

**"Killing of women in the name of 'honour':  
An evolving phenomenon in Lebanon"**

A one - day expert group meeting called for by the UN special rapporteur on VAW Ms. Rashida Manjoo was convened in the UNFPA New York headquarters on Wednesday October 12, 2011. Sixteen experts from different corners of the globe presented papers that portrayed the regional idiosyncrasies of manifestations, root causes and consequences of gender - motivated killings ( femicide and feminicide). Besides papers that presented concepts and related conceptual challenges, the presentations covered selected countries from Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, South East Asia, Canada and Europe. Following is the paper presented by Azza Charara Baydoun, professor of Social psychology (Lebanese University) and researcher in women and gender issues.

## **"Killing of women in the name of 'honour': An evolving phenomenon in Lebanon"**

Azza Charara Baydoun

Although 'crimes of 'honour'' is the phrase commonly used to describe the killing of women within the family in Lebanon, these killings are drifting further away from the classical form of what is known in our part of the world as 'honour' – based crimes.

### **I- Manifestations**

In my attempt to highlight the manifestations of family femicides<sup>1</sup> in Lebanon, I will delineate 3 categories:

1- So called 'honour' crimes': whose incidence has become rare<sup>2</sup> in Lebanon. For instance, among the 66 concluded trials in the court of cassation between the years 1999 and 2007, only 16 may be described as such, and most of these were executed in rural areas. I am referring to the well documented<sup>3</sup> scenario featuring a male family member, preferably a minor, who is delegated to kill his<sup>4</sup> female relative, usually his sister, who by her 'loose sexual behavior' she has brought shame upon her family and sullied its 'honour'. This behavior is

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<sup>1</sup> I will mainly rely on the deconstruction of documents of cases of domestic Femicides in Lebanon committed between the years 1978 and 2004 and tried in the court of cassation between the years 1999 and 2007; see my book *cases of femicide before Lebanese courts*, 2011(Arabic and English), posted @ [www.kafa.org.lb](http://www.kafa.org.lb)

<sup>2</sup> Between 1995 and 1998, 36 femicides were documented in Lebanon, 62% of which were committed by the brothers of the victims ( Abdel Sater and Moghaizel, 1999) ( in Arabic); whereas among the 12 femicides that were reported by the press between May2010 and May 2011, only one was committed by the father of the victim. The remaining 11 were uxoricides (wife killings). (Compiled by the NGO KAFA (enough violence and exploitation), see [www.kafa.org.lb](http://www.kafa.org.lb). )

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Sherifa Zuhur, (2009), "CONSIDERATIONS OF 'HONOUR' CRIMES, FGM, KIDNAPPING/RAPE, AND EARLY MARRIAGE IN SELECTED ARAB NATIONS" , paper prepared for Expert Group Meeting on good practices in legislation to address harmful practices against women, United Nations Conference Centre Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 25 to 28 May 2009, at [www.wluml.org/node/7212](http://www.wluml.org/node/7212)

<sup>44</sup> The perpetrator is normally a male. In Lebanon for instance, women killers never exceed 5% of any sample of cases of Femicide studied.

predominantly heterosexual liaisons whether imagined<sup>5</sup> or real, whether she was a willing participant or raped (including incestuous rape) ...in all these cases the killer's act is described as 'cleansing the shame' of his family and restoring its 'honour'. The act is deemed necessary and is hailed as heroic<sup>6</sup>.

It is common knowledge that 'honour'-based crimes are underreported<sup>7</sup>. But the widespread urbanization, the proliferation of media and the changing roles of women in Lebanon has made it difficult for such a crime to go unnoticed<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, those reported are thoroughly investigated<sup>9</sup> and the accused is tried in

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<sup>5</sup> The women activists in Egypt, for instance, maintain that the percentage of 'innocent' women that have been killed on the pretext of suspicion of sexual 'misbehavior' is around 79%. See, for instance, Fatima Kafagy (2005), "'honour' killing in Egypt", The association of legal aid for women, Cairo, Egypt @ [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/.../khafagy.'honour'crimes.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/.../khafagy.'honour'crimes.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The nature of the crime has made it almost impossible for researchers on femicide to study systematically the repercussions of the crime on the killer and other members of the family of the victim. Anecdotes about family members and interviews conducted with some of them or their neighbors in Lebanon and Palestine are probably the only documented 'evidence' of the impact it may have on these. See Abir Hamdar, (2000), "Testimonies on 'honour' Crimes", *Al-Raida*, Vol 17 nos 89, and Lamis Abu Nahleh, (2007) Crimes of women's killing in Palestine in the period 2005-2006 @ [www.masader.ps/p/en/node/10177](http://www.masader.ps/p/en/node/10177).

