

Enough Violence: The Importance of Local Action to Transnational Feminist Scholarship and Activism

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Abstract: *This article provides a rhetorical analysis of a gender violence media campaign launched by KAFA, an NGO based in Lebanon, modeling the kind of empowerment possible when activists not only adopt but also adapt transnational resources to suit local contexts and local rhetorical situations. KAFA's gender violence campaigns have opened a cultural space for the public discussion of gender and women's rights in Lebanon, raising questions about the state's responsibility to protect its citizens from violence and redefining domestic violence as violence. KAFA's leadership includes adopting and adapting transnational examples for local use and also managing the media; they use print, visual, and social media simultaneously to keep the issue of gender violence at the forefront of public discourse. This article further provides guidelines relevant to feminist scholars doing transnational work at the intersection of multiple national constituencies and discourses, including public, legal, religious, and private ones. Transnational concepts, such as women's rights, are constantly negotiated within local contexts and used in grass-roots activism within marginalized communities as powerful language that can challenge oppressive discourses.*

Keywords: *gender, domestic violence, women's rights, family law transnational feminism, media campaign, Lebanon, Middle East*

In the winter of 2011, during a trip to Lebanon to visit family, I noticed a billboard that stood out among the many along the Beirut highway advertizing everything from perfume to lingerie. The billboard that caught my attention wasn't selling a product, however. Instead, it pictured of a pair of women's hands grasping off-white bed sheets, a wedding band clearly visible [Figure 1]. The text that accompanied this powerful image said simply in Arabic, "Rape is a crime, no matter who commits it," with the word *rape* in red text. This billboard intrigued me and not only because it offered a public service announcement rather than an ad. Sponsored by a group named KAFA: Enough Violence and Exploitation (kafa means "enough" in Arabic), the billboard promoted awareness of marital rape, which is an issue generally regarded as private in Lebanon and therefore seldom included in public discourse. Throughout my

stay that winter, I came to realize the billboard was part of a larger media campaign organized by KAFA to raise awareness about a law the group proposed in 2008 to protect women from family violence. Together, the proposed law and media campaign continued to incite vigorous public debate three years later, challenging normative definitions of gender and family as well as the patriarchal underpinnings of Lebanese society.

As I learned when I began researching KAFA, the organization has been leading women's rights efforts in Lebanon since 2005, and in doing so the group has continually—and successfully—negotiated the complexity of transnational human rights rhetorics. In practice, some NGOs serve less as mediators of transnational activism and more as one-directional conduits carrying transnational objectives into local contexts. Similarly, within the academy transnational feminist scholars often focus on how international ideas and values, especially legislation, translate into local settings. Yet, KAFA's activities illustrate the directionality of this thinking is as limiting as a strict focus on lawmaking. Laws alone cannot change a society, and in the case of women's rights in Lebanon, a single law would not be enough to protect women from family violence. As KAFA members knew, for such a law to pass, its purpose



Figure 1. "Rape is a crime, no matter who commits it. Do not distort the bill on the Protection of Women from Family Violence."

would need to seem exigent to a disparate audience, and for such a law to be effective, were it passed, it would need to be enforced by police willing to address and document each incident; it would have to be supported by doctors and hospitals willing to provide medical attention as well as further documentation, and it would need to be upheld by judges willing to rule in favor of women plaintiffs. Accordingly, KAFA focused as much on culture work as advocating legislation, and in doing so the group accomplished a great deal more than simply translating transnational ideas into a Lebanese key. As an example, I return to the billboard: anyone inclined to approach KAFA thinking strictly in transnational terms is likely not to see what is missing. Notably, KAFA's public service message mentions rape but not marital rape, and the absence of that one word speaks volumes.

When KAFA began consciousness-raising about domestic violence, the organization faced three main, site-specific obstacles that are easily lost within globalizing generalizations about human rights and transnational feminism. First, ahead of increasing public awareness of domestic violence, KAFA had to establish the existence of the problem, since there are few public records to consult. As Ghida Annani, Lebanese founder and director of ABAAD Resource Center for Gender Equality and former program coordinator of KAFA, points out, the failure of police and hospitals to report incidents of domestic violence compounds the problem of violence itself. "Every year more than 500 women seek help at women's centers in Lebanon," Anani explains, but there are only four safe houses that can accommodate a total of forty women ("Lebanon: Move"). Thus in 2007 KAFA collaborated with Oxfam and the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women to conduct a study, which involved 1415 Lebanese women of various ages, educational backgrounds, religions, and incomes. In total, 35% of this group reported having experienced domestic abuse (Usta et al. 208-19). These statistics are not widely known, and KAFA had to explicitly establish the existence of domestic violence as a problem before it could propose a law protecting women from it.

The second and third obstacles KAFA faced are interlocking, and they stem from the classification of domestic abuse as a private matter. This distinction relegates adjudication of domestic violence cases to religious rather than civil courts. In Lebanon, which is governed by a political system known as Confessionalism, all Lebanese citizens are identified by one of seventeen religious communities into which they were born, and each community has its own court, which is authorized to establish personal status laws for its members (Tabet 15). As a result, Lebanese women do not exist as a single political group; instead, they are legally and socially affiliated with their particular religious community. To campaign for effective state-sponsored laws against domestic violence within this system, KAFA had to do more than persuade

people to see their point of view. They had to redefine domestic violence and specifically marital rape as a civil concern, making the state responsible for protecting women against it. KAFA also had to shift national discourse from multiple private, religious spheres to the public sphere, and they had to constitute their audience as participants in a shared, secular court of public opinion. Given these challenges, KAFA's accomplishments between 2005, when they began actively campaigning against domestic violence, and the present are a testimony to the power of using local knowledge to make local change while in dialogue with transnational human rights activism.

