Gender and Transition in Libya

Mapping women's participation in post-conflict reconstruction

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Executive summary

More than three years after the end of the Gaddafi regime, Libya is struggling to end a vicious circle of violence in order to take steps towards reconciliation and durable peace. This paper analyses the ongoing transitional period in Libya from a gender perspective. It maps the most pressing concerns of the post-conflict transition: women's lack of security in both public and private spaces, the silence around conflict-related sexual violence in transitional justice processes, the struggles for political representation and gender-sensitive electoral processes, the challenges of including both men and women in reconciliation efforts, and the lack of sustained international engagement for gender justice in Libya. It is argued that women's security concerns remain unaddressed, and that formal and informal structures interact to exclude women from decision-making and transitional justice processes. At the same time the study shows that women in Libya take an active role in the political transformation and have made some inroads into traditionally male domains of politics.

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Keywords

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Introduction

Libyan women not only experience the fear of the rising crime and violence, the unlimited availability and misuse of weapons or the conflict in power between the weak government and the illegitimate armed groups wandering the streets of Libya and killing whoever don't please them, but they also have to deal with the endless harassment, threats, sexual assaults and now execution as well. And what's worse is that they also have to deal with a series of ludicrous "fatwas" that impede their ability to lead an independent private and personal life.
 Libyan blogger Nafissa Assed

More than three years after the revolution that toppled the Gaddafi regime, Libya is struggling to end a vicious circle of violence and move towards reconciliation and durable peace. This paper analyses the ongoing transitional period from a gender perspective in order to better understand the situation for women in Libya and to identify possibilities for transformation. We show that women's security concerns remain unaddressed, and that formal and informal structures interact to exclude women from decision-making and transitional justice processes. At the same time, windows of opportunity are identified within the ongoing transitional justice process and we point to instances of women's contributions to positive developments.

This is a timely study. Nearly 15 years have passed since the adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325, which calls for the protection of women and girls in conflict and for the participation of women in peace processes (United Nations Security Council 2000). Nonetheless, gender inequality in post-conflict countries remains large and peacebuilding practices repeatedly fail to include women in decision-making, thereby reproducing gender hierarchies (e.g. Anderlinini 2007; Bell and O'Rourke 2010; Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic 2013). At the same time, peacebuilding and transitional justice projects are concerned with transformation – and are thus periods of deep change and huge challenges.

Transitional periods are precarious times of negotiation, formation, reconstruction and reassessment. They entail dealing with a contested past while forming an uncertain future. At such moments of fluidity, windows of opportunity open up for challenging one of the most pervasive inequalities – that between men and women. Such opportunities can involve the transformation of societal norms as well as material, legal and social injustices. Given that post-conflict reconstruction provides an important opportunity to study the effects of institutional change (Gizelis and Pierre 2013), it is important to monitor the "gender gaps" of such change. Scholarship emerging on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is an increasingly important contribution to security studies and IR literature. In the world of policy there is growing recognition that gender equality must be projected as a key element of sustainable peace and development (de Jounge Oudraat 2013). All too often, however, analysis of the gender dimension is added as an afterthought, in the manner of "add gender and stir."

As a post-conflict country going through an unstable transitional period, Libya provides a case in point for investigating the gendered dimensions of peacebuilding and transitional

justice mechanisms as they unfold in a time of social turmoil that also carries opportunities for change. The situation for women receives barely a footnote in the academic literature on Libya or reports by international organizations. Overall, research and policy papers of real substance are scarce – and comprehensive analyses of the gendered dimensions of the transitional period almost entirely absent.

In this paper, we explore how the broad concerns of 1325 have been addressed in post-Gaddafi Libya. Our investigation rests on the existing but scattered information on women in Libya gathered from a close reading of recent accounts of the transitional period. The sources include academic papers, news reports, reports by civil society organizations in Libya, and reports by international organizations such as the UN mission to Libya (UNSMIL). The written sources have been complemented by 11 interviews with representatives of women's and youth groups, government officials, UNSMIL and transitional justice experts either based in Libya or with experience of fieldwork in Libya. Out of concern for their safety, the Libyan interviewees are anonymous.[1]

The study focuses on the most pressing concerns of the post-conflict transition that Libya faces today, such as the deteriorating security situation, transitional justice processes, electoral processes and the challenges and opportunities linked to women's political participation. Through this mapping we have been able to identify a number of gendered challenges in the reconstruction of the Libyan state. We have also identified instances of advances in gender justice and indications that women are increasingly taking part in political life, thereby beginning to shape a discourse of inclusiveness. The mapping is not all-encompassing. Nonetheless it adds to previous findings from other contexts that have established linkages between sustained and multiple insecurities and women's shrinking space for political participation and inclusive peacebuilding. The study thus supports the argument that in order to build durable peace for all, gendered dimensions of peacebuilding need to be addressed. The limited attention paid to the injustices against women in post-conflict settings is often accepted as a "necessary evil" in order to maintain a fragile peace and avoid antagonizing social conservative forces. These "gendered silences" permeate analyses, strategies and research, and reinforce gender hierarchies.

The paper is organized as follows: first it provides a short overview of key findings and contemporary debates in the field of gender and peace research. Then follows an overview of the gendered politics prior to and during the Libyan revolution, before focusing on the post-revolution society. Current ongoing insecurities, political participation, legislation, sexual and gender-based violence, transitional justice and international support are analysed from a gender perspective. The paper ends with a summary and concluding discussion.

What Do We Know about Gender, War and Peace?

The adoption of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 in 2000 made women's protection and participation in times of conflict a matter of international peace and security.

The resolution calls for the *protection* of women from violence, including sexual violence during conflict, the *participation* of women at all levels of decision-making related to peace processes, and the consideration of women's and men's sometimes distinct needs in all programming, implementation and evaluation of conflict management and peacebuilding efforts, so-called *gender mainstreaming* (United Nations Security Council 2000). Several subsequent resolutions have reinforced the call for gender equality at all levels of decision-making and conflict management.[2]

Growing international concern about sustained intrastate violence, and the insight that almost half of all settled disputes relapse into conflict, provide cause to rethink existing models for building sustainable peace and security (Harbom and Wallensteen 2010; see also The World Bank 2011). Research indicates that states characterized by gender equality are less likely to experience intrastate conflict (Caprioli 2005) and literature on gender equality, development and security suggests that successful long-term development and sustainable peace are interlinked with policies that promote gender equality.[3] Hence it is often argued that for the sake of efficiency, if not for justice, peacebuilding efforts should include support for gender equality through stable institutions that guarantee and implement policies on gender equality.

