The Interplay between States and Movements on Violence Against Women.
Comparative Perspectives in Sociology and Policy Analysis

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Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge-JMK

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Abstract

In the last 25 years, women's movements, governments and international bodies have been active in awareness-raising on and reduction of violence against women (VAW). The main aim of this issue is to provide an overview of comparative perspectives of policies and services, which offer an innovative point of view to evaluate action. A comparative outlook on VAW initiatives can show acceleration or deceleration in decision-making, proliferation or scarcity of regulations, high or low effectiveness of plans and services in reaching set goals, and reasons why this is the case.

The four articles of this issue present original research conducted on firearm policy on a global scale, comparative analysis of services in Italy, accessibility of VAW services in Israel and perceptions of VAW after film screening in Tunisia. The articles illustrate the level of interest that elicited by VAW, the complexities of the analysis and the local and global actors that play a role in action against this global problem.

Keywords: Violence against women, Gender violence, Women's movements, Feminist movements, Prevention policies, State policies.

In the last 25 years, in many regions of the world there has been a growing concern and debate on violence against women (henceforth VAW) as a social phenomenon. Grass-root movements, feminist and women's movements, public bodies, NGOs and international bodies such as the UN, the EU and more, have been very active in awareness-raising, prevention and reduction of VAW. Attention to this topic arose at the end of the 1960s, especially in the USA and some of the Western European countries where second-wave feminism began calling attention to VAW through their claims about women's subordinate position in society (Fraser, 1985; Moghadam, 2015; Hall 2015). Since that time, awareness has spread slowly but continually across the globe. In 1979 the UN General Assembly adopted the CEDAW-Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women, which includes relevant articles on VAW. In 1986, the European Parliament passed a Resolution on VAW, which became the first in a series of initiatives and positions. In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna and, in 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing took up and strongly relaunched this issue. In 1994, the UN Commission on Human Rights created the office of a Special Rapporteur with the mandate to collect information, recommend measures to eliminate VAW and work closely with other bodies in the framework of human rights.

Today, many countries of the world have deliberated provisions on VAW. This has now become a central theme on the women's international agenda, part of a strong discourse that, since the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, has shifted the issue of violence from the cognitive framework of women's dignity to the global discourse on human rights. Many demands by feminists and women condense around it: the criticism of male dominance, the expectation of equality, the protection of victims as vulnerable subjects, the expectation of empowerment.

The main aim of this issue is to provide an overview of comparative perspectives on VAW. More specifically, the issue offers innovative perspectives on research, analysis and policy on this global phenomenon, to be applied in contemporary multicultural societies. By VAW, we mean different kinds of individual action purposely meant to harm women and girls. Examples of VAW are, among others, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, and femicide. By policies on VAW we mean laws, plans, services, shelters and any other form of collective initiative that aims at preventing and reducing this phenomenon. The four articles of this issue present original research conducted on firearm policy on a global scale, comparative analysis of services in different regions of Italy, accessibility of VAW services for minority group women in Israel and awareness raising media screening and perception of VAW in Tunisia. Taken together, these articles make up on original view that illustrates the level of interest that VAW elicits in the world, the complexities of the analysis and the many actors who act on the local and global setting and play a crucial role in the definition, awareness-raising, fight and prevention of the problem.

The comparative analysis of policies and services offers an innovative point of view to evaluate action to combat and prevent VAW (Corradi and