In this essay, which showcases KAFA as an exemplar for transnational feminist scholars, including scholars of rhetoric and composition, it is important to understand the organization as part of an intricate web of transnational activists. In their campaign against domestic violence alone, KAFA established its objectives in collaboration with the UN and representatives from eleven Arab countries, including national and international NGOs. On the ground, KAFA worked not only with lawyers and legislators but also with a variety of grass-roots organizations. In this way, KAFA provides a counter to all-too common examples of structural inequality within transnational activism. As Arabella Lyon and Lester C. Olson caution, especially when human rights become an impetus for legal change, the resulting discourses can become "tools by which elites manage or control otherwise already disenfranchised or marginalized, ostensibly 'autonomous' individuals" and communities (206). As Lyon and Olson make clear, however, activists "can, at times, find human rights vocabularies to be powerful resources for revealing hypocrisy, making radical claims on elites for recognition, inclusion, and justice within communities and affirming their stature as fully human within dehumanizing and oppressive cultures" (206). I argue KAFA is exemplary in this regard because its members were able to engage and, importantly, transform available human rights vocabularies to advocate powerfully for human rights and women's rights specifically. As the 2011 billboard illustrates, they did so by negotiating social structures and audience expectations both rhetorically and multi-modally. As such, as I discuss below, KAFA models the kind of empowerment that is possible when activists not only adopt but also adapt transnational resources to suit local contexts as well as local rhetorical situations.

In naming KAFA an exemplar for transnational feminist scholars, including scholars in rhetoric and composition, I seek to highlight their rhetorical strategies and savvy rather than their success. As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell warns, "In a social movement advocating controversial changes, failure to achieve specific goals will be common, no matter how able and creative the advocates, whether male or female" (Campbell qtd. in Buchanan and Ryan 8). Thus, she recommends, "critics must judge whether the choices made by the rhetors were

skillful responses to the problems they confronted, not whether the changes they urged were enacted" (8). Campbell's is the critical lens through which we should view KAFA's efforts, not least because at the time of publication the law the group proposed continues to be debated in Lebanon. Affirming rhetoric as a stochastic art and KAFA's particular artistry does not deny the desirability of their success. Passage of the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence stands to improve the lives of countless Lebanese women and their families. All the same, KAFA's initial and continuing success lies in its ability to challenge normative definitions of gender in a climate deeply entrenched in patriarchal, religious, and sectarian politics. Further, as part of the act of challenging, KAFA has opened a cultural space in Lebanon for the public discussion of gender and women's rights. Just as the organization continues to mediate between transnational and Lebanese legal discourses, KAFA has enabled a wide variety of constituents—activists, politicians, bloggers, and protestors—to participate in nation-wide deliberations that concern not only women's right to protection from family violence but also women's status as citizens in Lebanon.

The Letter of the Law

The legislation KAFA proposed in 2008, the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence, combined with the initial responses it provoked created the occasion—and the need—for their media campaign. The law itself purported not only to criminalize all forms of family violence (i.e., physical, mental, verbal and economic) including marital rape, but also to place such crimes under the jurisdiction of civil rather than religious courts. In developing the draft law, KAFA worked with Association Najdeh, a secular Lebanese group that serves Palestinian women and refugees; Young Women's Christian Association, the oldest volunteer association for young women in Lebanon; the Beirut Women's Association of Lawyers, three judges, and a senior official of the International Security Forces (ISF) among others. The result of this collaboration was a law that included numerous provisions designed to protect women within the family, allowing victims to lodge criminal complaints free of charge, and it specified a range of sentences for convicted perpetrators, ranging from mandated anger-management counseling to fines and prison sentences. Further, the draft law included provisions to force convicted perpetrators to pay their victims' medical expenses plus housing and alimony, and it mandated the establishment of specially trained police units within the Internal Security Forces.

For all its apparent novelty, the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence was not new. In 1997, the Lebanese government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women or CEDAW, a treaty established by the United Nations 20 years earlier. A kind

of declaration of rights for women, CEDAW contained thirty articles, which enumerated different forms of discrimination against women the UN sought to prevent. Of course, as different countries around the world signed the accord they also modified it. In Lebanon's case, the government opted to exclude three articles by entering formal reservations against them: Article 9 concerning nationality laws; Article 16 concerning equality within marriage and family life; and Article 29 concerning arbitration between states by the International Court of Justice. While the finer points of each reservation are complex, the result, most simply put, was the codification of gender inequality in specific ways. In particular, by entering a reservation to Article 16, Lebanon denied men and women equality in state laws governing personal status (i.e., divorce, marriage, inheritance and child custody). At the same time, the Lebanese government opted to uphold several existing religious laws that discouraged women from seeking protection against domestic abuse from either state or religious courts. As a result, although Lebanon adopted CEDAW, the Lebanese state side-stepped many of the specific human rights issues CEDAW was designed to address, and it failed to provide women with protection from domestic violence.

