subordinate to the nationality of their husband. In cases of divorce or widowhood in the years following family reunification, women may not have their residency card renewed. If the husband decides to go back to his country alone, his wife may be forced to surrender her residence. When the woman is a victim of conjugal violence, she is depending on her husband for her own residency status. The lack of an autonomous status for immigrant women prevents their access to the rights they would have enjoyed as an individual and keeps them submitted to their condition of mother, wife or daughter. Dictionnaire - Afficher le dictionnaire

In spite of all the positive legislative evolution with some important improvements, violence against women is not decreasing in the country. All the interviewed perceived the situation as serious. The sexist and structural character of this violence is still denied, and that is a major obstacle to understand, unveil and reach the roots of the problem. Violence in France appears to be a massive phenomenon, concerning a considerable number of women of all ages and all conditions. Each two days a woman is dying from physical violence. According to various studies, 10% of women are facing violence during their life. Young women are particularly affected by this violence, and the public space appears as increasingly unequal and sexist. A survey made in 2006 among 1600 girls living in the north region of Paris showed that two-thirds suffered sexual and verbal harassment in the public place and 23% suffered physical violence⁹. The last report of the National Observatory of Delinquency November 2010 shows an increase sexual and physical violence against women with 15% during the two last years).¹⁰

The consequences of this violence are often dramatic and create severe emotional disorders: depression, bulimia, anorexia and finally suicide. Until now, domestic violence has remained a taboo and often does not cross the walls of family homes. But when women talk, they turn first to their doctor who has a key role in detecting, collecting the history and establishing a certificate which is required in before filling a complaint. The problem then is that doctors say to be caught between medical confidentiality and non-assistance to persons in danger.

The general assessment is that, in spite of some improvement of the situation in terms of knowledge, awareness and legislation “the cataclysm is still in front of us” due to the extent of the phenomenon, the lack of comprehensive approach and political determination.

“In France there is a gap in the approach towards the different types of violence and a lack of political will” (F)

The judicial system as a whole is perceived as weak.

“The judicial legal arsenal remains fragmented and applied differently according the regions. We are facing legal difficulties. French justice is globally the red lantern of Europe and the large number of dismissed cases persuades women not to report ”(F)

The National Observatory of Delinquency estimates that 73 000 to 75 000 women have been raped in France in 2010. Only 10 to 15% of them have complained and the women’s associations consider that the

⁹ Maryse Jaspard Enquête sur les comportements Seine Saint Denis 2007

¹⁰ OLF «osez le féminisme» Press communiqué 21 /1/2011

recent changes in the judicial system, related to the cuts of the public financial means could dissuade even more the women to complain. One of these measures, as the suppression of the number of investigating judges in the judicial system, would oblige the victims to face several jurors during the procedures.

"There are developments, but they are unfortunately going together with the reduction of subsidies to associations. The consequences are, among others, gathering on a unique platform all the places available in shelters (including non-specialized ones). That means that women victims of violence could be sent in centers receiving homeless men, or people going out from jail, or even having been convicted for violence on their partners... For us it is unacceptable!"

'The Great Cause 2010'¹¹ has been a big joke. Almost nothing has been dedicated to it in terms of means "(F)

A new Triennial Plan 2011 -2013 to fight violence against women has been adopted. For the first time the fight against sexual violence, including at work, is a strategic priority together with the fight against the system of prostitution. These specific forms of violence will be tackled during three years via national information campaigns. However, the women's organizations are doubtful about the concrete developments of this strategy. The association against violence against women at work (AVFT)¹² questions the efficiency of a legislation that has been lacking precision and coherence for many years. They consider that the triennial plan does not solve the situation and that a harmonization with the European norms is now more than a necessity.

1.2 Spain

When societies are built on the idea of the inferiority of women and are structured by a very strong patriarchal system, a determined and sustainable political commitment and a concrete political involvement are required to integrate some changes in favor of equality between men and women.

"In Spain, domestic violence is a product of socialization. Hitting a woman is still widely considered as a normal behavior. Society is aware of the problem but there is not a firm condemnation. It is part of social normality!" (S)

The historic dictatorship phase in Spain has shaped and strengthened the patriarchal socialization of the people. During the franquist regime (1939-1977), violence against women was socially and politically tolerated. Patriarchy was strongly regulating the social life and women were considered as minors for life. Crimes, when exercised by husbands, had the benefit of judicial leniency. Until 1983 marital status remained an extenuating circumstance for violence against women. During many years violence against women was largely tolerated by the State authorities, even in some cases encouraged¹³. Punishment of

¹¹ National institutional campaign against VAW

¹² AVFT has a special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social

¹³ La mujer en el Franquismo

aggressive husband was virtually non-existent. The law prohibited divorce, abortion, the use of contraception but prostitution was allowed.

The first formulation of the problem of violence against women was made within the context of the struggle against Franco, since it tackled the institutional violence exerted on the population and on women in a special way¹⁴. This long term male chauvinist socialization left deep marks in the society and this is recognized and denounced today. With the end of the dictatorship, different feminist movements developed and joined political parties, especially the left ones. Consequently, violence suffered by women started to be gradually mediatized.

In 2003, the “Court Orders for the Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence Act” introduced new kinds of criminal acts and provided bases for extensive protection and non-molestation orders. Behaviors that were considered only an offence became crime through the new law. The court could oblige a perpetrator of domestic violence to leave the house and prevent him from residing or being present in areas where the victim is daily evolving. The definition and the perception of violent behaviors started to change. Consequently, the number of “declared” victims rose.

Even if laws and measures related to violence against women had been passed, a comprehensive analysis of the roots of violence was missing until 2004. There were rather a succession of plans and action programs focusing on the consequences without searching for the causes. The biggest change, according to the interviewees and the consulted documents, occurred with the Organic Law 1/2004 on Comprehensive Protection Measures to combat Gender Violence¹⁵ that was passed as a result of the pressure of the women's associations exercised ever since 1993. This law is the first to include in its preamble a clear denunciation of the patriarchal system. This political development made Spain a reference in the fight against violence against women. The law is characterized by a holistic approach to violence against women. It includes not only judicial and penal measures, but also educational, healthcare, social and support dispositions in order to guarantee equality between men and women. The main interest of this law is that it approaches violence against women as a political and structural issue. In this frame, all public institutions are requested to commit themselves to the eradication of this social plague.

The Organic Law 1/2004 also introduced as specific new tools¹⁶ and long term measures to transmit to society a “new scale of values based on respect for basic rights and liberties and the equality of men and women, and on the exercise of tolerance and freedom as part of the democratic principles of coexistence, viewed within the context of gender relations.” (art. 3.1) It insists on education on respect and equality between men and women as one of the main goals of the educational system. The Administration shall guarantee the absence of sexist contents or contents that could maintain inequalities in all the school programs. A new subject “Education for Equality and against Gender-based Violence” (“Educación para la Igualdad y contra la Violencia de Género”) is now compulsory.

The responsibility of the media in the perpetuation of sexism is acknowledged. Media are now asked to watch over their contents and there is more control over them. Training of the stakeholders is part of the measures. Healthcare protocols are set up in order to unify the detection of victims of gender based violence. The new law ensures also a first legal and psychological counselling and the creation of

¹⁴ L. PALUMBO, «Gender violence in Italy and Spain: Laws and Politics»

¹⁵ <http://www.migualdad.es/ss/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application/pdf&blobheadname1=Contentdisposition&blobheadvalue1=inline&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1244652172053&ssbinary=true>

¹⁶ LA VIOLENCIA DE GÉNERO EN LA LEY INTEGRAL Valoración político-criminal, Patricia Laurenzo Copello

emergency centers to assist women and their children. Autonomous communities and municipalities are involved in the development of these services and provide economic aid to victims in order to start a new life. In addition, victims have specific rights when it comes to job, working hours, geographical mobility, and employment contracts. These measures aim at supporting women's autonomy and facilitating their social reintegration. Legal assistance for the victims is planned at all stages of the process.

The Act establishes a special court that takes care exclusively of domestic violence against women and seeks to ensure close coordination of all actors involved in the process: forces and state security bodies, prosecutors, forensic psychologists, judges, etc. These must receive specific trainings in order to ensure that victims can at any time benefit specialized support. In 2007, 83 Examining Magistrate's Courts were exclusively dedicated to matters related to gender based violence all over the country. In addition, the Organic Law forbids all kinds of mediation procedures between the women and their perpetrators and some technical assistance measures, such as a unique emergency number in Spain and the providing of electronic bracelets were taken. All of these tools, means, measures and analyses contributed to social change that had even before started to take shape. The Organic Law was acclaimed by the Spanish feminist associations and all the women interviewed agreed to define it as a positive and decisive step forward.

"Now we even have a common protocol of care to women in the health sector. Even it doesn't seem much we did not have anything similar before"(S)

The Spanish socialist government has been praised by the Council of Europe for its achievements against violence against women¹⁷. Spain was chosen for the launching of the Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence (2006-2008) (slogan in Spain: "Stop a la violencia doméstica contra las mujeres"), due to the interest created worldwide by the adoption and implementation of the Organic Law considered as a firm commitment to gender equality.

However, the Organic law also has some limitations. One of them is to be focused on partner and domestic violence and not to mention other types of violence such as sexist abuse in the work place, social violence, forced marriages or prostitution. The reason given by the authorities for this orientation is the far higher frequency of domestic violence in the Spanish social context.

In spite of the new, important and positive developments regarding violence against women in Spain, the number of women dying from violence committed by their partner is still chokingly high. According to the studies 1,5 million women living in Spain today have been submitted to physical violence at least once in their life. Violence from an intimate partner is, according to the researcher Carmen Vives Cases, "an epidemics" in Spain as well as in the whole world: 100 000 women are dying from it each year.¹⁸ Furthermore a study by Amnesty International¹⁹ shows that the rate per million of foreign women killed by their partners or former partners in Spain is six times higher than Spanish women. As in the other countries, migrant women are more vulnerable. They don't know where to go or how to act. Women who are in irregular situations and are afraid of being deported cannot and do not report assaults.

¹⁷ The Council of Europe and gender based violence documents. Pan European campaign to prevent and combat violence against women (2006-2008)

¹⁸ Mortalidad por violencia del compañero íntimo en mujeres extranjeras residentes en España (1999-2006) Carmen Vives-Cases

¹⁹ Amnistía Internacional España. Más riesgos y menos protección: Mujeres inmigrantes en España frente a la violencia de género, Noviembre de 2007

In order to address this situation the Ley Orgánica 4/2000 on the rights of foreigners in Spain was modified in 2009. The new Act states that any process of expulsion should be suspended from the day a complaint of ill treatment is submitted. If the violence against the woman is “proved” she has the right to a temporary residency and a temporary work permit. If violence cannot be proved, the expulsion procedure goes on. Recently new acts were adopted to tackle forced marriages and female genital mutilations (FGM), following the action of the autonomous communities.

Although far from all the victims report, 400 000 women are estimated to have suffered from violence during 2008. The impact of violence on women’s health is always very important. It is known that women who experience violence by an intimate partner lose years of life²⁰.

Violence against women is more and more defined as a structural problem. Some analysts even speak about a structural number of victims impossible to decrease.²¹

1.3 Italy

“I donn hin minga gent “ - Women are not persons

(An old proverb from Lombardia)

Different studies estimate that 14 million Italian women have suffered from physical, sexual or psychological violence most of the time in their family context. According the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), almost 7 million of Italian women have experienced physical violence at least once in their lives, domestic violence being the most severe problem. In 2007 violence killed 182 women, one each two days. As in France, this is an increase of 22% from 2006. “In September 2009 a 18-year-old girl was killed by her father near Pordenone in the Region of Friuli Venezia-Giulia, North of Italy. He was opposed to the life style she had chosen. We are full of grief and anger for the broken life of this young woman. However, Sanaa is but one name to be added to the list of women killed or badly wounded in Italy over the last two months...”²²

In Italy, as in France and Spain, violence against women went out of the shadow only recently, during the last decades, after centuries of silence and only under the pressure of the women’s movement that have organized to fight it and made it visible. The Italian feminist movement of the late 1970’s and early 1980’s inspired many forms of mobilization for women’s rights, mainly in the field of reproductive rights and violence against women. These issues were challenging the social norms in a culture deeply influenced by the Catholic Church. Thanks to the feminist actions, several important reforms towards establishing reproductive freedom for Italian women were achieved. Nevertheless, Italian feminists have still to face the strongest cultural resistance in the field of reproductive rights. With all the improvements, these rights remain more rhetoric than real, at least in some parts of Italy.

²⁰ Vives-Cases C., Álvarez-Dardet C., Carrasco-Portiño M., Torrubiano-Domínguez J., “El impacto de la desigualdad de género en la violencia del compañero íntimo en España”, Gac Sanit. 2007; 21(3): 242-6

²¹ Osbourne R. p 7

²² Patrizia Romito, for the Women’s Cultural Association La Settima Onda, Trieste Sept 2009

“The legal changes have been very important, except for the disastrous decision concerning assisted procreation, but if the changes are not broadcasted and easily available they can’t be part of the wealth that everybody can reach” (It)

Italy has a heavy patriarchal cultural background. The level of women’s employment is one of the lowest in Europe (45,3%) and it is in this country that women have one of the heaviest workloads at home.²³ It is only after the promulgation of the new family laws in 1975 that the right of the husband “to correct and educate” his wife was abolished. It is only in 1981 that the “delitto d’onore” (right to take vengeance if one’s honor has been stained) was abrogated from the Italian Criminal Code, together with "matrimonio riparatore" (the repairing marriage) which meant that the rapists in Italy had the chance to clear their crime simply by marrying their victim. According to it, if a man liked a girl and she didn't reciprocate, he could rape her, even if she was underage, and then marry her, becoming in this way not chargeable anymore. It is also only in 1996 that sexual violence and incest were classified as crimes against the person. Until then they were crimes «against public morals and family order».

The first Romano Prodi government (1996-1998) made violence against women a political priority. For the first time a Minister for Equal Opportunities was appointed, performing under the delegation of the President of the Council of Ministers, with the attribution of important mainstreaming functions. In 1997, the adoption of «Prodi - Finocchiaro» directive (from the name of the Minister of Equal Opportunities) was a major step. This Directive has three main objectives: 1. The empowerment of women to create the conditions for an increasing presence of women in decision making bodies; 2. An increased awareness on gender diversity; 3. Policies for the promotion and development of occupation. This process led further to adoption of the law on the «order of protection» as a measure to remove violent members of the family from their homes. After that came the organization of the first national conference for «zero tolerance » in Bologna, year 2000.

The Italian Parliament approved for the 8th of March in 2000 a new law concerning the parental leaves. It stipulates the use of leave for both parents for child and relatives’ care and creates favorable conditions for the carrying out of family responsibilities.

The Italian Minister for Equal Opportunities later enforced the bill “against discrimination and for the promotion of equal opportunities” in order to insure the full accomplishment of article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty. In 2008 the government launched a Plan of Action with a declared cost of 20 million euros that included inter alia information campaigns and the creation of a permanent observatory on violence against women.

Italy still doesn’t have a frame law to protect women victims of violence as in Spain, or France now, and the implementation of the existing laws is said to be facing heavy obstacles.

“Women’s resistance and actions led to a better knowledge and some positive legislative evolutions but their implementation remains problematic: besides the global problems of justice in Italy, such as the length of the procedures, when it comes to violence against women, there is a higher risk of non-implementation of the laws linked to the machist and family

²³ Eurostat, Statistiques en bref 2006

*culture and the idea that conjugal and sexual violence don't need a "serious "political action
"(It)*

After two recent rapes in Italy, president Silvio Berlusconi declared that it is an "impossible" mission to fight against rapes in Italy, as the beauty of Italian women would then require the presence of a policeman behind each of them! According to the interviewed, such political cynicism from the highest responsible of the Italian State makes it easier to understand why more than 90 % of the rapes are not reported in this country.

"The hypothesis suggested by the researchers to explain the silence of victims is that they already know the answers to their complaints: they know that they will face the refusal to believe them that this violence is considered as banal and at the end, they will feel themselves guilty.... The cultural roots of this situation are grounded in the social depreciation of the female gender, especially when its voice stands against male one" (It)

A major part of violence against women and mainly domestic violence is said to be hidden – as in the other countries - due to shame of the victims, fear of reprisals and lack of trust in the judicial system.

International studies, such as the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence, showed that most women do not tell anyone when they have experienced violence²⁴ and that the number of complaints is only one aspect. It is needed to pay attention to the results of the trials and their quality, which means to understand how women are treated and how they face alone the disadvantages of the judicial processes. « Only half of the complaints for sexual violence are leading to a trial, then only half of the persecutors are condemned »²⁵

Several interviewed underline the crisis of the patriarchal relations. Men, having in mind that they are losing power are developing aggressive and violent strategies. The ultimate expression is the upsurge of the family assassinations. Generally the Italian government is accused of not showing any intention to address and modify traditions harmful for women.

"A lot of criminals remain in freedom. Women often endure violence without receiving justice and they feel abandoned by the State" (It)

Compared to the United Kingdom and France, Italy has experienced much later immigration. Consequently, the issue of violence against migrant women has not yet been addressed or legally recognized. However, recent events concerning North African and Somali communities are emerging. The rights of migrant women are inscribed in the Constitution and national legislation is supposed to protect them against all kinds of violence. The Consulta Islamica of the Ministry of Interior has an important role to play in this area. It underlines the recognition of the constitutional principles and values of the Italian democracy. The refusal of polygamy, integral veil and all violence against women are

²⁴ Geneva, Switzerland, World Health Organization 2005

²⁵ Laura Terragni, Su un corpo di donna, Milano 1997

assessed in the “Carta dei valori”. Marriage is regulated by the Civil Code, in which it is intended that a certificate of ability to marry is provided by the competent authorities from the country of origin for the marriage of foreigners.

3. Faces of violence against women

Different expressions are used to talk about violence against women; all of them refer to different contexts or reflect different perspectives or faces of this violence. All the interviewed expressed the idea of a wide spectrum of behaviors that result in physical, sexual and psychological harm to women and girls occurring in private or in public sphere.

3.1 Domestic violence

“Male violence begins at home and has no limits. “

“The murderer does not knock at the door; he has the keys of the house”²⁶

Domestic violence is the most widespread form of violence against women in Europe. 78% of respondents in a recent Eurobarometer survey recognized that domestic violence remains a common problem perpetrated in silence in homes and often ignored by authorities and the public.²⁷ It is often defined as “violence within the family” and covers under a gender-neutral coat violent behaviors perpetrated by any member of the family. But, it is well known that almost in all cases, it means violence against women perpetrated by their husband or intimate partner.

“When we talk about interpersonal violence, the one that happens outside, both aggressors and victims are men. But when we speak about interpersonal violence within a family or love relationship, the huge majority of the victims are women, and the perpetrators are men.” (S)

In accordance with the importance given to domestic violence, most of the legal and political instruments dealing with violence against women are focused on that specific expression. Nevertheless, within the current EU regulatory framework, domestic violence does not exist as an independent issue but is linked to other policy areas such as public health, fundamental rights and gender equality. The legal frameworks, as well as the dedicated means to address domestic violence, are quite diverse among the member states. Therefore the recent developments focus mainly on the protection of victims by establishing a physical distance between them and the perpetrators.

Domestic violence spares no country, no circumstances, and no social class. Unlike what is commonly thought this violence is not perpetrated by “the other”- the migrant or the foreigner. The analysis of the situation in Europe shows that the richest countries and the most privileged groups experience the problem just as severely as the others.

²⁶ Slogans written on banners in the demonstrations against violence against women, Italy 2010

²⁷ Eurobarometer 344, Violence against women 2010

Emotional abuses and economic restrictions are most often added to physical violence. The severe consequences on the physical and mental health not only of the woman but of the whole family, makes it a public health priority in several countries.

“The most widespread violence is the domestic violence. The fact that they are perpetrated by persons with whom women are supposed to have an affective and protective relation, intensifies the severity of the suffering and traumas women endure”. (F)

3.2 Sexual violence

“Nothing is more violent than rape; rape is a symbolic death” (F)

According to the statistics of the Council of Europe, one in five women aged between 2 months and 90 years will be the victim of sexual assault in the course of her life. 98% of attackers are male and 50% of them are spouses or partners. Furthermore, 70% of rapes are premeditated and only 3% of rapists are mentally unbalanced.²⁸

Sexual violence has a severe impact on physical and mental health of the victims and is associated with an increased risk of sexual and reproductive health problems, with immediate and long-term consequences. Sexual violence affects the social life of the victims since when the rape is known they are often stigmatized by their relatives and friends. Sexual violence leads also to death by suicide but also HIV infection or murder for "honor".

“The consequences of a rape can be compared to those of torture about which the destructive impact is acknowledged, but to promote this issue about rape is more difficult since it leads to destabilize the relation man/woman.” (F)

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considers several crimes of violence against women as war crimes and crimes against humanity. “Rape, sexual slavery, enforced sterilization, or any other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity” are considered war crimes.²⁹ Any kind of compliance towards the perpetrators is an additional violence for the victims.

However, the world remains widely adhering to the idea that women are “the cause”. They are “too attractive”, “too free”, “too provocative”, “too sexy” or “too incautious”. The guilt is on them, while the perpetrators have the benefit of mitigating circumstances due to the “uncontrollable strength of their impulse, desire, or love or of their male nature”. In other terms, women “choosing” to live free in the public space must assume the consequences of this choice on their security.

Basic women’s rights to sexual freedom and self-determination have very slowly entered legislation and specific legislation has been enacted in several EU member states under pressure from feminist groups. However, rape within a marital relationship is not always recognized as a crime. The wife’s consent to a

²⁸ Council of Europe *Administrative Data Collection on Domestic Violence in Council of Europe Member States*, 2008

²⁹ Office of the UN high commissioner for human rights Mars 2007

sexual contact is presumed. According the interviewed even if marital rape is considered a crime, the judges do not always apply the laws and the judicial procedure and even attitude is extremely heavy, painful and dissuasive for women.

3.3 Control of women's sexuality and women's bodies

❖ Limitation of sexual and reproductive rights

Prohibition of abortion or limitation of the freedom of their own bodies is described as violence and means of control of women's body and sexuality. The famous demand of the European feminists during the 70s: "A child if I want when I want", is still relevant. In spite of laws legalizing abortion, their implementation remains a challenge and prohibition is still ruling in several countries - Poland, Ireland, Malta, Cyprus and Andorra. The threat against the freedom of abortion is increasing under the pressure of religious and conservative trends. On October 7th 2010 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a Resolution (1763 2010) on "The right to conscientious objection in lawful medical care". The Resolution was originally meant to make it easier for women to perform safe abortion especially in the countries where they are refused health care due to resistance to abortion. But the text that was voted took the completely opposite direction. The outcome is the extension of the right of conscientious objection on abortion to all health professionals in Europe: "No person and no hospital or institution shall be coerced, held liable or discriminated against in any manner because of a refusal to perform, accommodate, assist or submit to an abortion [...]".

One of the eight Millennium Development Goals adopted at the Millennium Summit 2000 is improving maternal health. Reducing the maternal mortality is the main target and unsafe abortion is identified as one of the reasons behind maternal mortality. Over 500 000 women are estimated to be dying each year in connection with pregnancy, childbirth and unsafe abortion.³⁰ The CoE resolution goes against UN and the MDGs but also against different national legislations of EU member states, where abortion is free and legal; it goes against the basic sexual and reproductive rights of women whose right to abortion is essential part.

❖ Prostitution and trafficking

"Violence is the negation of otherness, the denial of human" in this regard, the prostitution system is the most emblematic. "(F)

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), every year 500 000 people, mainly women and children, are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation in the European Union. A Europol survey established that only a third of the women involved knew what would happen to them in the countries to which they were sent. Women are also victims of trafficking for the purpose of domestic slavery.³¹ Spain is a country of destination and transit with high incidence for sexual exploitation. Angela Cerrillos Valledor, President of Themis, an Association of Women Lawyers, declares that a Mafia specialized in trafficking of women for the purpose of prostitution is now working with a complete impunity. About 90% of the "match making" advertisements in the media are published by the mafias and would imply victims of human trafficking. The fact that women victims are deprived of all their basic human rights is said by the interviewed to be ignored by the majority of the population.

³⁰ 358 000 deaths in 2008, Official number of the MDG Report 2009

³¹ INSEE, Les violences faites aux femmes. N° 1180, février 2008

“Some women, coming or not from Spain, are living here and are victims of trafficking. The level of violence they endure each day of their life is hell”. (S)

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women in Europe (CATWE) published in 2005 “Survivors of Prostitution and Trafficking Manifesto”, in which it is declared:

“We, the survivors of prostitution and trafficking... declare that prostitution is violence against women. Women in prostitution do not wake up one day and "choose" to be prostitutes. It is chosen for us by poverty, past sexual abuse, the pimps who take advantage of our vulnerabilities and the men who buy us for the sex of prostitution. Prostitution is sexual exploitation, one of the worst forms of women's inequality, and a violation of any person's human rights. Physical violence, rape and degradation are often inflicted on us by customers, pimps, recruiters, police and others who gain from prostitution....”

In the European Constitution, slavery and forced work are prohibited (art II-65) but not explicitly trafficking for the purpose of prostitution. Neither is prostitution defined as exploitation and sexual violence against women. The European policies on the contrary, are approaching prostitution as a potential market.