Stöckl, 2016). By comparative outlook we mean analysis which looks at similarities and differences in diverse social settings. A comparative outlook on VAW initiatives can show acceleration or deceleration in decision-making, proliferation or scarcity of regulations in different settings, high or low effectiveness of plans and services in reaching set goals, and reasons why this is the case. To date, while there is an extremely vast and growing literature on VAW, there are very good but still scarce examples of comparative studies assessing the existence of different policy regimes on VAW, i.e. different frameworks and actions to tackle this social problem (Balkmar et al., 2009; Eriksson et al., 2005; Hearn and McKie, 2010;Roggeband, 2012; Charles and Mackay, 2013). The comparative outlook on VAW policy is innovative also because it recognizes that there are a number of actors who play a role in the policymaking: public bodies (such as the nation-state or local administrations), civil society associations, women's movements and supra-national bodies all play a part in identifying needs, demanding and approving budget, drafting policies, implementing services. Potentially, governments have multiple resources available and are the strongest actor on stage, but they never act alone. They can introduce new criminal offenses in the penal code; they can assign public funding for advertising campaigns, and helplines; they are able to reorganize the welfare state structure and coordinate the activities of different agencies, like the courts, the police, public hospitals, and social services. As Stamatel, Ratajczak and Hoekstra show in their article, states are responsible for approving regulation of firearms. From the moment that VAW policy-making becomes an issue on the government agenda, long-term transformations are in place. However, governments act because they are pressured to do so by other important actors on stage (Abraham and Tastsoglou, 2016).

Policies on violence against women are the final result of processes of cultural change triggered by collective actors and social events that solicit and guide institutional action. In this special issue, the articles based on empirical research conducted in Italy, Israel and Tunisia are an excellent illustration of the interplay of collective actors and social events which produces long-term social change. Institutional action alone is not sufficient to enact policies on VAW, which must therefore be read in the light of the complex local context in which they are produced. The framework developed by Weldon (Weldon, 2002) and Mazur (Mazur 2009; Mazur et al.

2016) is one of the most interesting theoretical models that guides this reading; it places women's movements at the centre of the progression of policies on VAW. An extensive literature (Bumiller 2009; Creazzo 2008; Stewart 2002; Weldon 2002) highlights how women's movements were the first to build public discourse on VAW, in the United States, Western European countries and then internationally since the 1970s. Since that time, movements became the main providers of quantitative and qualitative knowledge on the subject (Hall, 2015). The movements were also the main actors of institutional pressure both at national and supranational level taking charge of the problem. To "build the discourse" means to perform cognitive operations of categorization, selection and exclusion: in this case, it means to subsume into the single category of VAW, a series of social facts (insult, verbal threat, physical offense, stalking, rape, homicide, etc.) in which the woman is a victim and the man the perpetrator; it means to give theoretical explanations to the phenomenon so categorized (i.e., bringing all of its forms back to the patriarchal culture), and to start under this category a series of practices and events (studies, publications, public discussions, legislative proposals, etc.). These have the effect of adding up further knowledge, modifying the perception of the public and institutions, attributing new symbolic meanings, intervening on the social acceptance and rejection of the phenomenon, and constituting a body of theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence which, with the reiteration of discourse and further sedimentation of knowledge, slowly comes to acquire the status of a widely accepted interpretive framework (Shepherd, 2019). These cognitive operations are always taking place - implicitly or explicitly - in the construction of discourses in the public sphere; since the mid 70s and until today, they have highlighted VAW as a category that was previously confined to the sphere of private actions.

A social movement is a form of collective mobilization based on demands for social justice. Women's movements are social movements that aim to improve the condition of women (Weldon, 2002, p. 62); they identify women as a group and self-define themselves as women representing women. Some of the movements' ideas may be feminist as they aim to challenge the subordination of women to men and the hierarchies that support them (Mazur et al., 2016).

L. Weldon examines 36 different democratic countries in terms of culture, religion and geographical location, and interrogates why some of them from 1974 to 1994 have implemented policies to counter the phenomenon of VAW and others have been insensitive to this issue. Weldon does not measure the effectiveness of policies but wants to identify the factors of responsiveness, or capacity to respond, of governments in tackling the phenomenon. The types of public intervention identified by the author are: laws on domestic violence and sexual violence; existence of shelters and emergency shelter services for victims; training programmes for professionals including police, judges and social workers; public awareness campaigns; existence of a public agency for national policy coordination (Weldon, 2002, p. 13). The comparison allows the scholar to conclude that some of the often-mentioned factors, such as the influence of a Church or women's inequality, are not sufficient to generate reaction capacities in governments.