A decade later, in 2008, KAFA proposed the draft law to Protect Women from Family Violence, and two years after that the Lebanese Council of Ministers approved it. Following their decision, the draft law was sent to a parliamentary sub-committee, and almost immediately several religious authorities began to voice their objections to it, pressuring committee members to make amendments. In particular, critics of the law took issue with the term marital rape, claiming it was a foreign term that had no place in Lebanon's law books. In particular, Dar al-Fatwa, the highest Sunni authority, posted a direct response to the draft law on its website, *Naharnet*. They wrote: "Islam is very aware of and concerned with . . . resolving problems of poor treatment [of women]. . . but this should not happen by cloning Western laws that encourage the breakdown of the family and do not suit our society" ("Dar al-Fatwa"). Casting the term marital rape as a Western concept, Dar al-Fatwa refused to acknowledge such a crime existed in Lebanon. In fact, it could not exist in Sunni and other religious communities where marriage contracts granted husbands the right to their wives' bodies. Affirming this position, Dar al-Fatwa insisted the law would "have a negative impact on Muslim children . . . who [would] see their mother threatening their father with prison, in defiance of patriarchal authority, which [would] in turn undermine the moral authority" of not only fathers in individual families but also all men in society. From this perspective, the bill was not simply threatening; it was heretical. Thus, Dar al-Fatwa asserted: "We must continue to follow sharia (Islamic law) as concerns the Muslim family."

In response to public criticism by religious authorities, the parliamentary subcommittee made a series of amendments to KAFA's draft law. First, they changed the title from "Protection of Women and Family Members Against Domestic Violence" to "Protection of Women and Other Family Members Against Domestic Violence." Second, the subcommittee excised the phrase "marital rape" from the law along with any inference of the act. Initially, the draft law mandated legal repercussions for "Whoever forces his wife, with violence and threat, into sexual intercourse [is punished]." Article 3, on marital rape, was amended to state, "Whoever shall, with the purpose of claiming his/her marital right to intercourse, or because of the same, intentionally beat his spouse or harm the same, is punished pursuant to Articles 554-559 of the Penal Code." By striking direct reference to marital rape and replacing the phrase with "claiming his marital right," both the phrase and the issue were excluded.

Amendments to the draft law essentially gutted it, destroying its capacity to protect women against marital abuse. Along with the removal of the phrase "marital rape," another amendment specified if the law were to conflict with any religious community's personal status code, the code would prevail. Thus, the changes also confirmed the power of religious rather than state authorities to define marriage and marital relations. Rhetorically, the revised law served as clear reminder that gender issues and specifically women's rights function as a kind of fulcrum in the delicate balance of power between secular and religious authorities in Lebanon, with greater force being exerted by the latter. For KAFA to respond effectively, the organization could not focus exclusively on legislation. Instead, they had to go outside the political sphere and make public arguments capable of moving diverse audiences composed of individuals with wide-ranging, often conflicting subjectivities. To do so, and to make meaningful social and legal change, the draft law's success rested on the need to challenge the definition of marital rape as a foreign concept that does not exist in Lebanese society. KAFA contested the dynamics between different religions on one hand and the secular state on the other, while testing the perceived opposition between indigenous and foreign influences. KAFA's response to criticism of the draft law was to create a context and vocabulary for public sphere discourse about women's rights, domestic violence, and, ultimately, marital rape. Doing so required carefully crafted arguments that could withstand public scrutiny and challenge normative definitions of family and gender in Lebanon.

The Court of Public Opinion

The billboard I noticed in the winter of 2011 was by no means the work of activists new to national campaigns. In fact, KAFA had been making public

arguments about human rights for more than six years before that billboard ran, and they had developed a robust repertoire for raising transnational issues in Lebanese contexts. KAFA was also not new to campaigning specifically for women's rights. In 2005 they launched the first annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, simultaneously taking up and reinventing an international effort by the same name. Begun by the United Nations in 1991, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence took place around the world every year between November 25th, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and December 10th, which is Human Rights Day. KAFA found opportunities for developing the international UN campaigns in site-specific ways. For example, the initial 16 Days campaign included UN initiatives, such as the Clothesline Project, a visual exhibition of a display of shirts on a clothesline designed by survivors of domestic violence or relatives of women killed by domestic violence, a visual representation of airing out dirty laundry—making public what was once considered private family issues. They also incorporated the Silent Witness National Initiative into the campaign, which is a visual exhibition of a series of cardboard female silhouette cutouts, each with the story of a woman killed by domestic violence. KAFA organized these visual exhibitions each year during the 16 Days of Activism campaign since 2005, narrating the stories of Lebanese victims of domestic violence. All of the above serves to challenge the normative discourse on gender and sexuality in Lebanon and open familiar institutions such as “family,” “public” and “private” to greater scrutiny than they were usually accorded. By challenging definitions of private and public issues, KAFA gradually changed public discourse on domestic violence, including marital rape.

These early actions set the stage for the campaign KAFA mounted during 16 Days of Activism in 2011. As deliberations about the draft law continued, KAFA committed to supporting the law through culture work: namely, they set out to create a shared sense of the need for state legislation to protect women from marital rape. To accomplish this goal, they had to make marital rape a publicly acknowledged, secular national problem rather than a private matter best addressed in religious courts or an imported, international and specifically Western bogey. As KAFA shifted attention from the legal courts to the court of public opinion, it would be an understatement to say theirs was a complex and difficult rhetorical task. What makes them an exemplary organization is not only the series of multimodal arguments they developed, including print, visual, and social media; it is also the way they served as leaders of activist efforts related to the draft law, engaging others ongoing public deliberation and action over an extended period of time.