Facing what they describe as an increasing danger of legalization, the major part of women organizations declare they don't accept any rules to organize prostitution in the same way as humanity would not have accepted rules to organize slavery.

3.4 Economical violence

Economic violence is perceived as a major problem to be tackled. Poverty, precariousness and unemployment are described as being by themselves, some of the most important sources of violence against women. Economical dependency limits the capacity of women to resist and to escape domestic violence. In the present context, the economic and financial crisis in Europe generates frustration inside the families and leads to increasing violence against women and children.

In France in 1972 equality of salaries between men and women was inscribed in the Labor code. Since then six specific laws regarding professional equality have been adopted. However, the women's salaries are still on average 27% lower than men's salaries and the gap reaches even 32% for the older and higher graduated women. Economical violence means for the interviewed discrimination not only in terms of salaries but also in terms of access to professions, to professional training, to careers and in terms of retirement pensions.

“In France women are still contained in 16 professions linked with their 'natural' identity: children, health, cleaning. These professions are underpaid and have no social recognition “(F).

Part time work is described as a major sign of economic and social violence. Between 1999 and 2009, the proportion of women working part-time increased from 28,5% to 32% while for men the rate is from

6,4% to 8,3%.³² Many studies have shown that part-time workers are generally doing more basic and lower paid work than full-time workers; they have on average lower earnings, lower pensions and lower possibilities for progressing in their career.

In Spain, according to a study carried out by the Platform “Impacto de Género Ya!” the general salary gap between men and women in 2007 was 20%. Only one third of the management posts were held by women. 83% of part time jobs and the major part of precarious jobs were occupied by women. Women are the first affected by precariousness.

This situation and its aggravation in the context of crisis in Europe leads some of the interviewed to consider that economical violence should be tackled in priority as it is the source of all the others and the lack of economic autonomy- the major obstacle to women’s capacity to resist violence and oppression.

“According to me, all violence against women is coming from the negation of their right to be equal with men, and full part of public and economical life. (It)

3.5 Psychological, emotional, symbolic violence; harassment and stalking

Insults, humiliations, confinement at home and diverse daily threats are subtle and insidious forms of violence. Psychological violence is often considered as the « worst » one by the women’s organizations, since it is invisible, difficult to identify and to denounce and sometimes harder to bear than physical violence: it saps the energy of women and their resistance.

Even though the concept of stalking is not defined in the same way in all member states, it commonly refers to a pattern of harassing behaviors and threats and is increasingly condemned by national laws in the EU member states.

A study carried out in France of 628 women who consulted the emergency services of a university hospital showed that traumatic psychological violence by intimate partner was associated with a high prevalence of psychiatric morbidities of the victim, like anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, addiction to alcohol or another psychoactive substance and « underlines the necessity of « a systematic screening of these aspects of violence in emergency medical services». ³³

“There is no type of violence superior to any other. Let us not forget that the consequences of psychological violence are often much deeper and much more lasting than the effects of physical violence.” (S)

The strength of stereotypes is part of this violence.

³² European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions. Part time work in Europe European Company Survey, 2009

³³ Lamy C, Dubois F, Jaafari N, Carl T, Gaillard P, Camus V, El Hage W. Clinical and Psychopathological Profile of Women Victims of Psychological Partner Violence, Rev Epidemiol Sante Publique 2009 Jun 11

“There is also a violence of a psychological nature. It is to keep women prisoners in traditional roles that confine them in domestic tasks and hinder their equal rights and their effective role in politics.” (It)

Stereotypes of women in the media and advertising are condemned and said to have strong repercussions on society. They contribute to reproducing the strength of the patriarchal mentalities. The language and the representation of women weaken the already difficult process of women to access freedom and dignity.

“In the machist culture the women’s body is either the devil or the paradise. It must be covered or uncovered to fulfil the need of control or the sexual need of the male gender.” (It)

3.6 Traditional practices

In 2002 the Council of Europe raised the question of incompatibility between traditional practices and the European legislation and called upon the member states to act in order to have them punished and to launch information and awareness campaigns³⁴.

An increasing number of women and girls in Europe within migrant communities are submitted to ancestral practices of control and domination over their sexuality and their lives in the name of cultural traditions or religious beliefs and identities. The most widespread practices are female genital mutilations (FGM) that intentionally injure female genital organs for non-medical reasons; forced marriages and « honor » crimes, justified by the need to preserve the honor of the family. Female victims are condemned in order to clear the stain that their behavior puts on this honor of the family or community.

In Spain, France and Italy, women’s rights organizations declare they face a global lack of reliable statistics, a lack of prevention and efficiency of the services that offer assistance and generally social tools and actors to address this specific violence.

ROOTS AND CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1. The universal social model of patriarchal domination

“A woman who does not belong to a man belongs to everybody, anyway doesn’t belong to herself” (F)

The causes of violence against women are multiple and deeply rooted in the social, economic and cultural environment. Within patriarchal societies men are in a superior position to women. Researches on violence against women have demonstrated how social, economic, cultural and political factors inter-relate with each other in the reproduction of historically unequal power relations between women and

³⁴ Resolution 2002/5 of the Council of Europe on the protection of women against violence

men and perpetuate the male domination over women throughout the centuries. Universality of this model and universality of social tolerance that surrounds it are underlined by all the interviewed in this study, who describe marginalization and lack of recognition of women's needs as universal expressions of patriarchy and its gender power structures. Our cultures have been nurtured by the patriarchal ideology about the subjugation of women and have acknowledged the right of men to use violence against women to ensure their submission. The subjugation of women is not exercised only by the use of force but also through ideological control, which is often more efficient.³⁵

Vittoria Tola, an Italian feminist author, explains how women should remain trapped home, alone and not speaking with anyone, if they do not want to be raped. Apart from the well-known stereotype of the "miniskirt", a lot of female attitudes and behaviors can be "challenging" the male sphere: to walk in the streets at night in the city, to open the door for a neighbor, to get invited to dinner, to ask for a ride, etc. Almost everything seems to be a potential provocation for the "male instinct". This approach, "biologically based" in the principle of the uncontrollable men's behaviors, is developed into a perspective of "stimulus-response", widely socially legitimized.³⁶

2. Ultra liberal policies and impact of the economic crisis

"All the studies demonstrate that the situations of crisis are increasing violence against women. Nervous "tension", unemployment, economic difficulties lead to more aggressiveness, and bring a social backlash whose first victims are women. Besides, we are already seeing the economic consequences of the crisis on women, shifting from precarious labor contracts to unemployment."(S)

Even if the political supporters of European integration like to qualify Europe as a project bearer of progress, social and economic development, the economical evolution of Europe, its increasing militarization stated from treaty to treaty has as a consequence a decreasing investment in the public sector. Cuts of financial means for public services as transport, education, health and care for children or elder people have been done all over Europe for the sake of "economic efficiency" and "competitively". This evolution is mainly concerning the social care and protection. The transfer of the responsibilities in this field from State and municipalities to the domestic sphere penalizes first women and keeps them or drives them back homes. For the majority of them it is impossible to combine a professional life with a family life. According to the demographic previsions, the European population will get older and the number of people of 65 years and more will be multiplied by two between 2008 and 2060.³⁷ It means a heavier burden for women who are assuming the main part of the care not only for children but also for elderly and disabled people.

The public services are important providers of gender equality and their dismantling leads to a huge social backlash. Women, who have the financial means to get some help at home, have the possibility to invest

³⁵ Rapport malos tratos España

³⁶ Vittoria Tola Women's practices and men's violence in Liberté féminine et violence contre les femmes. Presidenzia del Consiglio. Dipartimento delle pari opportunità, Nov 2001

³⁷ INSEE French National Institute of Statistics, Demographic projections for the different European countries. Horizon 2060, Insee premiere» 1320. Oct 2010

in the professional or public life. But austerity policies are increasing the existing gap between formal and real rights in a context of general regression in Europe. When it comes to the analysis of this situation, it is remarkable that political and economic specialists widely ignore the gender dimension of the crisis, although women represent the major part of the employees in the public services and are consequently the most affected. Women are especially exposed to the economic crisis and double affected by it, as they represent the majority of the precarious and part-time workers. They are paying the highest price of the crisis in Europe: “flexibility,” precariousness, low salaries, low pensions and unemployment. 80 % of the poor workers are women. Poverty is not only a lack of financial means; it is also the lack of possibility to self-determination and to control over one’s own choices and lives. When they are unemployed or economically dependent, women are deprived of the capacity to leave a violent husband.

It is difficult and probably useless to establish a hierarchy between the expressions of violence, but according to me, the negation of the women's right to take part equally with men in public life and in economic life is the source of all the other violence. It must be tackled in priority. (It)

Even if women invested massively in the labor market and the public sphere, there is still the idea that it is more or less always to the detriment of their private and family life. The traditional social model still expects them to bear full responsibility for domestic and family issues. The strength and the persistence of these patterns have an impact on the full participation of women in the professional and political life and are described by several of the interviewed as violence.

“We may fear that in those times of crisis, the fight against violence against women get deprived of resources. Nowadays, we are already experiencing it.”(S)

When unemployment affects men, it is also a source of violence, by the single fact of threatening their male identity and their leading role of *pater familias*, even more when their wives are themselves working. Some respondents warned about another negative consequence of male unemployment linked with the permanent presence of men at home.

“[Because of the crisis] there are women who cannot separate from their partner, or whose husband, unemployed, stays at home more often ...”(S)

Since the beginning of the economic and financial crisis, male unemployment is always on stage, as if for women, nothing was changing. Even if the female unemployment is increasing more slowly than the male one, precariousness and development of long-lasting part time jobs are increasing only for women. What is at stake is the institutionalization of female precariousness. It is illustrated particularly in the spheres that are most concerned by part time employment: trade sector, cleaning, care and help to the people; low qualified jobs and devaluated jobs - all these widely womanized. These kinds of jobs bring the society back to a very strong logic of naturalization of women’s roles and of their place in the societies and to the old concept of womanhood which has been always used to exclude women from public sphere. Following the same logic, in Spain, the crisis has been the justification for the closing of several women’s institutes, and the suppression of the Ministry for Equality.

In the present context the interviewed women underlined the strong connection between crisis, social disarmament and violence against women. The lack of employment opportunities reinforces the

discriminated position of women on the labor market and increases their economic dependency on their partner. According to a recent report about part time work ³⁸ 32% of women in the EU 27 member states are working part-time compared with 9% of men. They were 29 % vs. 7% in 2005.

3. Intrusion of religion in the public sphere and daily lives

“Religions and traditions are a male construction of gender stereotypes and rules on how women have to behave, to dress and to relate to the world. This leads to violence and oppression. This situation leads to limiting or even to a setback of social development and its capacity of evolution.” ³⁹

A large part of the interviewed consider that the increasing intrusion of the religions in the public life is a source of violence against women, even if some of them want to precise that they don't question the religion in itself. Religions have developed a way of thinking that perpetuates a world where women are inferior and violence against them legitimized.⁴⁰ The respect of religious precepts is often used as a justification of the limitation of women's rights.

In Italy, the strong political role of the Vatican is a tool in the hands of the conservative Catholics to oppose every progressive step and improvement of women's freedom: the «good» woman is married, she never gets divorced, and «of course» she has children whom she raises according the catholic precepts.

“The Vatican is repeatedly developing campaigns that pervade Italian politics, against women's self-determination concerning the disposal of their own bodies, mainly against the right of abortion and the use of reproductive techniques” (It)

In France and in Italy, the action of religious trends is mainly related to reproductive and sexual rights⁴¹.

In Spain, the Church has no more the power it had during the Franco dictatorship but is still very powerful. The demonstrations organized by the Catholic Church to oppose the legalization of abortion illustrate this power. A part of the political sphere supported these rallies. The Church has not only a symbolical power; it has also the capacity to exercise a strong influence on the political life as it owes a large economical empire (banks, universities, lands).

“The heart of patriarchy lies precisely in the religions that command, dominate and prosper with the fear of sin and eternal condemnation”. (S)

When fanatic religious preachers are spreading intolerance and fear under the banner of purity, chastity and honor and are stigmatizing the bodies of women, the responsibility to face this danger, according to the interviewed, lies in the hands of those who have political power. In other words, governments have the responsibility to keep religion out of the public sphere, to address the issue of violence against women and to refuse all its religious justifications.

³⁸ European Foundation for the improvement of the conditions of living and working of people. Fev.2011

³⁹ Lilian halls-French, “ Breaking the walls of silence”, AWO Amman 2009

⁴⁰ Rapport malos tratos españa

⁴¹ <http://www.mujiereenred.net/spip.php?mot24>; <http://www.publico.es/espana/210188/la-iglesia-quiere-carcel-para-las-que-aborten>

A part of the Catholic Church is involved against freedom of choice when it comes to ethically sensitive issues - birth, death, homo parental families, adoption. Of course the action of Islamist trends is still limited but in the same time, secular voices among the Muslim population are not significantly heard “(It)

The Council of Europe adopted in 2005 a Resolution calling the member states to fully protect women living on their territories against any violation of their rights based on or attributed to religion. «All women living in Council of Europe member states have a right to equality and dignity in all areas of life. Freedom of religion cannot be accepted as a pretext to justify violations of women’s rights, be they open or subtle, legal or illegal, practiced with or without the nominal consent of the victims – women ».⁴²

But in France there are an increasing number of cases of violence by husbands who refuse that women give birth with the help of a male doctor, or violence by fathers who have been refused virginity certificates for their daughters.

“The conservative religious trends are more and more acting against women’s rights mainly in the field of sexual rights, right to abortion and fight against secularism.” (F)

In Italy, the responsible for public order in the city of Treviso declared, against the advice of the local leader of the Muslim community, that women should be allowed to wear burqa-type garments for religious reasons, as long as they allow to be identified when requested, for security reasons for example. These illustrations of the emprise of religion on daily lives show how it contributes to limit the rights of women in the public space. The importance to work for secular societies appears to be strongly linked to the deterioration of the situation of thousands of women in Europe under the pretext of respecting religious precepts or traditional values. Gender inequality, and violence, women’s imprisonment, women’s persecution and criminalization of the ones who ask the free disposal of their own bodies, can’t be for the interviewed, justified with any cultural or religious reasons. The principle of secularism, as exercised today in many European states and in all institutions and rules of the Union, which would secure the fundamental women’s rights against the pressure of the Churches, is not seen to be part of the basic construction of the European Union. On the contrary, references to religious Christian heritage of Europe are seen to be increasing in the political statements of European leaders.

A HUMAN AND SOCIAL PLAGUE

1. A schizophrenic world

❖ The guilt is on the victims and the perpetrators are absolved

In all the countries and cultures women who are fighting for women’s rights and democracy are looked upon as endangering “the social order”, which limits considerably their life choices and perpetuates violence against them as a way to control them. Furthermore, women who are victims instead of being

⁴² Council of Europe Resolution 1464, 2005

offered the support and understanding of the society are often blamed: “she looked for it, she provoked him, she is too much, etc.” At the same time the perpetrator is free of social disapproval.

Many UN documents and NGOs reports show that violence and oppression of women is often linked to the stereotypical perceptions of men as violent and women as passive and taking little part in the initiatives to combat violence. Guilt is on women since they don't act to combat this violence and even contribute to its perpetuation, while the perpetrators themselves are never directly questioned or even bothered. In addition they always have the benefit of mitigating circumstances: economic crisis, psychological fragility, social pressure. This way, the social and cultural roots and causes of this violence are remaining in the dark. As long as women are considered weak and minors, in need to be protected and educated by men; as long as men's “rights” to be jealous and to be respected give them socially recognized power over women's lives, there won't be equality between men and women and the word democracy will stay empty of content.

❖ A problem paid and perpetuated by society itself

Besides the physical and psychological traumas that affect the victims, violence against women has direct impacts on society, economically and socially, as recorded by the Council of Europe⁴³. The capacity of the victims to contribute to the economy is reached. It represents a very high cost for the social services, the justice system, health care agencies and employers. The most expensive categories are the health sector, the criminal legal and the civil legal sector, including police and prison and the social services, including shelters. Another cost is the losses for the employers since women victims are more likely to have health problems and are less productive. According to the Council of Europe, the cost of domestic violence for the Spanish society alone reaches about 2.4 billion euros each year. For the entire Council of Europe area, this cost is reckoned to be at least 33 billion euros. These reckonings, whatever they are, must be considered as grossly underestimated, as majority of victims remain silent.

Even if year 2008 a multi-year global campaign was launched bringing together the United Nations, governments and civil society to try to end violence against women, it continues to prevail and is still frequently undermined as an obstacle to social and economic well-being. Women all over Europe, who are still threatened by ancestral practices, are prevented from playing their role and exercise their full talents. This tears to pieces the social structure, between the involvement of women in all the fields, their contribution to the economic, political and social life on the one hand and the persistence, even resurgence of old patriarchal values coming from the far past, with women's bodies as stake, on the other. The increase of religious practices is strengthening this evolution.

2. An increasing gap between formal rights and actual rights; what about security?

“Do we live in Security in Spain? If you ask women in the street, I am sure a lot of them would answer “Yes, we do!” And it is true, we enjoy a minimum of rights, we are not in a war conflict, we do not live in an extreme violent situation... But there are women in our country who are living hell!”(S)

⁴³ The Council of Europe and gender-based violence. Documents of the pan-European campaign to prevent and combat violence against women (2006-2008)

The claim for security as a basis for all human rights on the one hand and the high prevalence of violence against women on the other is perceived as seriously questioning the European democracies, national or human security models and lifts up the gap between formal and real rights. In Europe, although guaranteed by the Constitutions of the States, many rights still remain inaccessible to women, such as the rights to a life free from coercion, fear, violence and insecurity.

“Public space is still a male space. We still have the feeling that we are not free to walk in the street. Public space is still a problem for woman” (F)

Democracy requires respect for human dignity. Violence against women is a crime against women's dignity, against their basic rights and against the collective rights. It demonstrates the inability of the State to insure half of its population the ability to live in peace. Women are defined in the Plataforma Impacto de Género Ya! as “second class citizens”

“It is true that the context is not guerrilla context, but there are women who suffer from their family, their partner, or women who come from other communities and who are suffering so heavy discrimination that they are forced to marry somebody they do not want! (S)

Security is not only, according to the interviewed, a matter of protection by the police. It is a vital necessity and a condition for people to enjoy their basic human rights, freedom and physical integrity.

“Security would be the freedom to be one-self, to be able to control one's own environment, to have control over one's own decisions, and to feel secure about it.”(It)

For the majority of the interviewed security is equal to freedom. A lot of Spanish women compare violence against women with terrorism. They underline that even if terrorism kills far less people than violence against women, it still remains the first priority of governmental action in the field of violence. Women's daily fight against terrorism they are subject to is a never ending war, and still, it is a fight that does not receive the needed support.

“If there is a terrorist threat coming from ETA, everybody would go down in the street; each politician would call people to demonstrate. Gender-based violence is killing between one and two women weekly, and nothing comparable happens.” (S)

Violence against women is an obstacle to enjoy the full exercise of citizenship that derives from the recognition of fundamental rights to equality and non-discrimination. What is called in Spain “*un déficit democrático*”⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ M. DURAN FEBRER, « Análisis jurídico-feminista de la ley organica de medidas de proteccion integral contra la violencia de género»

3. A step forward, two steps backwards

The overwhelming majority of the interviewed, while underlining several important positive steps, declared to have been worried about the present context of regression. The strongest concern is that positive changes are always and only linked to the actions of women organizations. The perceived controversy is that on the one hand there is more knowledge and more awareness among women and the laws are providing more protection. On the other hand there is a persistent and increasing gap between the right of women to live without violence and the reality of their daily lives. The reasons behind this are seen the strengthening of patriarchal mentalities, the lack of political will of the governments, the economic crisis and the raising influence of the conservative thought, including the increasing intrusion of religion in the political life. Even if the knowledge about violence against women is improved, it is still very limited. As pointed out in the national contexts, violence against women came out of the shadow only recently, thanks to the efforts and involvement of the women's organizations.

OPENING THE WAYS TO IMPROVEMENT

1. Priorities and emergencies

"A woman dying because she is a woman, nothing is worse" (F)

❖ Refusal of any hierarchy between the diverse expressions of violence

"Of course, one may think that physical violence would be more severe, but any kind of violence is destroying the person who suffers from it" (F)

All the interviewed refused to scale or classify according to hierarchy the different types of violence in order to assess and evaluate their level of severity. All types of violence are according to them the expressions of the same pattern of control and domination; all of them have devastating effects on the victims, and all of them are tightly interconnected. Symbolic violence through education system and media has for example a crucial role for the creation and perpetuation of the sexist language and attitudes.

"Physical violence is the consequence of a learning process of underestimation and massive consensus to the extreme act of rape. This process is initiated by sexism and stereotypes and gets more severe through the language and representations of the female bodies and sexuality as products, as merchandises" (It)

A helpful way to assess what would be more or less "violent" or "hurting" is to define some priorities in terms of solutions according to the emergency of the issue, its legal or social developments, its breadth or the importance of the consequences: homicide in the family in Italy, prostitution in France, domestic violence everywhere. Women expect a political action based on a typology of violence that would fit women's experiences and lives. The interviewed repeatedly stressed the importance of addressing not only the violence itself but also its causes and roots.

"If we talk in terms of health, it is not fair to establish any hierarchy since all forms of violence have an impact on women's health, and furthermore an impact that might be avoided. In terms of political intervention, we could prioritize.... But more than a hierarchy, it should be a typology. "(S)

❖ Domestic violence

"To fight domestic violence is an emergency ...it concerns 80% of the cases we have to solve." (F)

According to many of the interviewed, a priority should be given to actions against the violence which takes most victims, which damages to death the integrity of the women's bodies, which has heavy and definitive consequences for their whole life. This violence occurs mainly in the frame of family life and is described as the most spread, the most silenced violence, the one having the most destroying effects on the women and the whole family.

An essay published in France in 2007 estimates the number of children victims or witnesses of violence in their family⁴⁵ is up to four millions.

"To face violence at home---that means to wait and hope that it will be only once....and not to move initially But then to denounce; the problem is that denouncing members of their own family weakens at the same time the women's network of protection ... often institutions are just listening but don't do anything." (It)

The interviewed women insist on the fact that this priority does not mean that the other types of violence are less important. Each type of violence is violence and cannot be minimized.

❖ Against legalization of prostitution

"Prostitution as the public free disposal of women's bodies is a major violence and must be tackled in priority" (F)

During the study, prostitution was very present in the debate in France in connection to the project of creating a new profession of "sexual nurses" supposed to favor the sexual life of disable people in France, a country that is an "abolitionist". In a European context with a strong lobby for legalization of prostitution, this project is facing the protests of many French feminist organizations. Taking place in a

⁴⁵ Judy Da Silva "Enfants temoins ou victims de la violence conjuguale"Essai 2007, Mémoires de plume

moment of the resurgence of a debate on the reopening of brothels, it appears like a new form of “institutionalized” prostitution.

❖ General lack of means to support women to go out of violence

“If you want to prevent violence, you must dedicate the necessary resources on a sustainable way. If you cut down the resources, then you will have more violence and more victims.”(S)

Providing women the opportunity to leave home and to find a shelter for themselves and their children if they have nowhere else to go is seen as an absolute necessity. They must get a place to live in a safe area, since it is well known today that the risk of violence is most severe in the period which follows the woman’s departure. Providing shelters, providing women the means of their autonomy, supporting the associations who work with women’s victims, are required conditions to empower women with the strength and the capacity needed to leave a violent husband or partner. In the present context of general lack of resources linked to a lack of political will, the goal of providing an exhaustive network for survivors is still far from being achieved. The quality and availability of appropriate services varies depending on the places where women live. Rural areas for example are often neglected. The European Women’s Lobby (EWL), an Observatory on Violence against Women has assessed that the service provision is insufficient and the funding insecure. Shelters and hot-lines are described as under-funded and often managed by NGOs on a voluntary basis⁴⁶

« It is urgent to get means in order to train professionals, to welcome women, to work on prevention, to change mentalities, to promote a non-sexist education....if not everything is a complete waste of time. » (F)

❖ Economical violence

Economical violence comes also at a high rank of priorities since economic dependency and lack of financial autonomy are perceived as major obstacles to escaping violence. Economic autonomy is seen as a precondition to curb it.

❖ Ignorance and silence

Most of the reports regarding violence against women show that violence is increasing. However, lack of data remains a major problem in many countries. A large part of the violence is still invisible, especially the one that is not extreme. According to many researches, we still have a limited knowledge of the

⁴⁶ 101 Hanmer, J./ Gloor, D./ Meier, H. et al.: Agencies and evaluation of good practice: domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, Report within the Research Project CAHRV (Co-ordination Action on Human Rights Violations), Osnabrück, 2006. In: Women Against Violence Europe Country Report 2008. A right for protection and support? (December 2008) WAVE - Women Against Violence Europe, p. 11. Available at: http://www.wave-network.org/images/doku/wave_country_report_2008.pdf

situation and what we know represents only a tiny part of the reality on the ground. Available data remains too limited to describe this reality and to help addressing the issue efficiently. An example is that when the focus remains on domestic violence we tend to neglect the violence against women in the public sphere or in the working place. Several interviewed underlined the importance of knowledge in order to raise awareness. National studies have been in many countries the basis of legislative changes or provision of new means to fight violence. In France the national study on violence against women in 2000 marked a decisive step to reveal the width of the phenomenon.

