

Palestinian and Kurdish Women in Occupied Areas, Conflict and Post- Conflict Areas in Different Countries in the Middle East, presented at the Women in War/LAU conference in Beirut June 2015

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I have dedicated all my life so far in Women's Rights and Peace activism. During the past years I have been working national and internationally, voluntary and professionally against gender based violence. Between the years 2007 and 2012 I lived and worked in the Middle East in different women's rights project but I also lived in Iraq for a whole year. My opinion is that the peace is fundamental to improve specific women's rights and emancipation and a secular society. Secular society in my definition is a society that has a constitution and legislation built on universal rights and conventions and the religion is a private matter. I think this is the best way also to protect freedom of any religion in the society but also the freedom of no religious belief and freedom of speech. I will in my presentation give you a glimpse of two women I have interviewed to my coming book "The Sources of Women". I want by their stories show the situation for women in conflict areas, their hard life struggle for liberation and emancipation in a violent society. But my main purpose is to show though hard obstacles their positive attitude, their courage and their spirituality and constructive capacity to find solutions even in a difficult environment. My intention is to show another picture of women in conflict then the one we are presented by media worldwide. I want to show these courageous women challenging the violent and patriarchal society for a change a paradigm shift.

Cynthia Cockburn, a well-known international researcher and feminist activist has done interesting analyses of the effects militarism in human rights, in particular women's rights. She focus on the effects of the 9/11 2001 and the following "war against terrorism and its impact in all our daily lives. She points out the impact and influence the women's movement has have and stress on three important tasks in their work. First they focus on the importance of people's education and enlightenment in the purpose of militarism and gender based violence. They attention their suffering but also their struggle, resistance and success during war and armed conflicts.

My focus in the book has been on Kurdish and Palestinian women.

Historically Mesopotamia was the home country for the Kurdish people and the Kurdish women had then a total different role in the society then now. Research and Archaeological discovers have proved this. The women had a leading role in the society. Their gifts in cultivating, richness and power were admired. This was 11000 years ago. Jîn in Kurdish means life and still the word for Woman in Kurdish is Jîn.

Awara an illiterate Yezidi and Kurdish woman from Halabja today a sewing teacher in a women's school in Halabja. She was forced into marriage at the age of 13 to a twenty year older man. Today she has six children with this man and she has had a hard life with child marriage, a violent husband, experiences of war (both civil war and foreign attacks) She is a victim of the Halabja attack. Many times during the years she had suicidal thoughts such as self-burning very common in Iraq. But all the years she has been political active and fighting for the education of her h children. When she experienced the Halabja attack she describes it like this: The dawn began but we were close to the village we fled to. Then it began to smell, it smelt like burning and it was hard to breath. She attention her husband to it, he thought it was pollution from the cars. People came running from the nearby situated village. They (Saddams forces) had bombed us with chemical weapons. Some became blind, some puke up and some could no longer walk. Since 1974, and when she returned to Halabja after the escape to Iran she felt the US occupation as a relief.

I have thought a lot on the story Awara told me, She was forced to child marriage against her will to a much older man The marriage as all forced and child marriages introduces with rape, bur where the religious family law says it is the husbands right to have sex whenever he wants within the marriage. After the first child was born she stops nagging about divorce. Thanks to the child marriage she lost her education and she is an adult women but still illiterate. Though this she struggle for all her children's rights to a proper education. She has escaped abroad with her small children during war period and survived that too and she has protested against the Iranian Islamism. As an adult women she has become a teacher to other women and learn them to supply for their own income by sewing courses. She has struggled against her husband for her right to a work out of home and her right to her own income but also for her right to stay political active in the society. Even though her husband beat her and abuse her during this period. She will now study herself to help her youngest children. A custom that has increased after the wars and the occupation is polygamy. The women are very poor and a conservative and prejudging