The results of Weldon's research show that the necessary condition for a public response to the VAW phenomenon, understood as a course of action (e.g. political and civil servant positions, laws, decrees and other initiatives), is the existence of a women's movement which is strong and independent from political parties, trade unions or other organisations, acting to reinforce the interventions of public institutions responsible for promoting the status of women. Autonomy allows the movement to develop an original agenda, through the identification of a series of issues of common interest and their discussion in groups according to the personal experiences of the participants. The possibility to spread the identified priorities outside the movement is compromised when the women's movement is a subgroup of a larger entity (i.e. a trade union or political party), which has a main purpose different from the status of women. In this case the perspectives and objectives of the sub-group are secondary to the priorities of the organisation, which will tend to pursue only those issues that can fit its own broader and "neutral" agenda. In other words, the organisation will prefer to devote resources to achieving objectives that involve everyone rather than objectives that specifically concern women. The main mechanisms through which the women's movements, according to Weldon, influence the governmental response are lobbying to influence the way in which the social problem is defined and symbolically represented by the institutions, and creating public consensus

on a "women's agenda" which embraces several themes proposed as "women's issues", including VAW. As a result, the role of women's movements in determining governments' response is mainly to be agents of cultural change and discourse: these movements call into question the social values that make gender roles and practices normative or deviant, attribute public relevance to aspects that previously concerned the private sphere and propose a theoretical interpretation of the phenomenon that addresses the solution of the problem.

The work of A. Mazur (2009) integrates this perspective. Sheargues that women's movements have more chance of success not so much when they are united or when there are left-wing parties in government, but rather when there is a strategic partnership between the movements and those who sit in state institutions. The expression "femocrats" indicates this strategic partnership: women who are elected in public office or enter public administrations and support feminist causes through their action and in connection with women's movements and organisations. According to the research group coordinated by Mazur (Mazur et al., 2016), studying the different impact of movements on policies within different cultural systems and across historical periods means measuring the strength of movements with two dimensions: the capacity for mobilization or activism, and institutionalization. Mobilization refers to the accumulation of elements of advantage through the participation of women activists outside the structures of the state in order to advance the discourse and policy objectives of the movement in a wide variety of formal and informal structures (Mazur et al., 2016, p. 658). Institutionalization of the movement refers to elements of advantage that arise from the presence of representatives of women's movements in public institutions, national and regional parliaments, bureaucracies and public administration bodies, political parties, lobbying structures, trade unions, and more (Mazur et al., 2016, p. 658).

Finally, in analysing the role of the movements in the advancement of policies on VAW, it is important not to forget the weight of supranational political action and the centrality that the issue acquires through international conferences and conventions. In this field, supranational institutions such as the UN and the EU do not have the hard power to pass compulsory laws for nation-states, but they exercise a moral suasion on the latter in building discourses and suggesting best-case approaches to social

problems; at the same time, international conferences and conventions promote the development of VAW.

In the first article of this special issue, J. Stamatel, K. Ratajczak and R. Hoekstra examine the extent to which availability of and regulations on firearms affect lethal VAW. This is the first available study to empirically investigate whether firearm regulations specifically designed to protect women decrease the risk for lethal VAW globally.

The authors acknowledge that in the last two decades, there have been significant advances in data collection documenting the prevalence of VAW across a fairly large number of countries due to efforts by international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime to improve the measurement and monitoring of this global social problem. With respect to lethal VAW, males face considerably higher risk of homicide than females, but the causes and contexts of female homicides are quite different than males. For example, firearms are the most frequent means of committing homicide globally and young males are the modal victims of firearm homicides. However, females' risk of lethal gun violence rises significantly in the context of intimate partner and family violence. Among documented homicide cases in the world that result from intimate partner or family conflict, 82% of victims in these cases are female.