To initiate their 2011 campaign, KAFA started 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence with a press conference for journalists from several

leading newspapers, including *Assafir*, *al Akhbar*, *al Mustaqbal*, and *The Daily Star*. They did not stop there, however. In order to bring attention to the draft law and the distortions the parliamentary subcommittee imposed on it, KAFA also marshaled a wide range of additional media. At the outset, their campaign included visual art and photography exhibitions such as the Clothesline Project; live public performances in cities across Lebanon, including Ashrafiyeh, Hamra, and Ein el Mreyseh; promotional media including eighteen billboards in different areas across Lebanon; and flyers distributed with popular newspapers *al Joumhouria*, *Assafir*, *Annahar*. The group also launched a social media campaign utilizing Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, and they built on opportunities that arose both during and well beyond the annual sixteen days of activism. Indeed, as the campaign gained momentum, KAFA took their message to unscripted television talk shows, scripted television dramas, and live theater—a *Symbolic Trial on Marital Rape* played in Babel theater, Hamra, and was covered by *The Huffington Post*, *al Hayat*, *L'Orient le Jour*, *The Daily Star*, *Women News* and *Assafir*.

As their campaign expanded, KAFA consistently used multimodal arguments to create public discourse about not only the draft law but also its most controversial subject, marital rape. Returning to the billboard as a representative example, the verbal message on display identifies rape as a crime, while the visual message of a woman's hands clutching the bedclothes, wedding band prominently displayed, signals both marital rape and the violent nature of the crime. This complex message is a response to the significant gap between state and religious understandings of domestic violence. While the billboard argues marital rape is a violent crime against women, it makes this argument in a society in which neither marital rape nor domestic violence can, in a technical sense, occur. In the eyes of religious courts, which are ruled by clerics, family relationships are deemed private, and many of the acts that what would elsewhere be classed as domestic violence are understood as the prerogative of male heads of household. Critics of the draft law followed this line of thinking in their arguments against the use of the term marital rape. They regarded marital contracts as consensual agreements to a private arrangement, which includes husbands' and wives' access to each other's bodies. Lisa Hajjar explains the end result: "In contexts where intrafamily violence is not prohibited by law (i.e., criminalized), perpetrators enjoy legal impunity," and impunity often leads to "a reluctance or resistance to recognizing and dealing with intrafamily violence *as violence*" (3).

By portraying marital rape as rape and thus a violent crime against women, KAFA's billboard works strategically against social norms. The billboard shows a pair of hands wearing a wedding band grasping bed sheets. The assumption is that the person who is being attacked in the photograph is in her marital

bed. It introduces the concept of rape as it occurs between two married people. The use of the visual argument on a billboard advertisement places the visual representation of the “private affair” literally on the streets, a rhetorical strategy of providing the audience with a voyeuristic window into the homes of Lebanese women. The visual representation of marital rape brings to light a private issue that has no name within the local context. But the audience cannot ignore the existence of human rights abuses when directly faced with it. By visually representing a term they are trying to introduce into the local context, KAFA makes it nearly impossible for authorities to argue against the existence of marital rape. What are we seeing in the billboard, if it is not marital rape, then? How can we ethically allow the violation of the body within the marital relationship? The assumption KAFA is making here is that we cannot turn a blind eye to such human rights violations. It is this message that enables KAFA to recast private relations between husband and wife as a matter of state concern and, even more importantly, state intervention. To make this argument, KAFA drew from an international human rights legal framework, specifically from CEDAW, which defines women’s rights and human rights, and human rights as universal. KAFA’s proposed draft law pursues these ideas by reframing rape as violence, and placing responsibility on the state for preventing it. Similarly, the public arguments KAFA put forward visualized and dramatized these ideas, while making them unavoidable.

Along with print media, social media in particular turned formerly private affairs into public ones, while the pervasiveness of KAFA’s messages created a sense of the pervasiveness of the problem of marital rape. KAFA’s social media campaigns were effective at reaching large groups of people, flooding public attention with messages about marital rape. The influence of social media can be measured quantitatively: During the 16 Days campaign in 2011, 3,155 people liked KAFA’s Facebook page, 543 people signed an online petition supporting the draft law, and 3,860 hits on YouTube videos of the TV spots. KAFA also indirectly influenced face-to-face events, televised events, written discourse, and political positions on the issue of domestic violence. Various individuals and activist organizations began taking public positions, deliberating on the issue, marching in the streets, organizing and protesting, writing blog posts, publishing opinion articles in newspapers, tweeting, commenting on Facebook, tagging (graffiti), and participating in a variety of other activities through the use of social media as a tool for activism that lasted well beyond the end of the 2011 campaign. The debate on marital rape also included political figures taking public positions on the draft law. For example, several public political figures came out in support of the campaign, and in support of the draft law, including parliament member and leader of the Lebanese Forces political party Samir Geagea and parliament member Elie Kayrouz. KAFA

promoted public discourse by managing the media and capacitating other organizations for participation, providing information to journalists, activists, and public figures, and encouraging them to deliberate on the issue.