In the international arena there is growing recognition of resolution 1325 as a global norm. At the same time, implementation of the resolution "on the ground" is slow and arduous. Gender rights tend to be moved down the list of priorities in precarious transitions from war to peace – by international as well as national stakeholders. As discussed below, the transitional process in Libya has been no exception. Further, emerging critical peacebuilding research has begun to evaluate efforts to address gender inequalities in the transitional phases, and to critically scrutinize the implicit or explicit gender hierarchies that transitional justice and peacebuilding measures may reinforce (Väyrynen 2010).

Continuities of violence

Research confirms that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) occurs in many – but not all – conflicts, and can have multiple causes. While sometimes used strategically by the belligerents, it can also sometimes be opportunistic, and unfold as part of a general breakdown of societal cohesion, law and order. A recent quantitative study based on a new database on conflict-related sexual violence backs up qualitative case studies of conflict-stricken countries in which sexual violence has been prevalent, such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Nordås and Cohen 2014). The real numbers of victims may be even higher than those that emerge in research, considering the social stigma related to rape and other forms of sexual violence. This under-reporting has consequences in the post-conflict phase, as the overwhelming number of SGBV crimes are never considered in transitional justice mechanisms such as tribunals or truth commissions. Thus, gendered impunity and silence reign, despite the existence of explicit provisions on the protection of women and girls in resolution 1325 and subsequent Security Council resolutions.

The above studies have also exposed the fact that levels of SGBV remain high even after peace has been declared. Furthermore, SGBV in the post-conflict phase tends to move away from public places into the private sphere. Taken together, the findings question the standard dichotomy of war and peace. Temporal and spatial ideas that have defined our thinking around peace and in/security, such as "before" and "after" war as well as perceived differences between the "private" and the "public", are challenged by gendered readings (Mannergren Selimovic et al 2012).

Participation in transitional processes

Knowledge on the participation of women in peace processes – an important part of resolution 1325 – is patchy, but it is well established that women's participation is limited, and that the number of women taking part in some aspects of peace processes has actually declined (Bell and O'Rourke 2010). Beyond peace negotiations, gender representation is important in the various national and transitional forums in which roadmaps for societal transformation are drawn up. In many post-conflict countries, women's groups have successfully lobbied for gender quotas that support women's entry into decision-making bodies.[4] At the same time one must guard against facile assumptions that the presence of women automatically brings true participation and influence.

It is important to highlight women's agency beyond formal structures and search for it in informal spaces, such as civil society organizations. These spaces tend to open up in a post-conflict society, often in a process supported by international organizations that endorse women's rights. Civil society may therefore be a springboard for women's formal inclusion in peace processes. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, countries that have gone through two decades of peacebuilding, civil society has provided a space for women to engage in peacebuilding. At the same time, however, women's contributions to peace have often been overlooked precisely because they take unconventional forms and occur outside of formal spaces (Cockburn 2013; Mzvondiwa 2007). Moreover, it must be recognized that peacebuilding efforts take place within a larger environment of non-explicit "hidden" constraints on women. Such constraints may be linked to cultural norms, social codes and often deeply ingrained patriarchal values. In order to make a gender-just peace possible, these informal constraints must be recognized Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic 2013).

The above observations serve as seminal points of departure for a gender analysis of Libya's transitional process. In what way are they applicable to the situation in transitional Libya?

Libya's Revolution and Stalled Peace

Libyan women played a significant role in the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi after 42 years of despotic rule. Indeed, it was a demonstration led by women that sparked the revolution. For more than a year preceding the revolution, the mothers, sisters and widows of prisoners who had been killed in a massacre following the Abu Salim prison uprising of 1996 demonstrated in Benghazi. They called for a truth commission and accountability mechanisms. The weekly

protests escalated on 15 February 2011, igniting larger demonstrations that eventually called for the downfall of the regime. It was "…a mini-revolution against the Gaddafi's dictatorship… (t)heir protest was without precedent since Gaddafi's arrival in power" (Sharqieh 2013: 9). The protesters were violently dispersed, but their protests spread to several other towns, including Tripoli, demanding that Gaddafi step down (FIHD 2014). Women also took an active part in the ensuing war. They communicated information, acted as spokespersons, smuggled weapons and supported the families of the injured and killed. Some women took part in the fighting, although as the revolution grew more violent women mostly organized support behind the frontlines (FIHD 2014; Langhi 2014; Stephen et al 2011; Birke 2011).

In response to the civil war, in March 2011 the UN enforced a no-fly zone over Libya and a NATO-led intervention involving a coalition of states set out to support the rebels and prevent civilian suffering. Following the withdrawal of international troops and the establishment of a UN mission to support transition, Libya was left with a legacy of weak central institutions, a population deeply divided along tribal, ethnic and religious lines and the task of dealing with crimes committed by both sides.

Today, a majority of Libyans consider disarmament of militias, political stability and personal security as the most important issues to be addressed (National Democratic Institute 2014). Even as an embryo of civic rule and democratic institutions has been established, Libya's transition is repeatedly being called into question. Recent violent demonstrations of power by armed militias aim to undermine the legitimacy of the congress, and disarmament and reintegration of revolutionaries have been stalled by lack of employment and subsequent economic reintegration into civilian life. The level of instability and the absence of central power have been highlighted by events such as the abduction of the then Prime Minister Ali Zeidan in October 2013, and the government's inability to control oil output which led US troops to take control over an oil tanker loaded by Benghazi-based rebels (Stephen 2014).

Tribal rivalries continue to destabilize the political process. The interim parliament was heavily criticized for extending its own mandate and the parliament building have repeatedly come under armed attack (Al Jazeera 2014). Elections for a House of Representatives were held in June 2014, hastily announced just over a month before the new election date (BBC 2014a). In the new House of Representatives, the former Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril's party bloc National Forces Alliance, widely described as a centrist, liberal party, doubled its seats (BBC 2014b). In the ongoing power struggle over territory and oil output, it remains to be seen through what division of power, and ultimately in which type of state formation, the historically divided and ethnically diverse Libya can be unified.