❖ **Lack of appropriate legislation and non-implementation of existing laws**

Legislation is the social and symbolic recognition of what a given society allows or not and what it decides to be an unacceptable behavior or action. International and national laws are defining the States' responsibility and duty to prevent violence, to protect women from it, to support the women victims and to punish the perpetrators.

In spite of real improvements in the legislative field, some important gaps between the national policies and the reality of the women's lives remain. The international institutions are limited in their coercive authority if they face a lack of measures, a lack of implementation or a lack of spreading knowledge of international resolutions and conventions. European legislation in addition does not provide a binding frame on the issue of violence against women, which would be a decisive support for the women but also for the women's rights associations in their daily advocacy and awareness raising work and service provision.

❖ **Weight and persistence of patriarchal mentalities**

*«While European society as a whole has matured over the last decade in terms of its rejection of violent behavior towards women, it is clear that more education is needed, with 20% of people in the EU, for example, only considering sexual violence to be 'fairly serious', rather than the extremely serious crime which it is by law.»*⁴⁷

Awareness about violence against women has increased. Today, there is greater consciousness of how violence is used to maintain male domination and privileges. However, political will for decisively addressing and changing the patriarchal attitudes and behaviors based on the denial of gender equality is missing. This contributes to the still widespread social tolerance of violence against women. In spite of the efforts of the women's associations, the traditional mentalities reproduced by both men and women, contribute to keep domestic violence in the shadow.

In this context, awareness raising and education are seen as a major tool to fight violence against women. Family, school and media are perceived to be the actors who, in addition to political will and action contribute to change in patriarchal culture and mentalities. Spreading awareness among men and women, including education on gender equality in the school curricula is defined as a matter of emergency. Training the professionals working with youth in order to influence their own behavior and perception of violence that they witness in their professional environment - schools, sport centers, restaurants etc.

⁴⁷ Special Eurobarometer 344, op cit p

"The teachers must be trained to transmit a non-sexist education and strictly oppose any sexist stereotypes, sexist insults, girls' harassment etc." (F)

In Spain until recently, violence against women was perceived as related to the private sphere. Now the campaigns are taking in account the interaction between the different spheres and domestic violence is increasingly presented and perceived as a social problem. However some improvements are still needed. For example, the first campaigns were directed towards women victims of domestic violence in order to encourage them to report violence and were guilt-inducing. They were based on the assumption that the decision to put an end to the violence was depending solely on women.

"The campaigns focus too much on the denunciation, situating the woman as both a victim and a responsible of the violence" (S)

"You cannot put the emphasis on the woman only! Abuses are the result of a social problem, so it depends on everyone to put an end to them! " (S)

❖ **Upbringing, education and media**

The media influence on the shaping of mentalities and awareness is said to be huge for the worse.

"Currently the form of violence that is most widespread in Italy is physical violence within the family context and the corollary of this is the gender-based abuse of women's bodies in the media and advertising".(It)

But also for the best: In 1997 a story shook Spain by unveiling violence against women in a very abrupt way. Ana Orantes, a few days after having reported on TV that her ex-husband had subjected her to violence for forty years, was murdered by him - burned alive after being sprayed with gasoline. This incident marked an important change: the media coverage of the murder of Ana Orantes opened opportunities for feminist demands to become more audible. They reached the mass media and domestic violence occupied then the forefront of the political agenda.

2. Actors and tools for changes

❖ **Resistance of women and crucial role of the NGOs**

"Despite of all these obstacles, what surprises me is that women still complain! They are the heroines of our times!" (S)

Women's organizations across Europe have historically played a vital role in the fight to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women. In the present general context of lack of means and cultural resistance, women are developing solidarity and resistance networks to cope on their own and fight violence. In this configuration, women's NGOs play a crucial role as providers of activist non-professional or expert support to women victims. Many of the needs of the female victims of violence are met through the activities of specialized NGOs and associations dedicated to protection and empowerment of the women victims of violence. Services such as women's shelters, help-lines, counseling and advocacy centers which support women in their right to be protected from the perpetrators and/or the right to safe accommodation and adequate help are due to their persistent action.

The action of the NGOs is considered as a major factor to raise awareness, to develop women's rights and to change the society as well as to preserve these rights from conservative attacks consequently. Some of the interviewed deplored the division of the women's movement as a source of weakness. All the responsible of women's rights organizations expressed their wish to get a stronger support from the State for their action.

"A stronger role must be given to women's associations, because when a woman rounds the cape and contacts an association, she must be sure to get enough help and support. At the present time women have not this security". (S)

❖ Education through school and training programs, public awareness and media campaigns

"Education is the basis. Changing mentalities is a difficult work but it is the place to start". (It)

It is far from being enough to tackle what physically hinders equality between men and women. It is necessary to deconstruct the gender stereotypes and to raise awareness about them. The present context of increasing influence of conservative thought that perpetuates stereotypes about women makes this work even harder.

The idea of inferiority of women is nourishing girls and boys and must be fought from early age. It is perpetuated in and outside the family, among others via the school system.

"We need to install the idea that private is politics and to fight against women themselves is our most difficult work" (F)

The role of upbringing and education is of crucial importance in the spreading of stereotypes but also in fighting them, by giving women the knowledge of their rights, the strength to fight for themselves and by opening the minds of both men and women, both boys and girls on the perspective of a social development based on equal worth, rights and responsibilities.

"Awareness raising campaigns are an absolute necessity to contribute to the cultural change" (S)

Taking into account the significant influence that the media has on social perceptions of acceptable behavior and attitudes, the way media relate to gender-related violence is of major importance for the interviewed. In Italy the public opinion was shaken by the trial of Latina, filmed by Loredana Rotondo for the TV program «Processo per stupro» 2 which exposed clearly on RAI TV the anachronistic way of thinking of the Italian courts and the dominant juridical culture. It contributed to strengthening of the women organizations' work on sensibilisation and awareness raising. Silence was broken, continuous calls for help and the complaints were the symptoms of the reality of the problem.

The Spanish Organic Act on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence (2004) states:

“the communications media shall work for the protection and safeguarding of gender equality, avoiding any discrimination between men and women” and that “reports concerning violence against women, within the requirements of journalistic objectivity, shall do the utmost to defend human rights and the freedom and dignity of the female victims of gender violence and their children.”(art14)

Art.3 provides for the launch of a National Sensitization and Prevention Plan regarding violence against women targeting both men and women in order to raise awareness of values based on respect for human rights and equality between men and women. The Plan included also a monitoring instrument, namely a building of a Commission with members of relevant institutions, survivors of violence, professionals working to address violence against women, and experts on the issue.

❖ Coordination of the action

The failure to address violence in a holistic way leads to serious backlashes in all the three European countries of the study. In order to efficiently tackle violence against women, the interviewed underlined the need for coordinated action among all actors and stakeholders involved at all levels: from the family and local community to the international organizations, State authorities, civil society, institutions and media. That's why the Spanish Organic Law is often quoted as the example of an integrative and comprehensive approach. (See above)

The majority of interviewed are of the opinion that violence against women needs to be addressed in a multi-disciplinary way, based on the collaboration among lawyers, psychologists, social workers, doctors and other experts. This approach is seen to be the only one that can make possible a better understanding of the phenomenon and can provide sustainable solutions.

3. International feminist cooperation and reflection: a tool and a goal

“Patriarchy is the common heritage of all the countries” (S)

Sharing of experiences and perspectives in the field of women's issues, gender equality, democracy, development, peace and security among feminists from the Euro-Mediterranean Region is perceived by all the women as a major contribution to strengthening of the women's rights in the Euro-Med Space. Crossing national, cultural and geographical borders and trying to work together to influence the international politics is described as a necessity but also a challenge. Although most of the interviewed insist on the huge differences between countries, they agree on the necessity to work together on similar goals.

"Gathering, collaboration and common fight of women are absolute preconditions to change. In spite of the different contexts in Europe and in the Middle East, violence against women has common roots. Understanding of similarities and differences will strengthen our common work...." (It)

All societies and political systems are shaped by male dominated structures and ideologies. Women have no access to their basic human rights; they are under-represented in the decision making processes, they have limited access to resources. Women are facing violence, oppression and discrimination from birth to death, in all the spheres of their life. The presence of women in decision-making arenas and the co decision procedure in those arenas are described as necessary means to improve legislation in favor of women's rights. It is still seen as a challenge to engage human rights activists and social movements for a common action over gender equality and women's rights in togetherness with all other forms of discrimination. Oppression and discriminations have "local" expressions, but their roots are common. They cross geographical, political and social borders as well as historical phases and limit the freedom of women, independently of their nationality, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or culture.

"It is needed to keep a common approach over borders since the relation of domination is the same even if the expressions are specific." (F)

Gender equality and women's empowerment are one of the Millennium Development Goals but present policies still neglect the vital importance of the women's right to live a life free of threat of violence, violence and insecurity. The threat of domestic violence comes for women from "within", from the nearest men and partners in their lives. The threat for states security comes from "the enemy" "out" of the national borders, and therefore women and women's needs for security are excluded conceptually, politically and on policy level.

Today global economic crisis, militarization and conflicts, increasing of the religious fundamentalisms and conservative trends have severe consequences on the life conditions and freedom of the people, especially women. At the same time the globalization creates new opportunities for building up the international feminist cooperation needed to preserve and strengthen women's human rights. The development of common actions based on solidarity in addressing similarities between women's movements internationally is described as essential for addressing patriarchal structures and policies.

"To fight against this violence, the European institutions should promulgate binding guidelines and regulations and specific requirements for all member states. Then, the example given by Europe could, by imitation, be beneficial in the countries of the Mediterranean and the Middle East and reverse. In my opinion we must continue to stubbornly develop common action for women's rights." (It)

Even if there is a unanimous agreement on the principle and the necessity of cooperation with women from the Middle East, some major challenges for establishing this cooperation on equal bases are also pointed out. Lack of knowledge of the “other” is prevailing among them.

3.1 Main challenges for cooperation

❖ Lack of democracy and authoritarian regimes

“In Europe, we have now laws against gender-based violence. Even the male politicians talk about it. This is fundamental to start. I am not sure if this is the case in Middle East” (S)

From a political perspective, the interviewed consider that Middle East countries offer fewer opportunities to women than European ones. Even if the situation of women in Europe is far from being a model, the political systems are still less restrictive for women’s rights. It leads some of them to consider that cooperation with women from this part of the world is a risk, mostly for women from the Middle East themselves. They emphasize the fact that sometimes, governments promote some women’s groups as the official interlocutors. There is the idea that the only admitted and valuable organizations are often linked to the political power and are not representative of women. These are mostly promoting governmental actions and are not really interested in the improvement of women’s situation. That’s why some of the interviewed are rather reluctant to the idea of cooperating with organizations from Middle East countries. They do not oppose to cooperation per se, however they want to be sure that the feminist women they are introduced to, are really independent from their government.

❖ Wars, occupation and conflict situation

In all the Middle East countries, freedom of women is hindered by wars and occupation. In conflict zones the mutual reinforcement of patriarchal and militarist values in both private and public, justifies State agendas oppressive and discriminatory for women and makes discrimination in the gender power relations invisible and silent. The militarization of the society has also purely economic consequences for women. When the State increases its resources for maintaining the “national security”, the resources are taken from other parts of the public sector like health service and education, that mainly employs women, and whose activities are mainly used by women. Many interviewed highlight the fact that “women”, as a group, are always and everywhere instrumentalized by men and political parties. «The Woman » is still a political stake and a symbolical object useful to positioning oneself. By taking a stand on women’s image or on women’s place and role in society, each group specifies where it stands in comparison of the other.

Cooperating with countries that are in some ways supporting or backing up or even participating in wars and occupation may also, according some interviewed, be a problem for feminists from the occupied countries. Some of them mention that to try to establish links with the Middle East might be counter-productive because it would be seen by the population in the Middle East as cooperating with “the enemy”.

Some others, even if refusing to be themselves “cultural relativists”, do not want to be intrusive or to impose an “occidental” way of seeing and understanding to the women in those countries. Many of them admit that the mutual knowledge is still missing in order to be able to establish a fruitful cooperation. They are also very critical towards some instruments of cooperation such as the Euro-Med platform, in a context where Europe is supporting dictatorships to fight terrorism and imprisons women’s rights in

cultural specificities. That is why they support women from the Middle East countries in their efforts to mediatize their situation and to be the starting and leading force in the process of cooperation among the women of the two regions.

“Arab feminists are those who can say how to do to improve the situation of women. We must be there to help. From outside it’s very difficult.” (S)

In other terms, women from the Middle East should give the “start” for a cooperation based on mutual benefit and according to the contexts. The leading force of support would be in Europe due to more rights and freedom for women in European countries and among others, due to a weaker intrusion of the religion in the lives.

❖ Religion

According several interviewed religion is another obstacle to women’s cooperation, a very challenging one, as common projects can only be based on the respect of universal human rights.

“A common action Europe/Middle East would be relevant if based on the principles of secularism and freedom of any kind of religious pressure » (It)

Religion is not only intruding the social consciousness but also the political system.

Lack of civil legislation and personal status laws based on religious interpretations appear as a challenge to cooperation, since a status of women that depends on religious stances is said to lead to the impossibility to establish a common legislative base.

“Right now, cooperation seems very difficult, because in some countries, the woman is still considered as an object by religious principles. It is not Islam itself, but all religions.”(S)

Several interviewed praise the work and the efforts of Arab women to bravely challenge this situation.

3.2 Main reasons to face these obstacles together

❖ Universality of patriarchal domination

In spite of all the obstacles to cooperation between feminist movements from the two sides of the Mediterranean, a lot of similarities make such cooperation not only possible but needed, as male violence and patriarchal domination are universal.

“The status of women is very different, but it’s worth trying to find common ground” (S)

Wherever they are situated in the World, women are namely the victims of violence committed by their nearest partners and men and this violence in particular is faced by social silence and social tolerance. The

interplay of personal, structural and cultural violence makes it very difficult for women to unveil it as a social problem. In addition to the structural violence women's rights are often sold in the name of culture. The low status of women in the society is often explained in the same way, as if it was unchangeable. Violence against women and discrimination are the most often justified by culture and traditions. Many women stress that to refer to "cultural values" as an excuse for violence against women is not specific to the Middle East countries. For a long time, and even up today in some European countries, legislative frameworks are referring to culture and tradition to justify the lack of attention to some forms of patriarchal violence.

Women from Spain, Italy and France feel the need to share with feminists from the Middle East also on topics like honor crimes, forced marriage and FGM that are also affecting women living in Europe. Women need to take action and to make their voice heard on a political level, without leaving the ground to political interpretations that tend to instrumentalize women and their suffering, that seldom consider these issues a political problem and never a priority. Middle East women rights activists who are fighting against those practices for decades are seen as a very useful source of knowledge and support. Feminists in Europe are eager to share their experiences in this field.

❖ **Common global context of ultra-liberal policies and militarist choices on the expenses of women**

"Poverty and violence are two things that affect us women in the first place and in the same way, no matter where we are."(F)

Although women's conditions are always "specific", the economical context is affecting all of them. In many interviews, the consequences of neo-liberal policies were seen as a huge problem for women's rights. According to the UN, women are subject to structural exclusion from economic resources and as much as 70% of the poor population in the world is made up of women. Neo-liberal globalization is linked to the decrease of social protection, and it is well known that women are among the first beneficiaries of social protection. If European women are losing the security they are entitled to by the Human Rights Conventions, the Middle East women are placed in a worse situation. Indeed, according to some women interviewed, women's rights are never the priority, and in time of crisis, women always are the first to lose. But when women's rights are not even consolidated, it is worse because all kind of progress will be cut down. Therefore many women think that the fight against neo-liberalism must be a common one. Globalization is a phenomenon that affects the whole planet. If we want to make it right, we have to act at a global level.

In the same way militarization does not take place only in the Middle East. The world's military expenditure has increased globally with 49% from 2000 to 2009⁴⁸, independently on the financial crises. The world's top 5 largest military budgets belong to the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. As much as the Arab women need to face militarization in their countries, so much the European feminist face an increasing challenge to face it in their democratic contexts: militarization that does not only mean production of weapons but an increasing export of weapons and wars away from the borders of Europe. The need of international feminist cooperation and reflection is increasing in times when the global economic conditions in interplay with a patriarchal security policy are limiting the women's scope of action and aggravating the life conditions of the people.

❖ **Global raising of the conservative thought**

⁴⁸ Figures sourced from SIPRI Yearbook 2010

"There is a trivialization and deep penetration of the racist ideology. 6 laws about immigration have been passed within the last 7 years" (F)

Europe is not free from the fundamentalist threat. Many women describe the power of the religious sphere as getting stronger with each day and having increasing consequences on women's lives. In Spain, the Catholic Church is still very powerful and concentrates its current crusade on the fight against women's sexual rights. In the opposition to women's rights, conservative forces are united. Problems that seemed to be solved years ago are now revitalized and women's rights on both sides of the Mediterranean are threatened in the same way. That is why, the argument of two different religious contexts, a "South" with a politic influence by Islam, and a secular "North" is seen as irrelevant by many interviewed. According to them, it is wrong to think that European women are not facing tremendous pressure from religious authorities, no matter which ones. In addition, the influence of religion and its lobbies on political parties in Europe is still extremely strong. Therefore the fight against conservative movements is a strong common ground.

❖ **A common lack of political will to promote women's rights and gender equality**

The lack of political will to improve women's lives and women's rights is not only relevant to the Middle East. The weakness of the democratic movement in Europe is perceived as a cause for the weakening of the feminist movement.

The women interviewed emphasize the necessity to regain power in front of the new global challenge. Feminist movement is weak today, because it does not manage to make itself heard. That is why, to get stronger, it needs to form strong and united coalitions. All the interviewed agreed on the need to develop solidarity channels and common spaces of sharing knowledge and experiences.

The difficulties of the European women to preserve their conquests and rights in a context where the words democracy, security and freedom are getting empty of content have very similar roots to the dangers that Arab women are facing to affirm the values of feminism and to denounce the "huge gap" to jump over between to ask for women's emancipation and a real process of liberation.

"The differences between women here and there are the resources we have and how we do awareness-raising. But the problems and their sources are the same everywhere!" (S)

Women are dedicating their lives to expose patriarchy, the deep roots of which are tightly connected to militarism and violence. Across the world women's needs in the societies are never a priority on any political agenda or on policy-making level, not in peace and even less when conflict starts. Women's organizing is questioning male violence, questioning women's exclusion from the structures of power and public space, labor market etc. Women organize to constantly illustrate this marginalization, exploitation, violence and killings based on gender perceptions of dominance and subordination that brings about superiority and inferiority attitudes. It is women's feminist organization that illustrates the persistence of this discrimination and violence. Everywhere women are facing obstacles to have their rights implemented. Their expressions are different but the roots are the same. That is why cooperation around common goals is a necessity to show that the situation of European women and of the Mediterranean women allow common actions across differences and require common strategies to face discrimination and patriarchal oppression and a common lack of political will to address these.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"The lack of social recognition of your identity as a human being, like for slaves before, has for consequence that husbands, partners and police just don't consider ill- treatments, rape, abuses as violence"(It)

The first threat that European women have to face each day is a long lasting war that is still largely ignored. Women's life in Europe is far from being free from violence. Instead, this violence is increasing. Despite legislative improvements, the patriarchal structures remain powerful and fundamental women's right to leave in security is not guaranteed.

According to the Council of Europe, various studies on prevalence of violence against women suggest that approximately one-fifth to one-quarter of all women have experienced physical violence at least once during their adult lives and more than one-tenth have suffered sexual violence involving the use of force⁴⁹. The root cause of violence against women is in the denial of the equal worth and value of women and men. It is not possible to understand obstacles to gender equality, obstacles to implementation of the resolutions promoting women's rights or laws on violence against women without looking at the and global social political context. This context in Europe is characterized today by a global regression of women's rights due to the economic crisis and the weakening of the social welfare system and protection. This has been taking place in a tight interconnection with an increasing militarization, the raising of the conservative thought and movements and the increasing intervention of churches and religious authorities in the political development and in the lives of women. Finally in a context of weakness and division of the democratic movement, the feminist movement has also weakened.

All these elements in an international context of global militarization are standing on the way to gender equality and social development and have created an environment of fear and threat to the gains that women at global and local level struggled so hard to obtain.

The level of violence is tightly linked to the general status of women in the society in terms of their economic, family and social role and political representation and participation. The structural gender based violence deprives women of the right to live without fear, everywhere and at each moment of their lives. Domestic violence is often remaining in the dark and does not go out of the private family sphere. This violence even if less socially tolerated is often denied by the society and the victims themselves. In addition, economic dependence deprives women of the capacity to resist.

Some important political steps have been achieved during the last decade to address violence against women in Europe. However a lot remains to be done. In the European countries knowing peaceful times, the patriarchal violence has also other names as exclusion, precariousness, economic insecurity, trafficking and prostitution. Despite alarming figures, the majority of the studies underline the persistence of universal social tolerance towards this violence. The concept of human security promoted by the United Nations ignores the fact that the threat against the safety of women is also within their circle of partners, husbands and relatives. Violence against women has no boundaries of age, class, time and

⁴⁹ The Council of Europe, and gender based violence documents of the pan European campaign to prevent and combat violence against women (2006-2008), 4th issue in the Collection Against Gender Violence, Gobierno de España, Ministerio de Igualdad, 2008, 503pp.

nationality. In all its different forms it exists everywhere and everywhere it is still considered as a second rank problem.

“Violence against women must become one of the most important issues on which attention and financial means should be focused. Men must be involved more and more in this crucial process” (It)

The structures of violence against women in war and in “peacetime” are tightly interconnected. Deeply rooted in the patriarchal structures, this violence is extremely costly both to women and to societies all around the Mediterranean area.

The patriarchal way of political thinking is reflected in the EU economic and security policies. Patriarchal policies based on liberalized economy, competition and profit and defence based on armament and militarization are possible to be implemented only at the expenses of and through further subordination and discrimination of women. Profit and arms goes together with violence.

The deteriorating of the situation of millions of women, from Lebanon to Spain, from France or Italy to Palestine, gives clear indication of the universality of the patriarchal system built on domination and control of women. Zero tolerance towards violence against women is a common policy, needed to be designed and implemented according to the different contexts, in order to raise awareness and to ultimately accumulate more opportunities for more women to enter the political and public sphere, traditionally reserved for men and make their voices heard.

“There is one universal truth, applicable to all countries, cultures and communities: violence against women is never acceptable, never excusable, never tolerable” (F)

This study contributes to the global work demonstrating that the feminist movement is a necessary force in the common effort to counter the women’s rights violations over borders, over the diversity of cultures and historical backgrounds, in the respect of their differences. This work underlines the common refusal of women to be imprisoned in the nests of traditional patterns; the necessity of a common action to widen the space of women’s resistance.

Efforts are required from various actors in order to fight against violence against women. European Union, member states of the Euro-Med space and NGOs are due to act jointly. In order to fight it with efficiency, European Union and Euro-Med States should adopt a common definition of violence based on the universality of women’s human rights. They should develop common data base on violence against women using reliable and well known systems of collecting data to make violence visible. These steps are necessary to adopt a common and binding legislation such as exposing and condemning violence. An adoption and implementation of a protection order to guarantee women’s physical integrity should be a common tool.

Awareness raising, economic support for implementation of the laws, involving more women in politics, supporting women’s NGO’s, preventing intrusion of religious precepts in the public sphere are some important steps that need to be taken.

The promotion of national laws is crucial but it is only a first step. Their implementation requires always and everywhere further mobilization and pressure of women's organizing in order to put gender equality in a good place on the agenda of the governments, both in terms of goals and means. The universal rights stated in the laws must be translated into everyday life of women in spite of strong and universal patriarchal resistance to their implementation. International Resolutions and frameworks are not enough; common frames and binding texts with significant sanctions are needed. But if the principles that these conventions are based on, are not shared on the grassroots level, through education, upbringing and media, it is illusory to think achieving change.

The presence of women in the political sphere is a democratic necessity as well as a needed contribution to the promotion of their rights, among other the crucial right to live a life free of violence. Therefore, women's participation in the political life is tightly linked to the role and place of women in societies. Democracy requires an equal power of action for women and men on the decisions that are shaping their lives. The under-representation of women on all levels in the political sphere is an obstacle for the implementation of the women's rights and questions the democratic legitimacy of European Union to day.

Recommendations

There will be no solutions of the question of violence against women if this issue does not become a political priority.

1. The feminist organizing must keep the eyes open for the danger of a technical approach to legislation and public debate in order to face and address the patriarchal capacity of twisting the laws (ex to fight against violence against women for health and social savings, or promoting gender equality in the name of efficiency on the labor market) and never leave the ground of social justice, human rights and democracy.
2. Addressing informal codes, social norms, customs, traditions, but also religious pressure and interferences in the civil life is required for sustainable changes. In the three countries religion appears to be interwoven in the roots of tradition to rule and limit the women's freedom.
3. Common actions based on solidarity in addressing similarities with other feminist movements internationally are essential to be able to address patriarchal structures. Violence and discriminations against women have "local" expressions, but their roots are common.
4. A priority is to address the roots and the causes of violence against women in all the spheres of the women's lives, both private and public and not only their consequences.
5. Institutions dealing with violence against women must have the human and financial resources for their policies and the action among the different services and actors must be coordinated.
6. Awareness programs on the issue of violence against women must address boys and girls, men and women, including upbringing education and media.
7. The qualification and education on violence against women and gender equality of the professionals in contact with the victims must be improved.
8. Specific measures must be taken to tackle violence against migrant women who are facing the consequences of domestic, social, cultural and institutional violence from both the country of origin and from the host country.