<sup>7</sup> This is the prevailing impression in all Arab countries. Under reporting impedes the collection of hard data. In Syria, for instance, the figure reported by the media varies between 40 and 300 femicides per year! In Yemen for instance, it is practically impossible to come up with a figure as a corpse may be buried by the family without obtaining a license from health authorities; hence no comprehensive official cause of death is available. Furthermore, some countries (Kurdistan- Iraq, Jordan and Egypt for instance) report a very the high incidence of female suicides. Women activists suspect that this figure hides behind it 'forced' suicides/femicides.

<sup>8</sup> A family murdering a 15 year old girl in distant rural area may claim that their daughter died of 'natural' causes and few people, the police amongst them, would consider it their business to question the cause of her death. This may have been the case a couple of decades ago. But killing a student (which qualifies the vast majority of young females of Lebanon) or a young single working woman (making up more than 40% of the working force), or even a non working woman living in an apartment building in an urban or semi- urban area cannot possibly escape the attention of one or more concerned agencies: the state and its security institutions, the media, work colleagues or classmates and human rights activists or even religious clerks etc.

<sup>9</sup> This is in contrast to the fate of similar femicide cases in neighboring countries – Jordan and Palestine for instance – until recently when, as an emotional response to widely reported murder of a female university student, President Abbas of Palestinian authority passed a decree eliminating the exemption of an alleged 'honour' based crime from investigation and treating it like a regular crime. I am

a court of law. Among the previously mentioned 66 trials, article 193 of the penal code that mitigates the sentence of the accused on the basis of his being motivated by ‘honour’ was used 3 times only (that is less than 5%).

It is to be noted, however, that the judges’ attitude towards the murder was related to the geographical location of the murder site; judges that presided over courts in rural areas showed ‘understanding’ towards the accused motives. Those judges acknowledged the power of the dominant values that condemns the victims’ ‘wrongful act’ and that deems the violent reaction of the accused as ‘necessary’ and hence inevitable. This has led judges to extenuate the accused sentence in accordance with their discretion or ‘the power invested’ in them to assess the situation.

By contrast, the panel of judges in urban areas often distances itself from the alleged ‘culture of ‘honour’’ in favour of a moral and ethical stance that looks down upon and even reprimands those who believe in it. This is particularly evident in cases where the accused claims an ‘honour’able motive for his crime while the court finds nothing but ‘unadulterated selfishness’ in the motive and a deviation from the values of our times<sup>10</sup>.

2- A more pervasive family femicide in Lebanon is the murder of the intimate partner- wife, divorcee, cohabitant etc. – who is invariably accused by the perpetrator of infidelity and /or promiscuity, whether real or imagined. These are similar to uxoricides or ‘crimes of passion’, and are well documented all over the world.

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referring to the article 340 of the Jordanian and Palestinian penal code that grants killers impunity once they claim that their deed was a matter of family ‘honour’. Their allegation prevents further investigation and allows them to be referred to the court directly which exonerates them or mitigates their sentence to a minimum.

<sup>10</sup> This is similar to what Azza Suleiman from Egyptian Women legal Assistance describes. Judges from the poorest and least educated provinces are more lenient towards women killers than judges in more urban ones. See <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-the-lie-behind-mass-suicides-of-egypts-young-women-2074229.html>

3- The third category of crimes is the killing of women -whether spouses or blood relatives- which is motivated by the greed of the perpetrator. Upon investigation it turns out that the killers were interested in the victims' possessions or their money and killed them in order to inherit their share.

In Lebanon, the last two categories are the most prevalent, and the murder is usually the culmination of a series of episodes of violent disputes<sup>11</sup>. In neighboring countries that embrace the 'culture of 'honour'' to a greater degree, further investigation into alleged 'honour'-based crimes has shown a similar trend<sup>12</sup>. 'honour' is put forth as a façade, an excuse, to escape the well-deserved punishment of a regular crime.

