



THE DAY AFTER

Supporting Democratic Transition In Syria

So I'm not Kept in the Shadows

(stories for survivors from Syrian detention centers 11)

Lama Kannout



The Day After (TDA)
www.tda-sy.org

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The Day After organization (TDA) is a Syrian organization working in support of the democratic transition in Syria, with a focus on the following points: Rule of law, transitional justice, security sector reform, design of electoral systems and election of a Constituent Assembly, constitutional design, economic reform and social policies.

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Additionally, Ms. Kannout has co-founded and managed a number of civil society organizations concerned with democracy and human rights.



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Prelude

Oral histories from a gender perspective, when based on narrative anecdotes and oral testimony, are particularly important during revolutions, armed conflicts and wars. They bear witness and lend essential documentation to history. They challenge the unilateral narratives of victors and power mongers. These unilateral narratives become especially complicated when they are told by de facto authorities propped up by neighboring states and/or world powers; they prolong the conflict, intensifying under occupation, as is the case with Syria today. As for voices suffocated by pain and suffering, they tell a history that once written cannot be ignored, nor erased, nor lost. However, all this does not mean that oral histories from a gender perspective are less important in times of stability and peaceful struggle for power.

These histories celebrate personal experiences, moving them from margin to center. They challenge and seek to fundamentally change power relations and structures within society, and work towards the democratization of history. They highlight women's struggles for freedom, equality and social justice; they provide alternative sources of knowledge about their roles and achievements; they hold on to the belief that the personal is political.

In Syria, with Hafez al-Assad coming to power followed by his son and heir Bashar, official history has been distorted, falsified, misrepresented. Histories of crimes and gross violations of human rights have been buried. Voices calling for freedom, democracy and equality have been silenced. The collective national memory and conscience have been altered and abused through an ideologized system of education that ties the nation to the leader, and where a citizen is only good as far as he is disciplined, obedient and loyal to the "eternal leader". Since the beginning of the revolution in March 2011, two parallel narratives around the conflict have emerged: the first is the official version by the Syrian regime, employing all the state's resources and institutions in every policy and program; the second is a parallel track based on the Bill of Human Rights and International Law, working so the voices of the survivors of violence can be heard. Another narrative has been offered up by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its military wings, the People's Protection Units (YPG) and the Women's Protection Units (YPG) – a regional narrative separate from the first and second narratives.

The Syrian regime uses oral history as a socio-political tool to legitimize its war crimes and crimes against humanity, to consolidate societal fragmentation, and to direct public opinion in support of its brutal, oppressive and authoritarian narrative. For this purpose, it founded an organization called "Wathiqat Wattan" [*Document of a Nation*], whose website states it is a patriotic non-governmental non-profit research organization "concerned with preserving national memory from loss and distortion ... writing contemporary Syrian history with Syrian hands by comparing oral histories. It works to formulate public opinion around major events. It aims to build an archive of documented testimonies, a database of references on Syria and the Arab world [...] to build the core of a national archive that plays an important part in history and contributes to an integrated national identity." The organization, represented by its Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Dr. Bouthaina Shaaban, signed a memorandum

of understanding with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor on 31/3/2019. It is worth mentioning here that Shaaban is the Political and Media Adviser to the President, refuting the institution's claim it is non-governmental.

Until transitional justice is established in Syria and truth commissions have oral histories safely preserved in an archive of some sort, Syrians, human rights defenders and organizations working on transitional justice insist on confronting the official narratives imposed by perpetrators of crimes against humanity and war crimes, for decades in the forefront. They insist, almost as if they are saying "We are here, like the solid oak, we will not allow you to marginalize and distort our history. We will tell what happened, and the pages of history will remember you as executioners and liars."

Documenting the spoken memories of female survivors of violence in general and female detention survivors in particular aims towards:

1. Official recognition of state-run political violence against women, girls, men, boys and communities that have revolted against the regime since the beginning of the revolution in March 2011.
2. Preserving their narratives from becoming lost and forgotten in the midst of the power struggle, and preserving the historical narratives of events since the beginning of the revolution in Syria in 2011.
3. Understanding these women's roles and experiences in order to establish a transitional justice that changes power structures through policy-making and institutions, so that justice is achieved and never lost again.
4. Change stereotypes of women and promote their roles in the desired democratic radical change.
5. Archiving survivors' stories in order to commemorate them and make sure the crimes and violations never happen again, and so they can be a cognitive and cultural reservoir open to all forms of art, including architectural symbols.
6. Recognizing the importance of spoken memory in oral history, in terms of the democratization of its formulation, in which everyone who was part of historical events can contribute, both women and men; as well as recognizing spoken history as a historical source as important as any other.
7. Acknowledging feelings and emotions, personal circumstances and the socio-economic environment, all often ignored by official history, all of which affect the lives and characters of men and women and can change their roles until they shake the structures of power – although they do not usually change.
8. Including gender-based violence, its patterns, hierarchy and intersections, along with all other forms of political, economic, social and legal violence, on the map of crimes and violations severely damaging girls and women over successive generations, affecting their participation both politically and in all aspects of life.
9. Honoring survivors of violence as a form of rehabilitation, until the day that Syrians can build a gender-sensitive transitional justice process with the equal participation of men and women shaping all its levels, stages, mechanisms and programs, so it tackles not only direct and indirect crimes and violations against women and effects of the conflict, but also the social relations that allowed and facilitated such occurrences and their continuation.



10. Making their stories, roles and experiences available to the general public as an integral part of the history and memory of Syrians in their search for truth.

This book documents the narratives of eleven female survivors of detention, supported by The Day After, part of fifteen recorded meetings which took place between 2nd February and 6th March 2019. The stories were selected based on several criteria, the wide spectrum of abuses during and after detention which intersect with political violence and forms of domestic, community, and/or legal violence experienced by several survivors, the diversity of survivors' socio-economic backgrounds, level and degree of education, diversity of political views and age groups.

The 11 stories do not summarize women's experiences of political violence that intersect with other forms of violence; each experience has its own unique and different implications, and its gender analysis is different, but limited time to complete the book has left it at these.

I chose to conduct my interviews in a semi-structured form, during which I covered questions I had previously prepared and asked new questions without interrupting the narrator, leaving some space for spontaneous discussions. I tried to enter the narrators' memories, understand their personalities, behaviors, circumstances, feelings, evolving roles and self-identification. I tried to comprehend how detention and the extensive violations they had suffered, whether before, during or after detention, had affected their lives, their activity and behavior, in order to deepen our general understanding of the impacts of political violence practiced by the state against communities that revolted against the regime, and the damage to women when it intersects with multiple forms of economic, social, cultural and legal violence, as well as the effects of violence at the hands of extremist jihadi factions.

The importance of documenting the spoken memories of some of the surviving detainees is to reveal the forms of torture and abuse inside Syrian detention centers, to testify against state-run political, sexual and gender-based violence, the conditions of arbitrary arrests and abductions, and the methodology of the state's practice of holding women and children as hostages to force male family members to surrender, and/or to use in prisoner exchange – the conduct of unrestrained militias rather than states. For example, in her testimony entitled "Hostages", Narjis recounts how she, her sister, and her paralyzed mother were detained at the Mujtahid Hospital from 14th May 2014 until 8th April 2015, They were then transferred to al-Khatib branch and then to Adra Prison until they were released on 25th April 2016, all so her brother would give himself up. The same thing happened with Reem in her testimony "Between Two Prisons"; she was heading to Jordan for her wedding. She was arrested together with her uncle; he was released three months later, and she was kept hostage for one year and nine months to use in prisoner swaps. She was released along with 23 women following an exchange between the regime and the Rahman Legion. Both testimonies illustrate, for example, how women are used as bargaining chips; a crime with severe impacts on their lives and rights, a crime that spread and rooted social divides. In Ward's testimony, "Last Woman in Qaboun", she was detained by the regime when her husband and four friends kidnapped a brigadier general near Tishreen hospital in Damascus, to negotiate Ward's release with the regime.