Think Globally, Act Locally

Within the transnational network of human rights activists of which KAFA was a part, the United Nations was only one source of support. KAFA also turned frequently to more immediate neighbors in the Global South, particularly Arab nations involved in the social movements now known collectively as the Arab Spring. Together the revolutions, uprisings, and large-scale protests that swept through more than two-dozen countries between 2010 and 2012 created a new context for human rights advocacy. As Ghida Anani, explains, “[T]he power of people [today]—women and men—on Arab streets is palpable. We, the rights holders, are now holding our governments, the duty bearers, accountable... If toppling a government is possible, what is not possible?” (Amani 2). This question resonated through KAFA’s activities, even while their relationship to the Lebanese government was substantially different. Unlike protesters who worked to topple corrupt governments, KAFA sought to strengthen the state by authorizing the government to protect women against family violence. They raised questions about the state’s responsibility to protect its citizens from violence. KAFA was able to redefine domestic violence *as violence*. Thus while Arab Spring protesters expanded human rights discourse in one way, by including the protection of individuals from their own governments, KAFA sought greater government protections for Lebanese citizens, particularly women, in the form of the draft law. Nonetheless, KAFA learned a great deal from Arab Spring protesters, adapting and adopting some of their examples to suit their own rhetorical purposes.

KAFA’s repurposing is nowhere more in evidence than in the ads that ran during the 16 days campaign in 2011, created to shame those members of parliament who revised the draft law. The democratic currents that took place in 2011 in the Middle East illustrated that political figures can and should be held accountable for human rights violations, and the ability to achieve national unity is through popular protests. For example, the toppling of Egypt’s government after thirty years of dominance demonstrated that popular protests are able to challenge the government and change the political landscape. As a result of the Arab Spring uprisings, the discourse on human rights has broadened to include individual security from one’s own government and representatives. KAFA’s rhetorical strategy is to accuse the government of harming its own citizens through their refusal to pass the draft law. By doing so, KAFA does not fall into simplistic “men as perpetrators of violence” and “women

as victims” analytic that often pervades discussions of gender. KAFA instead places the responsibility on the state to protect citizens from individual harm: women’s rights are violated by individual men, and also by the Lebanese government who refuses to protect them. Following this strategy, KAFA put up billboards featuring portraits of all eight members of the parliamentary subcommittee assigned to work on the draft law. The text that accompanied the portraits included two concise statements, which together issued a stern accusation: “Marital rape is a crime” and “The law is your reflection” [See Figure 2]. By using shame as a rhetorical strategy, KAFA locates the responsibility of the protection of women on the state, instead of the individual perpetrator of domestic violence. KAFA argues for the recognition of women’s citizenship and for the responsibility of the state to protect women. The rhetorical strategy of public shaming in the billboard holds individual political figures accountable for the distortion of the law. The “your” in this public service announcement refers to the eight individual parliament members, placing blame on the eight people responsible for passing the law. By identifying the eight members on the subcommittee in the Lebanese media, KAFA took up a rhetorical strategy used during the Arab Spring to communicate shame and honor, a rhetorical move drawing on discourse that resonates within the local culture.

The PSAs were placed on TV and on busses whose route took the message across Beirut. The act of public shaming and identification of the term marital

rape with the individuals responsible was a purposeful means of thrusting these individuals into the public spotlight. The purpose of using the portraits was to identify those individuals who can provide further information and reasoning for the lack of protection of women, putting them on the spot, so to speak. Several lawmakers and religious authorities attempted to censor the ads to protect the individuals identified in the



Figure 2. “Dear representative... Marital rape is also a crime! The law is your reflection! Do not distort the Protection of Women from Family Violence.”

campaign, but KAFA refused to take down the advertisements, maintaining that the media plays an essential role in civil society (“Stop Airing”). As a result of the PSA, two of the subcommittee members, Shant Janjanian and Nabil Noula, stepped down from the subcommittee so as not to be associated with others who were stalling the draft law. They were then able to publicly address the issue, which they were unable to do while they were on the parliamentary subcommittee.

KAFA's repurposing and use of shaming as a rhetorical strategy was effective in the Lebanese context because of the political and religious landscape. KAFA used the portraits to elicit statements from the parliament members that are derived from religious ideology, in order to highlight their inconsistencies with the liberal ideological foundations of the Lebanese government. This rhetorical strategy is particularly effective in a public sphere such as Lebanon because arguments refuting marital rape as a crime in the public sphere reveal the contradiction between such views, based in religious ideology, and the liberal values on which the Lebanese government is grounded. This rhetorical strategy associates individual parliament members with religious ideologies in order to discredit their arguments against the term marital rape. This strategy casts the parliament members as holding beliefs that are inconsistent with human rights values and congruent with religious conservative ideologies, which have no place in the Lebanese penal code.

KAFA's leadership included not only adopting and adapting transnational examples for local use but also managing the media. In this regard, KAFA operated as a behind-the-scenes tour de force, working to encourage public deliberations about the draft law among numerous interlocutors. Not only did KAFA play a pedagogical role, sharing information and rhetorical strategies with other organizations; KAFA also directed the Lebanese media to draft law advocates ready and willing to play a role in national deliberations. For example, a popular Lebanese activist group called Nasawiya publically debated the law in both the Lebanese and international media. One such public debate aired on Al Jazeera's online streaming channel, AJ Stream. Nadine Mouawad from Nasawiya and Souhay Nouh from Dar Al-Fatwa appeared to debate the issue, moderated by international human rights lawyer and journalist Bec Hamilton. Nadine's arguments for the domestic violence bill echoed those KAFA had established throughout the 16 Days of Activism Campaign. By providing activists with the arguments and information to publicly debate the issue, KAFA publically shared responsibility for pushing the draft law through parliament.

As public discourse about the draft law grew, so, too, did the range of arguments in circulation. On one hand, the proliferation reflected the many perspectives of people who supported the law; on the other hand, some



Figure 3. Fight Rape (Graffito).