Gaddafi left Libya with a contradictory legacy with regard to women's rights. Although relatively progressive legislation guaranteed equal rights in law, women's rights in family law were severely restricted. Gaddafi's somewhat progressive reforms gave women citizenship rights and declared women's formal equal status but were not accompanied by a broader societal debate that truly challenged conservative ideas on women's subordination (Pargeter

2010). The transitional period, including the drafting of a new constitution and the adoption of a transitional justice law, has provided opportunities to deal with the Gaddafi legacy, but also created friction around the ongoing negotiations about the role and rights of women in a future Libya.

Sustained Insecurity

The Libyan state remains fragile and its inability to enforce the rule of law and control the various armed groups has created sustained insecurities (Gazzini 2014). A weak central government and the proliferation of various tribal and other groups with their own armed militias have trapped Libya in a vicious circle of violence. It comes as no surprise that the number one political priority of Libyans is stability and national security (IFES 2013: 17).

Everyday insecurity encourages families to keep arms in their homes and contributes to a militarized society where violence is normalized. Criminal violence has increased and kidnappings for economic or political reasons have become much feared and highly publicized. So-called "katibas", local brigades, act more or less independently as unsanctioned police forces that set up checkpoints and arrest people based on rumours of affiliation with the previous government (International Crisis Group 2013: 25). 3,000 persons are estimated to be held in extra-legal detention centres run by local brigades. Further, the state authorities hold an estimated 5,000 conflict-related detainees in overcrowded prisons, and while they may fare better that the persons held in extra-legal detention, the wait for trial can become indeterminate due to the paralysed judicial system (ILAC 2013: 34).

Overall, these insecurities are deeply gendered. To a large degree the violence is performed by men, and men are also the main targets for abductions and arrests. Nonetheless, almost one-third of Libyan women feel either totally restricted (14 percent) or somewhat restricted (15 percent) in their movements in public places (IFES 2013: 58-60). There have been several cases of abductions of women and girls, including kidnappings from schools. Little attention has been paid to these crimes and no investigations have so far been instigated. Fundamentalist groups have also performed explicitly political attacks against beauty salons for women (Gazzini 2014).

To these threats are added various forms of sexual harassment. Up to 11 percent of young women, between 18 and 25 years, experience harassment every time they are in public spaces. This harassment has twofold consequences, as street insecurities also become a reason for discouraging women from moving freely in public spheres (IFES 2013: 58-59). 57 percent of women between 18 and 25 years feel restricted in leaving their homes without permission. This reasoning follows the logic "of honour codes", i.e. the idea that women carry the family's honour and hence women need to be controlled and restricted so that collective honour and status is protected. It is a "social system" that restricts women in their private lives - but also in their roles as political agents.

As noted above, the uprising against the previous regime brought unprecedented numbers of women into the streets to express their political opinions in multiple ways, and in many ways the revolution "broke down a social barrier" (Interview, political activist 2014). Nevertheless women who step into the public sphere often come under harsh attack. They are chastised for breaking honour codes by speaking publicly, being interviewed in the media or having their photograph published. Several interviewees spoke of the threats that such appearances brought with them.

From public to private spaces

Women's security concerns are often hidden or misread. For example, the proliferation and circulation of small arms in Libyan society (McGuinn 2012) increases the severity of violence in the private sphere. As a resident of Tripoli explained: "There is no army or police to offer protection. Even if you are against the violence, you want to protect your family. So every home has a gun" (Interview, political activist 2014).

The perception may be that a weapon provides security, yet the presence of a weapon in the private sphere increases the risk that domestic violence escalates to a deadly outcome. An important reason behind the prevalence of domestic violence is, once again, the fact that women are seen as carriers of the family's "honour". Therefore, if they do something that is understood as dishonourable, they must be punished. Approximately 70 percent of men and 66 percent of women think that in certain scenarios it is acceptable for a husband to beat his wife (IFES 2013: 60-61). As one interviewee noted, "The threat against women is not that they are targets for snipers or for kidnappers. No. The threat against women comes from within, from the families" (Interview, political activist 2014).

Hence one can note that while violence against women tends to be labelled "family problems" (Interview, government official 2014), it aims to keep women out of the public arena. Therefore its reach extends far beyond the family sphere as it has clear implications for women's freedom of movement and opportunities for political participation.

Lack of women in the security sector

The lack of women in the armed forces, the police and the prison system is not only an issue of equality but directly affects women's security. Following a decision by the army chief-of-staff, women cannot join the armed forces. There issimilar reluctance to train and employ women police officers (Langhi 2014: 205). Part of this reluctance stems from bitter memories of the past. The Gaddafi policy of recruiting female police officers and then allegedly using them as "sex slaves", left Libya with an awkward discourse on the issue of women in the security sector (Gazzini 2014). The lack of women in the security sector impacts negatively on women prisoners. Although few reliable estimates exist, women are reportedly held in detention under male supervision (Sengupta and Hughes 2011). The severe maltreatments of detainees include male guards strip-searching women and children (Sherwood 2014).

Political Participation

In 2012 the first democratically elected representative body replaced Gaddafi's parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union Database 2014).[5] The revised electoral law of 2012 had a positive impact on women's representation, which reached 16.5 percent. A so-called "zipper model" was adopted that required party lists to alternate male and female candidates. As a result, women made up 45 percent of the candidates nominated by political parties (Quota Project 2012; Langhi 2014: 203). [6]

However, gains on women's rights are often subject to challenge. In the 2014 elections for the House of Representatives that replaced the General National Council, men got 170 out of 200 seats, and the quota for women was decreased to 15 percent (Al-Jazeera 2014). Importantly, the decrease indicates a substantially lower ambition with regards to women's representation compared to the previous model, which required every other name on the party list to be a women candidate.

According to EU observers, the quota issue was highly controversial and sparked a lively debate. But the message that wider societal benefits are gained through representation of both men and women did not reach the wider public (European Union Election Assessment Team in Libya, 2012). Yet at the same time, one-third of Libyan women stated that one of the key factors influencing their vote was the candidate's stance on issues of importance to women and women's rights (IFES 2013: 18).