Hanadi also affirmed in her testimony entitled "So I'm not Kept in the Shadows" that the regime treated female detainees as hostages, and that at Adra prison in the



detention department, where she was transferred in June 2013, entire families were held, mothers and daughters, and that the majority of detainees are only released through exchanges and/or what the regime calls "national reconciliation". This was how Hanadi, her sister, her sister's in-law, Mona Baraka, and four other detainees were released, as described in Baraka's testimony, "Shams al-Dimashqia", as part of negotiations with notables from al-Qadam. Hanadi also points out that her name was on the list of the so-called "nun swap", and explains why she was not released: "I was second on the list, and my name appeared in the media, but they did not release me because the reconciliation process in al-Qadam began to move ahead, and they wanted to use me for more gain; why would they let me go in a swap?" Hanadi compares the state of female detainees in regime prisons as "becoming more like sheep, like animals taken to slaughter, our strength faded and we were stripped of our will."

Narjis' testimony also indicates how the Syrian regime transformed state institutions such as al-Mujtahid Hospital, a government hospital in Damascus, into secret intelligence branches. She along with her sister and paralyzed mother were detained in such a room, close to a room where a number of young men were held and tortured. Narjis witnessed one of them die under torture, and she heard a security agent tell his Head, "Gone, dead, sir". She compares the hospital to "a military barracks, there were so many agents posted inside."

As for Mezzeh Military Hospital 601, where Amira was tortured for a whole week, hand and feet cuffed to the bed, according to her testimony "Amira" it is one of the two hospitals in whose courtyard "Caesar", forensics photographer for the military police, photographed corpses of detainees and smuggled out more than 50,000 pictures taken between May 2011 and August 2013, when he defected. Prisoners who were "seriously ill", men and women, were transferred to military hospitals in the Damascus area, including Mezzeh Military Hospital 601 and Tishreen Military Hospital near Barzeh al-Balad [where] prisoners were tortured by hospital medical staff. "Accounts indicate that some medical professionals participated in the mistreatment. Since 2011, Military Security, Military Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, and Security Department of the 4th Division of the Syrian Army and the Republican Guard have brought detainees to separate wards inside the hospital. Detainees, including children, were beaten and burned with cigarettes, and tortured using existing injuries. Many patients were tortured to death in this facility."

A large number of detainees, including Lula Al-Agha, Yasmine Al-Shami, Narjis and her sister, and even their paralyzed mother transferred on a blanket held from its four corners, were referred in a bus to the Terrorism Court. Narjis describes her feelings, people's glances as they stood on the steps while someone took their names, clothed in the blue of Adra prison inmates, before being taken with other detainees to the court, "women handcuffed together in twos, to come before the judge of the terrorism court, people and lawyers looking at us as if we were criminals, it was horrible and we started to cry". Mona Baraka describes it as "we were a spectacle in our criminal robes and in chains."

The Terrorism Court is a model in terrorizing and repressing communities. It was formed by Decree 22 of 2012. Its purpose is to protect the ruling regime and fight the opposition and activists and human rights defenders. It does not meet the minimum



degree of international fair standards and is not related to the judiciary. It is more of a security branch whose judges and staff are part of the security services, no one is appointed as court staff or judge until they have obtained prior security approval [...] The judge has the power to interrogate detainees without the presence of a lawyer, and a detainee's request to have a lawyer present during questioning is not count taken into account. The judge does not respond to the detainee's or his representative's request for forensic medical examination to check if he has been tortured. Often the judge adheres to confessions contained in the security report". Article 3.1 of the Act provides for the broad jurisdiction of the Court: "The Court shall have jurisdiction over crimes of terrorism and crimes referred to it by Public Prosecutor of the Court." Article 4 states: "The jurisdiction of the Court shall extend to all persons, civilians and military personnel". Unlike Article 3 Clause 1, it is not the Public Prosecutor who refers crimes to the court but the security branches. Those who provide humanitarian assistance are equal to those who carry a weapon, demonstrate against the regime, write in opposition to the regime in social media, and those who kill; "Everyone is a terrorist in the eyes of the regime." Those accused in absentia are also deprived by Article 6 of the right to fall in absentia rule when arrested, and this is final unless he voluntarily hands himself in: "In absentia court decisions shall not be subject to retrial in the event of arrest of the convicted person unless he voluntarily surrenders."

All the female detainees whose testimony is included in the book had only one option upon their release: to leave Syria. A former detainee and/or someone subject to community-related risks may be detained and arrested at any moment and at any checkpoint, and this has weighed heavily on them in their places of asylum, in conditions of poverty, sickness and exploitation.

They all hope to hold the perpetrators accountable, and assert their willingness to be part of the prosecution when international or national investigation tracks are opened in the future.

Reports of targets, violations and crimes based on civilians' places of residence and ID information have emerged in several testimonies, such as those by Zeinab, Mona Baraka, Hanadi and others, and this has deepened the divide in society. Yasmin al-Shami, from Damascus, gives a testimony that shows how an officer tried to send a message that Damascenes would not be treated differently; she was effectively placed under house arrest for twenty-six days with her three children when the officer and his security agents lived in her house and forced her to serve them. Nour's testimony tells how she had viewed Bashar al-Assad as a developer of the country, before witnessing with her own eyes the killing of five young men in Rukn al-Din in Damascus in 2011. Her testimony also indicates there were arrests even of relief workers in officially licensed organizations.

The policy of contempt for religions and beliefs, specifically Islam according to testimonies, is firm and rooted in the discourse and practices of the entire security apparatus. This contradicts all conventions including the Syrian Constitution which stipulates in Article 3 Clause 3: "The State respects all religions and guarantees the freedom of practicing all rites as long as they do not disrupt public order". And in Chapter 1: Rights and Freedoms, Article 33 Clause 3: "Citizens are equal in terms of rights and duties, with no distinction as to race, origin, language, religion or creed." This must be respected and adhered to by workers in state institutions, including the



security sector, during their reconstruction after political transition and transitional justice.

Prisoners of conscience were forced to elect Bashar al-Assad in the 2014 presidential elections, according to Lula Agha's testimony during her detention in Adra Prison. She says 3 detainees refused to elect him and were subjected to verbal and physical abuse, starved and coerced to elect him: "During the presidential election in June 2014, they brought us ballot boxes to elect Bashar al-Assad! How do we elect him while we are political prisoners? It was the worst day for us, we were forced to vote for him, we cried after his election, and when three girls refused to elect him, we heard the voice of Lieutenant Colonel MB saying 'Bring those whores down into solitary confinement and don't give them anything to eat or drink'. Each girl was put in an individual cell with no food or water and when they came out, they were in very bad shape and "faint from hunger and thirst." They were beaten and forced to vote for Bashar, after which they remained sick and prostrate on the mattress for a month." Mona Baraka's testimony also shows the use of violence during the election of al-Assad; when asked by an officer in the Military Security Branch 215 if she had elected Bashar al-Assad, looking at her fingerprint, and she answered no, he slapped her on her face so severely she lost consciousness.



Crimes and violations in prisons and detention centers in some reports:

The Syrian Network for Human Rights documented in a summary report entitled “On International Women's Day... The continuous abolition of women's basic rights in Syria” issued on 8 March 2019, in the paragraph (B: Arbitrary Detention and Enforced Disappearance) that “at least 10,026 females are still in detention or enforced disappearance by the main actors in Syria since March 2011 to March 2019”. Of these, 8,160 were detained by Syrian regime forces, 439 girls and 7,721 women; and 906 under arrest or forced detention by various opposition factions, 65 girls and 841 women. In the paragraph (C: Torture), the network documented the killing of at least 89 females due to torture by the main actors during the same period; 72 by Syrian regime forces, 27 girls and 45 women. The network also documented at least 8,032 incidents of sexual violence that occurred during the same reporting period. “The regime forces and its militias were responsible for 8,016 incidents, including approximately 876 incidents in detention centers, and about 443 against girls under the age of 18.”