## **II- Root Causes**

### **1-Background**

In the Arab world, Lebanon is perceived as being the vanguard in the realm of women advancement<sup>13</sup> and women's visibility in the public space is one of several indicators pointing to a change in the roles of women<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> In cases of femicide that are tried before Lebanese courts, all or almost all, defendants claim to have been motivated by honour. (Baydoun, 2011a).

<sup>12</sup> Reported by the media in Jordan that a man killed his sister claiming his deed to be motivated by 'family 'honour'', but was prosecuted as a regular murderer when his other two sisters filed a lawsuit against him accusing him of killing their sister because she refused to grant him an inherited piece of land. See examples of motives in hidden behind alleged 'honour' on <http://www.amanjordan.org/pages/index.php/openions/6083.html>

<sup>13</sup> Yet it figures relative low on GDI and HDI: out of 156 countries with both HDI and GDI value 117 countries have a better ratio than Lebanon. ( 2009, see <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/124.html>)

<sup>14</sup> Research studies conducted in Lebanon through various methods and samples indicate that young women tend to perceive themselves as androgynous, thus rejecting partially the limitation imposed on them by the socially desirable image of women in our society and embracing the characteristics reserved traditionally for the male. Furthermore, men are responding to this change and some research studies arrived at the conclusion that male college students -for instance- tend to be less attracted romantically to the traditional woman and tend to prefer an intimate partner who is partly, if not completely, similar to the self image of his female college mate . A shift of attitudes towards women is also observed, albeit

In so far as sexuality is concerned, contradictory manifestations are noted: in one series of research<sup>15</sup>, for instance, Evidence gathered from group interviews, point to a change in the notion of “honour” among teenagers, both boys and girls, and among their parents especially among those belonging to the middle and upper classes. ‘honour’ is related to a woman’s behavior among lower classes only. Yet guarding this ‘honour’ is rarely seen as a reason for resorting to fatal violence, among girls, especially<sup>16</sup>. In an attempt to study the ‘socialization process to family ‘honour’ a research conducted by another researcher three years earlier and using the same research method (focus groups of parents of adolescents), showed a difference in attitude towards ‘honour’ crimes amongst classes, gender, geographical location ( rural vs. urban), level of education of parents. Transgression of prescribed sexual behavior was overlooked for males while choice of sanctions for females ranged between forced marriage followed by an arranged divorce, forced hymenoplasty, disowning and ultimately, but rarely, femicide”<sup>17</sup>.

In so far as pre-marital sex is concerned, research indicates a shift of attitude and practice among middle and upper classes. For instance, in one study researching the sexuality of university students, 20% -both males and females- admitted to have been sexually active in their teen years<sup>18</sup>. However, widespread

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women are much more egalitarian than men. See for example: (Baydoun, 2004), “ The Preferred Partner An Investigative Field Study of Lebanese Youth”, **Al-Raida** Vol XXI, Nos 104-105, Winter/Spring 2004, pp 74-83.

<sup>15</sup> Rida, R. (2005) and (2006) and (2007). See the first part (lit. review) in (Baydoun, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Of relevance, is a fatwah released by a widely followed and respected Shia’ clerk in Lebanon (Muhammad Hussein Fadl-Allah) and in Egypt (Sheikh Al- Azhar), both prohibiting (pronouncing anathema) women killing on the pretext of preserving family ‘honour’.

<sup>17</sup> Marie Hélène Parre, (2005), “ A research model for ethically sound investigation of kin femicide in ‘honour’- based societies in the light of evidence-based practice”, Oxford, U.K., University of Oxford, ( Unpublished M.A. thesis).

<sup>18</sup> Outing the sexual taboo: Unveiling issues of sexuality among university students in Lebanon [http://www.information-international.com/pdf/sexuality-issues\\_nov03-en.pdf](http://www.information-international.com/pdf/sexuality-issues_nov03-en.pdf)

practice of hymenoplasty (hymen restoration) among young women (reported by media and doctors and some researchers) is an indicator of the lag of sexual ideology behind practice.

## **2- Family femicide: An expression of extreme disruption of gender arrangements in the family**

A salient finding in research on family violence against women in Lebanon, and irrespective of the method implemented and the population researched, indicates that the gender arrangements relegating family relationships has been disrupted. The dynamics of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator is an expression of an extreme maladaptation to the changing roles of women and men in our contemporary world:

\_Accused men tended to refuse to adapt to the implications of the said changing roles,

\_ And women victims are reported as having exhibited a defying and challenging attitude towards men.