Figure 4. Occupy Beirut (Graffito).

emerging arguments threatened to diffuse the focus of public discourse by merging arguments for the draft law with arguments about other issues. For example, as the debate on domestic violence waged on during the end of 2011 and well into 2012, activists began to spray paint images associated with the cause on walls around Beirut. One of the most common images was a woman shouting with her fist in the air [See Figure 3]. The accompanying slogan, "Fight Rape," implies more than an attempt to pass the draft law. The iconic image of a raised fist and its accompanying English-language command connected the Lebanese fight to change the government to a history of populist activism around the world, particularly the Black Power movement. While sometimes this figure appeared alone, it also frequently appeared near two other notable images. In one, protestors used the colors of the Lebanese flag to highlight the English-language slogan "Occupy Beirut," connecting protests over the draft law with the Occupy Wall Street movement, which began in New York City in 2011 and addressed widespread economic and structural inequalities in the United States [See figure 4].

The Occupy Beirut and the Occupy Wall Street movements were both inspired by the social media-fueled Arab Spring and connected in their call for addressing structural inequalities. The other prominent graffiti featured a question and answer posed in Arabic, which together openly opposed

Lebanon's sectarianism [See Figure 5]. Asking, "When will the civil war end?" the graffiti answers: "When the sectarian regime falls" [See Figure 5]. This rhetorical move associates the Lebanese civil war, which took place over the course of fifteen years between 1975-1990, with the sectarian political structure. This argument is one that has been hotly debated in Lebanese public discourse since the beginning of the civil war, and as such is a logical extension of KAFA's arguments for the domestic violence law. It's placement next to the "Fight Rape" logo and the "Occupy Beirut" logo associates the arguments against domestic violence with the sectarian political system, clearly making the connection between violence against women and the government system that permits it. By engaging in these rhetorical acts, the association of images and words paint a larger picture of political corruption that directly affects the status of women, drawing from secular/sectarian dichotomies that shape the discourse on gender violence.

KAFA's campaign illustrates the way public discourse about the draft law, legislation ostensibly focused on a transnational feminist goal, was never divorced from the local national context in which it circulated. The campaign illustrates, too, how the issue of protecting women from domestic abuse could be connected to other Lebanese issues, whether recent ones such as the international Occupy movement or longstanding ones



Figure 5. "When will the civil war end? When the sectarian regime falls."

such as criticisms of the sectarianism structured by Confessionalism. For decades many Lebanese have argued for a unified civil law as the solution, and KAFA's campaign was shaped by it as much as it gave those older arguments new shape. As one Lebanese blogger explained: "We have to start with the creation of a civil personal status law in Lebanon. Only that can lay the foundations (legal, civic and institutional) and structure to debate and regulate matters like marital rape. Anything else is putting the carriage before the horse" (Hamoui). So while KAFA's campaign did not directly address the lack of a unified civil law, by allowing the campaign on marital rape to be shaped by local bloggers, political figures, and activists, it provided opportunities for others to make the logical connection.

Reality Check

The parliamentary sub-committee completed their revisions of the draft law in August 2012, reinserting the term marital rape and establishing mechanisms for women to report abuse as well as special training for a section of the International Security Forces (ISF). However, this version of the law does not actually criminalize marital rape. Instead, according to KAFA, the new law ensures "the harm that accompanies it" would be penalized but not the act itself ("Joint Committees Approve"). This would mean that marital rape is not considered a crime, but the effects of the violence can be penalized. One year after the draft law was approved it sat languishing in parliament due to other political issues that kept parliament from meeting. During this time, KAFA continued their advocacy efforts and launched a new campaign on July 5, 2013: "I haven't died, but many others have." This campaign featured the testimonies of two women, Rim Zakaria and Zainab Awada, both of whom survived murder attempts by their husbands (Merhi). These women's video-recorded testimonies were featured in media outlets across Lebanon. Addressing the parliamentary speaker of the house, Nabih Berri, directly, these women urged him to put the draft law at the forefront of the agenda. Their testimonies aired on television only two days before Berri complied, although parliament was at a standstill due to other political issues. However, it wasn't until the death of Roula Yaacoub became headline news that the draft law was finally approved.

Roula Yaacoub, 31, was found comatose in her home in Akkar, Halba, on July 8 2013, and she later died in a local hospital. According to her family, she was severely beaten by her husband Karam al-Bazzi, but a 13-page report, including an autopsy claiming Yaacoub died from an aneurysm, cleared him of any wrongdoing (Rainey). The controversy that unfolded through intense media coverage was tragically kairotic. It occurred while public discussions about domestic violence were prominent alongside stories about parliamentary deliberations over the draft law. Against this backdrop, Yaacoub's family

refused to accept the results of the autopsy and requested to have her body exhumed. Roula's mother, Leila Khoury, was widely quoted as insisting "she would not rest until the criminal was punished" (Abou Jaoude). Eventually, neighbors came forward to report that al-Bazzi regularly beat Yaacoub and their five children. As the story was reported over and over again, Yaacoub became a nationally known martyr, standing in for the 24 women killed that year alone by their spouses (Aziz). As pictures of her smiling with her daughters in her lap circulated, she also became the face of KAFA's campaign. Thus when a judge ordered Bazzi to be released from jail, the community as well as the country reacted with outrage. The victim's family and KAFA members worked together to organize protests in her hometown, while activists were protesting in Beirut.