Human Rights Watch said that 10 former detainees, including 2 women, reported that sexual abuse of male and female detainees in Assad's prisons included rape, penetration with solid objects, sexual sensitization, prolonged forced nudity, electric shocks and beatings on the genitals.

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic documented in a paper entitled “I Lost My Dignity: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Syrian Arab Republic” the “rape of girls and women in 20 branches of government political and military intelligence, and the rape of boys and men in 15 branches.” The paper noted that sexual and gender-based violence has been “a persistent issue in Syria since the 2011 uprising.” One person described in an interview how pro-government militiamen broke into his home after government forces moved into Bab Amr neighborhood in Homs in February 2012, killing five male relatives and forcing him to watch a gang rape of his wife and two daughters, both minors. The interviewee was then raped in front of his family.” “Sexual violence and murder occur in parallel and on a regular basis.”

In some cases girls and women were killed after being raped, and during house raids, and in many cases girls and women were arrested and detained in detention centers to pressure their male relatives to turn themselves in. One 16 year-old girl from Karm al-Zeytoun said she had witnessed “two women being raped and then forced to walk in front of the tanks for hours.” At checkpoints in some cases, girls and women detained at checkpoints were raped in front of their male relatives. The document states that “evidence of the tactical use of rape during the Houla massacre in May only emerged after the Commission's report on its special investigation into the Houla events was published.”

From the moment of arrest and during detention, many girls and women were subjected to various types of sexual violence including rape, sexual torture, sexual assault and humiliation. “The Commission has documented the rape of several girls, the youngest of whom is 9 years old.”

A paper issued by UN Human Rights Council on 27 January 2016 entitled “Out of sight ... out of danger: Deaths in custody in the Syrian Arab Republic” reported that



“detainees held by the government were beaten to death or died as a result of injuries sustained during torture. Others died as a result of inhumane living conditions. The government committed crimes against humanity of genocide, murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence, torture, imprisonment, enforced disappearance and other inhumane acts. On the basis of that same behavior, war crimes were also committed.” The paper examined the killing of detainees between 10 March 2011 and 30 November 2015. The findings of the paper are based on 621 interviews and significant documentary material detailing the use of violence and the inhumane conditions of detention. Among these aforementioned interviews are interviews with 200 persons who were “former detainees present when their cellmates died.” Similarly, female detention survivors witnessed the killing and torture of many detainees, and Hanadi described the sounds of torture they heard as a deadly nightmare.

One of the inhuman forms of intimidation was threatening Narjis’ elderly paralyzed detained mother, taken hostage by a member of the Khatib branch who told her “If you say you’re in pain or you’re paralyzed I’ll send you back to the Branch. Say your feet are hurting”.

In Adra Central Prison, Mona Baraka reported how Najlaa, suffering from tuberculosis, was thrown in a lonely basement cell without treatment until she died in front of their eyes.

The indignities, verbal abuse, and disturbing name-calling at checkpoints and in prisons are constant; the filthiness of [cells] infested with insects and rats has emerged in several testimonies, such as ‘Amira’; inedible food is also a consistent feature in all the narratives; the same bowl is used in cells for cleaning floors and drinking water.

The regime's disregard for the UN and the UN envoy

The regime's disregard for the United Nations and its former envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, is apparent in the fact that they call a cane by his name, especially used to beat and torture female detainees in a number of security branches, indicating that the idea was a directive from a person of high status and authority to various branches, and this is absolutely consistent with the regime's behavior towards a political solution and UN resolutions.

Criminal conduct is considered a feat in security branches, clearly illustrated by a banner placed in a prominent place in the Palestine Branch, one of the worst in terms of human rights violations, which reads: “All who come in here are lost and those who leave are reborn”, or by the naming of the Investigation and Torture Chamber “The Slaughterhouse”, a label appropriate for what happened inside to Lula al-Agha.

Basil A. of Branch 227 is one stark example who boasts about committing murder and, as Hanadi tells in her testimony “So I’m not Kept in the Shadows”, insists on publicly announcing his name, his place of birth and his current residence, defying human rights organizations’ documentations of crimes and abuses and any consequences that may arise in the future. He undoubtedly reflects the principles of the prison system and the justice sector in Syria, the immunity and methodological legal protection provided by the Syrian regime to criminals and perpetrators of violations, and fully applies the text on a small paper that an interrogator showed Hanadi in the same branch on 5



December 2012: "The interrogator is not held responsible for the death of any detainee during interrogation", stamped in blue by the Head of the Military Intelligence branch, afterwards telling her: "See? If you die here, you are as much as a cockroach I stepped on". It complies fully with the methodology adopted by the regime so far. The Syrian Network for Human Rights has documented the toll of those killed by the Syrian regime in its official and secret detention centers; around 13,608 people from March 2011 until August 2018, and pointed out that the regime "deliberately concealed the fate of tens of thousands of detainees to inflict as much pain and humiliation as possible on their families". However, in May 2018 it began "to uncover a large number of enforced disappearances, by manipulating data in the Civil Registry and registering them as deceased". The network's database indicate the regime has acknowledged the death of 836 people. Syrians for Truth and Justice also received notifications of at least 700 death documents in detention centers sent to the Civil Registry in Hama province and countryside in early 2019, who in turn informed the families of detainees, and handed them the documents informing them of the death of their loved ones, without handing over their bodies or informing them of their place of burial. The organization adds that "Most of the family members reporting to the Department were women, especially since none of the young men dared to go and inquire about their detained relatives, for fear of arrest".

The comparison between the oppression of Hafez al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad is also clear in Ahmed Alia's words. Nicknamed Sharshabeel, he works in Branch 215, and Hanadi says is "an retired old man who was honored by being assigned to this place, a bald, stupid bureaucrat fanatically loyal to the Baath Party and to Hafez al-Assad and his supporters, more than to Bashar al-Assad. He kept talking about Hafez al-Assad and repeating 'If you had been here during the time of Hafez, you would not have survived, but our leader is gentle with you and so you are alive'." By the leader he means Bashar al-Assad. This comparison is similar to what Major General Jamil Hassan, Head of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence Branch, said when a journalist asked him what Hafez would have done if he had seen what happened in 2011; recalling the events of the 1980s, he said: "Journalists then wrote exaggerated figures on the number of deaths during the events of Hama, but I say, if we acted from the beginning of the current crisis in the same way we would have stopped the bloodbath and we would not have reached the degree of fighting we see today."

The reassurance of perpetrators of crimes and abuses that are legally protected from accountability has unleashed various creations of forms of torture, intimidation and threats against detainees, from calling jailers names like Abu Azrael, to practices and behaviors. There is a fertile environment for all forms of violence, such as deliberately maintaining the filthy state of cells and the spread of rodents and insects. All forms of degradation are employed, including the inability of detainees to use the toilet when needed, and forcing men, women, girls and boys to use bags or buckets to relieve themselves inside cells outside permitted hours. During menstruation, women are deprived of sanitary pads unless they have money to buy them, and they are forced to use pieces of their dirty clothes and then wash and re-use them, making them vulnerable to diseases. Even those who had money or borrowed from others to buy their needs found everything was expensive, as if it were a profitable business.

The kidnapping and ambushing of activists such as Nourhan and Mona Baraka are evidence of the regime's mafiosi behavior, and deliberate enforced disappearance of



detainees either in one detention or when transferred to other branches, is not only a crime against humanity as defined by international law, but a state-run corruption system, in order to provide a source of income and to benefit those in power so they can extort families of detainees. To add to this, there is careful examination of released detainees and severe punishments for those who take phone numbers of detainees' families to reassure their relatives of their whereabouts. This was reported in several testimonies, including those by Amira and Yasmin Shami.

Detaining women with their children and then taking their children away or keeping their children in detention, is another form of torturing them and their children, a systematic criminal behavior aimed at breaking up the family and subjecting children to psychological trauma, which will reflect on generations.