One way to protect women from firearm violence within the private sphere is therefore to regulate access to guns based on the risk of family violence. As such, some countries include domestic violence offenses as part of background checks for gun licenses and deny or revoke licenses for applicants with domestic violence convictions. However, we do not know the effectiveness of gun regulations for reducing VAW on a global scale or whether or not geographic variations in levels of lethal VAW can be explained, in part, by differences in firearm policies across countries. To address this knowledge gap, Stamatel, Ratajczak and Hoekstra examine a relatively large sample of countries. Based on an extensive discussion on available literature, the authors posit and test six theoretical hypotheses concerning the *material* context of VAW (economic development and income inequality of the country), the *integrative* context (adoption of policies that mandate criminal history check on applicants for gun licenses in the country), the *situational* context (gender inequality and lethal VAW rates in

the country) and *cultural* context (countries with a history of persistent or severe violence).

The results from the quantitative analyses confirm three of the six hypotheses for this study. Notably, the *situational* and *cultural* contexts have the most influence on lethal VAW across countries. Greater gender inequality, more firearms, and living in Latin America were consistent predictors of high female homicide rates. There were mixed results for the *material* context, although the findings raise interesting questions for further research. In countries where women have longer life expectancies, more education, and higher standards of living relative to men, they are also at *greater* risk for violent victimization. In contrast, countries where women have more equality, as measured by more reproductive freedom, more political power, and more labor force participation, they have a *lower* risk for violent victimization. These seemingly contradictory findings are consistent with previous studies that have found support for both the backlash and amelioration hypotheses with respect to understanding VAW cross-nationally. Greater rewards for women from economic development could generate a backlash effect, whereas greater social status through gender equality may enable women to enact social protections against violence. As the authors admit, more refined measures of the different aspects of gender roles, status, equality, norms, and values are needed to adequately disentangle these complex relationships.

The key question of interest for this study that was situated in the *integrative context* was not well supported in this study. Criminal history background checks were not significant in any of the regression models. Similarly, domestic violence background checks were not significant in the main regression models. Although these findings are contrary to theoretical expectations, Stamatel, Ratajczak and Hoekstra suggest that it would be premature to conclude that firearm regulations are ineffective. Theirs is the first study to examine the effects of these laws cross-nationally so additional research is warranted before any strong conclusions can be drawn. For example, further investigation suggested that legal protections against VAW might be relevant under certain social conditions. This is an area worthy of further research.

In the second article of this special issue,A. M. Toffanin, M. Pietrobelli, A. Gadda and M. Misiti investigate the connection between the process of integrating anti-violence centers(AVCs) in the Italian public welfare system

and changes incurred in the original, feminist approach which created these centers in the first place. The interplay between public action and the women's movement is a crucial part of the analysis.

In Italy, the evolution of state intervention to combat VAW is linked both to the activities of grassroots movements, namely feminist and women's groups, and to the role of international, supranational, and European conventions and agreements. VAW public policies only started in the mid 1990s, i.e. comparatively later than elsewhere in Europe. Country regulations - such as different forms of coordination (i.e. plans, protocols), regulatory frameworks (i.e. standards), and criteria for resource allocation - act at the regional level and they are fragmented and heterogeneous. In recent years, there has been a willingness to regulate the system of services supporting women, through adoption of the National Action Plans on VAW and, in 2014, approval of the so-called "Agreement between State and Regions on minimum requirements for anti-violence centers and shelters". By analyzing different Italian regional systems that support women experiencing violence, Toffanin, Pietrobelli, Gadda and Misiti aim to answer the following questions: what consequences does the bureaucratization of VAW policies have on the activities and practices of AVCs? To what extent has a policy that originated from the activities and practices of feminism ended up in very strict bureaucratization processes? Since many AVCs build their services on a "women's-relationship" methodology, which is based on respect of women's needs and confidentiality, do these policies affect the methodology? Three Italian Regions are identified for fieldwork: Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna in the north of the country, and Apulia in the south. They were selected in the light of their VAW policy development, since they all have been very active in implementing a system of support services, although with different strategies.