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3. Fabiola Gil, responsable of gender politics Municipality of Terrassa
4. Forum de politicas feministas
5. Themis, association de femmes juristes
6. A ssociation Jokkere endam, association d'aide aux femmes immigrées
7. Observatorio de la violencia de Bizkaia
8. Tamaia, association de femmes contre la violence familiale
9. Consuelo Barea, médecin psychothérapeute, spécialisée dans l'attention de femmes victimes de violences
10. Federacion de mujeres separadas y divorciadas

Italy

11. Elena Coccia, lawyer Napoli
12. Shelter for Women Victims of violence, Casa delle maltratate donne. Milano
13. Association Trama di terra, Imola
14. Maria-Grazia Campari, Lawyer Milano
15. Monica Lanfranco, journalist and writer, Founder of MAREA
16. Dounia Ettaib, Feminist activist, Milano

France

17. Michele Loup Elected (green party) Regional Council « Ile de France »
18. Elected against violence against women, ECVF
19. Maya Surduts, Responsible of the National French Coordination for women's rights
20. Sabine Salmon, President of « Femmes Solidaires » association
21. Ernestine Ronai, Responsible of the Observatory against contre les violences faites aux femmes .Seine Saint Denis
22. Isabelle Gilette Faye, Association against sexual mutilations GAMS
23. French Familial Planning, MFPPF
24. Malka Markovitch, European coalition against trafficking and prostitution CATWE
25. Association of fight against violence against women at work, AVFT
26. Federation Nationale Solidarité Femmes, FNSF
27. Feminist Coordination against rape, CFCV

3. Grid for interviews

I. Global approach and definitions

1. First of all, can you tell me what definition you give of the following terms?

- Violence against women
- Security
- Peace

Do you make any connexion between those three terms? If you do, be explicit.

2. What are the major forms and/or the most widespread violence against women in your country today?

3. According to you, is it possible to draw up a hierarchy between the different types of violence women are victims of?

If so, what scale of evaluation would you establish?

What type(s) of violence would according to you, require a priority action in your country?

4. What is the global state of information about violence against women?

(studies, polls, statistics, articles in the media) what is its evolution?

5. Do you think that civil society / political world are informed of this question, and aware of it?

II. Evolution of the legislation in France/ Spain /Italy

1. According to you, what impacts did the evolution of legislation have during the last 10 years?

2. How do you make out the collaboration / dialogue between the State and the civil society on that question?

3. Has there been an evolution in the perception of violence against women following the evolution of the legislations, and the actions of women organizations?

4. Which impact had these evolutions over your work?

5. The evolution of the rights for women is confronted to the opposition of conservative religious currents. What is the impact of their action on the legislative evolution? And over your own action?

III. Resorts and plans of action

1. According to you, what are the most efficient measures to fight against violence against women? Is there an evolution in this field?

2. What types of help may the women appeal to, in case of violence? What help is provided by the State? Or by associative world?

3. Different documents attest that few women who are victims appeal to associations? According to you what are the main causes for that?

4. Do the people in relation with women victims of violence, (policemen, doctors, lawyers...) receive any particular training?

IV. Resistance and capacities of women

1. What forms of actions have women taken to resist the violence they are victim of?

2. Have you noticed any change in that field?

3. Could you identify any "good practices" that have been developed successfully?

4. What are the main global challenges to fight against violence against women in the present?

V. International context

1. Where does the French/Italian/Spanish case stand in Europe? What is the action of the EU in this field? How do you evaluate it

Building Dreams,

Achieving Goals:

Some Patterns of Defiance among Women in Palestine and Lebanon

December 2010

Leila Zakharia

Sonya Knox

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Executive Summary

There is no shortage of interest and research into the ways in which women are oppressed in the Arab world. Nor is there any doubt that Arab women do indeed come up against and confront patriarchal structures on a daily basis, both inside the home and as institutionalized in the public sphere. Gender inequality is institutionalized in the state through the sanctioned co-habitation between civil and religious laws; bolstered by the constitutional codification of patriarchal religious values; reinforced by structural factors like class, ethnicity and sectarianism; perpetuated through gender-based violence, discriminatory laws and unequal access to opportunities and services; exacerbated in times of conflict yet manifest in times of peace; and demonstrated through women's unequal participation in decision-making mechanisms and roles of authority.

However, there is much less research documenting the ways women in the Arab region break the norm: In essence, women's empowerment, a prerequisite to confronting and challenging gender inequality, is both poorly understood and insufficiently researched. This report will analyze the ways in which Arab women do challenge the patriarchal structures which perpetuate discrimination and inequality.

Beginning with a comprehensive literature review detailing the impact of patriarchy in the Arab region on women's human rights and security, the report then explicates the authors' rationale behind the search for transformatory change in the daily actions and decisions of women in Palestine and Lebanon. The methodology of qualitative interviews and focus groups with 54 women in Palestine and Lebanon in 2010 is followed by the research analysis.

Our participants identified numerous motivators to begin their process of defiance, including: aspirations for economic security and building the self, awareness of and/or experiences of injustice, and opportunities including supportive familial and external environment and, interestingly, times of conflict. The women interviewed employed multiple, overlapping strategies to pursue their aims. These ranged from rebellion (through defying family and institutional authority, overturning societal norms, manifesting resilience during war and conflict) to negotiation and compromise. Throughout our participants' lives, obstacles – both as motivators and as outcomes – continually resurfaced. These obstacles included: chauvinistic responses and societal/religious opposition, gossip, harassment, threats and violence, and the balancing of multiple burdens. Sacrifice and loss, including emotional hardships and hurtful decisions, the loss of children, and isolation due to familial and societal rejection, were the price paid by many of our respondents during their journeys. All of our participants, however, experienced a fusion of gains and achievements from their struggles. Gains, which represent further growth and the possibility of further success, included strength and self-reliance and opening new perspectives. Achievements, indicated by an advantageous shift in power relations, enabled our respondents to make independent strategic life choices.

The findings in this study offer a glimpse of the experiences of women who choose to become active agents under conditions of gender inequality, and proceed to change the course of their lives. In the context of Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory – situations of human insecurity – their decisions are affected by the predominance of patriarchy and prolonged

conditions of occupation and civil conflict. Nevertheless, as is discussed in the report's analysis and concluding section, women, on a daily basis, consciously and unconsciously mobilize intent, locate and use various pathways to defiance and begin a life-long process of change.

Introduction

Women's security in war and peace

The championing of human security – “the liberation of human beings from those intense, extensive, prolonged, and comprehensive threats to which their lives and freedom are vulnerable” (AHDR 2009, p. 23-24) – signaled the departure from a commodities-centric approach to development and progress. The understanding of security was broadened from that of the state to that of the individuals in each state, and their security from economic and physical wants and the provision of health, personal, political and community security became paramount (Ibid., p. 19). As such, indicators such as market growth and GDP no longer sufficed in isolation to determine a population's quality of life; rather human security entailed the prioritizing of a human rights-based approach to development and the pursuit of issues like equity and justice. The concept of human security, first raised in the international humanitarian community by UNDP in its 1994 Human Development Report: New Dimensions of Human Security, has been more recently broadened to incorporate the right to human security in times of war and in peace, with a growing discussion about determining the different needs which must be met to ensure human security at all times.

Nevertheless, the achievement of human security and development – in both war and peace – remains dependant on the empowerment of all of a society's members, including the vulnerable and minority populations, and those most frequently discriminated against. Human security, like human development, cannot be achieved without the full participation of women. This is particularly relevant in the Arab region, as shown in UNiFEM's *Progress of Arab Women*:

...the human security of women in Arab states is greatly compromised. Throughout the region, women fail to see the protection of their rights, the security of their freedoms, and recognition and support of their strengths and aspirations. ... To protect women's security, we need to recognize and address the exclusion they face in their daily lives which prevents them from achieving their goals, expressing their needs, fulfilling their social responsibilities and changing their world. (2004, p. 12)

As will be described below, Arab women's human rights are legally, institutionally and societally obstructed, they face inequalities in their access to and control over resources, and are disenfranchised from and under-represented in institutions of authority and decision-making positions. All of these obstacles are manifestations of patriarchy: In the Arab region, it is the all-pervasive impact of patriarchy that presents the greatest obstacle to the achievement human security and development.

The role of patriarchy

In her comprehensive review of writings on patriarchy in the Arab region, Inhorn presents patriarchy as:

... characterized by relations of power and authority of males over females, which are (1) learned through gender socialization within the family, where males wield power through the socially defined institution of fatherhood; (2) manifested in both inter- and intragender interactions within the family and in other interpersonal milieus; (3) legitimized through deeply engrained, pervasive ideologies of inherent male superiority; and (4) institutionalized on many societal levels (legal, political, economic, educational, religious, and so on). (1996, p. 3)

In the Arab region, the entrenched institutionalizing of gender discrimination and the societal resistance to dismantling patriarchal norms is understood best through the lens of “neopatriarchy.” First proposed by Hisham Sharabi in 1988, Sharabi argued that the Arab region’s “neopatriarchal society was the outcome of modern Europe’s colonization of the patriarchal Arab world, of the marriage of imperialism and patriarchy.” (1988, p.21) As described by Karam, neopatriarchy, then “is the mixture of both patriarchy and dependency, where the former is a feature of how power has consistently exercised and manifested itself internally, and the latter is the interaction with external forces - i.e. pressures that come with the pursuit of modernisation.” (2000, p. 10) Karam continued to explain that modernisation – or the growing presence of globalization in the Arab region – has in fact strengthened patriarchal beliefs and practices. (Ibid.) Moreover, as Arab countries freed themselves from colonial rule, the iconography of statehood reflected and perpetuated patriarchal norms. “The linkage of woman/mother to nation and man/father to state,” Hijab writes, “facilitated the institutionalisation of gendered citizenship in state-building projects.” (2003, p. 4)

In the Arab region, neopatriarchy’s “marriage of imperialism and patriarchy” creates a convolution of the issues, whereby opposing colonial systems is still often expressed by defending patriarchal practices, or where promoting women’s equal rights may be viewed as an imperial, or foreign, concern. In addition, a common response by Arab governments to this marriage of ills has been to separate personal status codes from the secularization of other legal codes, thereby preserving patriarchal practices within modernized legal systems. Moghadam argues that “the distinctive way in which MENA [Middle East and North African] countries have institutionalized gender discrimination, subjecting MENA women to legal forms of discrimination in addition to patriarchal attitudes and practices,” causes the Arab region to stand out from other regions in the extent of its gender discrimination (2007, p. 10). As such, the pervasive insinuation of gender discrimination into all aspects of life in the Arab region makes any resistance to patriarchal norms exceedingly difficult, as victories tend to occur in isolation and, rather than signaling a possible paradigm shift, are all too often mitigated by institutionalized discriminatory practices elsewhere in society.

Perhaps the most the serious impediment of women's equality from patriarchy, however, is the resultant rise of a fundamentalist understanding of Islam. Sharabi argues that the Arab Awakening – the region-wide intellectual and cultural response to the growing dominance of colonial powers in the 19th century – was in essence:

A cultural and social struggle between the two fundamental standpoints of secularism and Islam... Secularism (expressed in liberalism, nationalism, and socialism) and fundamentalism (articulated in reformist, conservative, and militant Islam) provided the Awakening's two basic 'regimes of truth', which went on to dominate the subsequent phases of neopatriarchal society ... In time only a radical fundamentalist view in the face not only of secularism but also reformist and established Islam, would be able to claim absolute validity, as it does today, as the interpreter of self, history and society. (1988, p. 9-10)

This orthodox interpretation of Islam in contemporary Arab society is most clearly expressed through the lack of secular personal status codes in most Arab countries. According to Inhorn, "Muslim personal status laws [are] one of the most glaring examples of the nexus between patriarchal ideology and practice in the Middle East... [including] legal restrictions and gendered inequalities in inheritance, marriage, divorce, child custody, and the ability of women to serve as witnesses." (1996, p.26)

Unfortunately, contemporary and mainstream portrayals of Arab society all too often limit their understanding of gender discrimination to that of an all-encompassing oppressive Islam universally oppressing all Arab women, without taking into account the roles played by factors like class, age and different cultures. The "gender oppression experienced by Middle Eastern women," writes Inhorn, "may have much less to do with Islamic ideology and practice per se than with social, cultural, and political-economic conditions that are often class-based and that cross the boundaries of religious sect." (1996, p. 32)

Inhorn identifies "overlapping sources of women's oppression" to include class, religion, race, ethnicity, nationality, etc. In societies where gender discrimination is already well entrenched, she writes, these additional differences between women can "radically separate" women from each other, most particularly the "cruel dynamic between patriarchy and class stratification under capitalism." (Ibid., p. 33) Despite the different ways that Arab women experience and resist gender discrimination, however, it remains "no secret that Arab women remain subject to domination, both spiritual and material, directly and indirectly. The degree and strength of this domination vary from one environment to the other depending on the stage of life through which the woman is passing..." (AHDR, 2005, p. 167-168)

Of course, this should not imply that Arab women, often supported by varied sectors of society, have not also resisted the multifaceted manifestations of patriarchy. From the writings of Palestinian May Ziade and the activism of Huda Shaarawi and the Egyptian Feminist Union in the early 1900's to the contemporary legal campaigns for Arab women's rights as equal citizens, Arab women have confronted patriarchy and gender discrimination across the region. However, despite the successes of the women's movement in the struggle against patriarchy, the road ahead remains long: normative and structural barriers across the region prevent women from achieving

their potential, and much of the challenges and changes wrought by the women's movement have not often led to substantive, transformatory change.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Women's human rights: An institutionalized lack of equality

1.1.1 Overall

There is a consensus among analysts, scholars and UN Agencies that the Arab region lags behind other regions in human development due to the structural obstacles created by the entrenchment of patriarchy within its societies and its public and private institutions. The societal and legal subordination of women is its most devastating manifestation, although Arab state structures also promote tribal and sectarian divisions among citizens and violate fundamental freedoms across the region.

There is also agreement that the proliferation of war and civil conflict in the region plays a significant role in hindering progress in Arab countries, most notably the continued occupation of the WBG and the invasion and occupation of Iraq, along with the states of insecurity in Sudan and Somalia. Occupation and domestic civil conflict intensify human rights violations, which in turn nourish a climate of extremism and sectarianism that will continue to impinge on human development for many years to come:

In the Arab region, human insecurity — pervasive, often intense and with consequences affecting large numbers of people — inhibits human development. It is revealed in the impacts of military occupation and armed conflict in Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and Occupied Palestinian Territory. It is found in countries that enjoy relative stability where the authoritarian state, buttressed by flawed constitutions and unjust laws, often denies citizens their rights. (ADHR, 2009, p.2)

The recurrent external military interventions, culminating in the invasion of Iraq and the continued Israeli occupation of Arab land, with the denial of self-determination and statehood for the Palestinian people, have often occurred in collusion with Arab governments and leaders. As Sharabi points out, this is a characteristic of modern Arab patriarchy that acquiesces to external domination and depends on such external influences to ensure its own survival. Arab countries also instrumentalize the absence of peace to justify authoritarian rule in the name of state security (AHDR 2009). As such, human security, a prerequisite for human development, is absent from the region; and women's security encounters hermetic obstructions where "conservative authorities, discriminatory laws, chauvinist male peers and tradition-minded kinsfolk watchfully regulate [women's] aspirations, activities and conduct." (AHDR 2005 p. III)

Thus if human development is to be constructed in the region, with threats to human security like violence, poverty, ill-health and environmental degradation reduced and eliminated, then the overriding pre-requisite for both human security and human development is the liberation of women from the burdens of patriarchal domination and discrimination.

1.1.2 Institutions and cultural norms

Patriarchy in the Arab world is rooted in the authoritarian social relations of kinship, clan, and religious and ethnic groups. Its central feature is the “dominance of the father (patriarch), the center around which the national as well as the natural family is organized. Thus between ruler and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations: in both settings the paternal will is absolute will, mediated in both the society and the family by a forced consensus based on ritual and coercion.” (Sharabi 1988 p.7) In this system it is generally accepted that the young obey the old, however women, whether young or old, are expected to obey men and the dictates of their family throughout their lives.

The clan and the tribe as essential refuges in political authoritarian structures, both historical and contemporary, continue to make their presence felt in relationships between the sexes. They also continue to place women in a complex construct that combines the social, religious and legal and that determines women’s role and fate. Their features are conspicuous in the Arabian Peninsula, in the countryside in Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, in North Africa, Somalia and Mauritania. (AHDR, 2005, p. 163)

This affects all aspects of women’s lives from the pursuit of education, to their choice in marriage, and their ability to work. It results in the devalorization of women within the family and society. The persistence of patriarchal structures in Arab society legitimizes women’s control by male members of the family and stigmatizes them when they break social rules, especially when they decide to divorce and often when they decide to stay in school or choose to become economically active.

1.2 Legal frameworks: Personal status laws, discriminatory civil laws

1.2.1 Constitutional Equality vs. Second-Class/Subnational Citizenship

Except for Saudi Arabia, the constitutions of most Arab countries guarantee equality for all citizens. Some countries have recently introduced amendments in their constitutions explicitly guaranteeing equality for women (Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, and Tunisia). In practice, however, women face discrimination through personal status codes or family laws that are under the jurisdiction of religious courts and that regulate marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance depending on sectarian affiliation, whether Muslim or Christian. Through these courts’ traditional patriarchal ideology, women are considered dependent on males:

Some scholars argue that laws regulating marriage, inheritance, and property are among the formal means through which the [Arab] nations define and maintain their economic and therefore their political strength. Thus, legislations controlled and protected the productive and reproductive outcomes of women and not women themselves in order to benefit the community and male members in the family. (UNIFEM, 2004, p. 137)

The incorporation of religious codes in the judicial systems of Arab countries institutionalizes patriarchal relations and sanctions kinship control of women. Personal status codes enshrine the superiority of men over women. It requires husbands to support their wives economically in exchange for which wives are obligated to obedience of their husbands. In Islamic law, the husband has the right to dictate divorce and in many Arab countries the right to work and freedom of movement requires the approval of a husband, or a male relative for a single woman.

Furthermore, religious codes institutionalize inequality between women (and between citizens) belonging to different religions and different sects. Since most Arab constitutions adopt Islamic shari'a laws, with the exception of Lebanon, the status of non-Muslims lies outside the scrutiny of civil courts.

Middle Eastern states, thus, tend not to construct citizenship exclusively or primarily as individualized. Citizens, in various ways, are formally recognized as members of family units, religious sects, ethnic, tribal or other subnational groups. (Joseph, 2006, p. 7)

Within this patriarchal paradigm, discrimination against women in Arab countries is also replicated in civil laws pertaining to nationality, penal codes and employment. In most Arab states, women do not have the right to give citizenship to their children. If an Arab woman is married to a foreigner, their children are denied any kind of legal status or are given limited residency status. In Arab penal codes, men receive reduced penalties for honor crimes and adultery while women face much harsher punishment, which in some countries can signify a death sentence. With variances between countries, Arab labor laws can prohibit women from employment in some occupations and often discriminate against them in pensions and benefits.

Lebanon

In multi-sectarian Lebanon the absence of a unified civil law has meant that authority over personal status law is granted to 18 separate religious courts that regulate matters of birth, marriage, divorce; and child custody according to the codes of each sectarian group. Their shared foundation is patriarchy:

In addition to discriminating between women in Lebanon, dividing them into categories of different forms of violence against women, they all have a common factor. They all place women in a position of dependency and submission to man's will. They all regard the man as the absolute custodian over his children. After them, custody is transferred to their male relatives (father then brother...). (Committee for the Follow-Up on Women's Issues, 2007, p. 62)

Concern over the impact of Lebanese personal status codes has been strongly emphasized by the CEDAW Committee which has repeatedly recommended that the Lebanese government 'urgently adopt a unified personal status code which is in line with the Convention and would be applicable to all women in Lebanon, irrespective of their religion.' (Concluding Remarks of the Committee on CEDAW, 2008, p. 4)

Another salient characteristic of the Lebanese legal context is the denial of civil, social and economic rights for Palestinian refugees especially the right to work and the right to own property. Lebanese intransigence is exemplified by the failure to address the situation of Palestinian refugee women in its three country reports presented to the CEDAW committee. Palestinian women living in Lebanon thus confront multiple prejudices, gender discrimination, as well as discrimination as refugees and as stateless persons. The Lebanese authorities believe that any amelioration of the legal situation of Palestinian refugees will lead to their permanent settlement in Lebanon, a matter which would, in their view, affect the sectarian balance in the country. The same justification is used to continue denying Lebanese women the right to pass their nationality on foreign husbands and their children. (Committee for the Follow-Up on Women's Issues, 2007, p. 7)

Palestine

Like most Arab constitutions, The Palestinian Basic Law which acts as a temporary constitution upholds the principle of equality for all and prohibits discrimination. Article 9 guarantees that 'Palestinians shall be equal before the law and the judiciary, without distinction based upon race, sex, color, religion, political views or disability' but this is undermined by, Article 4 which stipulates that 'the principles of Islamic *Shari'a* shall be a principal source of legislation.' (Palestinian Basic Law) But the legal framework that affects women's status is far more complex than in any other Arab country because the Occupied Palestinian Territory is controlled by four legal systems: Israel (occupying force), the Palestinian Authority (interim government), Jordan (in the West Bank) and Egypt (in the Gaza Strip) with Palestinian legislation under Israeli control including nationality, residency status and visit permits as per the Oslo Agreement of 1993 (Hijab 2003). In 2002 for instance, Israel unilaterally froze the agreed upon application process for family reunification between Israeli citizens and residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This was subsequently followed by the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law in 2003 which prohibits Palestinians married to Israeli citizens from obtaining Israeli citizenship or residency. The measure has separated at least 25,000 families many with spouses from East Jerusalem. (Freedom House, 2010, p.363)

Women's citizenship rights are further undermined by the patriarchal nationality codes of Jordan and Egypt, whereby only men can pass on nationality to children and Palestinian women married to foreigners lose their nationality, except by special dispensation from the authorities. (Freedom House, 2010, p. 363)

1.2.2 State reluctance to eliminate legal discrimination

CEDAW is based on three principles, equality, non-discrimination and state obligations. (IWRAW) Between 1981 and 2009, 19 out of 22 Arab countries ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The countries that have so far desisted are Qatar, Somalia and Sudan. (AHDR 2009) The OPT acceded to the convention but as a non-state actor does not report to the CEDAW committee. Sixteen Arab countries expressed reservations on a number of specific articles, namely Articles 2, 9, 15, 16 and 29, while the Comoros, Djibouti and recently Morocco did not table any reservations.

Arab states recognize the existence of discrimination and accept its definition in CEDAW Article 1:

... any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

However, eight countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Qatar, Syria and UAE) have lodged reservations on Article 2, which condemns discrimination and obligates the state to enact policies of nondiscrimination and to stipulate equality before the law in national constitutions and legislations. Thus a good number of Arab countries have acknowledged gender discrimination and inequality only in principle.

As a result most Arab states have chosen to be selective in enacting measures to eliminate discrimination through reservations in three areas: nationality (Article 9), equality before the law (Article 15), marriage and family relationships (Article 16). These reservations are extensive: reservations on Article 9 are expressed by 14 Arab countries as it pertains to the right of women to grant nationality to their children; Article 15, on women's legal equality with men in civil matters, has earned reservations from nine Arab countries; and 14 Arab countries lodged reservations on Article 16 dealing with family law. Although most Arab countries justify their reservations based on shari'a law, only Article 16 is directly related to religious law while the others pertain to existing civil laws

Arab legislators generally rest their justification of men's superiority over women in marital relations on the premise that men are in an economically stronger position than women and are therefore obliged to support their wives and children. It was this premise that led some Arab States to enter reservations to Article 16 of CEDAW, which provides for equality of men and women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations. (AHDR, 2005, p. 191)

It is clear that in practice most Arab countries are unwilling to prevent and prohibit gender discrimination. This contradiction was noted in 1981 by the CEDAW committee which called on Arab states to withdraw their reservations on Articles 2 and 16, since they are "central to the object and purpose of the Convention and that, in accordance with Article 28, paragraph 2, these reservations should be withdrawn. Article 28, paragraph 2 states that: "a reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted." (United Nations Treaty Series [CEDAW] 1981: 13; UNiFEM, 2004, p. 2)

The majority of Arab countries (13) are also unwilling to be held fully accountable to the CEDAW convention through reservations on Article 29, which concerns the settling of disputes by arbitration or the International Court of Justice. Thus Arab countries are disinclined to enact radical legal reforms and by so doing undermine the core CEDAW principles of equality and nondiscrimination.

....careful assessment of the reservations pushes to the forefront that Arab countries are not against core CEDAW principles, but are instead quite reluctant to commit themselves to changing specific articles in their laws. In particular Article 16 captures substantial resistance in Arab countries as it relates to the rights of men and women within the family. The other reservations entered provide a 'shield' against these states having to adopt and/or implement any of the articles that the country interprets to be against Islamic shari'a. (UNiFEM, 2004, p. 2)

Over and above CEDAW reservations, there has been slow progress in the last 29 years, since the first CEDAW ratification by Egypt in 1981 and the last by Qatar in 2009. This long and arduous trajectory has brought some relative but insufficient improvements for women in the region. It has been spurred by cumulative and determined action from women's rights organizations and feminists across the region.