The structures and elements of power are rearranged within the "prison community". Hanadi attacked the "Qawwosh leader" in Adra prison, who she says in her testimony "acts like our head and leader". She also attacked her colleagues to draw borders and secure a safe space they would not dare to cross into. Amira refused "authority" when the prison director wanted to appoint her supervisor of the room, because she wanted to maintain friendly relations with other detainees and insisted on taking care of them by washing their clothes when they showered. In Nour's testimony, the dynamics of power and the relationship between the detainees are clear in the arrogance of the cell supervisor at the Air Force Intelligence Branch, a position assigned due to the fact she had been in the detention center the longest, in addition to the size of her case and her claims to detainees that she had been investigated by Major General Jamil Hassan himself, Head of the Air Force Intelligence Branch, and not the prison interrogator; a power derived from someone like Hassan for whom an international arrest warrant was issued, charged with "complicity in acts of torture, complicity in enforced disappearances and complicity in crimes against humanity and war crimes."

Changing the roles of women during revolutions, uprisings and wars does not require a change in the structures of power. Mona Baraka ran a charity association and was an activist during the revolution. However, she adhered strictly to the red lines set by her nucleus family and uncles; she was forbidden to mingle with males or to go out in demonstrations, keeping to the shadows, taking photographs and becoming active through social media. Even when she had managed the charity, she only went out with her mother when she had to attend meetings or make warehouse visits.

She was also afraid, despite the dramatic change in her roles, that her uncle would kill her when she was released from detention. It is worth noting here that, as reflected in her testimony, women are not only controlled by their fathers, but also by uncles who command authority in the family.

The political role of women activists is removed

The fact that activists in the revolution are called terrorists, and the rejection of the word "detained" by all security sector workers, is not only to delegitimize the revolution and the political role played by activists, but to demonize what they have done, men and women. Mention of the word "arrest before agents and officers was enough to release the beast in the jailer and interrogator to inflict brutal torture. Their insistence on using the word "fatas" [derogatory term meaning 'death of an animal']



when a detainee died under torture to deprive him of his humanity, charging female detainees with Jihad al-Nikah to humiliate and degrade her. For example, Lula al-Agha says in her testimony: "Of course, this charge, Jihad al-Nikah, was directed at most of the detainees, including me, even the elderly woman was not immune from this charge."

In the same vein, for the same purpose, some women were accused of prostitution. For example, Zeinab's testimony in the book under the title "Zainab's Trill" indicates how on 19 March 2016 an officer addressed a group of women who wanted to cross the Barzeh checkpoint, among whom was Zainab, her sister and her daughter, to return to the besieged Qaboun, telling the women: "You whores, what brings you into this house at night? Your men are in there and you're whoring out here." Mona Baraka's testimony in the book "Shams al-Demashqiya" also tells how one of the members of the Military Security Branch 215 asked her: "What do you do, prostitution?" She replied: "It's shameful to talk to me like that", to which he replied: "You all pretend to be honorable before us". Amira Fouad Tayyar also says, for example, in her testimony entitled "Amira": "in all the security branches they used words such as 'whore' as if they were our names, and threatened to rape us and our daughters". Hanadi, in her testimony titled "So I'm not Kept in the Shadows" noted that the interrogator who interrogated her in Branch 215 was bargaining over the charges he wanted to accuse her of, one of which was opening a brothel in the al-Hajar al-Aswad.

Sexual violence

The rape of some of the female detainees emerged in Lula Aga's testimony entitled "Meeting at the Slaughterhouse," where Lula recounted how she was raped in front of her husband who died on the spot. She recalls that in the beginning she only recognized her husband from his voice when the officer brought him to the room she was in, his head was larger than its normal size due to the severity of the torture. She also reported that she met a seventeen-year-old girl who was brutally raped in the Military Security in Hama. Agha describes the girl: "Her condition was deplorable and her torture was unspeakably severe and the clothes that she had on were torn, and the rape she had experienced was evident; scratches and visible wounds, blood was flowing from her, he had been raped on both sides by "Lakhdar Brahimi" and lost her virginity. She told me the man who tortured her said he was disgusted to penetrate her with his penis, and she was tortured naked. She had been engaged, then her former fiancē joined the FSA, and the regime arrested her in Hama and accused her of being in contact with him and of practicing Jihad al-Nikah. [...] In all the interrogations conducted with her she was naked, and her torture was rape with all the tools of torture [...] This is the only case I have seen in various security branches where the rape was so perverse. I know there are rapes, but I have never seen anything as brutal as this. Her nipples were bleeding because they pulled her with something like some forceps, even she didn't know what she was being pulled with, they didn't beat her but tortured her in her sensitive areas. I also heard from an elderly detainee I met in the Palestine Branch that she was tortured in a similar way by the Fourth Division, and I am not surprised because in the Fourth Division in Damascus there is a lot of rape." She added that the girl knew she had become shameful to her family and they would kill her when she was released and she kept saying "I'm dead anyway, here or out



there". When I saw her, I was horrified, I turned pale, lost focused, and I feared that I would be tortured as she was tortured."

Most of the detainees feared rape. "It was not a question of whether I would be subjected to sexual violence, but when I would be subjected to it." For example, Zeinab recounts how she held her daughter, who was arrested with her, to her chest to sleep. "The room was so small; I couldn't even stretch my feet when I lay down. I put my arm over my daughter and put her over my chest to sleep. I didn't dare to sleep out of fear for her. I was afraid if we slept a security agent would come in for us." Zainab remembers trembling with fear every time she heard footsteps of the officer and his soldiers when they came down to the lower floor where her cell was. "When I heard their footsteps, my body trembled and my color drained, I still shake when I see policemen in Turkey, I am afraid, and I try to avoid them, because I have a terrible phobia." She was afraid for her daughter during their detention. The threat of rape was either a hint, as Zeinab says: "I was with my daughter throughout my two-month detention, even though they threatened me that we would be separated and they would tell me: if we take your daughter to another room and you hear her voice, what will happen to you? I always told them, "Take what you want, but don't keep my daughter away from me"; or the threat of rape is direct, as stated in Ward's testimony, "The Last Woman in Qaboun". A security patrol stopped them when they were heading to the market of al-Khaja in Damascus. They were dragged, as Ward reports, to an office located near the governorate building on 18 October in early 2015, where one agent blackmailed her sister and asked her to go out and bring him 250,000 SP to allow them to leave, so that Ward would not be transferred to the security branches, so she did. But when she delivered the money, he said "Get out of here, or I will report that you tried to bribe me, and I will put you in a room and your sister in another room and we will rape you both." At this moment, my sister no longer wanted to get me out and no longer wanted the money she paid, she just wanted to leave. The officer to let her go after he made her sign a white paper, and told her not to tell anyone anything or "he will cut out her tongue."

In the context of sexual and gender-based violence, the forced nudity of female detainees emerged in several testimonies, including, for example, Mona Baraka's testimony during her detention at the Military Security Branch 215. "They took me into a small room, an old man entered came in and told me to take off my clothes, I broke down crying, and begged him not to make me, but he threatened to electrocute me with a stick he was carrying [...] I had to take all my clothes off, and he began to inspect me, he told me to squat and bend over, he touched my breasts and molested me under the pretext of examining me, I begged him and said: "Why are you doing this?!" His response was: "You might have a dollar in your vagina!".