The authors conducted a comparative review of documents, laws, regional plans, and legislation from the selected Regions. At the same time, they also analyzed qualitative data collected from thirty-five AVCs and six shelters. The analysis reveals huge heterogeneity in terms of practices as well as the symbolic and political meaning of the interventions and sometimes tensions related to the role of the AVCs, and their relationships with public actors and the VAW victims.

Toffanin, Pietrobelli, Gadda and Misiti maintain that public institutions are crucial in defining and financing actions to combat VAW. Furthermore, the heterogeneity of methodologies and interventions in the anti-violence system seems to require evaluation of practices and results, as the public aim is to give all women, wherever they live, equal opportunity to access the anti-violence system both in terms of territorial availability and quality. For the anti-violence system, public administrations are proposing solutions by setting quantitative criteria and standards of evaluation. However, the authors also urge to pay attention to the regulating processes that may fail to recognize the specificity of VAW. They claim that the strong connection between VAW and welfare policies cannot result in framing anti-violence services and plans as social policies. In a time when bureaucratization processes of VAW policies seem to be in an advanced phase, and AVCs are called to sustain a great role in combining a technocratic approach typical of institutions, AVCs political action is still oriented to tackle gender unequal power relations. In the development of a national system of services against VAW, the challenge policies face will be to avoid as much as possible the de-politicization and de-genderization, thus guaranteeing AVCs' sustainability and continuity in order to improve the support to women experiencing violence.

In the third article of this special issue, T. Meler and M. Hisherik deal with domestic VAW (including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence) from the minority groups of Palestinian and Ethiopian women in Israel, which record far more cases than other populations. In the country, these women, who belong to patriarchal, collectivist societies undergoing changes influenced by global trends, suffer from poor civil status. The obligation of the state institutional resources (such as the welfare system, the judicial system, public housing, etc.) to these women and their right to protection is sometimes conceptualized as a struggle for women-human rights. However, until recently, academic and public discussion has not considered the possibility that the state maintains tools and services for violence victims, which are inaccessible to them. The debatable level of commitment of the state stems from the intersectionality of exclusion, which occurs on the political, economic, and social level and renders citizenship meaningless. In their daily lives, these women are exposed to "hollow citizenship", i.e. to the disparity between on the one hand the commitment to protection and legal entitlement to relevant

resources and services which are declared by public bodies, and on the other hand their vulnerability in practice, which is reflected in continuous exposure to domestic violence.

Meler and Hisherik held semi-structured interviews with widowed or divorced/separated Muslim and Christian Palestinian women with children, abused Ethiopian women and Israeli officials at all levels in the social services for domestic violence prevention. Findings show that official citizenship does not always imply stability and protection for women. The analysis revealed oppressive structures that prevent women from having full access to formal resources. State and welfare policies create stratified citizenship, where women are at the lowest level, especially if they belong to excluded groups, such as minority groups, immigrants, or women in low socio-economic status. Thus, authors distinguish between Palestinian women who suffer from partially exclusionary citizenship (as part of the Jewish majority) and Palestinian women who suffer from fully exclusionary, "hollow" citizenship. The interviewees who had already contacted the authorities had to deal with major social barriers. Attempting to receive appropriate care and guidance sometimes fails due to language barriers or concern about authoritative spaces such as welfare or legal authorities. Legal challenges include being unfamiliar with social services and criminal systems, as well as feelings of alienation and distrust.

Meler and Hisherik's study also shows that the state of Israel has dual governance, manifested in a discrepancy between the rhetorical level, in which the state declares a commitment to its citizens, and the practical level, which reveals abandonment. This discrepancy is reflected in the cultural bias of drafting regulations and laws and their unsuitability to women from certain ethnic-national-class positions, problem in decision making, budget allocation and sometimes removal of VAW from the agenda. Meler and Hisherik claim that such dual governance provides a partial solution that does not meet the needs of abused women and often relies on patriarchal mechanisms. In some cases, there is also a discrepancy between the scope of investment in solutions and the needs, which means that the allocated budgets are not realistic.

On the basis of their findings regarding the similarities emerging from the marginal status of Palestinian and Ethiopian women, authors conclude by listing concrete recommendations for Israeli policy makers in the prevention and treatment of VAW, including through legislation and the

establishment of a national agency that will review and monitor the prevention and treatment of violence over time.