Elections were held early in 2014 to a Constitution Drafting Assembly, a key step in establishing a permanent constitution for a democratic Libyan state. International and Libyan organizations called for the representation of women and minorities in the elections, under the slogan "Libya's future depends on the representation of all its citizens" (ICAN 2013). According to Elham Saudi, director of Lawyers for Justice in Libya, "(t)he constitution offers the opportunity to define the relationship between the state and the people of Libya. It is absolutely crucial that representatives from all constituencies are involved in all stages of the drafting if it is to be considered a legitimate and inclusive process" (Lawyers for Justice in Libya 2014).

In January 2013, 29 female congress members came together across party lines in a women's bloc to promote women's inclusion in the drafting of the constitution. The initiative followed a statement by a male congress member that criticized the presence of women in the congress, stating that they had drawn God's fury on the assembly and thereby caused its shortcomings (Human Rights Watch 2013: 22). In the end, only six seats were allocated to women. Another six seats were allocated to "linguistic and cultural components": Amazigh, Tebu, and Tuareg groups. Of the 649 candidates who registered, 65 were women – 54 of whom were running for the six seats reserved for women, and the remaining 11 for the seats allocated to ethnic minorities (IFES 2012). Civil society organizations warned that the design of the quota put women's political participation at risk. In some districts, parties would be required to have

only women candidates in order to fulfil the quota, risking negative attitudes against those women (Lawyers for Justice in Libya 2013).

A survey showed that a strong position on human rights was the most important factor when choosing the candidates in the election. 92 percent of Libyans thought it either very important or somewhat important that the candidates ensure women's rights. In contrast, an overwhelming majority thought that Sharia should be either the only source or the main source of legislation (National Democratic Institute 2014: 26).

One may note a shift in public and political support, from the victory of the quota in the first parliamentary election of 2012, to a lower guaranteed representation in the constitution-drafting process, and the 15 percent quota in the 2014 elections to the House of Representatives. It raises concerns that the window of opportunity for women to take public office is swiftly closing.

Civil society and informal participation

Women "not only helped in their country's rebirth, but also took on a new identity as collaborative members of Libya's public sphere", according to the writer Amina Raghei (2012). Indeed, nearly one in five Libyan women took part in a protest or demonstration. In some parts of the country levels of participation were even higher, such as in the eastern region, where 50 percent of women have taken part in an activity "to express their view" (IFES 2013: 19-25).

Even though women in public office face multiple types of challenges and threats, there is no lack of women's political engagement. For many, civil society has become an important space for influence. Under Gaddafi's rule, independent women's organizations were not permitted and the right of association was severely limited. Post-Gaddafi Libya has seen an exceptional growth of civil society organizations, including women's organizations which are rapidly becoming part of the democratic process (ILAC 2013: 65). Many organizations nurse their independence from international donor agendas as well as taking on a watchdog role vis-à-vis domestic state institutions, scrutinizing procedures and calling for gender sensitivity in draft laws. Since the end of the Gaddafi regime, civil society organizations have advocated, educated and made numerous calls for gender quotas, as well as gender provisions in transitional justice law and other legislation affecting women's rights and security, in addition to organizing campaigns against domestic violence, supporting female candidates for political office and documenting human rights abuses (Peacewomen 2014). However, some have reportedly lost faith in their cause, fatigued by the perception that no one is listening to them (Dettmer 2012). Further, women in civil society are often the target of slander that portrays them as "single" or "widows" – and therefore of little worth (Interview, government official 2014).

Attitudes and threats to women in public life

After voting in the June 2014 parliamentary election, Salwa Bughaighis, a female human rights lawyer and an outspoken advocate of women's rights, was shot dead in her home in what is believed to be a politically motivated assassination (BBC 2014b). A prominent organizer of the protests against Gaddafi and member of the National Transitional Council, Bughaighis had continued to challenge Islamist militias despite receiving threats (Boukaert 204). The assassination of Bughaighis is a recent example of the high price that politically active women pay in Libya. Nevertheless, both women (81 percent) and men (69 percent) express support for women as candidates for political office. Younger women tend to be more supportive than older, and in the eastern regions the number is as high as 92 percent. Most women (77 percent) would support their daughters standing as candidates for parliamentary elections. However, 83 percent of women and 92 percent of men think men make better political leaders than women (IFES 2013: 28-31).

At the inauguration ceremony of the new interim government on 8 August 2012, when the transitional council formally handed over power to the newly elected body, the friction between the new political presence of women and their traditional roles became evident. The female presenter of the ceremony, Sarah El-Mesallati, was heckled by a male congress member, who told her to cover her head. She was then asked to leave the podium by the outgoing chairman of the transitional council, Mustafa Abdel Jalil (Raghei 2012).

Women parliamentarians face strong resistance in the conservative social environment of the congress. They are reportedly challenged to the extent that they are prevented from bringing up the issue of women's rights (Interview UNSMIL representative 2014). Women candidates have been hindered in their campaigning by a lack of funding and conservative attitudes to women in public life. Some candidates were put under pressure not to speak in public or to campaign door-to-door and women's campaign posters were vandalized to a larger extent than men's, according to EU electoral observers (European Union Election Assessment Team 2012: 24).

As women increasingly take on public roles, pursue professional careers, stand for political office and speak up, their security is compromised and they pay a high price in their personal life. Politically active women receive threats online, and have their pictures distributed and defamed. They risk being vilified and subjected to slander concerned with their character and personal life. While male politicians also face insecurity, threats of rape, assassination and harm to family members are probably more vocal against female MPs (Interview, representative of UNSMIL 2014).

In addition, religious conservative elements of Libyan society explicitly try to limit women's public appearances and gender mixing. The Grand Mufti, Sheikh Sadiq Al-Ghariani, has called for gender segregation at workplaces and universities (Abdul-Wahad 2013). According to the professor and women's rights activist Aicha Almagrabi, girls are feeling increasing pressure to wear the hijab or niqab (Zurutuza 2013). In contrast, one young female activist stated that the senior religious authority still has limited influence in her life and that women

and men mix easily in the various student organizations at her university (Interview, political activist 2014).