This is amply verified when looking closely into trial documents of femicide cases. In these documents, the victim is portrayed as an impulsive and capricious individual. She is described as an adventurous rebel refusing to conform to the gender and sexuality arrangements sanctified by her family / partner<sup>19</sup>.

These “imperfect” victims are complemented by male murderers who suffered from a “deficient” manhood. This deficiency is due to their failure to meet

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<sup>19</sup> She is qualified as an imperfect victim when compared to the “perfect” one, the socially desirable feminine stereotype in a typical patriarchal society, where she figures as passive and compliant to her (male) guardian who “knows what is best for her”, and hence her murder is “not justifiable”, and she is described as ‘innocent’ especially when she is declared (posthumous) by the medical examiner a virgin. In Palestine, for instance, two contradictory images of the victim surfaced in the anecdotes told by their relatives and neighbours, one similar to the above and another portraying her as a “perfect victim”. <http://www.sawa.ps/ar/Reports/ViewReportDetail.aspx?RepId=4>

the prescribed requirements of traditional manhood that can put into question their right to prerogatives accrued to their gender. Their manhood is compromised in one or more than one way:

As intimate partners these men tend to have their manhood tarnished or undermined socially. In case of marital infidelity, their sexual potency is questioned and jeered upon especially when this infidelity is publicized through. If unemployed, they are deprived of a major component of their manhood which is the role of a provider for their family. Overrepresented in the sample of femicide killers are marginalized men, presumably mentally ill, drug addicts, alcoholics, ex-militia fighters and those with criminal records. This is not in any way different from family femicides all over the world.

As blood relatives: what is specific to our Middle Eastern Arab cultures is that gender-based roles include the charge men have over the sexuality of women under their “guardianship”. This is the case irrespective of the age and social status of either party. Hence men are entrusted with the responsibility of controlling the women’s behaviour and to ensure their chastity and their self-restraint. Thus, any threat to that role becomes a threat to the male’s sense of self-worth and his manhood.

It is worth noting that the victims who transgressed the gender arrangements have had the chance to experience “their male guardian” as vulnerable and weak. What these women had overlooked, however, was that their guardian’s weakness is not a license to give free reign to their own sexuality; for acting as such is a threat to these men’s unfounded -and hence precarious - authority and is a concrete reminder of their deficient manhood<sup>20</sup>. Eliminating the woman who revealed the

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The described vulnerability of men is not specific to killers of women. Researchers on masculinities contend that it is rather one of the characteristics of men in this age who are said to be experiencing a ‘masculinity crisis’. Femicide is but a magnification of an open aggression and enmity



killer's deficient manhood and threatened his authority seems to him to be the means to restore the 'decorum' of that manhood.

The threat can reach its peak in sub-cultures in which the well differentiated "individual" is not yet crystallized. For persons in such sub-cultures the self-image/self worth is often externally determined and where seeking the approval of others is the norm. Hence the individual's self-esteem heavily depends on his ensuring the proper, so called 'honourable' behaviour of those in their immediate social milieu, especially women under their guardianship; this is often viewed as a necessary condition to bringing order to their inner selves and subsequently to the clan/ family. Disruption of this order is grave and the person responsible for this disruption must be eradicated to restore order to both, the individual as well as the clan/ family. That is why if the immediate guardian of the defiant woman refrains from his 'duty' to kill her when she violates the sexual dictates of the family, someone else does. This would be the case in a typical 'honour'-based kin femicide.

### **3-Femicide and VAW**

Furthermore, studying the files and court documents of family femicide cases shows that women killing is no more than a maximization of a blatant or low-intensity and ongoing violence against women; this violence is mostly perceived and dismissed as "natural" for too long. The murder itself is no more

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against women in significant numbers of men in contemporary societies, and the prevailing violence against women is but the defense mechanism against their sense of their own vulnerability. This vulnerability is not related to women and the maladaptation of some men to their changing roles alone, but rather women are, by the dictates of the gender arrangements, the accessible scapegoats to men; they are thus allowed to vent their frustration over their continued marginalization in a world that boasts much promise and offers little to meet them.( See author's book *Manhood and the Changing of Women's Condition*, ( Baydoun 2007) – in Arabic).KAFA, a prominent NGO in Lebanon, launched two years ago a program targeting Lebanese young men in an attempt to sensitize them to this fact and implicate them in the campaign for combating VAW. ABAAD (Dimensions), a newly founded NGO is currently addressing men under the slogan "Men and Women against VAW"  
<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=322887>.

than an inevitable outcome, an end point of a continuum of this escalating violence.