In Hanadi's testimony are two incidents; the first is inside Branch 227 where they were forbidden to close the bathroom door during their shower, and the jailer Abu Somail watched them while they were undressed, and those who try to close it were beaten with a stick. She adds: "None of the agents were allowed to stand in front of the bathroom door while we bathed except Abu Somail. When he was sick or absent, we would not shower, he acted like our boss". The second was when she returned from al-Qadam to photograph her house which had been shelled by the regime. She fell into the agents' hands when she went down an unfamiliar lane and unknowingly entered a controlled military zone. One of them took her to a room in a house and molested her



and told her to take off her clothes on the pretext of searching her. When she refused and threatened to scream he replied, according to her testimony, "Either I would take off my clothes or he would take me out naked in front of all the soldiers. I continued to beg him and tried to prevent him, but he insisted and forced me to take off my clothes, searched me and harassed me, did not dare to rape me, because the agents were below in the building, I was helpless, very difficult moments I went through, and if I knew what would happen I would never have gone to the area." In her testimony, Hanadi also referred to the sexual violence she faced in one of the armored vehicles as they took her to branch 227, where she was beside a huge fat person with fair skin and balding hair, saying: "He began harassing me openly without any shame, he began to pull down my pants and lift my veil and loosen my hands. He told me to look at his penis and to fondle it. I wanted to die. I was very scared and became dizzy, I started sobbing and he whispered: "If any sound or word comes from you, I will kill you," and he began to explain what he wanted me to do with his penis. "Do this, do that" and he was doing to me everything he wanted with his hand, touching and sexual movements, he lowered his pants, and I felt a second hand on my body, and a third and a fourth, and I no longer felt anything and lost consciousness, it seems that I fell on the ground". As she was taken to the armored vehicle Hanadi also received a threat of rape, and she says the road was full of tanks, military vehicles and soldiers. She says "One soldier held me on my right and one on my left, they were molesting me and abusing me verbally, and one of them sometimes stepped on my foot so I would fall to the ground, then pinch me so I would scream in pain, they made sexual gestures, one of them put my hand on his penis, all of them harassed me in one way or another, and I remember that one of them said to me: "there are 200 men here who I'm going to let rape you, I haven't smelled a woman for 2 years, I'm going to get it all out of you, confess everything". It wasn't just a threat. They were able to do anything with no accountability."

Reinforcing authoritarian male practices

Terrorizing and sexual and gender-based violence policies are not confined to detention centers, but the jailer and / or interrogator reinforce male authoritarian practices in entrenching gender stereotypes of active female detainees, and minimizing their role. Zainab tells how an interrogator at the Air Force Intelligence asked her "Why are you demonstrating? You are women and your men are conservative, and women do not do such things. Women stay at home." The activist Nourhan also tells: "I entered into the room of an agent, he was short and wearing civilian clothes, he said to me: "Damn you, are you still alive, aren't you dead? Why didn't you get married and stayed at home and made a family? Why didn't you stay put?" Male practices are evident when a jailer strips an activist of her identity and called her by husband's name, as one of them did to Ward at Air Force Intelligence, according to her testimony, "The Last Woman in Qaboun"; "They called me by my husband's name (R.L.) because he shot at warplanes and felled 2 of the regime's planes". This behavior was carried out by jailers with female detainees in Morocco during the so-called Years of Lead, and was reflected in the testimonies of the political detainees mentioned in Fatima al-Bayeh's book "Hadith al-Atma". In this context, former detainee Widad al-Bawab says: "... noting that the guards are a sample of human beings who have no human emotions, one of them said to his friend: See these girls, they want to enter the



world of politics, and to do the work of men, let's choose men's names for them. And so they chose for each of us the name of a man, mine was Hamid, and they called me that for six months."

Sexual violence is a smashing and humiliating tool for individuals and communities

The threat of rape was not only within the security branches, but was also issued by some loyalists of the regime. Zainab said she didn't dare tell the driver of the taxi she and her daughter were in that they were from Qaboun, she told him they were from Barza, as he was cursing Qaboun residents, saying: "Those dogs, those rascals, those sons of whores, they tried to cut off [in a car] my brother yesterday, I swear to God we will rape their women and mothers before their eyes". Because Barza had reconciled with the regime, and when her daughter threw him a look after his insults, he began to threaten her, and Zainab adds: "I was very scared of him because after we passed the place where I was going down and continued driving on quickly, I thought he would take us to the shabiha, and they would slaughter us and we would not get out of there alive or they will demand a large ransom."

Not only is sexual violence, including rape, a stain on the survivor, but detention itself is a stain because it seems to be linked to a large extent in the mentality of a large number of Syrians with sexual violence. The first questions detainees like Nour and Mona Baraka asked themselves when they entered the cell was "Will we be raped?", and / or the first question to a detainee after her release is "did they rape you, is there a rape, etc.?", and / or questions such as that by Zeinab's sister-in-law to her husband, after Zeinab and her single daughter were let out: "Did you have your daughter checked at the doctor?" It is an expression of horror that has dominated them, society, and the collective memory of a society passed down through the generations, which is rooted legally in the so-called "honor crimes" in the Penal Code in a legal and violent legal system with laws such as personal status laws governing women's lives.

Crimes of gender-based violence, including sexual violence during conflict, are part of the process of destroying and humiliating individuals and communities, especially in societies where women's bodies are public property and a symbol of virtue or shame. The regime has used sexual violence against women as a weapon of war with those it considers its enemies or suspects them to be opponents. This has fueled conflict. For a broader understanding of what I mean, albeit in another context, with the absence of law and the proliferation of weapons in conservative societies where warfare is taking place, some males have behaved in a vengeful manner when gender-based violence is performed against women towards whom they feel responsible. For example, Zeinab said in her testimony that ISIS operatives entered Qaboun and were there during the end of 2016 as dormant cells and set up a barrier where; while her daughter passed through the checkpoint, someone cursed her because she was wearing a short jacket. The girls said "You have nothing to do with my clothes, and I am not a member of your family for you to talk to me, even my father and brother do not interfere in my clothes, I wear what makes me comfortable." He swore at her and said: "Damn your father he hasn't raised you well". When her daughter told her uncles what had happened, they were furious and said, "By what right do they stop our daughters!" They attacked and killed some and others fled outside Qaboun.



Gender-based violence, as defined by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), is “any harmful act that targets individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of gender. Gender-based violence can include sexual violence, domestic violence, human trafficking, forced / early marriage and harmful traditional practices”.

Rape is not an act between an individual and an individual, hidden in a dark room. Rape was and is a cultural and political act: it attempts to remove a person with agency, autonomy, and belonging from their community, to secrete them and separate them, to depoliticize their body by rendering it detachable, violable, nothing.

The policy of intimidating the families of the detainees destroyed social relations and dashed the safe space of survivors. For example, Lula Al-Agha’s brother considered her dead and did not dare to check on her after her release, even though his house was close to hers. Mona Baraka, when she was released and left to Turkey after they tried in the Palestine Branch to recruit them for their benefit, considers herself completely alone, and says in her testimony: “I feel in Turkey as if I have no family, communication with my family is once every twenty days and sometimes once every month, either because of poor Internet, or because of their fear of the regime. My mother is the only one who risks calling.” Ward said: “What saddened me after I left the detention center was that most of my acquaintances, including my friends, blocked me on social media, I can’t blame them because the regime is treacherous. The ones who haven’t blocked me, who are few, communicate with me with great caution. During my interrogation, the regime got and verified all the calls I had made, and immediately shut down my number.”

Gender analysis

Gender analysis of the content of testimonies of survivors of violence allows for the monitoring of the structure of male domination in a patriarchal society, gender-based violence, its patterns, hierarchy, and intersection with all forms of political, economic, social and legal violence.

The European Commission defines gender analysis as “examining the differences in conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources, development, asset control, decision-making authorities, etc., between women and men in their relative gender roles”.

The purpose of gender analysis is to identify and address gender inequality, through:

- Recognizing differences among and between men and women, on the basis of unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, constraints and power.
- Ensuring that the different needs of men and women are clearly identified and addressed throughout the policy cycle.
- Recognizing that policies, programs and projects can have different impacts on men and women.
- Seeking and clarifying the perspectives of men and women and making their contribution an important part in the development of policies, programs and projects.



- Promoting women's participation in community, political and economic life.
- Promoting more informed, gender-responsive interventions.

Gender analysis involves recognition of the historical and social inequalities faced by women and aims to inform the design of policies, programs and projects to address these inequalities. This includes consideration of women's experiences, roles and responsibilities, level of access to resources and decision-making.