Young women activists convey a belief in the future, while also acknowledging that the sense of growing insecurity is affecting their freedom of movement: "After the revolution there was security, but now there are lots of problems with the militias. I cannot go out after eight o'clock. The violence has turned deadly and the fear is affecting women because families tend to be more protective of women and girls. You always have to take into consideration that you are a girl. Nonetheless, we go to university every day" (Interview, political activist 2014). Another young activist states that family members have tried to keep her from speaking out publicly on television as a youth leader: "It is not that they do not support me, but they say, 'This is not the time to express your opinion" (Interview, political activist 2014). Thus, the *perception* of insecurity also restricts women. Despite these examples of restrictions, several young, politically engaged women noted that that there had been an overall shift in opportunities for women in the aftermath of the revolution: "For our generation, a lot has happened in the past four years" (Interview, political activist 2014).

Legislation and Discrimination

Gaddafi ruled single-handedly without a constitution. Although a constitutional declaration in 1969 established that all citizens were equal before the law, there was no provision explicitly prohibiting discrimination against women.[7] Legislation to promote women as equal citizens was introduced and women's participation in the workforce and higher education was encouraged, but progressive reform was slowed down in order to mollify the conservative elements of Libyan society (Pargeter 2010).

Against a backdrop of women's active participation in the revolution, expectations were high on the new Libyan regime. A nationwide survey in 2013 showed that a majority of both men and women believed that women's rights would improve following the revolution (IFES 2013: 9). Some leaders have stated that Libya should enact legislation that includes more conservative interpretations of Sharia law (Human Rights Watch 2013: 14) and several concessions were swiftly made to conservative groups. For example, the new leaders of Libya overturned Gaddafi's somewhat restrictive legislation on polygamy, which required the consent of the first wife, following a Supreme Court ruling that declared polygamy to be in accordance with Sharia law (Al Arabyia 2013). This concession was made despite the fact that polygamy is a fairly rare practice in Libya (Human Rights Watch 2013: 30) and stands in stark contrast to women's public opinion on the issue (IFES 2013: 36). Women's groups are now concerned that polygamy may become more common. They regard this ruling as an indication of the friction between the somewhat progressive legislation under Gaddafi and the attempt to purify the new Libyan society from its despotic past. They fear it may provide for an increasingly moral-conservative political environment.

Human Right Watch reports that while political change has opened up unprecedented opportunities to reshape the legal and social status of women in Libya, the gains made to date remain fragile and need to be rapidly bolstered by clear constitutional and legislative guarantees (Ibid: 24). A number of legal provisions on personal status discriminate against women, in particular concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance. The CEDAW committee has expressed concern that women were not permitted to travel abroad with their children without the consent of the children's father (CEDAW 2009: 4-5). Following a call by Libya's Grand Mufti to ban women from marrying foreigners, in April 2013 the Ministry of Social Affairs reportedly suspended marriage licences for Libyan women marrying foreigners (Libya Herald 2013).

Libya's only law related to domestic violence is Law No. 10 of 1984, which states that a woman "has the right to expect her husband to […] refrain from causing her physical or psychological harm". Human Rights Watch has criticized the lack of enforcement mechanisms for the law, as well as the problematic classification of sexual violence as a crime against a woman's honour rather than against the woman as an individual victim or as a violation of her bodily integrity (Human Rights Watch 2013: 26). As noted above, there are multiple interconnections between women's access to justice, personal security and opportunities for participation in the political sphere.

Accountability and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

On 26 March 2011, Iman al-Obeidi entered the lobby of a hotel in Tripoli to seek protection. She explained to international journalists staying in the hotel that she had been tortured and raped by members of the government's forces. Her statement made news all over the world.[8] A few weeks later, the special representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual violence in Conflict, Margot Wallström, told the Security Council that "[r]eports from transit camps on the Libya-Tunisia border, from surgeons, doctors and international media representatives suggest that it is not plausible to consider her case an isolated incident" (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict 2011). The then International Criminal Court (ICC) chief prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, said that he had "information to confirm that it was a policy in Libya to rape those who opposed the Government (Physicians for Human Rights 2011).

Three years later, however, organizations monitoring developments assert that not a single case of sexual violence has been taken to court, either in Libya or at the ICC (Gazzini 2014; No Peace Without Justice 2014). Issues of rape and other forms of conflict-related sexual violence are largely shrouded in silence. Hard information is difficult to obtain and UN investigators highlight the lack of forensic evidence to support allegations of rape (Physicians for Human Rights 2011). What data are available diverge: estimates by the interviewees in a 2013 report range from around 200 to several thousand cases (Sharqieh 2013: 35). Such statistics are certainly hard to corroborate, but the narratives which civil society organizations and human rights activists have managed to collect from victims highlight instances of war

rape, in many cases systematic and in the form of gang rapes. These reports include statements that men also have been raped (FIDH 2013). Misrata, Ajdabia and the Western mountains have been identified as locations with an alleged high prevalence of rape (Sharqieh 2013: 35).

Issues of Honour

The biggest obstacle to efforts to address conflict-related sexual violence is the idea that rape is a crime against a woman's honour, rather than against the individual. This was formalized in the Libyan penal code of the Gaddafi era. The code also provides a reduced sentence for any man that kills a female relative who is suspected of having an affair. As noted above, at the same time legislation against domestic violence is weak and rarely reinforced (Human Rights Watch 2013; ILAC 2013: 39). The perception of rape as a so-called honour crime seems to be prevalent in large parts of Libyan society and rape consequently carries a social stigma: "The argument around SGBV is double. The community is really closed and victims of sexual violence become isolated. The local culture does not allow them to express themselves, to speak out – afraid that the honour of the family will be damaged. They don't see her as a victim" (No Peace Without Justice 2014).

Interviews with Libyan women refugees in Tunisia underscore the fact that the victims of rape during the conflict were doubly vulnerable as they suffered the risk of being killed by their families. Women also ran the risk of being killed "pre-emptively" by family members to prevent the shame that a rape would bring. Informants noted that they had heard about husbands of rape victims committing suicide. While these reports do not provide any clear statistics, they indicate the danger and fear that a rape generates beyond the impact of the specific crime (FIDH 2013).

The dangerous situation for victims makes it hard to bring cases to trial, as victims are terrified of being identified. Furthermore, evidence such as mobile phone footage is often destroyed in order to protect the victims and their families from stigmatization (Ibid). It seems not too rash an observation that in Libya, as in most other conflict settings, conflict-related sexual violence is severely underreported.