To sum up: Femicides in Lebanon are shifting from being ‘honour’-based to being the outcome of an inevitable end product of a chain of violent events within some families. These families have betrayed their presumed protective functions and turned their homes into deadly traps for their female members.

Women organizations in Lebanon argue that enacting a comprehensive law for the protection of women from family violence<sup>21</sup> is the effective strategy to prevent femicide. Given the overarching and binding power of law, then if it is comprehensive it will provide deterring, pre-emptive, preventive and punitive measures and consequently will be effective in reducing incidents of women killings.

### **III- The state and the Religious Confessions**

In Lebanon, unlike most Arab states, NGO’s and private organizations have been almost always ahead of the state in addressing social problems. This phenomenon was reinforced during the fifteen years of civil strife

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<sup>21</sup> The most important components presented in the draft law prepared by KAFA ( the previously mentioned NGO) and adopted by human rights organizations in Lebanon include the following:

- Criminalizing all forms of family violence against women and girls ;
- Ensuring that all investigation, court sessions and trials remain confidential and private;
- Establishing a specialized unit for family violence issues within the Interior Security Forces;
- Securing a Court protection order for victims;
- Allowing for complaints of family violence to be made by verbal notification;
- Requesting the perpetrator to seek rehabilitation; and
- Requiring that the perpetrator to secure a safe housing for the victim and her children, and paying alimony.

For further information and for more on the amendments proposed to the draft law, refer to the KAFA website at [www.kafa.org.lb](http://www.kafa.org.lb). The preparation of this draft law goes back to July 2007. The Council of Ministers approved the draft law in August 2009 and the law was transferred to the Parliament in April 2010 for vote.

during which the confessional communities instituted organizations that replicated and, in some instances substituted, the functions of the state, and have continued to appropriate the public space and dominate the Lebanese political and public<sup>22</sup> life.

Presently, the political representatives of the Sunni and the Shiite sects, politically antagonistic, have joined forces against the passing of the law to “protect women from family violence”<sup>23</sup> whose draft was prepared by the “National coalition for the legislation of protection of women from family violence”. The arguments of these opponents of the law, Islamist groups and their representatives, are rampant with fallacies and wrong information<sup>24</sup>, but they know very well that their power to oppose the passing of the law does not lie in the logic of their rhetorical arguments, but that it is derived from the present political robustness of confessional communities, as well as the

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<sup>22</sup> This was manifested, for example, by the loss of the state – backed by the civil society- to religious authorities of what became to be known as “the battle for the law of civil marriage” in the spring of 1998. The Islamist organizations and the church (albeit not overtly) launched a vicious campaign against the proposed law which failed to obtain a majority from the council of ministers. The loss of this battle before the religious authorities was a bitter reminder to the women’s movement and activists working under the banner of human rights of the obstacles these authorities pose in the face of legislation, especially that which is perceived as infringing on the power given to them by the Lebanese constitution (which allows them to manage the personal and familial affairs of the Lebanese). It is worthwhile noting that there is no unified personal status law in Lebanon. Instead, Lebanese citizens are subject to the personal status laws of their respective religious sects in which they are born. This system has led to a legal and judicial “plurality” in the matter of personal status and family law and it is sanctioned by the Lebanese constitution. Each of the 18 sectarian communities in Lebanon of 3 major religions Islam, Christianity and Judaism is thus constitutionally authorized to manage its own particular sub-regime, and the followers of each sect are subject to their sect’s respective personal status laws. Needless to say, the personal status laws, and particularly family laws, in Lebanon discriminate between women and men in numerous matters: marriage, divorce, inheritance, custody of children etc. That is the reason behind the Lebanese reservations (and most Arab countries) on some items of article 16 of CEDAW.

<sup>23</sup> Articles and provisions in this law are inspired by the legislative model prepared by the UN special rapporteur on VAW submitted in accordance with the Commission on HR resolution 1195/85 and the Socio- Economic Council of UN (1996) and is thus comprehensive in tackling all preventive, protective, pre-emptive and punitive aspects and the regulation of concerned security and legal bodies etc.

<sup>24</sup> Baydoun, (2011,b)

authority of their institutions, has over the legislative bodies of our weakened state. ‘Thanks’ to them, this law is being disfigured and emptied from its human rights value<sup>25</sup> as it moves from one legislative body to another.