As a feminist, for the purpose of gender analysis, I asked the narrators who documented their testimony in this book open questions that would allow the use of a gender analysis approach, for example: In your opinion, what is the difference between the experiences of a detained woman and a detained man?

And six questions within the question axis - socially, such as:

- Has your relationship with your family / friends / co-workers changed after arrest?
- Describe your relationship with the community before and after arrest?
- Has your relationship with the street changed after arrest?, etc.

In-depth interviews with survivor detainees resulted in capturing the experiences of life and understanding their roles. The above questions, which require comparisons between pre- and post-arrest, have highlighted the violence of patriarchal society and its intersections with other forms of violence, and the stereotype that women are intended to comply with specific roles, and thus have highlighted the voice of society.

Although the introduction to this book and the time devoted to its completion do not help me conduct research from a feminist perspective, I will address some issues:

The voice and violence of patriarchal society emerged in the testimony by Hanadi. She was an activist since the revolution began. Her personality developed after she failed 8th grade at school, as she insisted on getting her baccalaureate certificate and continued to study in secrecy so her father and brothers wouldn't know. She took the exam and passed. She [openly] supported the revolution because she didn't want to be irrelevant, as she puts it; she worked under her real name in the coordination units, unlike her peers who used pseudonyms in the coordination units of al-Qadam and the southern areas; she protested with demonstrators and chanted with them in a demonstration in which she was the only woman. Hanadi says "The biggest obstacle for me was my family, my brother and father in particular. They said I was a girl and shouldn't go out with men and chant with them. I broke the rules and gradually started communicating with people to go out in demonstrations, and I was happy to do so." Hanadi and her brothers faced community violence because of her participation, and people questioned the manhood of her brothers who could not control her. They were accused in ways she includes in her testimony, such as: "Control your sister, your uncles pretend to be men! Control your sister first." Hanadi expressed her rejection of her community's refusal to allow women in al-Qadam to participate in protests. "This was the hardest thing in my life, I had no support and no one encouraged me, and I was always subject to criticism by people because I am doing what I want and not what they want."



Hanadi made a personal decision that changed her fate, which she described as "making a difficult choice between escaping or staying in the area". She refused to leave the town with her family who moved to Quneitra, and she stayed behind, living alone in her house in al-Qadam, although she knew it was a radical and dangerous decision, almost suicidal with a brutal regime that used all forms of violence to bombard, blockade and arrest all those who remained in al-Qadam, civilians and armed fighters. She worked in the media and relief and in the field hospital, she repeatedly spoke of the voice and violence of patriarchal society towards her, a violence neglected by official history and preserved through oral history from a gender perspective. She said, "... for the first time I lived in the house alone, and it was difficult for me and my family, because I am from a very conservative environment, and one's reputation concern them more than the person himself. If I was a man, it would be normal, and there would be no fear for me, but being a girl they were afraid of what people would say and not for my life." She adds "I rebelled against this reality and left them. They lived in one place and I lived elsewhere, because I did not want to be a zero in the margin, and my decision to do so was why my parents abandoned me after my arrest and did not help me, because I had abandoned them first."

Hanadi did not escape the violence of her friend's family when the latter decided to take a decision similar to that of Hanadi and live with her away from her family. They blamed her and cursed her in the street and tried to run her over with their car, and accused her of corrupting their daughter's life. Hanadi repeated her conviction that their families were afraid of what people would say, not for their lives: "People gossiping is what scares them, and it is not important if the girl dies, but more important not that people not talk about us."

Societal and state-run political violence intersects in Hanadi's narrative. She was arrested twice; the first lasted three days and the second lasted three years, during which she was threatened with rape, murder, sexual violence in an armored vehicle, constant verbal violence, sexual harassment, coerced nudity, humiliation, beatings, electrocution, and having hot and cold water poured over her. When she was arrested the first time, there were horrendous hours during which the agents discussed amongst themselves who would kill her.

Hanadi's testimony illustrates how patriarchal society imposes its coercive system against women who decide to live alone, as Ward also testifies, the last woman who was in Qaboun when the regime besieged it while she was working in the field hospital. The males who stayed on insisted on her marrying, and she did so after their repeated attempts so she would not be living alone.

The intersection of societal violence and political violence also emerged in Lula al-Agha's testimony. "Society has transformed our detention into a scar on our bodies, wherever we go, the community's perception of us is ridiculous. For them, arrest by the regime means the female detainee was subjected to everything, and if a person is bad, he will exploit the detainee, to put in bluntly, for his sexual interests." Everyone says: you were detained by the regime which means you are raped, why should I not have the right to do with you what I want? A man who wants to marry is not happy to marry or be associated with a former detainee, although he himself may be a former detainee, and this story happened with our friend. She met someone who wanted to get married but refused to consider her and said: "All the world knows that you are a detainee, I



believe that nothing has happened to you, but society will not believe it." Nour confirms that "society gives itself the right to ask a detainee whether she was raped or not, and this is not happening with male detainees."

The question: What do you think is the difference between the experiences of a detained woman and a detained man? led to important comparisons, as seen above. In the detention center, Reem said: "The treatment of a man during detention is worse and more humiliating and torturous than a woman's, even in terms of the amount of food, his share is less, and the women in the prison are loud and demanding and protesting, while the men did not dare to do so. This does not mean that women are not tortured, but they are usually tortured by order of the head of the branch." After their release, Hanadi described the matter as: "When a man comes out of detention, he is celebrated and cheered [...] but when a woman is released she is forbidden from talking about it. I know many married women who are forbidden by their husbands to talk about their story even inside their house! Because they consider the imprisonment of women is shameful, and so that rape is not discussed, even though they have not been subjected to it, I emphasize that ninety-five percent were not raped and those who suffered were only about five percent, and I bet that it is impossible to say "I was raped" unless she has the ability to say so, and her personality is already strong, her family supports her and her community supports her when she talks. A detainee who is forbidden by her husband to talk at home about her experience in prison, how will she live the rest of her life with a prison inside her? And how she will live and raise her children!"

As an example of community abuse of detainees, Yasmin al-Shami, who traveled to Turkey with her two children after her release, also painfully recounted: "I swear the days of detention were less cruel than what I'm facing now in Turkey, because people will not leave you alone. Someone just called me from an unknown private number, he was talking to me, saying I wanted to sleep with you, why won't you agree? Do you want money? Why are you so arrogant? What difference would it make to you if you slept with you? [...] In Turkey, Syrians regard a woman who lives alone immoral. " She adds "Syrians keep asking" Why are you alone but I still can't get to you? Why are you alone and still people praise you?" And because security agents stayed in Yasmin's house for twenty-six days and imposed a house arrest on her and her children after they had arrested her husband, she married off her daughter, the girl who was detained with her, at the age of fifteen for fear of people's gossip. She compared between the detention of a girl and a boy: "Because of the 26 days that security was with us in our house, and because of my fear of what people would say, within one month after I left prison, I had her engaged and married, why?! Because people will not leave you alone. She is a girl and her detention days will haunt her, people will keep saying she spent 26 days with security agents, and no one knows what happened in the meantime! Whereas if I had a young man with me I would not be afraid, on the contrary, I would probably be proud of him and say: "My son was with me at home" and my would be a hero." But she is a girl, and I preferred to see her married as she might never find a husband if people started to gossip."

Nour, who left her fiancé after being released from prison because he could not accept that she was a former detainee, talks about two characteristics of everyone who approached her for marriage: "There were two things present in all who came: either he is a revolutionary and has the idea that he should marry a former detainee in order to hide her shame that she is a victim of torture, thus contributing to his support of the



revolution, and some of them prefer specifically a woman who was raped; or someone distant from the revolution, and can not accept the idea that I am a former detainee and considers it a shame. Both cases marginalize the detainee; I need to be associated with a man who sees me as I am and accepts me as a person, who I can talk to about what I have been exposed to, and I can be sure he will accept it."