The greatest gains were achieved in the areas of employment, education, and political representation. More women today hold jobs, are literate, and enroll in areas of study previously deemed inappropriate for them than five years ago. Women's rights organizations are becoming more vocal and better organized, and women are increasing their representation in elected government bodies, albeit with the help of quota systems. (Freedom House, 2010, p. 4-5)

1.3 Gender inequality in control over resources

1.3.1 Education

Women in the Arab region have progressed most in education, although traditional roles continue to affect them and gender gaps remain significant in the areas of literacy and secondary education. In addition, fields of specialization chosen by women at University or in Vocational Training are markedly out of tune with the job market and indicate that employability is still considered a male prerogative:

Discrepancies in the gender dimension of education become wider in vocational and technical education, where the rate of female enrolment is less than half that of male enrolment (UNESCO, 2002). This type of education generally tends to confirm the prevailing traditional division of the sexes in society, as girls generally move towards service-oriented professions, such as secretarial work, nursing or work as beauticians, whereas boys gravitate towards industrial, agricultural or vocational education. (AHDR, 2005, p. 78)

Although it is estimated that women's literacy has increased three fold over the last 3 to 4 decades, illiteracy rates in the Arab region remain among the highest in the world (60 million - 40% of all adults) and the majority are women (AHDR 2002). According to UNiFEM (2004) women aged 15 and above are 'twice as likely to be illiterate than men'. ESCWA and UNESCO statistics for 2005 indicate that two thirds of adult illiteracy in the region is female and that half of the adult female population is illiterate (44 million) of whom 20% are youths. In total, only 59.4% of the female population over the age of 15 in the Arab region is literate. (AHDR 2009)

In primary education female enrollment ranges from 75% to 85% in the majority of Arab countries with the exception of Djibouti, Sudan and Yemen where enrollment is less than 50%. These national statistics however indicate that girls in rural areas remain highly disadvantaged in terms of gender parity at school (UNIFEM 2004). Female enrollment in secondary schools is lower than 80% in most Arab countries (AHDR 2005) and a World Bank 2004 report indicates that less than one third of girls actually complete their secondary education (UNIFEM 2004).

As for tertiary education, much progress has been reported with 12 Arab countries reaching gender parity (Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Oman, Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia). However, available data does not include students studying abroad (AHDR 2005) a matter which may be skewed in favor of men considering the high economic investment that this entails from a family. In addition, as in secondary education there is a gap between women's enrollment and completion rates at the tertiary level, with two fifths of females leaving university before graduation according to World Bank data (UNIFEM 2004).

1.3.2 Access to health care

Women's health in the Arab region varies greatly between and within countries, with unacceptably low standards of health care and health outcomes in the region's least developed countries and those in conflict – including Sudan, Yemen and Iraq (AHDR 2005). Moreover, even in the region's wealthier countries, where some aspects of women's health are similar to those in European countries, women's access to health services in the rural areas and for migrant and minority groups is still far too limited.

Maternal mortality, a key component of Millennium Development Goal 5 and a clear indicator of the quality and accessibility of health care for women, is extremely varied in the Arab region. According to WHO figures from the 2009 AHDR, and adjusted for input from UN agencies, the Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) per 100,000 live births ranges from a high of 820 for Mauritania to Kuwait's 4 (it should be noted that the average MMR for Scandinavian countries is 2). More than half of the Arab region has a MMR over 100, and even for the rich Gulf Cooperation Council countries, their MMR rates "remain relatively higher than countries with comparable commands over economic resources." (UNIFEM, 2004, p. 39) MMR was seen to sharply increase in Iraq following the 2003 invasion, has remained very high in conflict-ridden Southern Sudan, and is suspected of being high in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, (although no figures are available), due to the obstructions to freedom of movement by Israeli Army checkpoints (AHDR, 2009, p. 149-151).

In its enumeration of the types of violence women encounter in the Arab world, the 2009 Arab Human Development Report highlights "health violence" as occurring when society or families are:

Forcing a woman to live in unsuitable conditions, denying her adequate health care and ignoring her reproductive health needs by failing to regulate pregnancy periods and limit the number of births can destroy her health and shorten her life. In the Arab and Islamic culture, people tend to have many children. The

consequences of this for women may not constitute intentional violence but rather illustrate how cultural and social heritage can be harmful to them. (AHDR 2009, p. 78)

Although teen pregnancy – due to early marriage – is decreasing across the region, “many women continue to have little control over pregnancy...[and] a large proportion of women have six or more live births, and short spacing between successive births remains prevalent.” (UNIFEM, 2004, p. 55) Abortion is not legally accessible in almost all Arab countries, and the unmet need for modern forms of birth contraceptives is also relatively high. (PRB 2010)

Life expectancy in the region also demonstrates the impact of unequal access to healthcare and the extra burden women bear due to childbearing. In the G8 countries and Scandinavia women on average live eight years longer than men. In the Arab region, according to the Population Reference Bureau’s 2010 World Population Data Sheet, women live only four years longer or less in 90% of Arab countries (PRB, 2010).

Finally, access to information related to women’s sexual and reproductive health – in particular targeting adolescents girls, who represent a very vulnerable component of the population – is heavily sanctioned by Arab governments, and regarded in most societies as highly taboo. (PRB, 2007, p. 2) Without access to this key information, Arab women are at higher risk of catching sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS, where the majority of infections occur within marital relations. (AHDR, 2009, p. 14)

1.3.3 Economic disparity: Feminization of poverty, salary differentials

Because of slow economic growth in the Arab region compounded by a range of structural difficulties, living standards have been declining, unemployment is on the increase and it is estimated that 68 million persons are living in poverty. (UNIFEM 2004, AHDR 2009) Data on poverty levels of women in the Arab world are scarce, however their vulnerability is best exemplified by low participation in the labor force, high rates of unemployment and by the wage and benefit differential between men and women.

Despite the narrowing of gender gaps in education, not only do women have to compete with men in a shrinking job market, but they are disadvantaged by pervasive social norms which underrate women both in the home and in the work place:

Gender norms play a role in ensuring that men have a greater claim on jobs than women. In addition, the effects of economic growth are gender differentiated as growth operates through various types of markets, through intra-family and intra-household resource distribution and through public spending. Each of these is subject to pervasive influence of social norms regarding the roles and rights of women. (Kuttab & Johnson, 2007, p. 19)

In the Arab region, the participation of women in the labor force is estimated at 28 to 33% and is considered to be the lowest in the world, as compared to a global average of 55.6%. This is despite the fact that the proportion of working women in the region grew by 19% between 1990 and 2004, exceeding the growth rate of male employment as well as surpassing the global growth

average of 3.3 per cent for female economic participation. Nonetheless, women's participation increased slightly in the agricultural sector between 1997 and 2007 but declined in the industrial sector according to ILO data, signifying that rising work opportunities for women are more likely to be concentrated in underpaid seasonal jobs. Wage gaps with men are reported to range from 60 to 25 per cent depending on women's educational levels, although most labor laws require equal wages for men and women. (UNIFEM 2004; AHDR 2009) Discrimination in Arab labor laws lies in pensions and social security benefits: The recent Freedom House study on women in the MENA region indicates that few Arab countries have reformed their labor laws to give women equal access to social security:

... women face significant discrimination in laws regulating pension and similar benefits. In many countries, gender plays an important role in determining the length of employment necessary to qualify, the eligible beneficiaries, and the conditions under which benefits are provided. Upon death, a female employee generally cannot pass her pension to her surviving spouse or children, whereas a male employee can, although female workers give up the same share of their salaries for such benefits as men. Moreover, men employed in the public sector are often eligible for special family and cost-of-living allowances, which are only available to a woman if her husband is dead or disabled. (Freedom House, 2010, p. 7)

Discrimination is best exemplified by the gender differential in female unemployment. More women than men are unemployed at 17.1 per cent and 10.6 per cent respectively (UNIFEM 2004). Among young women aged 15 to 25, especially the educated, unemployment rates are twice that of young men (AMDGR 2005). This is against a backdrop of economic decline in the region, with unemployment in 2005 reaching 14.4 per cent as compared to a global average of 6.3 per cent (AHDR 2009).

A tight job market, slow job creation and the spread of women's education, along with society's irrational preference that men should take what jobs there are, have combined to increase the unemployment of women, especially educated women... Arab countries are witness to an unfortunate phenomenon: an abundance of qualified female human capital suffering from above average rates of unemployment. (AHDR, 2005, p. 201)

Lebanon

Although Lebanese women are under-represented in the labor force, statistical data indicates that their participation is improving and has risen from 24% in 2004 to 27.4 % in 2008. Like other working females in the Arab region they earn on average one third of the income of men. The participation rate for Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon hovers around 16% due to restrictions on employment rights. Traditional social norms also impact on Palestinian women who stop working mainly for reasons of marriage and childrearing (PARELECO, 2008, p.54).

Discrimination in Lebanese Labor laws prevent married Lebanese women from claiming family allowance unless they are widowed. They are also denied fiscal reductions on income tax:

Although men and women are officially entitled to the same minimum wage, women's net income is lower than that of men because married women's wages are taxed as if they were unmarried, while married men or male heads of households are granted a tax break. (Freedom House, 2010, p. 266)

Resident Palestinian women (and men) who are working under an official work permit, cannot benefit from social security although these costs are deducted from their salaries. (Committee for the Follow-up, 2007, p. 38) However most Palestinian women do not have access to work permits and are forced to work in the informal sector at below average wages.

Palestine

Due to the economic policies of occupation and the siege of Gaza, the OPT has one of the highest poverty levels in the region. It is estimated that 50% of household in the West Banks and 70% of those in the Gaza Strip live below the poverty line (UNDP 2007) because of unemployment and declining wages. Reports indicate that men "are struggling with feelings of emasculation and disempowerment" (FAFO 2009) as a result women consider poverty as a major source of insecurity because it increases the incidence of domestic violence: Married women explained that when their husbands were unemployed and unable to provide for their family, the whole household suffered considerable stress. (DCAF, 2010, p. 2)

Because of poverty and high male unemployment, women's labor force participation in the OPT has doubled in the last decade (FAFO 2009), but it remains the lowest rate in the Arab region at 15.2% as compared to 25.4% in Jordan, 31% in Lebanon and 21.7% in Egypt. Social norms continue to prevent Palestinian women from seeking work. A poll conducted in 2009 indicated that 60% of respondents believed that men should seek a second job rather than allow their wives to work. Only a quarter reported that women had the right to work, while the remainder considered that women should work only as a last resort (PWRC, 2009, p.5-7).

1.4 Gender inequalities in power and decision-making

1.4.1 Classical power: Governmental representation, unions/workplace, politics

In the majority of Arab countries women obtained the right to vote and to stand for elections between the 1950s and the 1970s, but only a trickle of women have been elected or appointed to parliaments. In 2005, 12 Arab countries had women in parliament, with two digit proportions only in five countries ranging from 31.6% in Iraq and 22.8% in Tunisia to 12% and 10.8% in Syria and Morocco respectively. The adoption of the quota system has increased (and sometimes doubled) the number of women parliamentarians in Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and Iraq. The appointment of women at ministerial levels remains nominal, with thirteen Arab countries claiming cabinet membership of a woman (rarely more than one), to a usually secondary ministerial post. (AHDR 2005, p. 309)

Until recently, women have been reluctant to engage in politics or run for elections despite the recent experiences in Iraq and OPT. Evidence suggests that this is due to lack of safety and security. Over and above patriarchal cultural factors – including male-dominated political parties – women are deterred by the prevailing undemocratic environment, the lack of resources and the lack of proper skills. They also have to contend with many obstacles during elections; often their votes are decided by male members of the family and there is increasing incidence of violence during elections. For women candidates and politicians, the hazards of harassment are frequent:

Women politicians are often the object of defamation, accusations of impropriety and scandalous rumors that destroy their public image. In a culture that holds honor, particularly that of women, in the highest regard, these tactics ensure that the public trust and faith in women candidates is eroded. (UNIFEM, 2004, p. 284)

In Lebanon, the sectarian system has prevented the adoption of a quota system in electoral law under the pretext that such a measure will upset confessional representation in parliament. As a result, the number of female candidates running for parliament dropped from 18 in 2000 to 14 in 2005 constituting only 3% of total candidates. (CEDAW 2006) Out of 123 seats, six women were elected to parliament in 2005 but the number dropped to four after the 2009 elections mainly because two female parliamentarians, in true feudal form, gave up their seats for their sons:

Prevailing patriarchal views on gender roles, reinforced by the blending of political and religious identity, discourage female political participation, and women have difficulty matching the financial resources of male incumbents during electoral campaigns. (Freedom House, 2010, p. 270)

On the other hand the quota system was adopted in Occupied Palestinian Territory and the elections held in 2006 doubled the proportion of women in the Palestinian Legislative Council from %5.7% to 12.9%. Women were even more effective in the first and second round of municipal elections held in 2004 and 2005. They gained 18% of seats with only 62 out of 165 succeeding because of the quota system (Freedom House, p. 366 and 380). This is viewed by most activists as a positive development since the quota system in the PLC, with most seats gained through the traditional mainstream parties could not generate gender sensitive legislation, due to the conservative ideological stance of most female members.

1.4.2 Violence against women

CEDAW defines gender-based violence as "any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (United Nations 1995: 15). It can be perpetrated within the family, within the community and by the state, including an occupying and invading power. In all situations, it is caused by normative and institutional denial of fundamental human rights, inequality, oppression and discrimination as well as by impunity and the absence of legal and social protection mechanisms

As documented in the 2005 and 2009 Arab Human Development Reports, violence against women in all forms is widespread in the Arab region, as it is in most parts of the world. Also, and as is common in much of the world, incidences of violence against women are drastically under-reported and under-researched. Moreover, “in societies where women are still bound by patriarchal patterns of kinship, legalized discrimination, social subordination and ingrained male dominance, women are continuously exposed to forms of family and institutionalized violence.” (AHDR, 2009, p. 78) In the Arab region, as this report has summarized, it is the extent to which discrimination against women is legally and socially institutionalized that enables the perpetuation of violence against women.

Depending on a variety of factors, different Arab women may be subjected to different types of violence at different points in their lives. Young women may suffer physical or sexual abuse in the family home or from their employers. The majority of girls in Djibouti, Egypt, Mauritania, Northern Sudan, Somalia, and Yemen – as well as in other African countries – continue to undergo some form of Female Genital Cutting. Early marriage – when the bride or groom is under the age of 18 – ranges from 3% of all women aged 20-24 in Algeria to as high as 45% of similarly aged women in Somalia. (ADHR, 2009, p81) Once legally adults, women in the Arab region face the institutionalized gender discrimination described above in terms of their access to health and education, their employability and their access to decision-making positions, all of which reduces women’s options and abilities to lead lives free from violence.

With most Arab countries still registering reservations on some clauses of CEDAW, the marriage laws and or personal status laws in some Arab countries allow for or perpetuate violence against women, with some laws resulting in “male guardianship” over their wives. Moreover, most Arab countries’ legal systems still offer reduced penalties for convictions of sexual assault/rape and those somehow linked to an “honor crime.” There are no reliable statistics for incidence of rape in the region, however the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women documented reports of gang rape in both Algeria and Saudi Arabia. Police brutality, including sexual assault against women, has been documented in Egypt and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (HRW 2008; AI 2005). In Lebanon, two studies by NGOs working on reducing violence against women documented that the Lebanese Penal Code “allows for the application of reduced penalties for crimes intended to ‘preserve honour.’ This provision has softened penalties for different forms of homicide targeting women, and has made committing crimes against them easier.” (AHDR, 2009, p. 85)

Female migrant workers in the Arab region, many of whom come from south-east Asia, are not accorded their rights as workers in many Arab countries and, lacking such protection, may be subjected to sexual assault and violence from their employers, as documented by the ILO (2004). The trafficking of women in and out of the Arab region is essentially undocumented, yet still constitutes a grave source of danger for the safety of women.

The safety of women worsens in countries undergoing occupation, war or some form of violent instability. American soldiers have been convicted of raping Iraqi women during the occupation (AHDR, 2009, p. 90) As described by the AHDR 2005, the Israeli occupation of Palestine directly increases the burden of violence faced by Palestinian women:

Occupation and the separation wall unevenly violate women's rights. Palestinian women are routinely harassed, intimidated and abused by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and gates. They are humiliated in front their families and subjected to sexual violence by both soldiers and settlers... Women prisoners are subjected to gender-based violence while subject to investigation and in detention. (p. 118)

Finally, although the use of rape against women and girls as a weapon of war was documented in the Arab region in both Sudan (Darfur) and Somalia by the UN in 2007 and 2008, very few of the perpetrators were brought to trial and, of those prosecuted, even fewer were subjected to serious punishments (ADHR, 2009, p. 90-91).

Lebanon

Human security in Lebanon is threatened by recurrent Israeli military aggression and internal civil strife. The regional political situation, particularly the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are inextricably linked to the domestic Lebanese situation with sectarian ramifications that tend to fragment internal civil harmony on a continuous basis. Palestinian refugee camps are particularly vulnerable to external encroachments as exemplified in 2007 by the destruction of Nahr El Bared refugee camp in the north of Lebanon resulting in the unresolved displacement of its population.

Gender based violence in Lebanese society occurs within the family, educational institutions and against domestic workers. Like most Arab countries women do not received sufficient protection against domestic violence and the penal code is lenient towards men who perpetrate crimes in the name of honor. Civil society organizations consider that efforts to reform of the penal code are obstructed by the sectarian political system:

Honor crimes and domestic violence against women and children and crimes against foreign labor persist in the absence of adequate legislative framework and protection. The relegation of family matters to the different religious courts is not helpful in this regard. The limited capacity of the state to enforce protection and its inability to claim a monopoly on the use of force in these spheres and others remain a source of concern. (NHDR, 2009, p. 28)

Palestine

The violence of the Israeli Occupation over the West Bank and Gaza manifests itself in a multitude of forms that permanently threaten human security in the OPT. Military aggression consistently violates the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of civilians in times of war. There is widespread abuse of personal freedoms especially the freedom of movement through 600 checkpoints and the Separation Wall built on the forcible expropriation of Palestinian land. These measures have fragmented the OPT divided cities, villages, streets and households with the West Bank 'dismembered into more than 240 districts isolated from one another' (AHDR 2005, p.43). Israel's military occupation has undermined the Palestinian economy and led to the sharp decline in living standards, as mentioned earlier. This is accompanied by an escalation of settler violence against the Palestinian population, including schoolgirls and teachers, in a bid to evacuate Palestinian property and land.

... The teachers and students of the school are attacked everyday during the school year from the settlers of Beit Hadasa. The settlers regularly throw stones, eggs and rubbish at the children and their teachers. The settlers swear at them and force them to stand at the checkpoint for many hours so that they are unable to reach their school on time. The girls and their teachers are harassed and abused by the Israeli soldiers (Affouneh, 2008, p. 38)

During the second Intifada in 2000- 2003 over 182 women and 497 children were killed by Israeli soldiers. Most women were caught in the crossfire on their way to and from work and/or because they were denied access to medical care (Kuttab 2004, p.4). Israel has also exploited patriarchal traditions to exclude women from the struggle against occupation by detaining women activists, harassing them sexually, threatening them with rape and defamation (Siniora 2001). These oppressive measures have been shown to affect young girls disproportionately with 58% reported to be suffering from severe trauma because they are expected to suffer silently (Affouneh, 2008, p. 32). Check points are a major source of threat and fear for most Palestinian girls and women where they experience humiliating practices that can range from delay to reach work or classes to sexual harassment and denial of passage with countless pregnant women being forced to give birth at checkpoints (DCAF, 2010, p. 20)

Palestinian security has deteriorated rapidly since 2000. More than 6000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military, with more than 1300 killed in the Gaza Strip during 22 days of aerial and ground attacks ending in January, 2009. ... Palestinians are tortured in prisons and humiliated at Israeli checkpoints. The separation wall and the checkpoints prevent access to work, family, sites of worship, and health-care facilities. Poverty rates have risen sharply, and almost half of Palestinians are dependent on food aid. Social cohesion, which has kept Palestinian society intact, including the health-care system, is now strained. More than US\$9 billion in international aid have not promoted development because Palestinians do not have basic security. (Batniji, 2009, p. 1133)

Violence has increased in Palestinian society. A recent study has shown that nearly a quarter of ever-married women have been exposed to physical violence from their husbands and two thirds cited psychological violence (FAFO 2007, p. 110). It should be mentioned that domestic violence is not prohibited by law in the OPT meaning that Palestinian women are unprotected when and if assaulted and must remain silent to avoid besmirching the reputation of the spouse or the family;

... Women and girls described Palestinian society's tacit acceptance of physical violence against them within the family circle as eliciting feelings of powerlessness. It is an unwritten rule that speaking out against this type of violence will cause more problems, as women and girls will likely be stigmatized by their families and by their communities. (DCAF, 2010, p. 31)

2. Rationale and Methodology

2.1 The search for transformatory change

As shown above, there is no shortage of interest and research into the ways which women are oppressed in the Arab world. Nor is there any doubt that Arab women do indeed come up against and confront patriarchal structures on a daily basis, both inside the home and as institutionalized in the public sphere. Gender inequality is institutionalized in the state and by religion; reinforced by structural factors like class, ethnicity and nationality; perpetuated through gender-based violence, discriminatory laws and unequal access to opportunities and services; exacerbated in times of conflict yet manifest in times of peace; and demonstrated through women's unequal participation in decision-making structures and roles of authority. Empirical, quantified proof is easily found in UN and NGO documentation, including UNIFEM's "The Progress of Arab Women" and in the UNDP's 2005 Arab Human Development Report "Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World."

However, there is much less research documenting the ways Arab women do challenge the patriarchal structures which perpetuate discrimination and inequality; In essence, women's empowerment, a prerequisite to confronting and challenging gender inequality, is both poorly understood and insufficiently researched. This lacuna is in large part due to the lack of a general agreement at the international level of how the process by which women become empowered and/or enact their empowerment is defined, understood, contextualized and, most crucially, replicated.

As such, in both the Arab region and internationally – although "women's empowerment" projects are a very common element of most UN agencies and international organization's development plans – women's empowerment has become diluted such that any development project which targets women as the main beneficiaries is automatically "empowering," regardless of its actual impact in terms of creating lasting change or challenging patriarchal norms. This is not to say that women – in and outside of the Arab region – have not defied and made progress against gender inequality, but rather, that the causes and motivations for such achievements are still poorly understood.

Moreover, the little research and documentation of when women do challenge patriarchal structures and the – infrequent, but not insignificant – achievements of women in the Arab region all too often focuses on women who come from positions of relative privilege, either in terms of their control over resources, access to education or political awareness (i.e., self-identified activists). This focus on a small percentage of aware and articulate women is also accompanied by a broader "reduced and universalized" understanding of the rest of "third world women" as disempowered and inarticulate (Kabeer, 1999, p. 459). As such, this dichotomy in research precludes investigations into how third world women themselves articulate and understand their choices (and lack thereof), as well as limits exploration into the multitude of strategies that women employ to realize their potential, the consequences of their choices, their awareness (or lack thereof) of alternative, viable choices, and the role of essentially un-empowering factors within the local context, like the importance of status within the family and community.

Through in-depth interviews and focus groups with a wide variety of women in Lebanon and Palestine, the research project “Building Dreams, Achieving Goals: Some Patterns of Defiance among Women in Palestine and Lebanon” seeks to initiate of process of remedying these research lacunae and misunderstandings.

This paper takes as its premise the understanding of empowerment as presented by Naila Kabeer in 1999: “Empowerment is gaining the ability to make [strategic life] choices, as such, it is a process of change” (p. 437). The exercising of choice entails resources, agency and achievement. Empowerment, then, is not manifest when a woman who already has the ability to choose or to challenge continues to do so, nor when the choice made perpetuates a system of gender inequality. Rather, empowerment is identifiable by its “transformatory significance,” or “the extent to which the choices made have the potential for challenging and destabilizing social inequalities” (Kabeer, p. 461).

This research project sought to explore the process by which women, consciously and unconsciously, enact transformative change in their daily lives. It is this paper’s contention that lasting change, transformative change that challenges patriarchal norms and structural factors of discrimination that oppress women, comes from the ground-up and is continuous. As such, this research was designed as an attempt to redress the imbalance of attention on “oppressed Arab women” and their few, privileged, exceptions by qualitative interviews with a wide variety of women in Lebanon and Palestine, the majority of whom do not come from places of privilege and are not self-identified activists.

As such, we sought to investigate ways in which women consciously and unconsciously resist patriarchal systems by challenging societal norms, through four categories of inquiry:

- What are the factors that encourage women to consciously or unconsciously resist patriarchy?
- How are women consciously and/or unconsciously resisting patriarchal norms and systems?
- What happens when women consciously and/or unconsciously resist patriarchy?
- What have these women learned from their experiences – what advice do they proffer?

2.2 Methodology

During August and September 2010, 54 women were interviewed, 38 in focus groups and 16 through in-depth interviews. There were 11 respondents from Palestine, either living in the West Bank or Gaza; of the remaining 43 participants living in Lebanon, 15 are Palestinian refugees and one is Syrian. Recognizing the non-universality of women’s experiences, emphasis was placed on ensuring geographic, age and religious diversity. In Lebanon, participants were located in and outside of Beirut, Tripoli and Saida, 14 of who were living in refugee camps. The youngest participant was 18 and the eldest 62, with the average age 35.5. Of the 55 respondents, 14 were Christian, and the remainder were Muslim.