Collective allegations

At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, sweeping allegations of rape are made against collectives. One such case concerns events during the two-month siege of the town of Misrata by militias from the neighbouring pro-Gaddafi town of Tawergha. According to statements by citizens of Misrata, the fighters from Tawergha, affiliated with the Gaddafi brigades, undertook "a systematic campaign of rape and murder" (Sharqieh 2013: 13). According to the international organization No Peace Without Justice, representatives of Misrata estimate that 700 women were raped during the siege: "While none of these victims have come forward, they argue that they have been told of the crimes in confidence. Local prosecutors have worked very hard to try to bring these cases to trial, but so far they have not managed to persuade victims to come forward" (No Peace Without Justice 2014).

After the liberation, Tawergha was attacked by Misrata militias, partly in retaliation for the allegations of mass rape, forcing the whole population of 42,000 to flee. Today, the town is deserted and the population lives in refugee camps. So far no one has been charged with the alleged rapes. Not only does this mean that victims do not get any reparations or acknowledgement, but the lack of accountability and the paralysis of the legal system "permanently stigmatize entire communities with unproved allegations of rape" (ILAC 2013: 39). The crime of rape has been politicized and is by many considered as a pawn in a power struggle, with little connection to real events (Interview, government official 2014). The insecurity and dangers faced by victims who testify hence have wider implications, as it leads to lack of individual accountability with a destructive effect on the overall reconciliation process.

Towards reparations and acknowledgement

Women's rights activists have struggled to break the culture of shame and silence. For example in November 2011, women organized a public event and marched through the streets of Tripoli with their mouths covered by tape, demanding that the silence around victims of rape be broken and that much-needed support be provided (FIDH 2013). They point out that the absence of investigations not only hampers the accountability process against perpetrators, but also means that victims do not receive much-needed psychosocial support and/or material compensation (Ibid).

Their continued lobbying has led to some concrete gains. The government has passed a ministerial decree on conflict-related sexual violence. This draft law has two major features. First, it makes rape a war crime, which is a major step forward. According to Elham Saudi, Director of the human rights organization Lawyers for Justice in Libya, "Victims of rape rarely dare to speak out for fear of stigmatization and reprisals. The draft law's adoption would undoubtedly be a major step towards putting the blame on the criminal rather than the victim" (Ibid). Second, the law provides for reparations to victims of war rape, such as access to housing and healthcare, and opportunities for training and education. For those women who have been forced to leave their families, the law asks the state to provide shelter as well as benefits to children born as a result of rape. Under the law, victims would also receive legal support in order to bring the accused to trial (The General National Congress 2013).

The legal drafting is imprecise, however, and it is unclear how such a process of reparations would be put into practice. Claudia Gazzini, an International Crisis Group Senior Analyst on Libya, calls it a "PR law", as "there has been no substantial inquiry into rape" and there is no information about how many people have been abused. She also notes that "the law is more about compensating these women, not about prosecutions" (Gazzini 2014). The law has not yet been approved. The General National Congress has put it on the "waiting list" and other issues have been given priority in the ongoing political crisis (Ibid).

In addition, there is the question of whether victims will come forward to accept the compensation because "accepting compensation for rape is a stigma" (Sharqieh 2013: 20).

Once again it is clear that deep changes in attitude will be required in order to break the vicious circle of social stigmatization, and that work to change such norms must go hand in hand with legal measures.

Facing the Past: Fact-Finding and Reconciliation

The adoption of the Transitional Justice Law in September 2013 was a landmark in the Libyan transitional period. With it comes hope that the violent legacy of the past will eventually be addressed. The law spells out several key areas. A central issue is the accountability process. The law further emphasizes truth-seeking as a central element in reconciliation and formalizes the set-up of the potentially important Fact-finding and Reconciliation Commission.

A preparatory conference on the law was held in Tripoli in December 2012, bringing together around 100 participants including already selected members of the Fact-finding and Reconciliation Commission and members of the General National Congress. Civil society organizations such as victims' groups and traditional mediation organizations also participated. The conference recommended that the transitional justice process should address the period of the Gaddafi regime (1969–2011), the liberation war (February 2011 - October 2011) and violations that have occurred since the revolution. The recommendations of the conference referred to the need to address sexual violence. However, there were no detailed specifications on how this should be carried out in practice.

Women are not mentioned as a specific category in the section of the Transitional Justice Law that spells out the responsibilities of the Fact-finding and Reconciliation Commission. This is in contrast to another vulnerable group, displaced persons, which is mentioned specifically (No Peace Without Justice 2014). Furthermore, given the dangers that women witnesses are exposed to, civil society organizations point out that anonymity needs to be provided in order for the commission to fulfil its obligation to gain a comprehensive understanding of past events, including the experiences of women. According to a representative of No Peace Without Justice, "For women to be able to come forward to give their stories and statements, the commission has to guarantee full secrecy – no victim's names or faces" (Ibid).

On a positive note, the law encourages the commission to cooperate with civil society. Given the high number of women engaged in informal sectors of society, this opens up opportunities for the presence of women in the process. The Association of Families of the Martyrs of the Abu Salim Massacre is one of the organizations that the commission might engage with. This group, whose protests kick-started the Libyan revolution, consists mainly of women who for a long time have lobbied for a truth and justice process in order to heal one of the major wounds from the Gaddafi era – the massacre of political prisoners in the Abu Salim Prison in 1996. Their demands include financial reparations for the victims' families as well as public commemorations and public disclosure of all the known facts around the tragic event (Sharqieh 2013: 9).

Women as agents of reconciliation

Initiatives for mediation and reconciliation are rare, but some potentially influential processes have unfolded at local and regional levels. An important traditional mediation organization in such processes is the Council of Wise Men (Hukama), which has initiated and carried out a number of local reconciliation initiatives. Such dialogue meetings are said to have played an instrumental role in deterring tribal clashes between pro-Gaddafi and pro-revolution groups in tense areas.

Women have been largely excluded from formal assemblies that deal with mediation and reconciliation. The organizations working with local mediation efforts, including those of Hukama, state that it is difficult to involve women in traditional mediation meetings because the male elders who usually take part would not agree to it. In some cases, separate meetings for women have been set up, and it seems that the participants have reached some indirect influence by sharing their strategies and insights with the men who are part of the official meetings. According to one observer at these meetings, women tend to look at the broader picture of the conflict and raise family-level security concerns. Women-only meetings were also said to engage in more open reconciliation efforts, sometimes aligning across opposing tribal affiliations. For example, in the town of Sabha women have built relations across tribal dividing lines (Interview, Local NGO worker 2014).