It is difficult to say whether Roula Yaacoub ultimately got the justice her family and thousands of others sought for her. On one hand, the draft law was approved on July 22, 2013 (Ayoub), and a parliamentary human rights committee met the next day to discuss its implementation, calling it a "first step with many positive aspects" ("Rights Committee"). On the other hand, her husband was recently acquitted of all charges on January 25, 2014. Zoya Rouhana, KAFA's director, called Yaacoub's case "an issue of justice," stating: "This case has not been given the special attention it should have been given. There has been some sort of conspiracy, which has led to this conclusion" (Rainey). By contrast, the death of Manal Assi almost a year later garnered a different response. Assi was bludgeoned to death with a pressure cooker by her husband, Mohammad al-Nhaily. During his fatal attack, al-Nhaily fought off neighbors as well as the Civil Defense ambulance, threatening to shoot anyone who tried to stop him (Majed). At trial, Assi's daughters informed the public their mother had been beaten on previous occasions, and the judge hearing the case reacted. Unlike the judge in Yaacoub's case, Judge Fouad Murad issued an indictment against al-Nhaily, accusing him of premeditated murder and recommending the death penalty.

Although Murad's decision was unprecedented (Khraiche), the fight to protect women from domestic violence in Lebanon is far from over. The draft law, while in effect, remains watered down, and the case against al-Nhaily remains in criminal court today. Meanwhile, protests continue, ensuring the public remains aware of domestic violence and the inadequacy of the current law. In March 2014, only a month after Assi's murder, KAFA organized a protest just outside the Justice Palace in Beirut in observation of International Women's Day. Over 5,000 people participated in an event acknowledged as "one of the largest [protests] in recent memory on a social issue in Lebanon" (Qiblawi). When Maya Ammar, a spokesperson for KAFA, commented on this event, she connected the two women's deaths, and she credited public discourse with

playing a key role in the cultural change represented by the protests. She said: "I think people are really changing in their attitudes about this subject, and I think this is all because Roula Yaacoub's family broke the silence about it" (Qiblawi). To ensure the issue remained both prominent and exigent, KAFA launched a series of television PSAs about the law in conjunction with 16 Days of Activism in 2014. Known as the Zalfa campaign, these PSAs provided information on the rights and protections women are afforded under the law number 293 for the protection of women against domestic violence.

One of the most important elements of KAFA's success in raising awareness and changing public discourse on domestic violence is their responsiveness. Key to their advocacy strategy is their ability to immediately respond to unforeseen events, such as Yaacoub and Assi's murders, and limitations to the draft law, such as the watered-down version amended by the parliament subcommittee and religious cleric's rejection of the term marital rape. As another example, at the end of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign in 2011, KAFA was preparing to their campaign, "I haven't died, but many others have," and while the Zalfa campaign aired on television, they worked with ISF officers to prepare them for responding to incidents of domestic violence effectively. As events unfolded, KAFA effectively continued to organize around the issue of domestic violence. They used print, visual and social media simultaneously, keeping the issue at the forefront of public discourse.

Global Positioning

Considered in local national context, KAFA's efforts to advocate not only for women's right to protection from domestic violence but also for women's rights in general have been effective, whether efficacy is measured in the passage of the draft law, even in its diluted state, or in relation to changing legal and social practices. Considered from alternative locations, how should we evaluate their impact? As scholars how should we approach further study? Particularly as feminist scholars of rhetoric and composition, what can and should we glean from KAFA's example?

As a transnational feminist scholar having lived in the Middle East, my approach to feminist issues is nuanced; we need to pay better attention to the ways we are shaped by competing and often conflicting discourses and to the assumptions under which we operate. However, as a Lebanese citizen, I am also aware of the ways such an approach to issues of identity often creates fractures of communities, dividing a society instead of providing opportunities for coalitions. As a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country, Lebanon's various religious, cultural, and social communities attempt to negotiate definitions of gender roles within a climate deeply entrenched in political strife, kin-based communal relations, and patriarchal structures of power.

Middle Eastern states “have imagined their citizens to be differentiated by religious attachments and primordial identities and loyalties preceding the state” (Joseph 11). As such, the nation is seen as a series of smaller communities. Muslim and Christian communities and religious institutions have elevated the religious status to that of civil status. By doing so, they have supported a patriarchal structure and engendered citizenship (Joseph 11). In addition, such a fractured public discourse and sense of identification poses problems for building coalitions across communities. To return to the billboard at the beginning of this essay—my reaction was one of awe. How would KAFA be able to form coalitions for women’s rights across the fractured sectarian communities that plague Lebanon? How would such coalitions successfully challenge normative definitions of gender and family in Lebanon?

Turning collectively to KAFA as feminist scholars of rhetoric and composition, we do well to take up the framework offered by Wendy Hesford and Eileen Schell. In “Configurations of Transnationality: Locating Feminist Rhetorics,” they write:

At this historical juncture transnational feminism might best be characterized as an interdisciplinary analytic, attentive to the constraints of neoliberalism and to the power differentials and inequalities that shape geopolitical alignments. (467)

Further, they note, “we are interested in how transnational publics, which emerge as processes, are bound to and intersect with national publics and their discourses” (Hesford and Schell 467). Their approach highlights the recursive relationship not only between transnational and local national discourses, but also among the legal, religious, and public-cultural discourses that animate the local scene. Certainly, all of the latter, local discourses come into play when Lebanon is the subject of study and human rights, particularly women’s rights, are the focus. As I have argued throughout this essay, to understand the complexity of such situations and to appreciate the rhetorical acumen of a group like KAFA, transnational feminist scholars must do more than trace the dissemination of transnational ideas, practices, and laws into local national contexts. Instead, scholars must examine the ways in which local contexts inform activists’ reinvention of available resources, including legislation as well as advocacy and protest praxes. To that end, drawing on what I have learned from my study of KAFA, I offer the following heuristic as a complement to the framework Hesford and Schell provide through their call to transnational work. These guidelines are especially relevant to feminist scholars doing transnational work at the intersection of multiple national constituencies and discourses, including public, legal, religious, and private ones.