The testimony by Lula Aga, who holds interviews in various media outlets and calls for the release of detainees, highlights the crimes and abuses of female detainees in prisons and detention centers, when surrounded by voices that reflect patriarchal values and patriarchal hegemony, telling her: "You are a woman, why are you doing this, and who is listening to you, pretending to be a media worker!"

The relationship with the street for some survivors has become a fear and obsession. For example, Lula describes the street in Turkey as a jungle and she compared it to the street where she used to chant for freedom; "It's like a jungle to me, I just walk to work, I don't have to pay attention to the other side, any street for me is the other side, I don't even look at the names of the shops. It's different from the street I used to protest in and chant for freedom, back then we were one people and one hand, we demonstrated for a principle. Now, there are no demonstrations, hearts are no longer pure nor consciences clear". Nourhan's relationship with the street changed and she lost confidence in society after her first arrest in 1986, she says about this: "I'm now afraid, I've lost trust in my society, my relationship with the street has changed, I no longer go out alone, I go out with my grown-up niece now. My brothers used to send me a car and I rarely walk in the street. My behavior has changed completely and I go everywhere by car now. When I went to university in Aleppo, I would immediately return to my family home and not stay in Aleppo. I am no longer satisfied with anything. I've started to smoke and drink coffee, and if I feel hungry I drink coffee or smoke a cigarette."

Hanadi's relationship with the street and male society has become more bold, challenging and confrontational; she defines herself as: "I no longer care what people say, nor for the opinion of society, I smoke in the street, and if someone disturbs me I yell and scream, and if someone harasses me I scream, and if I do not like what someone says, whoever they are, I can't be polite, I don't care about anything and I act spontaneously, and I no longer give anything consideration because all our sanctities have been violated, and I do not want someone to pretend to be a man, and preach about honor, and in the end I don't care anything for him and his honor; in there we bore the brunt of it while you were out here cheering and pledging your soul and blood to Bashar." In general, I no longer care what society thinks, that women should stay at home and not go out at night and may not smoke, no, *[expletive]*, I want to smoke and who you are to tell me not to! I became bolder, I can ask any question, and I am not ashamed to ask any question, and if I have a right I demand it firmly." She compares her self-definition during arrest to how society describes her after it, and says, "During detention my character was very strong and everyone knows it, I confronted the agents, I wasn't afraid of anything, I don't have a child to be afraid for, my family was outside prison living their normal lives, everyone got married and moved on with his life, and frankly now after the detention, everyone tells me that my personality is weak, and that I am introverted and isolated, detention was for me an honor but it broke me, especially regarding my daughter."



In the testimony by Narjis, her relationship with the street and the city Damascus changed, from love to fear; she said: "I stayed four days in Damascus, and every time I went out to the street I looked around me, afraid I would be arrested again. I used to love Damascus. But after the arrest, fear controls me, because I saw women being returned to prison after their release."

Embarrassment, and the request for sanitary napkins in prison were mentioned in both Zainab and Hanadi's testimonies. Says Hanadi: "I used to be ashamed to say that I am on my period, but in prison we screamed and hit the door and told the jailer we wanted pads and wanted to go to the bathroom." Zainab says: "At that time I was afraid to get my period, and I wondered what I would do, but then, after much embarrassment and hesitation, I asked for pads, which is the only thing they gave us." Girls and women often talk about menstruation in hushed tones and whispers, or use one of the common expressions: "I have it", "I don't have to pray", "I'm excused", or express it in a foreign language like the French "r gles". When they want to buy pads, they prefer to buy them from a pharmacy run by a woman, and if the grocery store is the only option available, they prefer to complete the process quickly and without any observers – i.e. customers - and if there must be someone present, they resort to covering the pads as much as possible and hurrying to pay and put them in a black plastic bag so no one knows its contents; all this is in an anxious, almost secretive, manner, and she can only hope to arrive home and hide the pads away from the eyes of her brothers and father.

The disclosure in the testimonies of Hanadi, Amira, Zeinab, Narjis and Reem about menstruation is a revolutionary reaction to a socio-political system that has allowed their oppression.

Abusing women and depriving them of their children in general, and former female detainees in particular, and the ease with which their morals are challenged in courts in order to deprive them of their children, inciting their children to question their morals in courts, were all apparent in Lula Aga's testimony; her husband's family exploited her inability to access justice and took advantage of their influence and proximity to members of the ruling authority as a shabiha family in Aleppo, as described by Agha in her testimony. She says: "I went to the workplace of my brother-in-law Muhammad, who was surprised to see me, and I said: "I miss my children and I want to see them," He said to me in an offensive way: "You have no children with us." I told him "I am their mother and it is my right to see them", and he said "Go and file a complaint against us." So I left him and walked away. I started to think about it. If they found out my weaknesses, they would lean on me harder, while if I showed them some kind of strength and diplomacy, it might be better. So I called my mother-in-law, telling her what Muhammad had said to me and adding: "I don't want problems but if that's what you want, fine." But she said, "Go to the courts." My husband's parents tried to incite my eldest son against me. At the time he was fifteen, and they told him they would bring a case against me, and asked him to testify that I do not have morals, they wanted to challenge my morality. My son would never do what they asked; when he heard I had arrived in Aleppo, he went out looking for me, and this is what caused them to stop inciting against me, and drove my mother-in-law to call me, and asked me to come and see my children."



Age-based discrimination against women was mentioned in Nourhan's testimony when she went to an organization to learn Turkish so that she could work in Turkey. When she registered her name for the course, one of the female staff prevented her from attending and told her the course was only for the youth. Nourhan replied "learning is not for a specific age", but she was surprised by the employee's discriminatory response: "Come, you adults lived your life and that's enough, leave room for young people, we have had no turn". Nourhan's reply reflected how much pressure she felt: "You are rude, your younger generation has had more opportunities open to them than ours, we are old and no one receives us at work, no one receives us for anything, throw us in a garbage container, we older people no longer have a role!" She added in her testimony: "I always ask, why are there no services for older people, when I worked I experienced hardship myself and I always ask: "Where is our place in society?" The issue of age has greatly affected me. I came to Turkey in a time and at an age where I was very old. If the revolution had taken place while I was young, I would have worked and endured and I would have been able to face all the challenges, and my situation could have been different."

She faced the same age discrimination when she went to another organization for work, even though she is university-educated and has a strong personality. After the manager agreed to provide her with work and housing during the first meeting, he later told her: "Housing is currently difficult, but come to the organization and work for us, you can make coffee and tea!"

A field research published in 2016 entitled "Inclusion of Women in Civil Society Organizations" targeted 100 Syrian civil society organizations in the city of Gaziantep, Turkey, and the sample does not include women organizations, and the percentage of women working in these organizations is 20%. The low rates of women's participation was attributed to "The unavailability of competencies, skills and experience with many women, long working hours that are not suitable for the nature and responsibilities of domestic women [...] And in some answers: "The reason is noticeably favoritism, it's not the competent person who is employed but the person who has connections". From this answer, we conclude that the employment mechanism of most of these institutions lacks transparency and employment standards are not clearly defined, which gives the work of these organizations the characteristic of corruption [...] One of the answers also referred to the situation of women and their needs, explaining that "physiological need, pregnancy and lactation require maternity leave" which leads some organizations to refrain as "the burden of paying an employee on maternity leave can be as high as three months", as some of them said in the questionnaire. The age group preferred to be employed is (20-30 years), and those who are over 40 years of age and above do not exceed 36 women out of 2,863 working in these organizations, i.e. only 1%, and the proportion of women who held leadership positions were 5 women holding position of executive manager, one woman regional director, one woman board director, four are members of the board of directors (child welfare), two are researchers at an organization working in documentation, and one in research, and the rest are women in administrative work. Out of 100 organizations, five organizations had women making strategic decisions and voting is used as a method of decision-making. After analyzing the proportion of males and females in decision-making positions in the five organizations, research shows that their voices have no



weight, because of their low representation, even if the decision-making mechanism is consensus.

We can see from the above the reality of discrimination against women at work (in these organizations), in terms of their employment and access to decision-making positions, as well as a complex discrimination against women over the age of 40, and the preference for the appointment of single women to married women.