In the last article of this special issue, J. Tchaïcha and K. Arfaoui focus on perceptions of gender violence in Tunisia, as triggered by K. Ben Hania's film, *The Beauty and the Dogs*.

Tunisia is known to be one of the most progressive countries in the Middle East and North Africa region in terms of women's legal rights. In 1957, the country adopted the Code of Personal Status, which recognized women's right to education and workplace opportunities. In 2014, it became the first country in the region to ratify the CEDAW without reservations, and it was one of two countries in the region to adopt its Optional Protocol on human trafficking thanks to women activists who lobbied the government demanding action. Across the years, Tunisian women groups and organizations have continued to advocate protection of these rights by monitoring the actions and policies that actually impeded access to these provisions. It was not until 2017, however, that the government amended the Tunisian Penal Codeto align it with provisions addressing VAW to prosecute rapists and perpetrators of VAW. In present day Tunisia, more women appear more empowered to make their voices heard. Yet, still very few women pursue legal recourse to the end. What is behind this gap? What factors influence women's perception of gendered violence? Do they believe that Tunisian institutions and laws are effective in addressing VAW? To elicit some answers to these questions, Tchaïcha and Arfaoui present a year-long study centered on women's perception of gendered violence in post-revolutionary Tunisia. The research design encompassed Ben Hania's film screening in eight different locations in southern Tunisia which women and young female adolescents attended. Afterwards, the attendees to the screening completed a post-viewing survey and participated in focus group discussions.

Ben Hania's award-winning *Beauty and the Dogs* addresses sexual violence on multiple levels. Ben Hania developed her fictional account from a real event that took place in Tunis in 2012. The storyline exposes female sexual and psychological violence, but the act of rape is never depicted on screen. In the film, Meriem is a young woman who meets Youssef at a student party. They are both physically attracted to each other and leave the crowd to enjoy a walk along the beach. A few hours later, the audience sees Meriem screaming, and in shock. A long night ensues during

which time she exposes her case to the police and medical staff, in the hope of being provided with the help she needed. She recounts how the "morality police" stopped the couple and interrogated Youssef, while she was dragged into the police vehicle and raped. The arrogance, viciousness, and inhumanity of the police is such that, instead of finding help, Meriem is accused of indecent exposure and moral turpitude –an archaic remnant of Tunisia's social code law. And so, as it has long been the case for women globally, the accuser becomes the accused.

The 101 female participants voluntarily attended the film screening and responded to research protocols, assisted by members of local branches of women-focused non-governmental organizations who had extended the invitation by email and word of mouth to participate in the study. Participants were asked to complete the post-viewing survey, which was followed by their participation in small focus group discussions. Part one of the survey gathered general demographic information and background experience. Part two queried their individual reactions to the film and concluded with questions about their renewed personal agency to tackle gendered violence in their own communities. The focus groups began by eliciting general reactions to the film, which set the stage for more open-ended probes about the state of gendered violence in their communities and their opinions about the latest national efforts to curb the violence in the public sphere and at home, and the challenges in raising young girls and women's awareness of their rights.

Almost all women recognized the positive impact of the reforms made to the *Penal Code*, but they also acknowledged that further work was needed in the field to protect women against all odds, particularly with regard to unchanged mentalities and patriarchal laws. The sense of female solidarity was ever present in each session. Women, young and old, believed that Meriem did not deserve what happened to her regardless of her behavior, and they were united in their opinion that people in positions of power who abuse their power are more reprehensible than any kind of behavior exhibited by a VAW victim, such as what was depicted in the film. There was also a clear sentiment that women must unite to fight against VAW; relying on men or the state (which many considered as dominated by a patriarchal mindset) to ask for change will not solve the problem. In conclusion, Tchaïcha and Arfaoui claim that VAW remains a

very real problem impacted by socio-cultural mores that remain a dominant influencer on the application of the changing laws.

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