The women's rights activist Zahara Langhi notes that we may have to look beyond representation in formal political bodies to discover Libyan women's contributions to peacebuilding. While their contributions to the revolution have failed to translate into formal political influence, "women have the potential to be shapers of a new discourse of politics of inclusive state-building, gender equal reform, inclusive social transformation and peacebuilding" (Langhi 2014).Women have taken on the task of shaping a new public discourse on peacebuilding and unity. In civil society organizations women tacitly take part in rebuilding social cohesion by adopting a discourse that downplays tribal affiliations (Interview, political activist 2014).

Moreover, women's organizations have actively taken part in transformative work concerning the military. They have introduced inclusive practices for building human security, for example by inviting legislators and revolutionaries to a consultation on issues concerning the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of rebel fighters (so-called DDR processes) and security sector reform (SSR) (Libyan Women's Platform for Peace 2013). The disarmament and reintegration of fighters and the establishment of a reformed national army under democratic control are issues of pressing concern to women's security - and a prerequisite for any reconciliation process.

The Role of International Actors: Conditional Support?

UNSMIL aims to support women's participation in elections, including standing for office and in constitutional processes; women's engagement in the transitional justice and

reconciliation processes, including aspects related to missing persons; gender-sensitive security sector reform; and the strengthening of national and civil society capacities to safeguard women's rights and investigate violations (UNSMIL 2014). The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has stated his support for women's political representation guaranteed by a quota, and UNSMIL has provided gender-sensitive technical advice on electoral reform (United Nations 2013). A public statement was issued by UNSMIL calling on the General National Congress to ensure the active participation of women in the constitution-drafting process, and urging the inclusion of special measures for women in the electoral law (UNSMIL 2013).

These ambitions are no doubt high, but the outcomes of the UN presence have been mixed. While international pressure helped gain momentum for a redrafting of the electoral law, civil society organizations have criticized the UN and the international community for not sustaining the call for true representation of women (Libyan Women's Platform for Peace 2013). UN support for Libyan civil society has been tentative according to women's rights activists, thus indicating the inconsistency of the UN effort to deliver according to its own commitments under resolution 1325. In fact it was only after Libyan women's organizations reminded the UN Special Representative for Libya, Tarek Mitri, of his obligations to Libyan women under that resolution that he came out in support of their pursuit of a quota in the parliamentary elections (Interview, political activist 2014).

While the international community has taken an interest in the transitional justice process, the gendered aspects of transitional justice have been largely absent in reports and strategies. In September 2012, UNSMIL published a report, *Transitional Justice: Foundation for a New Libya*, proposing a comprehensive transitional justice strategy to the Transitional National Congress with the aim of promoting reconciliation. There is no mention of gender at all in this report. Nor is the issue of accountability for sexual violence addressed (UNSMIL 2012). Similarly, other documents lack a gender perspective, such as the 2013 report on torture and ill-treatment detention centres which makes no reference to female detainees (OHCHR 2013).

According to an UNSMIL representative, Libya is a challenging environment in which to promote women's rights, not only due to its social conservatism but also due to its faltering institutions: "We have a whole unit trying to mentor and support the Libyan institutions on gender equality, but we simply do not have a partner on the Libyan side. There are no institutions so all cooperation relies on individuals" (Interview, UNSMIL representative 2014). With no stable partner among Libya's institutions, gains are constantly being challenged and in need of renegotiation, as is evidenced by the decision to lower the quota for women in the House of Representatives. Moreover, a Libyan government official regrets that most of the UN personnel have either limited or no previous experience of post-conflict settings (Interview, government official 2014). In such a situation, the UN may fall short of fully grasping the opportunity to advance women's rights as an integral part of institution-building.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

This paper set out to map and analyse the transition in Libya from a gender perspective. We have been able to observe a number of gendered insecurities and exclusions that affect women deeply.

- Gender inequalities run deep in legislation, including transitional justice mechanisms. Neither the sexual violence during the conflict nor ongoing violence is being addressed. The legislation around domestic violence is deeply flawed and so far no cases of conflict-related sexual violence have been tried in Libyan courts. Silence reigns concerning these crimes. Consequently, reparations to victims have been non-existent, although the new law on reparations does open up the possibility of change.

- The transitional decision-making bodies have not used the transitional moment to protect equality in legislation. On the contrary, personal status laws on marriage, divorce and inheritance infringe women's rights, and legal restrictions on polygamy have been removed. The laws on domestic violence are weak and rarely enforced. The classification of sexual violence as a crime against women's honour is highly problematic.

- Women's political participation and representation in decision-making holds potential for addressing these inequalities. Lobbying by women's groups has resulted in the adoption of a gender parity principle with altered party-lists in the 2012 election, which substantially increased women's representation in the interim parliament. However, the quota was subsequently radically lowered to 15 percent of the seats guaranteed for women in the 2014 elections to the House of Representatives, indicating that gains made by the women's movement are not permanent, but constantly challenged.

- Despite the explicit resistance to women politicians from conservative groups, the most difficult obstacles for women's political participation are informal rather than formal exclusionary mechanisms. Conservative values and patriarchal structures mean that many vocal women who challenge traditional roles are targets for slander, abuse and threats. Politically active women have been subject to violent attacks and even assassination. These crimes are typically not considered political. Moreover, the traditional idea that women carry the family's honour restricts many women's opportunities to act individually and seek public office. The need to "control" women leads to severe restrictions on freedom of movement.

- The prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during the conflict and the ongoing violence in the post-conflict phase has been dramatically under-reported as a consequence of the social stigma that rape carries not only for the victim but also for her whole family. Women who have been raped or abused in other ways run the risk of being punished. Importantly, these crimes become normalized and treated as a

more or less inevitable consequence of "traditional societal values", rather than being identified as crimes.