#### **IV- Glimmers of hope...yet**

Certain positions being taken by some actors in the court (judges, witnesses, plaintiffs and prosecution mainly) towards the victims and killers in cases of femicide indicate a change of attitudes towards women killings in our society. This change, albeit small, represents a herald in an egalitarian gender attitude within the judiciary. Most important of these manifestations is that the courts have almost invariably refused to accept the alleged notion of “‘honour’” to “‘justify’” these crimes. Article 562 of the Lebanese penal code<sup>26</sup> that mitigates sentences of those accused of family femicides has rarely been referred to in the narratives of the court proceedings documents, let alone used by the judges, for decades now.

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<sup>25</sup> Before the draft of the law was approved by the council of ministers, and passed to the concerned committees of the Parliament to discuss it, an article was added insuring that the law will not contradict the religious personal affairs codes. The law is now being discussed by the concerned committees of the parliament which are apparently giving leeway to the Islamist members of the parliament and their allies –Islamist women groups - that are arguing against its passing through. Hence, the phrase ‘violence against women’ is removed from the title of the law rendering it ‘law of protection of the family’ and the article pertaining to ‘marital rape’ is removed... all in the name of protecting the family and its sanctity.

<sup>26</sup> Article 562 is the Lebanese version of the legal article that goes by popular discourse and media as ‘honor crime article’ and is numbered differently in different Arab penal codes. Article 562 states that “‘a person, who is caught by surprise by his spouse or one of his offspring or their offspring or his sister in the act of the sin of adultery or in an illegal sexual relation, and as a result, kills or injures one of them, without premeditation, can benefit from a reduced sentence’”. The formulation in other Arab states differs slightly: In some Arab countries the article refers only to accused men and female victims, in others it explicitly refers to both genders whether the perpetrator or the victim. In some countries, the article mitigates the sentence of the accused spouse but not accused blood relatives. Furthermore, in most Arab countries, if the courts do not refer to this particular article, then other substitute ones are used for mitigation of the sentence of the accused; The reason for mitigation may be the ‘highly emotional state’ of the perpetrator and/ or his being provoked by the ‘dangerous’ or ‘wrongful’ conduct of the victim.

This article has been recently repealed by the Lebanese Parliament from the Lebanese penal code. Femicides will be treated by the court, hereafter, like any other crime. It is true that these killers will benefit from other articles of the penal code that would mitigate their sentences, but the repealing of this article has a major symbolic connotation. It represents a breakthrough for the women's organizations who have been lobbying with decision makers, judges and religious leaders to this end, for decades<sup>27</sup>.

Yet, the courts through passing sentences that will take into account extenuating circumstances for the accused, and through assuming a double standard in assessing the behavior of victim ('wrong' and 'dangerous') and of the accused (his perceived motive and emotional state), will be sending misleading messages that reinforce the tendency to resort to what we call 'private justice' all over not only in communities that embrace the 'culture of 'honour''.

## **V- Combating VAW and the Political Situation**

As the uprisings move from one Arab country to another, we are witnessing contradictory manifestations in their new spaces of expression. It is true that the uprisings increased the visibility of women in the public space, (Tahrir Square or the social networks of the internet) but they equally made possible the surfacing of

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<sup>27</sup> Reading through the minutes of the general assembly meeting of the Lebanese parliament, for instance, reveals that members arguing for the repeal of article 562 were referring to arguments that had been formulated by the Lebanese women's movement, implying a definite impact of this movement's rhetoric on decision makers. (Baydoun, 2011 c).

Needless to say, decision makers were not the only group targeted by organizations of the Lebanese movements. Numerous programs tailored to educate and sensitize audiences in meetings with various communities and organized groups (students, lawyers, judges, security personnel, teachers, activists, etc.), and people at large through mass media. To learn more about these programs see the newsletter TANSEEQ (coordination for ending gender-based violence in Lebanon -UNFPA) (online) which has started recently documenting activities of organizations confronting VAW.

These efforts are replicated in other Arab countries as they are being executed within the framework of CEDAW and Beijing Platform of Action and in partnership with UN agencies and international human rights NGOs. The challenges encountered differ amongst these countries in intensity rather than nature.

previously oppressed and silenced societal forces- mainly Islamists- whose ideas are not always women friendly<sup>28</sup>.