As with all qualitative research, bias is inherent in the selection process, and our sampling process was purposive. Women were selected for inclusion based on their having challenged patriarchal norms in at least one of the following ways in their personal lives: Pursuit of higher education;

Employed or self-employed; Married cross-religion or nationality; and Initiation of divorce (often from an early marriage). One focus group was also held with women who are actively seeking to redress domestic violence, and there were seven interviews with self-identified activists. Of the women living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), at least three were political prisoners in Israeli jails. Particular emphasis was placed on gaining participants who do not come from places of privilege: only half of the participants had completed high school or entered university, and two-thirds are living in a situation of economic hardship. Thirteen were divorced or separated, and 30 were employed or self-employed. Many of our respondents faced multiple structural obstacles, for example a Palestinian refugee in Lebanon living in a refugee camp divorced from an early marriage with an intermediate education (poverty, non-nationality, under-educated).

It is important to note, however, that the process of identifying respondents in Lebanon – through local NGOs active in women's empowerment (like awareness-raising work and vocational training) – may have also contributed bias to our findings. Much as we sought to identify women who are not in places of privilege and thus not, for example, running or employed in NGOs, nor holders of positions of authority (like high ranking jobs or academia), the majority of the women we interviewed had already initiated some process of gender discrimination awareness by their very involvement with a progressive NGO.

The selection process in Palestine differed slightly, in that only in-depth interviews were held, and women were interviewed within the following categories: Initiation of divorce (including from early marriage); Married cross religion; Employed; and Former political prisoner.

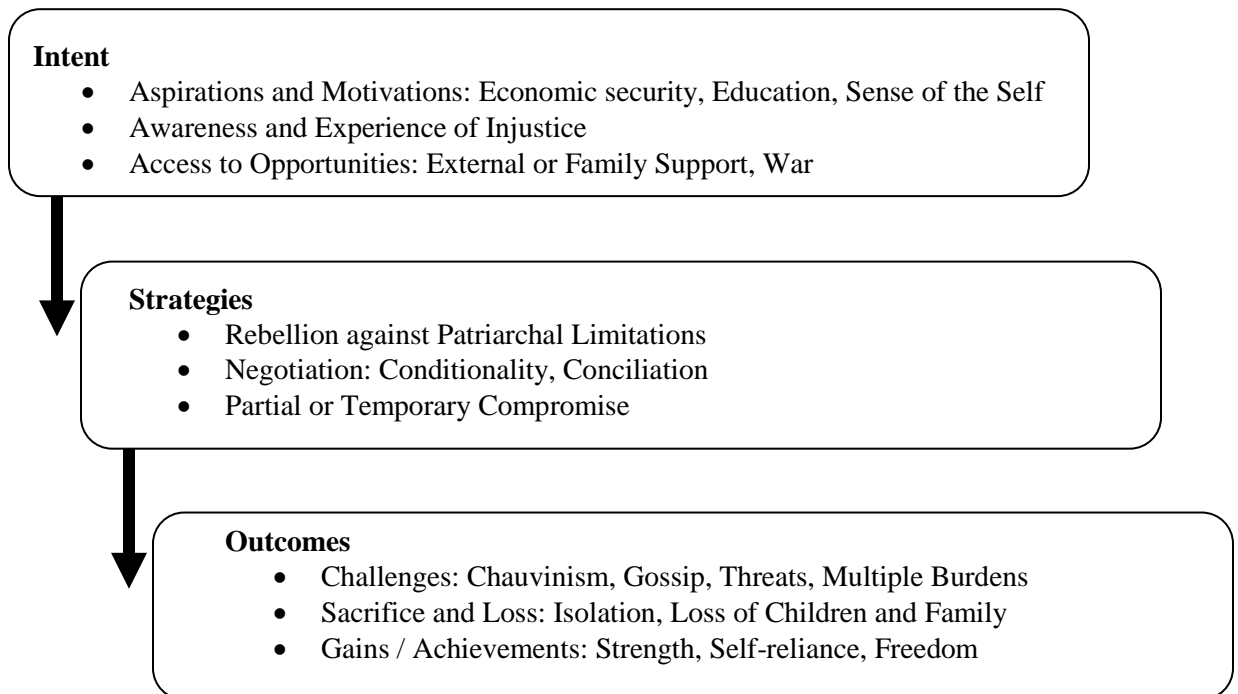
Given the wide variety of participants, the research questions also differed, both between the focus groups and the in-depth interviews, but also between the different categories of focus groups (working women versus pursuit of education). Four different women from different backgrounds undertook the research, with the majority of the focus groups and in-depth interviews held in NGO centers, and some interviews held at the women's houses. Prior to a focus group or interview, the purpose of the research and the participants' anonymity and freedom to answer/not answer/leave the research was explained. Oral consent was requested before beginning the questions. All participants' names were changed. Following the pilot focus groups and interviews, all research was recorded – again, after garnering the participants' consent. All research was undertaken in Arabic. Focus groups and interviews held in Lebanon were translated and transcribed in English, and interviews in Palestine were transcribed in Arabic. The majority of the focus groups and in-depth interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

Particular thanks is given to the Najdeh Association, RDFL, Mouvement Social and KAFA in Lebanon for their significant support in locating and gathering participants. Even greater thanks is given to the 54 women of this research project, whose strength and daring shone throughout the research process, and whose trust and willingness to share their experiences ensured that this research project provides an under-reported portrayal of how women resist gender discrimination.

3. Results

The findings in this study offer a glimpse of the experiences of women who choose to become active agents under conditions of gender inequality and proceed to change the course of their lives. In the context of Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, their decisions are affected by the predominance of patriarchy and prolonged conditions of occupation and civil conflict. Their voices, often addressing other women, relate an array of personal accounts about oppression, defiance and success. Normative and structural barriers are expressed both as motivators for challenging the status quo and as repercussions to choices made and action taken, albeit in different forms and at different levels. Their perceived accomplishments and articulation thereof reflect varying manifestations and different degrees of agency and empowerment. Through their gains and their suggestions to other women, they also offer pointers on priorities for feminist action and feminist investigation.

Summary of findings



3.1 What are the factors that encourage women to consciously or unconsciously resist patriarchy?

A variety of factors were identified as either aspirations and motivations to resist patriarchal norms, awareness and values leading to a rejection of societal expectations and demands, or opportunities encouraging a decision or action to reject patriarchal standards.

3.1.1 Aspirations, motivations

The many kinds of aspirations and motivators ranged widely, including the pursuit of economic security and/or education and the belief in protection and self-realization, to the broader forces of sheer ambition.

a) Economic security

For many women who were working (often against the wishes of their families and/or husbands), the motivation of economic gain was linked with the aspiration of building the self. Saeda, who has her own beauty salon in the ruins of the Palestinian refugee camp Nahr el Bared, explained her motivation for working as two-fold: “First of all, on the financial level, a woman needs to be able to spend on herself. Secondly, on the psychological level, she has to become an entity, to have a personality and to be able to do something in this society.”

Other women viewed their employment as a means to secure their and their family’s economic security. A Lebanese woman in Bourj Hammoud said that, “my husband stayed without work for a long time. Either I left him and destroyed my home or I worked and built my home. No, I decided to build my home and help him and bring up my children.” Another Lebanese woman who runs a small supermarket recounted how she “opened the store and they would tell me: ‘This is men’s work. What do you want with it?’ . I wanted to do something that would support my husband and support my children.”

For other women, their entrance into the work force was an act of resistance to war and occupation. “These days require that a woman take up work like a man,” explained a Palestinian entrepreneur living in Beddawi, referencing the destruction of the Nahr el Bared camp. “My husband became ill when we [returned to Nahr el Bared],” said another Palestinian woman. “He is unable to work at all. I stood up a like man – I am obliged to stand up.”

b) Pursuit of education

The pursuit of education, (again, often in defiance of familial objections), was a motivator as a means to economic security and the creation of better options, as well as a tool for aspirations like self-improvement. There was a common understanding that an education “protects a woman’s rights.” A young Lebanese student living Tripoli explained that she was studying because she would “like to become something, to arrive as a member of society.”

Rawan, in the WB/G, began working and pursuing her education after her marriage. “My father took me out of school when I really wanted to continue studying and had been clever at school,” she described. “Then I married and had children, but I always wanted to go back to school and every year I would ask my [relatives] if they would help me go back to school and they would say, “forget about it.” Rawan prevailed, however, and is now majoring in Business Administration.

Khadija, a Palestinian living in Bourj al Barajneh camp currently studying business, pointed out that a woman “can’t work in a respectable place ... unless she has a university degree.” Education was often linked to expanding opportunities. “I would like to have a good job and to advance to an important position...” said another Palestinian woman, “I would like to travel to a European country where you feel you can obtain your rights.”

Although education was cited as a means to better raise children and strengthen the family, it was also viewed as an integral component to self-awareness. According to a long-time Lebanese political activist, “every woman should go towards the whole woman,” through education and political engagement. Similarly, as Palestinian university students said: “We all want to get out of the circle of house cleaning and to show people that we, as Palestinians, are capable.”

c) Self-protection

Other motivations stemmed from the need for self-protection, often the escape from an abusive relationship or oppressive family. Raghida, a Palestinian from Shatila, initiated her divorce a few years after her early marriage to a Lebanese man, and now runs a small beauty salon. She viewed her experience as one common to many women: “Wallah, Women are not comfortable in their own homes. Women are not safe... There’s beatings, and shouting and economic pressure and violence. Even emotional violence. My mother raised me to never put up with these things, so when my husband did this, I directly left him.” Another Lebanese woman, who also initiated her divorce from an early marriage, explained her motivation to leave as: “What happened was that the things I had to deal with were increasing. They got worse and worse... So I started talking to my mother. She would say “wait a while, maybe it will change.” But when I would be quiet, and not say anything, he would just do more. So I learned that I shouldn’t be quiet.”

Nadine, a Lebanese woman married to a Palestinian man many years her senior, used her marriage as an escape: “My family was sacrificing me. I used to eat poison. I tried to commit suicide... My family upset me very much... Now, every day, I say I’m so lucky I live with my husband... I never knew how bad it was [living with my family] until I left.”

d) Ambition

A desire to achieve something, however, was also a source of motivations to challenge patriarchal norms. Selma, a Palestinian woman married to a Lebanese man explained that, “Girls that grow up in the camps gain stronger personalities. And because of all the difficulties she’ll have to sustain in the camps, she’ll become more capable, stronger. She’ll be more daring and more ambitious... Because Palestinians only have the weapons of their education, and their daring. So that’s what will motivate them.”

Nidal, a long-time Lebanese activist described her motivation in pursuing a seat in local government as part of a greater struggle: “I had to struggle, of course, but I am not unique. I thought that this [municipality] was very important. You open a door for the woman in the municipality.”

3.1.2 Experiences of injustice: Awareness, values, defiance

For many women, their ability to challenge patriarchal norms is in part linked to a sense of self, including: an awareness of and a resistance to discrimination and normative expectations; a belief in her own abilities (often superior to men’s) and those of other women; and a drive for defiance and resistance, including during war and occupation. In particular, double-standards, discrimination, domestic and familial violence created an awareness of injustice, along with a understanding of state and institutional oppression, which led to the conviction of women’s equality and/or superior capabilities – in particular during times of conflict and insecurity.

a) Double standards

From the majority of women interviewed, (with some notable exceptions), there was a clear articulation of society's double-standards and the structural factors which reinforce patriarchal systems. Hanan, a Lebanese survivor of domestic violence, said starkly, "We have a masculine society. The attitude of the man towards the woman is either for pleasure or she is undermined and exploited..." Zeinab, in WB/G, is a long-time political activist. According to her, "An awareness of the extent of the unacceptable discrimination around you leads you to a state of permanent resistance, which can help you enact change [and] build your self confidence..."

Bernadette, a divorced Lebanese schoolteacher, explained that she has "a high *intifada* against norms and traditions. A woman is not supposed to live like her mother... I don't like to be captive to norms or the captive of a man." Ola, a young Lebanese student in Tripoli, stated that, "I am for getting out of this male dominated society... we have much potential that we have not yet revealed."

b) Violence

Some women faced, and learned to resist, familial discrimination and violence. In describing her life's journey, a Lebanese survivor of domestic violence explained that, "In my life I collided with my environment... there was a preference for the boys over the girls... I became resentful because of my parents because of their preference. I built myself."

Nadine, a Lebanese woman married to a Palestinian man many years her senior, described her decision to leave home and her repressive family: "It suddenly came upon me. I was so fed up. They [her family] had made me ignorant, they kept me in darkness! I lived under a siege – it was forbidden to go out, to breathe, to come, to go."

Dania, who initiated her divorce from an early marriage, explained that she slowly developed an awareness of, and eventual resistance to, her husband's abusive behaviors. "I was young, and I didn't know and I wouldn't talk and I wouldn't know what to do. I would stay all the time silent. But then, when I started to be more aware, as I got older, I started wondering why these things are happening to me."

c) Societal oppression

Manal, a Lebanese woman who works cleaning houses, justified her decision to start working: "Where is my right as a woman in the house, with the responsibilities of a mother? ... He [her husband] talks about his honor when I want to work. What is honor if we can't live in dignity?"

Many women also identified the role of the state and religious institutions as tools of oppression, which they continually resist. For Nadine, who stopped covering her hair when she left her family, "What separates women from men is religion. From the religious side of things there is discrimination... If God made you beautiful, why should you cover yourself... If God wanted us to stay covered, he would have covered us before we were born."

d) Institutional oppression

Raghida, a Palestinian, initiated her divorce from her Lebanese husband, a process that took over two years and multiple lawyers. We asked if the divorce harder because she was a woman. "Of

course!” she replied. “The courts are against us. I mean, they’re better than they used to be... but they don’t give us all our rights.”

When Sahar’s husband kidnapped their children, she discovered that: “The law gives me nothing because I am from another sect according to personal status laws, imagine! I don’t have a right to my children or anything. Is this a law? You tell yourself that maybe there is a law that can protect you. Then you are shocked to find that the law raises obstacles before you. Then follows the struggle: in which way are you going to resist and defy?”

e) Women’s equality

For some of our participants, a sense of self was connected to a belief in their own abilities, and those of other women. Hind is young and single, from Tripoli. She explained, “I am from a family that runs for elections and belongs to political parties. I have the objective of continuing... I think, ‘Why should I not become Prime Minister?’ Why should we put it in our heads that a woman should become a nurse for example? Why should I put limits in my mind?”

Nora, a Lebanese Christian married to Palestinian Sunni living in the Beddawi refugee camp, credits her will power to her personality, and her experiences. “I’m stubborn. What I want to happen ... has to happen – and happen properly. ... I had to work to go to university. I had to carry pails of milk to pay for the transportation to university. I had the determination. And I knew that just because my father wasn’t a doctor or an engineer that didn’t mean I couldn’t achieve something.”

f) Women’s superior capabilities

There was also an understanding among many women that they had to work on themselves in order to achieve their goals. A long-time Lebanese activist explained, “A woman has to work on herself to impose herself, this is what I believe. Nothing comes easily. For a woman it’s a continuous struggle... You have to be there to be present proving yourself – proving your, struggle not necessarily yourself.”

Once that process was begun, however, some of our participants found that they not only were as capable as men, but also surpassed them. Florance, a Palestinian who lives in the Beddawi refugee camp, currently runs a bakery. In her opinion, “a woman is more capable than a man to run a business. I’ve been divorced for more than ten years... I am working and spending on my children and I am carrying the burden as much as a man and even more.” Dunya, who runs her own handicraft business, explained that, “The woman has the capability. Because she is the one who is managing a house and a family and bearing responsibility, she can manage any small concern or store. Despite the difficulties and her tasks and her housework she can manage these things.”

g) Women during war and conflict

Still other women were driven to reject patriarchal understandings, and found motivation through defiance and resistance, including times of war and occupation.

Dania, who divorced her Lebanese husband after an early marriage, linked her perceptions to her childhood: “I remember, when I was getting older, I would wonder why there were more limitations and rules [for women].” This questioning strengthened her ability to question. “There

are [women] that will defend themselves,” she said, “and will be like, ‘No, we have a voice, we will speak up’ ... It’s good when a woman can defend herself, when she doesn’t put up with everything.” Dunya also credits her resistance her childhood. “My mother experienced repression, injustice. I don’t want to live like her. Maybe this was what gave me the resolve to be strong.”

Other women experienced direct opposition, which led to their resistance. A student from the Shatila Palestinian refugee camp, now studying business in university, described how, “When I reached the Brevet level, my father used to say that I wouldn’t make it. So I decided to challenge him”

And other women found the motivation to resist through circumstances of insecurity. “In situations of war,” explained a long time Lebanese activist, “a woman is alone in life, thrown aside and forgotten... This is when the woman begins to feel the need to defy.”

Describing life in post-conflict the Nahr el Bared Palestinian refugee camp, Saeda, who now runs a hairdressing salon, stated that a woman, “If she is in a bad situation and wants to develop herself, then she has to take a serious stand, to defy these issues and to work.” Building on this sentiment, Lina added, “I used to have a store before the Nahr el Bared *nakbeh* [catastrophe], and I re-established myself. I borrowed two hundred thousand [Lebanese Lira]. I used to have a big store. Now I have two stores, not one.” Fatmeh, also from Nahr el Bared, described how her situation required that she rise to the occasion to provide for her family, and she now runs a grocery store: “A woman succeeds more than a man in work – and circumstances have dictated that I become stronger than a man.”

3.1.3 Harnessing opportunities

People and circumstances – no matter how adverse – also helped encourage and motivate our participants in their rejection of patriarchal standards. Support came from parents and relatives, friends and neighbors, colleagues at work and school, and from NGOs. Interestingly, the conditions of war and occupation also led to women being more able to locate and harness opportunities.

a) Family support

Nawal is divorced, and pursuing her Master’s degree. She mentioned the positive role played by her parents and her ex-husband in helping her pursue this opportunity. “Frankly, my parents supported me a lot,” she said. “My mother takes care of my daughter, who is now in the *douzieme*, and she oversees her education. Even when I was still married my husband used to support me. He used to do all the housework when he came home.” Sherine, an under-graduate student in Tripoli, also acknowledged the role of her family: “I got support from my mom and dad because what they had not been able to achieve, they wanted me to reach. Their ambition feeds into yours through their dreams.”

Multi-generational support was also mentioned. Aziza, a Palestinian accounting student living in the Bourj al Barajneh refugee camp, recounted how, “My grandmother brought me up and she was insistent that I continue my education... She is the one who sent me to university and paid for me. The credit is hers.”

b) Supportive environment

The concept of a “supportive environment” – both in- and outside of the house – was also frequently cited as an important factor. Nadine, who left her abusive family by marrying a Palestinian man many years her senior, explained that a woman’s ability to challenge societal norms “depends on how she was raised, and what sort of environment she was raised in. The environment might forbid her from doing things, and if she obeys that, and stays behind, then she won’t be able to challenge things or do what she wants.”

Fatmeh, from the destroyed Nahr el Bared refugee camp, now runs her own grocery store. “Thank God I received support from the neighborhood,” she said, describing how “one woman comes over to shop from the *barraksat* [different neighborhood of temporary housing]. She says ‘May God break my leg if I should shop somewhere else. You take priority over everyone’.”

Khadija, from Bourj al Barajneh, is pursuing a business degree while working. She explained that “at work, they support me a lot and cover for me when I have to attend my courses.”

c) NGOs

NGOs and institutions, whether through direct interventions, training courses or emotional support, also helped create opportunities for many of the women we interviewed. Rosette is a survivor of domestic violence, and a member of KAFA, a Lebanese NGO dedicated to eradicating violence against women. “I have to mention the role of KAFA,” Rosette said. “The sessions and the meetings... I like to attend them because it opens a window onto other things.”

Awatef was abandoned by her family after she married someone from a different nationality and a different religion, and she described a long period of economic and emotional hardship. “I was supported by the [Mouvement Social],” she said. “They found me a house and furnished it and they found me a job... they erased the ideology that the man comes home and that you have to serve him. They taught me that you are free human being.”

d) Harnessing opportunity in times of war and occupation

Times of insecurity and war presented not only obstacles to women’s empowerment, but also opportunities to challenge patriarchal expectations. Nadine stated that, “Women have a very big role during wars. Very big. Our village was attacked for two years... we [women] would help shoot. We were fighters, too.”

Long-time Lebanese activist Nidal was socially active during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in the 1980s. “I stopped fearing the Israelis,” she remembered. “I used to defy them. I would go for example to [a NGO-run] kindergarten in [the occupied Palestinian camp of] Ein el Helweh. The [Lebanese collaborating militia] had occupied it. I went and confronted them and I stuck myself in the Municipality and brought them foreign journalists to embarrass them and pressure them to clear out of the kindergarten. I became very strong... I was much stronger under the occupation.”

Selma was too young during the Israeli invasions to have actually taken part. But she insisted that, “in the past, when we were fighting Israel, the Palestinian women would bring the men food, help with the weapons, some women even used weapons. Women worked! It wasn’t just ‘women’s work,’ they would fight with the men, they had to.”

Afaf, living in the WB/G, is a former political prisoner, and long time activist. “During occupation,” she explained, “the concept of protection, which is normally assigned to men, is shaken, and women leave the protection of men during the demonstrations, and the confrontations and in the resistance movements.” Najla, also an activist in WB/G and a former political prisoner, seconded this understanding. Resistance to the occupation helped led “women to depart from their traditional role,” she said, “and so going out to demonstrations became familiar and normal for girls and women in the camp.”

Dunya, who sells handicrafts from her home, described her role during the Israeli war of July 2006. “We filled the car and went to the [displaced] people in the schools, distributing whatever they needed water, clothing. I collected money from the young men. We bought bread, water, diapers. I couldn’t stand seeing the men playing cards: ‘You are playing cards while people are dying outside?’ I would gather them and go to the schools.”

3.2 How are women consciously and/or unconsciously resisting patriarchal norms and systems: The processes of decision-making

To reach their personal goals in the context of an environment fraught with varying levels of social and legal interdictions, frequently complicated by insecurity and war, interviewees have employed various strategies to exercise choice. They can be broadly divided into three areas: confrontation, negotiation and compromise.

3.2.1 Strategy 1: Rebellion / Confrontation

In overt defiance of family and institutional authority, more than half the women interviewed in Palestine and Lebanon had confronted families and institutions as well as defied predominant social norms to realize their objectives: the right to an education and to work, the right to enter freely into marriage, the right to repudiate discriminatory male practices in the household and in the work place as well as the right to act in accordance with their values and principles. Their posture in times of conflict and war reflect resilience as well as resistance.

a) Defying family authority

On marriage and divorce

Twenty-three interviewees described how they had challenged the authority of their families, especially husbands and fathers, sometimes more than once. The most frequent (12 women) being defiance of parental opposition in marital issues: the women’s choice of spouse and her decision to initiate divorce.

Mixed religion marriages represented the most radical violation of family rules both in Lebanon and Palestine but were not exclusive to them. Fadia, a Palestinian woman in the West Bank chose to marry a political activist, and was strongly opposed by her family both for exercising choice and for entering the realm of Palestinian resistance: “I married him despite my parents. It was my choice and I had rebelled against my parents.” Najla, 47, also from Palestine defied her family repeatedly over her marriage: “I entered a relationship for six year before marriage because of my parents’ opposition. I engaged in a bitter war with my father for my choice. I also

faced other difficulties with the family when my husband was detained [in Israel] for six years, as they attempted to make me move and live with them in his absence. I refused and I defended my independence to protect my children from interference and against return to the limitations that I had formerly overcome. I resisted the same debilitating social atmosphere when I was young and I resisted it as I grew older.”

In Lebanon Nora, a Christian Lebanese woman, fell in love with a Palestinian refugee. She was undeterred by class, national or religious differences or the inevitable hostility of her parents: “I wanted to marry someone Muslim. Someone Sunni., chou ismou, someone Palestinian. So you have to look: where am I, and where is he? Religion – they’re different. Nationality – they’re different. And he’s a refugee here. I’m a university student, he – the fourth grade he didn’t pass. I, I can know my goals. But it’s difficult for me to say that because I knew what I wanted and what I had to do to get there.”

Another Lebanese woman, Nadine, shackled by her family’s conservative attitudes and exploitation, decided to accept a marriage offer from an older man, an intellectual, who was embarking on his third marriage because she was drawn by his culture and learning: “They didn’t want me to marry, they wanted me to stay working and provide for them [gidloun]. So when I saw this guy, and I knew he was educated – and I love learning, a lot, and especially I knew he was from the city and I was desperate to escape this environment – I made up my mind. He saw me on a Saturday. We read the fati7a on that Tuesday. On Wednesday we did kitbil kitab. By that following Saturday, I had gone to his house!”

Among interviewees who initiated divorce there was expression of resolve to escape untenable domestic situations. Several were also rejecting their parents for forcing and convincing them to enter into early marriage. For all, the opposition of parents to divorce was an additional manifestation of unacceptable subjugation. As Bernadette, a Lebanese teacher from Beirut states: “I am a woman who initiated divorce. When my father came with me to the court, divorce proceedings stopped. I then told my father I don’t want you in court with me. I want to get divorced by myself. I placed my son in a nursery and took it upon myself to travel from Beirut to the extreme south and continue the divorce project and stand on my own feet, because I was suffering a lot in my life.”