- Despite the enormous challenges facing Libyan women, the revolution marked a watershed moment. It opened up spaces for women's active engagement in the political sphere, especially in informal spaces. Since the end of the dictatorship, many new civil society organizations have formed an important platform for advocacy and education around gender equality issues. Women were an important driving force in the first wave of protests against Gaddafi and remained active during the revolution. Women have also engaged in mediation processes and managed to build alliances for peace across ethnic and tribal dividing lines. Swift and positive transformations in women's freedom have occurred in certain contexts, such as the universities, where female students report a growing recognition of women's rights. Although limited, these pockets of positive change give reason for hope. Support for civil society therefore has a double effect as it also supports politically active women.

- Poverty and economic insecurity are issues that are beyond the scope of this paper, but are nonetheless important to take into account in order to understand the long-term gendered effects of conflict. The high number of individuals injured, killed or held in detention also has indirect consequences for Libyan society. It is important to probe the consequences for women who are left with the challenge of providing for their families and navigating everyday insecurity. Sustained economic insecurity and reliance on relatives for survival further limits the independence of women and prevents them from taking part in political life.

- Finally, we have noted the continued ambivalence of the UN on the matter of gender equality. The gender perspective appears to be lacking in strategies and reports by UNSMIL. Even though UNSMIL has a clear mandate to support women's participation in elections, women's organizations report that UN representatives need to be pressured not to disregard their obligations, once again demonstrating that the UN has yet to fully mainstream resolution 1325 into its own organization. Most notably, it was the interplay between local women's groups, mobilized with the support of international women's groups, that eventually made UNSMIL live up to its own standards.

Supporting transformation: challenges and opportunities

It is clear that an understanding of the challenges facing Libyan women in the transitional period requires a reading of multiple, overlapping challenges that are shaped by a number of dynamics, such as geographical location, livelihood, the presence of state institutions, access to justice, tribal affiliation, access to education, level of social conservatism, proliferation of weapons, and the presence of armed militias and organized crime.

However, these deeply gendered challenges are rarely analysed. Most reports and articles lack a gender perspective. Given the severe human rights offences that women suffer in Libya, this

is a worrying flaw. The gender-blind gaze on Libya from the outside makes it difficult to monitor changes or react when developments point to the sidelining of women's rights, as is noted above. The lack of forthright and consistent support for women's rights is a failure to assist those forces within Libyan society that struggle for democratic progress. Ignoring or side-lining gender equality will undermine efforts to build a sustainable and inclusive peace.

Unfortunately, women's rights tend to be treated as a "hot potato" by the international community, which shies away from frictional encounters between globally driven projects for gender equality and conservative, patriarchal values at the local level. There are fears that raising issues of gender equality will destabilize the delicate balance of power in the post-conflict phase between conservative and liberal forces. We here argue that local forces for women's rights must be encouraged and supported. It is a key aspect of dealing with the Gaddafi legacy and must feed into the process of finding a new identity as a future peaceful democracy.

An investigation into the micro-practices of power in post-conflict spaces reveals local agency and engagement beyond the established institutions and formal civil society. There is a need to move beyond elite, urban environments to listen to the as yet unheard voices that can add complexity to the analysis of the Libyan path to peace.

Women face resistance in the political sphere and their guarantee of representation through a quota is constantly challenged. Any gains made are never permanent. The engagement of the international community in these issues is crucial. Acting in cooperation with local women's groups as watchdogs for women's rights is a task that demands continuous attention. It is important to advocate the need for representation. This is an argument that is well established when it comes to other marginalized groups. Ethnic quotas, for example, are generally embraced and understood as integral to the building of peace in polarized and broken societies. The same argument must be made when it comes to women, especially in societies where women lack fundamental human rights.

Women pay a high personal price for their public roles. Attacks on female politicians and women's right activists cannot be dismissed and blamed on lingering social norms, but must be addressed as attacks on democracy. Legislation has transformative potential, as abundant examples from other post-conflict societies demonstrate. In Rwanda, for example, radical new laws on inheritance have been put in place as a way of rectifying gender inequalities, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina stricter legislation on trafficking was pushed through as a result of local and global networking.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 is a powerful advocacy tool for the international community due to its normative power and the binding nature of resolutions adopted by the Security Council. It has provided women's groups with an effective argument to call on their governments to respect women's rights in times of conflict and to protect women from violence. The resolution should be regarded first and foremost as a political tool, reframing the agenda of gender equality for which women's rights groups have long been advocating. Fragile institutions and a rapidly changing environment that might undermine

previous gains are ingredients to be expected in conflict settings. Democratic institutions take years to establish, and they typically remain volatile and contested. The UN must therefore maintain constant pressure to take women's calls for inclusion seriously and support those actors which challenge social norms that uphold exclusion and crimes against human rights. Fragile institutions are no excuse for putting gender equality on hold. On the contrary, including women and advocating for their right to participate is part and parcel of post-conflict peacebuilding.

Endnotes

[1] All interviews have been recorded. Due to security constraints, the interviews were conducted outside Libya.

[2] The women, peace and security agenda consists of United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000); 1820 (2008); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009); 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013).

[3] For an extensive literature review see for example Gizelis and Pierre 2013.

[4] For example in Iraq, women are guaranteed 25 percent of the seats in parliament by a quota. In Rwanda special measures have been introduced, raising women's representation to a worldwide record of 56.25 percent in 2008, by a combination of a 30 percent quota and altered party lists. For a global database of quotas for women, see Quota Project, http://www.quotaproject.org/

[5] Female candidates won 33 of the 200 seats, representing 16.5 percent of its members. Former interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril's National Forces Alliance (NFA) took 39 of the 80 seats filled under the proportional representation system, while the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party won 17 seats. The remaining 24 seats under the proportional representation system went to 19 small parties, with fewer than three seats each. An additional 120 seats were filled under the majority system, in which only independent candidates stood.

[6] According to Article 15 of the 2012 Law on the Election of the National General Congress, on the lists of candidates submitted by parties for the proportional representation contest, "candidates shall be arranged on the basis of alternation among male and female candidates, vertically and horizontally. Lists that do not respect such principle shall not be accepted." 545 women candidates were nominated by political parties, compared to 662 male candidates.

[7] In fact, Gaddafi's Green book and Great Green Charter contained contradictory provisions with regard to gender equality. See for example FIDH Country Report on Libya (2013).

[8] The publicity did not provide protection for her. Security forces took her from the hotel and detained her for three days. She then left for Qatar, was forcibly taken back to Libya, before managing to escape to a refugee transit UNHCR camp in Rumania.

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