In Lebanon, and in spite of the raging divisive political problems that are creating an atmosphere conducive to another episode of civil strife, the Lebanese women movement is in the middle of the battle for passing the “Law for the protection of women from family violence”. In Lebanon where political and security disruptions are ongoing events, women organizations, both governmental<sup>29</sup> and non-governmental that combat violence against women tend to move on with their agenda and not let the ‘current extraordinary circumstances’ be waved before them as an excuse to obstruct it. This tendency is reinforced, starting from mid 1990s<sup>30</sup>, by the independence of most women organizations from the national political parties, and confessional ones in particular. These organizations distanced themselves from the crippling divisions of the mentioned parties and adopted the UN approach to development and its stance towards women’s issues. Needless to say, the UN organizations<sup>31</sup> support and provision of technical and expertise aid to these women organizations has been a major impetus in more than one way; it

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<sup>28</sup> Women organizations in Egypt, for instance, are worried that certain amendments in family and personal status laws that took painstaking efforts to achieve during the uprooted regime, are now being questioned based on the claim that Suzanne Moubarak – the wife of the former president – instated those amendments. Similar conditions prevail in Tunisia – the Arab state friendliest to women. Hence the challenges to be met by human rights activists and the women movements in different Arab countries are currently ambiguous and need to be reformulated.

<sup>29</sup> The National Commission of Lebanese Women (women state machinery) sent letters to members of the Lebanese Parliament expressing its total support of the proposed law to “protect women from family violence” whose draft was prepared by the “National coalition for the legislation of protection of women from family violence”. See [www.nclw.org.lb](http://www.nclw.org.lb)

<sup>30</sup> With the cessation of military hostilities following the civil war in Lebanon and the adoption of the Lebanese government of Beijing platform of action and the signing of CEDAW, in July, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> Like other Arab countries activists for gender equality have been accused of adopting, without reserve, UN and western stances and approaches to women issues and disregarding our ‘cultural specificities’, but these accusations did not intimidate women activists nor did it hinder their efforts in combating violence against women.

helped women activists in their endeavour to free themselves from the grip of the above mentioned political parties. In Lebanon this was crucial; since with 15 years long of civil war, women were mostly trapped within the boundaries of their religious confessions and their respective organizations, or within the political parties and their agendas. They were thus unable to develop their own discourse. Furthermore, the UN proposed approaches to women's issues provided these women with the conceptual framework and practical tools necessary to help them formulate their independent agenda and to choose their partners and allies accordingly.

Since its inception in mid- nineties, combating violence against women has been an all inclusive endeavour. No social actors were excluded from activities executed to that effect and among those targeted by women organizations combating VAW, for instance, were groups and organizations that expressed their scepticism, if not their overt opposition<sup>32</sup>. This inclusion may have slowed down the process (of combating VAW) but it ensured the wide circulation of the issue and we may say that VAW has become presently embedded in mainstream media<sup>33</sup>, both traditional and new, and in political and various cultural and social activities.

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<sup>32</sup> In all conferences, forums, expert and stakeholders meetings etc. held by women organizations combating VAW, religious personnel –known for their enthusiastic guardianship of the hierarchical patriarchal family- were invited to participate and present their views.

<sup>33</sup> Media reports of women killings are getting to be more and more common, mostly in the form of sensational stories. Although this reporting has been viewed with reservation by women activists combating VAW, it served to break the silence surrounding the issue and was often the main source for gauging the prevalence of the phenomenon (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon). Moreover, media provided activists/commentators with a platform for awareness raising, and a means to disseminate widely their campaigns against the practice of 'private justice'. Enlightened Ulama expressed their views on the matter and distanced Islam from the wrongly held belief of the justification of the murder. On interactive internet sites, both views- proponents and opponents of the killings- are expressed, thus serving as a monitor for women activists of 'opinion' on the issue.

In Lebanon, for instance, media is approached by NGOs combating VAW in an attempt to implicate it in their cause. Presently it seems to have gained momentum independently, and VAW has become a constant item in its programs. Furthermore, individual persons picked up slogans, spots,

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In our part of the world, addressing women's issues requires a great deal of perseverance proportional to the high level of entrenchment of sexist ideas and the degree of normalization of discriminatory practices. Vigilance is mandatory to preserve accomplishments in view of the fact some forces are lurking to rob women of these accomplishments; these forces have much to lose if women were to live free from the threat of all forms of violence, fatal violence included.

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