Similarly Yasmine, a Shia woman from the south of Lebanon defied her father by launching divorce proceedings and accepted his rejection. She had been forced into an arranged marriage, and never received any parental support when her husband subjected her to constant violence and abuse: “My husband would not accept to divorce me and asked for twenty five million [Lebanese Liras]... My father was opposed to divorce. I got divorced despite them and I defied everyone. I became able to confront... [My father] refused to let me enter the house. I rented a room and a kitchen and raised my children.”

On the right to education and work

Another frequent arena of revolt against family (9 women) involves overturning bans on attending school and going to the work place. Afaf , 52, a Palestinian from the West Bank and a former prisoner in Israeli jails resumed her education soon after her release. She was opposed by

her family despite her ordeal but she rejected this parental interference: “I refused submission to any kind of pressure I refused pressure to stop me from continuing my education after return to my country (from Israeli prison). I refused to become a number among many others.”

As for engaging in work, from Gaza, Rima, 62 a successful business woman, who began working after marriage, describes the depth of her father’s traditional outlook: “My family is conservative. My father did not want me to work and it was a tragedy for him that I should start working and face men in my job.” From Lebanon Duniya, 50, the entrepreneur living in Beirut’s southern suburbs states: “For my husband work was forbidden, forbidden, forbidden. I didn’t listen to him.” Her husband did not want her to work because he knew that his father-in-law was opposed to it. And for Lina 35, a Palestinian entrepreneur from Nahr El Bared camp there was no choice but to disobey the family: “For me there was refusal from my family who did not think that a girl should go out and work although they were in need. But the strength of my will imposed itself.”

On values and principles

The choice to confront parental authority, most often husbands and fathers, for the freedom to learn, work and marry sometimes also involves a battle in defense of values and principles. As indicated by Nora, the Lebanese woman quoted above, her choice of a husband from a different community was both motivated by love and by the chance to merge cultures, nationalities and religions. In Palestine, Najla, 49, a political activist and former prisoner, affirms that she defied her father’s authority for her “independence in the face of those who were trying to confiscate my right for national engagement. My father burned my books to prevent me from reading and from [acquiring] freedom of thought. I was also forbidden to go out and there were constraints on my daily movement.” As for Fadia 41, another previous Palestinian prisoner, divorce signified that her freedom of thought was secured: “After divorce I was liberated from the fear of life. I was liberated from the idea of abandoning him in his prison. He sent me the divorce papers from prison although he is condemned with eight life sentences. He sent me instructions. He wanted me to abandon my principles because of the growing gap in our ideological positions. I decided to choose myself and my choice and my beliefs.”

b) Challenging institutional authority

Many women (9) recount their battles to wrest recognition in various institutions. Political and business institutions are most frequently mentioned in Palestine; Rima, 62, states: “I stood for elections for my company’s Board of Trustees but a group of men plotted against me and I lost. I lobbied and tried again in the following round and I am now member of the Board.” Fadia, 41, a Palestinian holding high position, confirms that her success required resolve and confrontation: “A woman will face a battle with men and the leadership every time she rises within the party or in the work place. The opportunity is there but she has to be aggressive and skilled in order to rise towards the leadership.” A third Palestinian woman, Zeinab, 40 who is a political activist lobbies for measures to eliminate discrimination within her party: “My cause is to change people’s concepts and engage in debate for the sake of the woman. I have advised my political party to evaluate members in relation to their position on women because the mainstream social upbringing reflects itself within the party.”

In Lebanon political activist Nidal, 60, speaks of her commitment to fight social injustice and neoliberal economic policies, despite recent electoral setbacks: “I felt that it was very important to prove ones existence. You had no choice but to confront and say I exist and I will continue to be in front of you today, tomorrow and always.”

Several other Lebanese women recounted clashes with official institutions for obtaining their personal rights. Yasmine, 50, is intent on regaining guardianship of her kidnapped and abused daughters from her former husband. Because of her politically influential in-laws, she was threatened by police and disregarded in the courts: “I will not give up my right for my children. I am not pleading not from judges from sheikhs from priests. This is my right. I will go on shouting and one day I will get my right.” For Nawal, the young university student from Tripoli, who initiated divorce from her negligent husband, determination is bound to overturn injustice: “Don’t think that a woman does not obtain her rights if she demands them. True there is discrimination in the laws. I was strong. I was able to defy and achieve things.”

c) Challenging societal norms and attitudes

The decision of interviewees to break family constraints and institutional discrimination, oftentimes leads to confrontation with a disapproving social environment. As Saeda, the entrepreneur in Nahr El Bared camp explains: ‘In general society here is not well-disposed towards work for the woman. She has to take a serious stand, to defy these issues and to work.’ This often entails openly assertive behavior; Nawal the recent Lebanese divorcee emphasizes: ‘I have personality and I am sure of myself. I wear what I want sometimes ‘hafr’ [low cut] sometimes not. Also I put limits to my relationships whether it’s a boy or girl.’ This approach is adopted by many including Florance 38 the Palestinian entrepreneur from Baddawi camp: ‘I am divorced and mother of two and I prefer to go out alone, precisely to show everyone that I am strong and confident.’

On the other hand, Bernadette 44 the divorced Lebanese school teacher actively combats societal stereotypes: “This masculine principle, I am not raising my son with it. Never! The woman is the same as the man. When they ask my son: ‘are you a man?’ I tell him yes habibi you are a man but that does not mean this and that. I teach him the right values.”

Others dismiss the attitudes of their social environment, such as Nora the Lebanese woman married to a Palestinian. She refuses to succumb to pressure to have more children: ‘Me and my husband aren’t obsessed with having kids, actually, one boy and one girl is sufficient- why should we have more children? To get exhausted? First of all, I get tired out. Secondly, children cost money. now I go to unrwa and get the birth control pill and I don’t care what people say. And they say “haram, your son is getting old, it’s time for you to have another child.”

Duniya, the Lebanese craftswoman from the Beirut southern suburbs also chooses to discount peoples’ remarks, as she did when she first started working: ‘People supported me with mockery - my relatives, my neighbors: ‘why are you working for him [husband]? Why are you tiring yourself? Let him toil’. I did not pay attention to them.’

d) Resistance and resilience during war and conflict

In times of war, occupation, and civil conflict many interviewees relate acts of resistance and defiance as well as demonstrate resilience and the will to survive. This encompasses activists as well as working women and housewives. Former prisoners in Israel underline their resolve not to surrender to their jailer and occupier. Afaf, 52, is proud of her experience in Israeli jails: 'I reject oppression for myself and for others. I aimed for distinction as an activist who was imprisoned and defied her jailers by voicing my opinions and positions as a Palestinian.' As Najla, 47, sees it 'the struggle against occupation strengthens some women and reinforces their self confidence and teaches them not to break.' Fadia 41 adds: 'Resistance of the occupation and its prisons gives women the strength not to surrender or become demoralized or accept humiliation.'

In the field, businesswoman Rima 62 repeatedly defies harsh Israeli assaults to serve her community: 'I lived through the first Intifada in 1987. There was occupation then. I was probably the only lady who drove a car across the Gaza strip to secure [relief] needs. I would pass by the IDF although I did not have a travel permit because I had a Medical doctor's sticker on my car. In the last war against Gaza despite the intensity of the war I went to a dangerous region. The shells were exploding over my head. I am 100 per cent convinced that women are more capable than men to confront danger and war.'

Nidal, 60, the Lebanese activist who experienced the Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon in 1982 recalls that she was terrorized by the bombardment and shelling, but that when she came face to face with the Israeli forces, she confronted them and defied them without fear 'I can't bear the sound of bullets. It's the worst thing especially with children, fear and everything. But when did I become strong? I was strong when I returned to Saida under occupation. I remember he [an Israeli soldier] once told me we have mattresses that we want to give you. [I replied] Who told you we want mattresses? We have mattresses. You defy them you are not afraid.'

Sulafa, 43, a Lebanese supermarket owner living in Beirut's southern suburbs relates that in the Lebanese civil war she was nursing her invalid mother, who needed constant observation. Whenever their neighborhood was targeted by bombardment she did not panic and preferred to stay at home rather than drag her mother to a shelter: 'At home I felt more comfortable. The shell will reach the shelter and will reach the house. It's the same thing.' During the 2006 July war in Lebanon, many women disregarded hardships and mobilized to help others (see above). Some women expressed willingness to ignore domestic conflict for the protection and care of their families. Suha, 48, a Lebanese housewife who is a victim of violence confirms this. In her words 'a person stops thinking of the difficulties I mentioned. I have to think of my children's safety, my husband's safety. I will pray for the protection of my family. The priority is that we should live in safety.'

Finally, when Fatmeh 37 returned to the destroyed Nahr El Bared camp in the fall of 2007, she refused to accept the housing conditions provided by UNRWA, she searched for her house amidst the rubble and decided to repair it rather than share an apartment with six other families: 'We found a room [in our house] we were happy. He [my husband] cleaned it and repaired it. I was as happy as the world although I cried. I must admit that when I first saw the house I cried.' It had taken Fatmeh and her husband six years to save and build their home and they were relieved that at least one room was habitable.

3.2.2 Strategy 2: Negotiation

In order to reach their objectives, many interviewees (16) also employed bargaining strategies with family and spouse sometimes by setting conditions (8 respondents) and at others through conciliation (8 respondents).

a) Conditionality

Several women informed family and prospective suitors that they will be delaying marriage for education and careers. Others entered into marriage on condition that they continue their education. Two women threatened to abandon their husbands unless they were allowed to work, one of them Hassna, 40, a small entrepreneur from Beirut's southern suburbs also curtailed her husband's abusiveness: 'I don't allow a man to step out of line. You want something take it, but there are limits... We are willing to get tired but not that he [husband] should come and shout at us and insult us'. Nora, the Lebanese who was jailed with her spouse after they eloped, issued an ultimatum to gain her husband's release despite the vulnerability of her situation: 'when my mother came to see me in prison, I told her: "I'm getting out, sooner or later I'm getting out. But I will not leave this prison before he is set free." And they set him free, before me!'

b) Conciliation

A number of women used negotiation, appeasement and patience to achieve their goals. As underlined by the Palestinian activist Najla, 47 from the West Bank: 'The experienced woman knows how to rapidly exercise self control. She can better absorb personal shocks and think of solutions and alternatives.' This is also the approach of Nidal, 60 the Lebanese activist when dealing with male colleagues: 'I was their responsible and they would not respond to me. So I would reach out to that person and tell him let's sit and work out a task together. We would agree and still he would not implement it. I used various tactics until in the end... Don't think that it's finished even now it comes up again. I know that it is because I am a woman.'

To break spousal opposition some respondents used intermediaries such as Hilda, 38, a salon owner from Baddawi camp in Lebanon. She was childless and wanted to work to overcome chronic depression: 'At first my husband was opposed to the idea. It took me 13 years to convince him. I recruited the help of my parents and in-laws until he accepted.'

3.2.3 Strategy 3: Partial or temporary compromise

In the process of achieving their goals many interviewees (30 women) comply partially or temporarily with social norms and accept to partially or temporarily constrain their freedom. Some have delayed divorce, while others have yielded to social pressure on childbearing, seeking legal action for alimony or choice of career. Bouthaina was forced into marriage at 19 and waited 24 years to divorce out of concern for her economic security: 'the law will deprive me of my rights if I initiated divorce. When I finally took the decision, everything had been resolved since it was preceded by mutual agreement on separation'. Nadine 42 from Lebanon describes how she yielded to pressure regarding childbirth: 'I didn't want to get pregnant! And they [people] got so upset! "but you got married so quickly!" and I said "yes, and he's older than me, and yet we still love each other." So then, after about 4 months of being on the pill, when I decided I wanted to, I stopped the pill, and got pregnant, after about 6 months.'

Saeda, the energetic entrepreneur from Nahr El Bared refugee camp in Lebanon, entrusts male relatives with jobs that she cannot do as a woman: 'The first thing I did in the camp was to buy generators to supply electricity by subscription. Can I manage generators? I got together my brothers and cousins "you do this and you do that". One is limited in certain things. So I hand over these jobs to other people. I have a strong personality but there are things that I can't overcome.'

Some compromises are more painful, as Hoda, 23 a Palestinian divorcee discovered when she tried to pursue her husband legally in Palestine: 'I lodged a complaint against my husband for domestic violence, but my aunts, grandmother and the family asked me to withdraw it since I would be shamed and considered rebellious.' Another divorcee from Palestine Fadia 41 tolerated marriage to an authoritarian husband for many years because he was a militant fighting occupation: 'I discovered my husband's double standards through his array of interdictions: political meetings are forbidden, candidacy for elections is forbidden, and I submitted. I forbore because he was pursued and it was not acceptable to abandon him in the circumstances of the Palestinian struggle.'

The concern for reputation underlies most concessions as Bouthaina, a divorcee living in the West Bank explains: 'the woman has adopted the veil and sometimes the jilbab mainly to reach objectives and to access education or enter into political parties or participate in public activities or to work'. 'Indeed many respondents speak about setting limits on personal behavior and dress and as Wafa 50 from Beirut wistfully remarks: 'The woman whether young or old, doesn't like to lose her femininity but also people will stop respecting her.'

3.3.What happens when women consciously and/or unconsciously resist patriarchy?

Once women begin to resist patriarchy – through some or any of the pathways identified above, for some or any of the reasons identified above – they enter a lifelong process of defiance. Success in one issue may lead to future challenges; obstacles encountered immediately may result in later achievements. Of high concern is the incidence of violence that women suffer and overcome in their defiance: half of the participants reported being exposed to gender-based violence, either through verbal or physical harassment, or direct bodily harm. All participants encountered immediate and delayed obstacles to their goals, and many were forced to make difficult decisions leading to sacrifice and loss. Most, however, also experienced achievements and gains that they carried with them as they embarked upon still more confrontations with patriarchal institutions and gender discrimination.

3.3.1 Obstacles

Regardless of their motivations and the methods employed to resist patriarchal and normative expectations, every woman interviewed experienced numerous obstacles in her pursuit of her goals. Most common were chauvinistic responses and societal/religious opposition, followed by gossip, harassment/threats and the weight of carrying multiple burdens.

a) Chauvinistic responses and societal/religious opposition

Chauvinistic reactions and objections to women's achievements and intentions come from both general society and, all too often, within a woman's home or from her husband.

Ilham is a Palestinian undergraduate student in Beirut, living in the Bourj al Barajneh camp. “Even when a woman makes it and demonstrates that she is knowledgeable and she can bear responsibility,” she explained, “she is subjected to all sorts of interferences. What does it mean to call a woman ‘*mustarjileh*’ (a masculine woman)? That she is standing in a position of authority. Why call her that? Because she respects herself and ... wants to secure herself.”

Nora, from North Lebanon, argued that, “Even in the professional world, when you look at the positions women hold, you feel that her possibilities are limited... And if you push it at all, then you’re infringing on the rights of the man...” Later on she added, “Sometimes, education on its own is not enough to help you achieve your goals. You (as a woman) need to be both educated – and good looking.”

Chauvinistic behaviors were also experienced directly by many women interviewed. Selima, living in WB/G, holds a ranking position in the Labor Union. After many years being politically active and running a NGO, “I am still under the microscope,” she said, “and there is plotting from men to cancel some of the meetings I organize. Sometimes they directly raise a case against me, and all that is seen as normal within the context of our society.”

Other women faced chauvinistic opposition from within their families. Bernadette, who works as a teacher in the outskirts of Beirut, explained that, before her divorce, “My in-laws would meet with my husband and instruct him to lock me up and prevent me from going to work.” Myriam, Lebanese, began working when her husband was working abroad. “I was progressing towards becoming a supervisor,” she recalled. Then, “my husband returned from abroad four months later, and a lot of pestering began because my working hours were long ... This did not agree at all with my husband,” and Myriam eventually quit her job.

Some women faced opposition from religious elements in society. Zeinab, a long-time political activist in WB/G, explained that, “There is a contradiction between my life with my children and how I raise them, and between what society teaches them... For example, my daughter will ask me “Why do you wear that?” or “Why don’t you veil? The teacher said that it’s *haram* [wrong not to veil].” Dunya, who makes handicrafts in her home in the outskirts of Beirut, stated: “I am not veiled. If I were veiled the political and party venues would greet me immediately. They block me because I am not veiled.”

Nidal, a long-time Lebanese activist, pointed out the structural factors that oppose women. “The political class is an obstacle. The sectarian system is an obstacle, even the class system – that is certainly an obstacle. There are many factors that are obstacles. Women are not united. The women I see are like the men; they don’t like each other.”

b) Gossip

What people say when a woman challenges societal norms, and when they say it, was shown to be highly gendered, dangerous and pervasive.

Sawsan, an undergraduate student in North Lebanon, thinks that “educated women are exposed and they face more obstacles because they are educated.” She described the gossip she is subjected to because she is going to university: “They say ‘This one has opened up, this one is

going out, this one is going and coming everyday to university where the society is open, where there are boys and all sorts of things around her...”

Dania was 18 when she initiated her divorce from her Lebanese husband. “When I was going through my divorce I went through some very hard times, times so difficult I thought I would die from them, and people talked about me all the time. They never stopped.” “Society,” she added, “talks all the time. No matter what she does, people will talk. Sometimes, if she is in the right, they will talk less. But not always.”

Raida owns a clothing store in the destroyed Palestinian camp of Nahr el Bared. “A woman’s wing are always broken,” she said. “Whatever she does, she remains a woman. Even if you are strong, [talk] comes from your neighbor.”

c) Harassment and threats

Not all talk is idle, however, and many of our interviewees recounted harrowing experiences of harassment or threats. Zein lives in the outskirts of Beirut. “Because of my work, I was always on the road and I was frequently exposed [to harassment],” she said. One time, while in a car going to work, she was cornered by the driver. “I trembled and trembled but remained strong and I made him stop the car. I walked to the hotel [work place] sobbing and crying. I was constantly exposed to these things.”

Many university students, both in Beirut and in North Lebanon, described the harassment they were subjected to en route to their studies. Sawsan stated point blank: “The road to and from university is not safe at all. In the taxi, my purse is on my lap and my heart is in my hand.” Once, she recounted, after she exited a taxi, “My girlfriend stayed in the car. She calls me later and tells me that [another passenger] touched her and she had to start shouting in the taxi... there is no safety in the street. Not at all.”

Khadija, an undergraduate student living in the Bourj al Barajneh camp, faced threats from her family due to her studies. “I was first in my class in primary and in intermediate and my eldest brother used to threaten to beat me if I continued my education... When he saw me holding a book he would say, ‘Inshallah you will never see success’.”

d) Multiple burdens

Even when a woman’s pursuit of her goals is not directly opposed or threatened, she often has to face the obstacle of juggling multiple burdens – those traditionally assigned her, and those coming with her new responsibilities.

Dunya, who sells handicrafts from her home, explained that her husband “did not object [to her working] – on the contrary. But I felt that when he returned home he wanted everything arranged his way. See to what extent: I can work in his absence, but once he’s back everything should be out of his way.” Hilda runs a hair salon in Beddawi camp. “Women are toiling outside and inside the home,” she said, “but still no one appreciates this.” Bernadette, a Lebanese school teacher, concurred, explaining that a working woman, “has to fulfill all her responsibilities even at the expense of health.”

These multiple burdens increase during times of conflict and instability. Afaf, from the WB/G, is a political activist and former prisoner: “Women bear additional roles during occupation,” she explained. “This includes the responsibility for providing food and so they have returned to farming, as well as entering the labor market to compensate for the absence of men. And they continue to bear the burdens of managing the house and the children.”

3.3.2 Sacrifice and loss

Resistance to societal pressures and patriarchal expectations, even when the goal is achieved, often entailed a component of sacrifice and loss. Many women described the emotional hardships and hurtful decisions they had to take in their resistance, others faced the loss of their children, family and/or social standing.

a) Emotional hardships and hurtful decisions

Many of our participants described with candor, and with pain, their awareness of the cost associated with their actions of defiance.

Hassna, who lives on the outskirts of Beirut, opened a bakery to support her family when her husband was out of work for a year: “When I first opened the bakery,” she recalled, “I was ashamed. I was so shamed.” Suha, also Lebanese, described how, “Sometimes my husband would enter into risky projects and we would lose money... I went out to work at times. I used to take my children to school and they would return by bus.” Crying, she recalled, “They were five and three and one half years old. I used to give them the [house] key so that they can open the door [when I was late].”

Raghida, a Palestinian who initiated her divorce from a Lebanese man, a process that took 2.5 years, is constantly worried about her son. “His father doesn’t call for him, hasn’t seen him since the Eid last year. But I’m always afraid – all of us divorced women are always afraid – that one day he’ll just come and take my son away from me. Because the law is not with us...”

Nora, a Lebanese Christian, married a Palestinian from the Beddawi camp over her family’s strong opposition. She still feels the precariousness of her situation. “I have this theory, that sometimes, if the pressure gets too much on a man and there is too much need at home that he’ll just leave us... Let him stay comfortable. Let us all stay comfortable and be able to live a decent life. Maybe sometimes I forget myself. I forget that I am here so that my children will be comfortable and my husband is also comfortable.”

For the activists in Palestine, the hardships they faced in their political resistance were accentuated by the lack of support in their society. Zeinab, both an activist and a former prisoner, described how, “When we began political activism, because of the culture, society was against women working politically, and we were exposed to dangers and threats on our lives. We were considered no longer respectable.” Active during the first Intifada, she encountered both discrimination and adversity. “Political struggle was connected to men,” she explained, “and they permitted women [to be active] when it suited their needs. But whenever the [Israeli] Army assaulted a woman, [her resistance] wasn’t honored and it was viewed like she was the offender and it was her fault – and the same would happened with imprisonment – and we would hear the

talk.” Najla, also an activist, was imprisoned by the IDF when she was 15 years old. “The response from civil society was very harsh,” she recalled, “and I was criticized, as the understanding was that militancy was exclusively for men.”

b) Loss of children

Divorce and separation, for our participants, regardless of religion or nationality, can and often did lead to the loss of their children. For some, this was a known possibility, for others, they were dismayed to learn that the legal system and religious courts offered them no recourse. Dania in North Lebanon, who initiated her divorce from an early marriage, did not fight to raise her son. “I was afraid [the husband] wouldn’t pay [child support] and I wouldn’t be able to take care of [her son] and I don’t have anything, no job or any way to support the boy... right now, I can’t take care of him properly. It’s a big responsibility and raising a child needs a lot of things.”

Sahar is in the process of divorcing a man from a different religion and nationality, as a result, the legal system does not provide her with any rights – something she had not known. “One day,” she recounted, “he asked for the children for ten days, so that his mother can meet them in Egypt.” She had him sign papers with Lebanese police forces, pledging that the children would return. Then, she “called him and he told me ‘I don’t want you and you will no longer see the children’.” Crying, she said, “He wouldn’t let me speak to the children. They are still with him.” Sahar has not seen her children since.

Yasmine was already divorced in July 2006, when Israel waged war on Lebanon. During the fighting, she went to the South to help her entrapped family, many of whom were killed. But when she “returned to Beirut after 13 days... I went to see my children and discovered that my husband had kidnapped them. I lost my mind and started running and searching...” Crying, she described her futile efforts to locate them. “My children are still in Lebanon and I know nothing about them.”

c) Loss of family and/or social standing

For some of our respondents, the decision to challenge patriarchal norms led to the separation from their family or their society; even more concerning, however, is the resulting impact of the loss of this familial or societal protection.

Awatef works in a nursery outside of Beirut. “Once I decided my own fate, they abandoned me and I abandoned everything,” she stated. Her family refused to acknowledge her, she said, “Because I chose and loved that person. For us, as a tribe from a conservative village, it was forbidden for a girl to marry outside her religion.” Sahar also chose who she married, with devastating results: “I married a man from another country and from another sect. I suffered a lot with him, everything: material violence, verbal violence, physical violence... I was obliged to endure because I eloped with him.”

Nora, a Christian Lebanese from the North, married a Palestinian and moved with him to Beddawi camp. “In the beginning it was hard. Hard... I tried to go out and I didn’t find anyone that thinks like me, that I could be friends with. And then, at that time, my family wasn’t talking to me and I didn’t have children yet, I would spend all day alone, all I had was my husband. I would cry and cry.” Up to now, she said, “I don’t go out. I have no friends here.”

Zeinab, a political activist in the WB/G and a former prisoner, described how her activism led to abuse. “My reputation was slandered in society – for myself and other female activists – and they were verbally abusive in their descriptions of us. Also, I was exposed because of my dress – I do not veil – to the extent that one time I was beaten.”

3.3.3 Perceived gains / achievements

Asked to articulate the positive outcomes of their choices respondents mentioned: 1) gains with potential to further change and improve their lives such as development of the personality and social skills as well as an increase in social awareness and a sense of freedom and 2) achievements suggesting an advantageous shift in power relations within their families and social environment such as success in changing attitudes and stereotypes as well as more definitive signs of empowerment including decision-making status and independence.

a) Gains: Personality and social skills

All respondents relate that they gained self-reliance and/or strength and/or resolve as a result of their choices. Through education, work, and employment most have become more self-confident and have overcome shyness, hesitation and ignorance. This is most evident among respondents who dropped out of school or married early. Awatef, 33, attended job training and worked to supplement her husband’s meager salary. As a result she feels that she has imposed herself in the household: ‘As an uneducated person, I received a diploma for the nursery and here [my husband] saw the difference. ‘How is it that my wife who knows nothing is dealing with children has more confidence has more knowledge?’