Political violence against women, Morocco as a model:

The Moroccan experience must be remembered for taking a path of transitional justice and gender mainstreaming was the national course; however, the regime's control over it, and the failure to investigate and hold perpetrators of crimes and abuses accountable, led to a fragmented and incomplete transitional justice. Its focus on state-run political violence over the years against women politicians during the Years of Lead must also be remembered.

The Equity and Reconciliation Commission adopted a gender dimension in its approach as a "horizontal systematic choice, reflected in various areas of its work", and it examined the specificity of violations suffered by women, resulting damages, their experiences and roles in addressing them, in order not to repeat them. The Commission concluded in its final reports that the scarcity of data, writings and testimonies and the absence of gender studies and gross violations of human rights, made their suffering, roles and experiences invisible. The Committee adopted a working methodology aimed at highlighting the gender dimension in gross violations of human rights, through listening to women's testimonies in closed and individual sessions, public hearings, and "extracting quantitative data on women from the database to find out the general trends of the types of violations and their damages and the demographic characteristics of women victims". It also organized meetings with women's associations to involve them in the development of [damage] repair recommendations for women at the collective, symbolic and human rights level, and focused on violations against women because of their political and trade union views and affiliations.

The oral testimony of some female political detainees in Morocco during the testimony hearings organized by the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, and the study conducted by Nadia Ksous entitled "Women and political violence during the Years of Lead in Morocco", which included some copies of these testimonies, formed a recognition of the specificity and nature of women's experiences during that period, their complex nature and extent, which had not received the attention and recognition they deserved. However, these testimonies succeeded in breaking the silence that surrounds women's experiences of political violence, though insufficiently, and there is still a need for additional efforts to properly understand the roles and experiences of women and admit to these roles. The study sought to "develop a detailed and accurate understanding of the forms of violence suffered by women victims of political violence during these years, including physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, moral, symbolic, economic, social and cultural violence." This study falls within "the framework of a spirit of contributing to a public dialogue on the history of contemporary Morocco, and also within the framework of efforts to search for truth and reconciliation."



The compiled testimonies of five women in a book entitled "Women Breaking the Silence - Narratives of Women during the Years of Lead" by the Consultative Council for Human Rights also contribute to the definition of political violence against women, for whom the Equity and Reconciliation Commission had "excavated in the geography of forgotten Morocco. Meeting them marked the beginning of a new Morocco seeking to reconcile with itself, anecdotes revealed the suffering, torture, exclusion and ill-treatment of these women, just because fate chose them to be daughters, sisters, mothers, or wives of political opponents of the state". These women tell of the "trauma they lived through during their arrest, detention, interrogation, torture, harassment, and humiliation without respect for their dignity as Moroccan women with their particular characteristics."

In the same context, the novel "Hadith al-Atma" by Fatima al-Bayeh was the first book to convey testimonies of political prisoners in Morocco; she is a former political detainee (1977-1982) who wrote her testimony and the testimonies of other detainees during her detention, and tried in her book to explain that "the wound of prison accompanies you forever". After the publication of her book, she added that in the 1990s the women's movement was able to reveal violence against women, "but remained within the limits of domestic violence, but violence by the authorities does not exist". Even when talking about political detention, it is mentioned in the masculine form. "The women who were subjected to this violence have committed themselves to silence. Testimony is a form of self-exposure, and self-exposure for a woman in our culture and traditions is not easy. Talking about the executioner is new, even the authority does not classify violence against women. This was the message of the book." When we think about establishing a state of truth and law, we must think of mechanisms to combat violence against women, "The executioner deals with women in a way that was specific and different from how he deals with men; he uses everything that is cultural and promotes the inferiority of women, to degrade their value and break their dignity."

Al-Bayeh also noted that the experience of enforced disappearance behind bars is a bitter one, and for seven months she did not exist on the map of her homeland, a feeling of existence and non-existence together, adding that "Coming out of prison a bitter experience. What the detainee suffers from the most is freedom. Reintegration is not easy. How to go to the bathroom. How to buy groceries. How to socialize. How to laugh. All of these are questions because the language I learned inside prison was different. I used another language. The question of detention is not five years, there are things you lose forever. Prison is a school you can't wish on anyone."

The Equity and Reconciliation Commission considered in its final report that "rehabilitation by revealing the truth and erasing the effects of violations and memory preservation is a key component in its approach to reparations." In the report in Book IV: Elements of Consolidating Reform and Reconciliation, in 3.1 - Democratic Transition Memory and Writing History, the debaters conclude in the context of discussing the subject of democratic transition and transitional justice in Morocco to "the special importance of this justice at the level of memory and history writing", and summarized the most important points on this topic:

"The importance of the Equity and Reconciliation Commission's work is in its production of the archive, as an important material for writing the history of Morocco,



after decades of the dominance of the official memory that excluded other memories; the importance of including hearing sessions in the conditions of rewriting history, not only because these testimonies presented a narrative different from the official narrative, but also because these narratives summarized factors that were not in the possession of many, or that were forbidden or silenced." The report also noted the role of the Commission in rebuilding a pluralistic, non-selective non-exclusionary national memory, and recommended the preservation of national archives, and a gradual review of the content of history programs, and the establishment of an institute to document, research and publish on "historical events related to past gross violations of human rights, human rights developments, and democratic reform."

In conclusion, documenting the spoken memories of female victims of violence is a form of resistance against brutal security regimes, providing alternative knowledge, and knowledge is a force that contributes to exposing the marginalized and silenced forms of violence, interconnected and stacked against women. Their voices will express their effectiveness and their will for political, social, economic change, which will in turn change the violent legal structure relevant to the lives of girls and women.

The survivors have boldly and courageously described all forms of violence, crimes and abuses inside and outside the prison, and have documented their testimony in prisons and detention centers with determination, so that these crimes and abuses do not go unpunished, and so that detainees are released.

The methodology of collective punishment administered by the Syrian state in destroying all means of living in communities that revolted against the regime in 2011, the brutal structure of the prison system, the importance of granting the victims justice, women and men, and giving them the hope to fight against perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide escaping accountability and fair trial under international criminal law – all make us wary of neglecting or delaying transitional gender-sensitive justice, because ongoing crimes and abuses are the result of criminals who, after the Hama massacres in the 1980s, were reassured that they were protected from prosecution, born of a system increasing in brutality. Either transformative transitional justice leading to profound radical changes to establish a new structure, or a conflict that will not stop devouring the rest of the country.

Building a transformational transitional gender-sensitive justice course is a necessity to build a just and sustainable peace in Syria to address war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and other grave violations of human rights of men and women, repair the vertical divisions in society, and end the methodology of unaccountability. Recognizing the complex and multilevel impacts on girls and women during the conflict and in prisons and detention centers, and links with the forms of discrimination against them, requires us, as defenders of human rights for men and women, to develop a strategic vision to pair justice, peace, and democracy with gender equality. This is the ideal way to move from a brutal security system to a democratic one that adheres to the legitimacy of human rights, works to promote the rule of law, and build a modern state, a state of citizenship.

The path of transitional justice follows a rupture between two eras, it is an integrated process of mechanisms and means adopted to understand and address a past of crimes and human rights violations by revealing their truth and holding those responsible accountable, redressing and rehabilitating victims to achieve national reconciliation



and preserve and document collective memory and establishing guarantees for non-repetition of violations, by reforming institutions, including the reconstruction of the security sector and integrating gender in this, and by reforming laws to restore confidence in the State and its institutions and to move from a state of oppression to a democratic system that contributes to preserving human rights for men and women. Therefore, transitional justice must be transformative and gender sensitive, and must correct power structures which are based on inequality in society, laws and state institutions and policy-making, and this correction is the first step to achieve gender justice.

The course of transformational transitional justice in Syria is long and arduous and needs a holistic approach, and the combined efforts of those committed to human rights, those seeking the rule of law and seeking to build a state of citizenship and sustainable peace.

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