environment limit single women's independent life in the society. Widows have higher status than divorced women and single mothers are often seen as prostituted by the surrounding society. Sometimes male relatives get married to the widow to protect and supply for her, even if he has already one or more wives. Child marriages are also increasing cause by the high number of widows one to three millions today, they marry their daughters when they cannot supply for them. Many Kurds in the southern part thinks that the US occupation came as a relief. They had been oppressed by the Baath regime during many years. It is easy to put moralist aspects and opinions on this but there is a logical explanation. But it is also important to attention the main purpose by the US occupation of Iraq, the economical and imperialist purposes. After the occupation and after the US forces have left the polarisation and tensions between different ethnical and religious minorities in the region have increased dramatically. In the northern Iraq/or southern Kurdistan the economic interests from Turkey (and U S) have grown immense and I use to ironies and say they rebuild the Ottoman Empire. The situation in Syria has also an impact in the development.

The Palestinian national Mahmoud Darwish poet describes his home country as a beloved physical woman. A women, who's body, a man paid attention, owned, protected, killed for and sacrificed his life for. Very beautiful but also a perfect description of any nationalistic way of explain the patriarch. Anywhere!

The story of Khadija Palestinian, woman and refugee in Lebanon. Her family came to Lebanon in 1948 after the Zionist occupation of Palestine. She comes from a big family and have eight siblings. Her family were not poor but had a little fortune when they arrived to Lebanon. Her grandmother refused to invest in any property in Lebanon while they should return to Palestine one day. But she bought a tractor which was rented out also to Lebanese people and they earned money that way. Khadija became a kindergarten teacher and was one of the first to build up kindergartens in the camps. She was involved and employed by Najee Organisation they are still active in the camps in Lebanon. Khadija comes from a political active family and her father had a high position but she did not herself get into politic until the camps were destroyed and she became aware of the injustice against the Palestinians in Lebanon when she later on started to study political

science in the university. Though her mother got married very young and she brought up fifteen children (also relatives) she is still at the age of 82 very critical to the development in the Palestinian society. She is a very strong woman, she is also very religious and reads the Coran every day but she reject and condemn political Islam such as Hamas. She is very open minded and frank. All sisters in the family except Khadija wears hijab also her mother. Her mother is furious that Hamas force the women in Gaza to wear Hijab and she means that they use the religion politically.

Her mother but also Khadija want Palestine to be an open country to all, Muslims, Christians and Druses as it always has been. They want Palestine to be secular state as it has been. Nowadays the Islamists indoctrinates people and separate women and men as never before. Khadija and her mother say it makes the society to stagnation and they hope all governments in the near situated countries will stop the development to Islamist regimes and all introduce secular governance.

Also this story about Khadija shows a hard and tough life. How a young woman from a refugee camp has to struggle for her education in her own family but success from her parents that ignore conservative male relatives. She also describe the double oppression very well both inside the family as a women and from the racism and discrimination in the Lebanese society and how she overcome the obstacles. The impact of religious family laws is a result of an oppressive society that makes the Palestinian women depending on their own oppressive legislation were no alternatives are available. Family laws that still excuse m order in the name of honour even though some Palestinian leaders have tried to reform it. The Palestinian women always describes their migration to Lebanon as temporarily while they all intend to return some day. This is a more proactive way of describing the Palestinian question (Kassem, 2011)

The Kurdish situation in northern Iraq, or Southern Kurdistan appeared already when the Ottoman Empire ruled and after that the British colonisation. Even though the today situation, both the Kurdish and the Palestinian, has the historical aspects and wounds from the same era they are totally different acknowledged and analysed in the global political power. The Palestinian issue on the contrary is described as an occupation taking place after the Second World War as a solution to all Jewish refugees from Europe after the Holocaust. But Palestine was

hard struck by the Ottoman Empire as well as Kurdistan and the British colonialists signed an agreement for a Zionist state on Palestinian territory already 1920 in Bersheva in nowadays southern Israel. The Palestinians right to their own state is acknowledges by many states but not the Kurds right to their own state. This is strange. But I also fear the nationalist development all over the world. I am not sure it benefit women. I insist that the patriarchal world order is constructed by male hegemony, aggressive capitalism, militarism and religious fundamentalism. This is a challenge for both women and men to deconstruct.

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