Hoda 23 from Palestine feels that she has started to gain confidence because she has resumed her studies after divorce: ‘I have become stronger. I am looking forward to my graduation from university so that I can find work, realize my goals and choose my life correctly.’ At 16, Hoda had enjoyed school but had yielded to parental authority and accepted a servile marriage because of her naiveté and obedience: ‘I was ignorant ... and as a girl nobody heeded my wishes’.

Nawal 23 a sociology major believes that university has recompensed her by developing her personality and by teaching her ‘how to treat and communicate with people’ and Patricia 20 a x major states that ‘you have to be strong and equal to yourself so that you can agree with people’ given the diversity of personalities and mentalities she encounters. Similarly small entrepreneur Fatmeh from Nahr El Bared camp indicates that ‘your treatment of people changes’ when you have to deal with clients. This appears to have fortified her social support network in the camp: [people] begin to like you, they come and talk to you, complain. This comforts you.’

In Palestine interviewees emphasized that they derived strength from overcoming barriers. For activist Zeinab, 43, ‘discrimination generates a feeling of constant rebellion in me’ and former prisoner Afaf 52 adds that ‘when a woman defies difficult conditions her determination and personality become relentless’. A similar view is expressed by Fadia 41, who was also imprisoned. She feels that through challenging difficulties she has gained ‘internal strength and refined her personality’. Referring to her successive defiance of family which led her to political engagement and to resistance of Israeli occupation, she explains that a woman ‘begins to introduce more complex factors into her decisions’ as she surpasses each obstacle.

b) Gains: Social awareness and sense of freedom

Many interviewees stated that their social outlook was transformed when they left the narrow confines of their homes and communities. It has introduced them to diversity and equipped them with a sense of freedom.

In sectarian Lebanon, Hind, 23, from a small northern village was raised to believe that 'every sect has its place' only to discover that such barriers need not exist: 'At university you don't remember what you are. You remember that you are Lebanese... I had not imagined this before. We would not have known it had we stayed at home.' For Fathieh, 23, university introduced her to Lebanese society since she had rarely had occasion to leave Borj El Barajneh camp: 'one is more integrated into society... My personality became stronger through my interaction with persons outside the sphere of the neighborhood and outside the sphere of the home.' Nora the Lebanese who broke with her family after marrying a Palestinian, is mending bridges and feels that she has softened their racist attitudes: 'slowly I started going there more and talking with them. I have a daughter and a son and I wanted them to know their grandparents. And of course they loved them... And they started to realize that not everyone is alike.'

In Palestine Najla was embraced by fellow political activist when her family rejected her: 'My early political engagement contributed in strengthening me socially. I was not alone. The whole environment was with me as an alternative family. For me the family is not the biological parent. I found support, protection, and vindication of my right to choose my husband.'

The discovery of new perspectives has also kindled a sense of freedom among many young respondents. Dunya, 23, declares: 'We don't need anyone to hold our hand to reach [our objectives]. We have brains. No one has more brains than we do.' Darine, 20, states that she has developed 'her mind and her logic' at university and she tentatively concludes: 'It is possible that a woman who gets married afterwards may not want to give priority to the house and the family.' Ola, 19, adds that university imparts a sense of independence: 'Whatever you want is there, freedom of expression, everything... everything... When we were young we did not participate in things. Now we participate and you feel your personality and you feel free. You know that you have more value and that you can give more.'

c) Achievements: Changing attitudes and stereotypes

Respondents who have defied social and familial norms by opening businesses or by accessing employment attest that they have been liberated from financial dependence on spouses and parents as well as contributed to the economic security of their families. Wafa, 50, took over and rescued her son's faltering vegetable store: 'I find that when I need medicine or a piece of clothing or something I can buy them. I want to make a gift; I don't like to ask the man [husband] or my son. I feel better.' Maryam who runs a home business in Beirut feels 'special' because she has helped provide for her children and 'when she needs something she does not have to ask.' These views are echoed by many others including Manal who has started working because 'I don't want to tell the man 'provide for me'. You impose yourself as a human being.'

Other interviewees go further and relate progress in breaking a range of stereotypical attitudes that they had previously endured. Selima, 29, says that she has overturned many social barriers by first deciding to enter the work force after her early marriage and then when she struggled for

education, stating that ‘in situations of war and insecurity a woman finds new opportunities that have not been open to her previously’. Selima ran for labor union elections despite active discouragement from fellow unionists and wrested a leadership position: I have imposed my presence and my abilities within the union and this has increased my opportunities. It has also opened doors for other women to follow suit.’ Rima the company director from WBG, claims success in breaking the chauvinism of employees: ‘at the beginning when I was younger and throughout my life I have sometimes faced problems in the work place, but I have always tried to solve them. As I have matured and become more experienced this has strengthened my personality and I no longer encounter discrimination.’

Contrary to mainstream expectations Intissar, 23, a Arabic literature major, will delay childbearing until she has graduated and established a career: ‘[my husband] encourages me and tells me ‘at your ease regarding children’ while Amal 20 x undergraduate from Shatila receives unanimous support from relatives and friends: ‘they all tell me finish your education instead of saying ‘bil afrah’[in times of joy or may you marry].’

Many interviewees have become guides and role models for their daughters as exemplified by craftswoman Dunya: At first my daughters used to wonder why I was working while their dad slept. After they got married they told me that I was right. They understood why I was running around’. Sulafa, a grocery owner relates that her two nieces are ‘forbidden to marry before finishing their doctorates’ to protect them from replicating their mother’s experience of domestic violence: ‘the first studied medicine and is specializing in obstetrics and the second now has a doctorate in Psychology.’ Lebanese activist Nidal has given her daughter a secular upbringing and she is proud that her daughter has married a man from a different religion: His family is religious. [They say]: ‘go and bless this [civil] marriage with a sheikh or a priest wherever you want, but bless it.’ They [the couple] are obstinate and I have no problem.’

When Nadine married a non-conformist academic, she entered into an equal partnership. She gained the personal freedoms of her dreams: ‘from the day we got married, he said “I don’t want to see you in that hijab” – it made me very happy. He saw me veiled in pictures, and at my family’s house. But when we got married, I was already unveiled.’ As for Dania, initiating divorce and ending her marriage has given her the determination to break patriarchal barriers: I want to find work. I want to live freely. Eventually, I want to be able to buy a car. Things like that. But I’m not at all thinking that I want to marry or things like that. No, not at all...’ Reflecting on her own experiences, Fadia notes that once a woman challenges normative values ‘it is difficult for her to coexist with her previous life style as her family and society are accustomed. She abandons the submissive naïve personality that accepts limitations without thinking.’

d) Achievements: Signs of empowerment

One third of respondents indicate that non-normative choices have changed relations of power within their social environment. Many state that they have gained decision making sway within the family and most assert that they have achieved independence in making strategic life choices albeit at a high cost. A number of single respondents pursuing higher education and/or working cite that they have wrested equal status within their families. In most cases the household is very poor and the parents are uneducated with some families welcoming the role change and others

submitting to it reluctantly. Many married women who relate evidence of empowerment have struggled for their right to work and/or have become main income earners. They assert themselves upon their spouses and exert influence on the upbringing and future of their children. Most of the women who have been ostracized by family and/or community, for choice of spouse, initiating divorce and political engagement value highly the resultant freedom and independence despite the trauma of separation. To demonstrate, we quote below a selection of indicative answers with a summary of each woman's trajectory.

Khadija, 32, Palestinian refugee living in Lebanon. She is single, a university student and employee. She began defying her family in adolescence by remaining in school despite strong opposition from her father and bullying by brother. She was stalked by male relatives while in school, to ensure that she did not socialize with male students. She graduated from secondary school, attended vocational training and found secure employment. She has become a main income earner in her family. She is currently a graduate in Business Administration. Asked about parental opposition of this choice, she replied: *No one dares to stand up against me. Even my father, I tell him I'm going to continue for a PhD and continue for a CMA. He starts seething ['byinjan']*.

Sherine, 22, single Lebanese university student from Tripoli is majoring in Sociology with the support and instigation of her parents who never had access to educational opportunities. She is also an NGO volunteer and is preparing a research study on early marriage and divorce. Asked about the positive outcomes of being at university, she replied: *'It gave us more independence. We make our own decisions and they [the parents] take their own decisions based on that. The parents don't impose their personality. They follow your decision.'*

Sulafa, 43, is a Lebanese grocery owner in Beirut's southern suburbs and an NGO volunteer. She is married and has four children. She could not attend school because from childhood she nursed chronically ill parents. During the civil war in Lebanon her father sent all sons abroad, arranged the marriage of an older daughter and kept Sulafa at home. When her parents' health deteriorated Sulafa attended nursing courses, took over the management of her father's shop and became the virtual head of the household. Later she used her inheritance to invest in a grocery store. Sulafa attended university lectures in Psychology in proxy for her married sister who was forbidden to study by her husband. Sulafa is economically independent of her husband. When asked about her views on gender equality she replied: *'When we need to speak we should speak and the times that require our silence we should remain silent. Later we should show him [the husband] that we were silent for 'your dignity'. We were not silent in submission.'*

Dunya, 50, Lebanese craftswoman from Beirut's southern suburbs began working from home to compensate for her husband's low salary and his lack of motivation. She designs, produces and markets handcrafts. Regarding her achievements she replied: *First of all, [work] gave me economic independence. I don't tell him give. You don't have? I have. You see? Any plans for my house he tells me I don't have. Ya khayye [O brother!] just say yes and I will do the planning... One of [my son-in-laws] tried to stop his wife from going to university. I told him: 'no when you married the girl I had one condition she has to continue her education! You told me yes, now you're telling me no! A condition is a condition. This is what we agreed.'* He complied.

Bernadette, 44, is a Lebanese public school teacher from the eastern suburbs of Beirut and an NGO volunteer. She is a survivor of domestic violence and initiated divorced from her husband, a move which was rejected by her parents. She struggled and gained custody of her child. Living alone, she was forced to leave her infant son unattended when she went to work. Asked what a woman gains when she challenges society, she replied: *'If the woman does not preserve norms and traditions she will be on her own. I defied and stayed on my own whatever may happen. I am happy with this because I am the decision-maker.'*

Afaf, 52, is a Palestinian political activist from the OPT, a former prisoner, and a working woman. She entered into a mixed religion marriage and was rejected by her community and disowned by her parents who subsequently had to emigrate. Despite her conversion to Islam she has never been accepted by her in-laws who consider her a 'Christian stranger'. Afaf has also struggled against gender discrimination within her political party. Asked about the gains she has accrued from her experiences, she replied: *My isolation, the social pressure and the discrimination that I endured asserted my independence. They strengthened me and made me self-reliant. They motivated me to develop myself and to realize my ambitions. It is ironic that those who ostracized me yesterday seek me out today and deal with me because of my position at work, out of self-interest.*

Fadia, 41, is a Palestinian political activist from the OPT and a former political prisoner in Israel. She was disowned by her family for living with and then marrying an activist, as well as for her political engagement. She grew up in a household that denied her access to learning, but continued her education both during and after her marriage, and she considers her pursuit of education an integral component of her political activism. Her husband became a Salafist while in prison, and wanted her to stop her activism, eventually divorcing her, but Fadia has remained politically active. *Education has helped me to find equilibrium and has enabled me to compete, to work, to gain economic independence and to become self-reliant. A woman's experience at the professional and political levels alike increases her strength, independence and influence.*

Nadine, 42, was raised in a small village in northern Lebanon in a violent and oppressive household. She initiated her marriage to a Palestinian intellectual many years her senior as a pathway to self-liberation, whereby she left her family's village to live in a city, chose to unveil, and has since pursued a way of living closer to her wishes. Her family still does not accept her choices. *I'm free, free from them. That's what I want them to understand. In the beginning I wasn't this brave, but now I'm direct... I look around and I see all these women with degrees and with jobs and we didn't have those opportunities, not in the environment I was raised in. Before I wouldn't have dared to hold a cigarette, now if I wanted, I could drink (alcohol) in the street and my husband wouldn't say anything!*

Hoda, 23, was married at 16 in the West Bank. Although she had enjoyed school, she left her studies and yielded to her family's decision. After many years, she initiated a divorce from her husband, and returned to her studies, where she is now a third-year university student. *I gave up everything for divorce... After my husband took my children and after I felt that my family did not want to support me, I decided to face the difficulties and insisted on continuing my education*

in secondary school and then I entered university and refused marriage offers because they don't suit me.

Rawan, 32, lives in the OPT and was married at a young age. She only began working and pursuing her education after her marriage, in order to move out of her in-laws' house and to be able to lead a life of greater independence. Despite her husband's meager salary, she has completed her secondary studies and entered university, while raising her family and working. *All my life was difficult: my marriage, living with my in laws and many attitudes... But when I started working and became older I overcame these difficulties by insisting on completing my studies... Sometimes I think that my children have more right for the money I spend on school and that they and the household are more deserving... but I don't want to give in and I hope that I can find a scholarship or loan to complete my studies.*

3.4 Advice

Interviewees were asked to advise other women in similar situations as students, workers, or activists who may be single married or divorced. Their replies largely reflect the lessons learned in their personal trajectory and are clustered around three main areas: a) education (15 respondents) b) defiance of limitations in the private sphere (21 respondents) and c) mobilization against discrimination in the public sphere (9 respondents).

3.4.1 Education, capacity building and awareness-raising

Gaining education, increasing awareness and strengthening capabilities are identified by many respondents as a means for achieving women's goals and aspirations. Education is articulated as the guarantor of economic security, social status and integration, as an investment for the upbringing of children, and as a requisite for participation in decision making within the family and society. Women are also advised to exert effort to raise their awareness and develop their capabilities and women's organizations are urged to invest in this process.

Nadine 42, the Lebanese who left school against her wishes, recommends all women to study in order to gain status and free will: 'forget all your inhibitions. If you can walk, and think, and learn – then go and study! An education is the future of women. An educated woman has a place in society; she can do as she wants (fi7a timshi)... Even if she's not young, even if she's old – go study! Nothing will benefit you like studying, especially in this society.' Rawan 32 from Palestine evokes her own experience of early school departure and early marriage: 'I advise every girl to continue her education and hold on to it. A woman forced into early marriage should try to study and complete her education.'

Amal 20, a Palestinian university student living in the marginalized Shatila refugee camp also insists on education so that a woman may gain economic security: 'Anything can happen to her. She can get widowed or divorced and if she has children what will she do with them? She will be able to work stand on her own two feet and need no one.' Her senior, Afaf 52 from Palestine who resumed her studies after release from prison, agrees that 'education prepares the woman for economic independence' and adds 'this strengthens the independence of her decision and strengthens her position within the family and her participation in decision-making' which is the

antidote to Afaf's experience of permanent contestation by the family of her life choices in marriage, education and political engagement.

Some respondents underlined that education alone is not enough. For a woman to realize her goals and ambitions 'you must go and work on yourself' recommends Nidal, 60, the Lebanese political activist and former elected municipal member. She adds 'meaning that [women] should become cultured. This is the most important thing. Not just educated but cultured' to eradicate as she puts it the 'illiteracy of the mind'. In a similar vein, Nora 31 a Lebanese university student who married a Palestinian exhorts women to 'continually improve yourself. Expand your mind. If I didn't know my key strengths, I wouldn't have been able to continue as well as I did.' She explains that this will strengthen a woman's ability to overcome obstacles: 'know that if you're living through something difficult with bad conditions plan so that your children will have better conditions. So continually get stronger and plan and think and grow.'

But for Sahar, 40 a Lebanese still more is needed: 'I'd like to ask the associations to hold awareness raising seminars, especially for the new generation... to show that girls have rights as much as boys - even legal awareness. Had I known that I had no rights I would not have taken that step [marriage].' Sahar entered into a mixed religion marriage with a foreigner without realizing the vulnerability of her status under discriminatory religious and nationality laws. Her husband eventually abandoned her and kidnapped their children to Egypt. Since the children cannot obtain Lebanese citizenship, they cannot be extradited even if Sahar obtains guardianship.

Najla, 47 from the West Bank speaking as a Palestinian activist agrees that women's organizations and political parties should strengthen their battle against the rise of conservative attitudes towards women. They should: 'raise the awareness of women and build their capacities in order to change a woman's view of herself and of her role and to extricate her from her tiny shell so that she can view matters from a wider perspective. This will accelerate the realization of her equality and will disseminate a culture embedded in human rights.' It also requires women activists to develop themselves, adds Palestinian labor unionist Selima 29: 'they should train themselves in the educational, social and psychological domains because women's problems are caused by a combination of social residues. Training, capacity building and awareness are continuous for motivated activists. They are not the means but the basis for working with the constituency and engaging in its concerns.'

3.4.2 Defiance in the private sphere

Respondents addressing the personal sphere invoke women to break social limitations and to exercise independent choice in order to achieve their life goals. They also recommend prudence in considering marriage and many encourage revolt against interdictions and against oppression.

Aziza, 25, a Palestinian university student from Borj el Barajneh camp in Beirut advises women to 'struggle in order to reach what is in their heads'. Referring to the discriminatory attitudes towards Palestinians in Lebanon she adds that women have to 'defy the surrounding environment - to defy even themselves. Every time they reach an objective they should set another one and struggle to reach it'. Other respondents in Lebanon who had not articulated experiences of patriarchal obstacles nevertheless urge women like themselves to disregard social attitudes. This includes two Lebanese university students in their 20s, Tania and Nancy from Tripoli who state,

in consecutive order, that women should not ‘rely on the opinion of others, such as parents and your society’ and should not ‘trust anyone’.

A third Lebanese student from Tripoli, Nawal 23 who is divorced, affirms unequivocally: ‘don’t pay attention to people’s opinions, be convinced of what you are doing within the reasonable and the possible. A woman should continue to rise so that she is recognized.’ Another Lebanese, Nadine 42 who does not regret defying her family in her choice of spouse asks other women to emulate her and focus on their aspirations: ‘I would tell [a woman] don’t respond to your family. If she wants to stay like I was, poisoned and oppressed by everyone, she’ll spend the rest of her life ill-treated, in despair. So she shouldn’t listen to anyone... and listen to what’s in her head, to what she dreams about. Get out of that environment!’

A number of suggestions deal with the decision to embark on marriage. Many interviewees strongly advise against early marriage, especially respondents who have undergone the experience. ‘Don’t let your daughter get married at 12’ says Dania from north Lebanon, ‘she’s too young, it’s not fair... Wait until they’re 25. Wait until the girl knows more... I was so little, I know people used to laugh at me because I couldn’t behave properly ...’ others caution against hasty decisions and instruct women to study their suitors and to impose conditions. ‘I advise women to prioritize the mind over the heart’ warns Bouthaina a divorced Palestinian woman from the WB and further recommends that women should ‘document all material rights and hold custody over personal finances.’ This is because a draft law has been tabled in Palestine regarding the right of women to stipulate conditions in the marriage contract. Rosette, 40, a married Lebanese woman who is a victim of domestic violence agrees that a woman should state conditions ‘from the beginning a woman should know her rights and ask for them.’

Sahar, 40 another Lebanese victim of domestic violence exhorts assertiveness: ‘My advice to every girl is that from the moment she speaks to a young man and he tries to exercise control, the moment he tells you ‘this is what I want’; you tell him ‘no, that is what I want. I have a point of view and you have yours. You have your rights and I have mine. I do not impose on you and you should not impose on me’.

Sahar continues addressing married women who are tolerating violence ‘don’t accept you are not obliged to endure for anybody. This is your life. You have a right, shout and demand it, stand up straight and don’t bend you head for anyone’. Similarly many divorced respondents strongly counsel women to reject domestic oppression, break their marriage and defy social censure. ‘As a divorcee I advise women to opt for divorce with courage’ states Fadia, 41, from Palestine. Hoda, 23, another divorced woman from Palestine, adds: ‘I advise every woman not to feel that her life has ended after divorce and not to look back and not to surrender to conditions and obstacles. She should set her own objective to realize herself.’

3.4.3 Mobilization in the public sphere

A number of respondents call for mobilization to change unjust laws and to eliminate institutionalized discrimination. Most are activists. They address perceived priorities for action as well as some desired strategies for women’s groups and political parties.

For Sulafa a Lebanese entrepreneur in Beirut's southern suburbs, it is important to amend divorce laws since her married sister was subjected to domestic violence for many years and only obtained divorce under civil law once the couple moved abroad. Civil law is one priority objective for Najla, 47, the Palestinian activist from the West Bank to neutralize the interference of religious authorities, as exemplified by mixed religion marriages: 'Civil law is the solution without any condition on changing religion. Two persons have taken the decision and bear responsibility for it and for its consequences.'

As for Selima, her recommendation is to eliminate early marriage through instituting compulsory education in Palestine: 'Based on my cruel experience I have joined the ranks of advocates and activists combating early marriage because I don't wish for anyone to endure my experience.' Since a draft law has already been tabled in Parliament, Selima urges women's groups to monitor and follow-up its progress....

Nidal, 60, the Lebanese political activist agrees with her Palestinian counterpart Najla that civil law is a highly desired objective especially in Lebanon. Therefore she urges like-minded women's group in Lebanon to end fragmentation and join forces to fight sectarianism since women are the main victims of religious personal status laws.

However Zeinab, 40, political activist and Najla, 47 from Palestine believe that women need to be organized in political parties to better mobilize around a specific objective. For Zeinab women should have a feminist cause and view membership in a political party as 'part of the struggle for the woman's cause.' She explains that this necessitates effort to re-calibrate the priorities of political parties: 'Women should mobilize the political parties to serve them rather than to serve the party's cause. We should find an enlightening voice that speaks to the benefit of women.' Najla concurs that women's enrollment in political parties and in mass organizations is 'the entry point for the woman's integration in the effort to dismantle the closed patriarchal constraints on her freedom and independence.'

4. Conclusions

Our literature review demonstrates that human development in the Arab region lags behind most of the developing world, with human security prerequisites largely unfulfilled. When the details are scrutinized, the second class status of women and their socio-economic exclusion emerge as principal factors impeding progress in the region. At the same time our review shows a gender shift in key development indicators; there is gender parity in basic education, more women are pursuing higher education and their participation in the labor force is increasing. Also more women are engaged in activism impelling a certain degree of legal reforms as well as increasing awareness on women's rights. This study has attempted to provide a preliminary profile on women participating in these minuscule changes.

There were no variances between respondents based on religious affiliation, nor were religious tenets ever cited as values, motivators or goals. Patriarchy was the overarching common denominator challenging respondents. It was articulated in similar terminology with comparable experiences across geographic locations.

A variety of factors come together in order for our participants to embark upon a process of tranformatory change. Each person's individual journey constitutes a roadmap starting from motivators and aspirations, moving to take a choice to achieve a personal goal, resulting in new challenges as well as gain and achievements. At this point, for many of our respondents, the journey begins anew, as new goals are identified, new challenges arise and new strategies employed to succeed. Once respondents break away from domestic (father/husband) authority many become more vulnerable to gossip and slander. In the external world they enter into confrontation with new varieties of gender discrimination and chauvinism and oftentimes discover new threats from racism or sectarianism.

Numerous motivators to begin this process were identified by our participants, including: aspirations for economic security and building the self, awareness of and/or experiences of injustice, and opportunities including supportive familial and external environment and, interestingly, times of conflict. The women interviewed employed multiple, overlapping strategies to pursue their aims. These ranged from rebellion (through defying family and institutional authority, overturning societal norms, manifesting resilience during war and conflict) to negotiation and compromise. Throughout our participants' lives, obstacles – both as motivators and as outcomes – continually resurfaced. These obstacles included: chauvinistic responses and societal/religious opposition, gossip, harassment, threats and violence, and the balancing of multiple burdens. Sacrifice and loss, including emotional hardships and hurtful decisions, the loss of children, and isolation due to familial and societal rejection, were the price paid by many of our respondents during their journeys. All of our participants, however, experienced a fusion of gains and achievements from their struggles. Gains, which represent further growth and the possibility of further success, included strength and self-reliance and opening new perspectives. Achievements, indicated by an advantageous shift in power relations, enabled our respondents to make independent strategic life choices.

Through these experiences, hardships, lessons learnt and goals realized, our participants offered pointers on priorities for feminist action and feminist investigation. Advice took the forms of: develop yourself (through education, capacity building, awareness raising), defy norms in the private sphere (take decisions independently, the do's and don't's of marriage) and defy norms in the public sphere (mobilization: organizing and politicizing women, overturning legal inequities and transforming political organizations).

Throughout all of participants' experiences, the issue of violence hovers as a constant factor. Violence is present during times of war, civil strife, insecurity and occupation, and our respondents described both the hardships they and their families face, and their will to overcome adversity, as activists and as women. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, our participants' resilience was perhaps most severely tested through the incarceration of women activists, who both defied their jailors and challenged societal censure upon their release. But women also face violence on a daily basis, outside of prisons and during times of peace. During our research, women described the many faces of violence they are exposed to: from roadblocks and checkpoints to physical and verbal harassment in public places, to and violence in the home, both emotional and physical and enforced servitude.

As mentioned in the Methodology section, all of the respondents had varying degrees of awareness about gender discrimination – this may be due to involvement or support from local NGOs. However, the shift from an individual awareness of discrimination to action that impacts society or initiates a paradigm shift requires collective civil society action. The women interviewed in this report represent a cadre of potential leadership for such collective action, whose experiences can impel and inspire other women.

The dominant message articulated by the 54 women interviewed in the report is clear: Do not merely mobilize women, but organize them and politicize them. Feminists are called upon to develop their strategies and address the needs and the potential of women who break the norm and challenge patriarchy in their individual lives.

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