Analyze legal examples in conjunction with related culture work, including activism, artistic production, and so on. As Sally Engle Merry argues in *Human Rights and Gender Violence*, in order for transnational concepts of human rights to translate into social change, they need to “become part of the consciousness of ordinary people around the world” (3). By using transnational concepts of human rights to argue for women’s rights, groups like KAFA have had to address the definitions of human rights within the local contexts. In the case of Lebanon, arguments between KAFA and religious communities centered on definitions of the term “marital rape.” KAFA focused on pushing legislation to protect women by redefining domestic violence as violence against a citizen of the state, taking it out of the private family context. In order to push for such legislation, it is important that normative, local definitions of gender are challenged, in addition to cultural definitions of marriage, family, and sexuality. KAFA’s work, while unsuccessful at the level of the law since the draft proposed is not the one that eventually passed, is a shining example of the way in which local culture can be challenged.

Pay attention to the nature and directionality of the dissemination of transnational ideas and practices. As the example of KAFA illustrates, transnational concepts, such as human rights, are constantly being negotiated within local contexts and used in grassroots activism within marginalized communities as powerful language that can challenge oppressive discourses. As transnational feminist scholars, we need to critically examine the systemic forms of inequalities that operate globally connecting these forms of misogynistic violence in women’s lives by tracing the relationship between transnational public and national publics. One way of doing this is by following the process of implementing human rights concepts into the local, as in the example of KAFA’s campaigns. However, as I have illustrated throughout this essay, tracing legal framework within local contexts limits our understanding of how local activist groups shape and are shaped by larger transnational social movements. As researchers interested in transnational feminist rhetorics, we need to pay attention to the local reinvention of transnational ideas, and consider not only the transfer of ideas and practices from global organizations and powers (i.e., the United Nations, the United States) to individual nations but also the exchange of ideas and practices between different countries and regions. KAFA’s campaigns illustrate the transfer of ideas and practices are open to influence by transnational social movements that resonate with the larger population, such as the popular uprisings during the Arab Spring that changed transnational human rights discourse.

Approach discourse broadly, paying attention to verbal and visual language in use as well as media praxes. In order to best reach a larger population, KAFA’s consistent use of media in all its forms and their continuous

campaigning across all platforms provided an effective approach to challenging dominant discourses on gender and domestic violence in Lebanon. The 2011 media campaign helped propel the normative understanding of gender into the public sphere, providing opportunities for a once-private issue to be debated publicly among citizens of the state. KAFA encouraged deliberative oratory because it was able to benefit a larger population, instead of making their arguments heard only within a judicial context. KAFA used a variety of media for their campaigns. Print media enabled them to include journalists in the public discussions and distributed flyers with local newspapers. KAFA was careful to pay attention to the written language used in their media campaigns, as evidenced by their “marital rape” billboard, and the visual arguments, as illustrated by their television ads and talk show deliberations. They used print, visual, and social media as pedagogical tools, to propose arguments, to challenge cultural definitions, to disseminate information, and to provide opportunities for the Lebanese public to participate in the public deliberations.

Place feminist issues at the fore. Transnational feminism has often focused on how international legal language can be translated into the local to affect change in the legal systems of nation-states. Rita Sabat calls this the “process of norm diffusion” (23). In her work on norm diffusion in campaigns on violence against women in Lebanon, Sabat observes that successful campaigns involve reframing international norms in ways that do not disrupt the patriarchal honor system embedded in local culture. In other words, although international norms are redefined within in a local context, they are often met with such resistance that they are redefined to fit within sociocultural structural inequalities to the extent that their potential for substantive social change is greatly diminished.

An example is that KAFA’s 2011 campaign defined gender violence as violence against married Lebanese women. However, violence against women in Lebanon is not confined to married women, and certainly not directed only towards Lebanese women. Violence against migrant workers, for example, is neatly kept out of KAFA’s campaign, and instead addressed in a separate campaign. KAFA’s campaigns to challenge discourses on gender remain within the structure of the family and within normative heterosexual gendered definitions, without taking into account the marginalization of homosexual and transgendered communities, and the sex industry in Lebanon. This does not mean that KAFA has not addressed violence in the migrant community and rights for migrant workers. In fact, it is one of the important causes that KAFA champions. However, violence in these marginalized communities is addressed in separate campaigns. While strategically such separations make sense—laws that protect migrant workers are separate from those that

address violence against Lebanese citizens.—it also prevents coalition building around gender-focused anti-violence initiatives.

The diffusion of activist efforts also has a negative impact on how Lebanon is regarded both internally and externally. As campaigns against gender-based violence of all kinds proliferate, the message they send is that Lebanon is a culture of unstoppable misogyny. This kind of characterization feeds stereotypes at the same time it limits national and international activists' ability to address systemic structures of violence, which operate both locally and globally. The violent acts against women that occur in Lebanon may be culturally situated but they are also not unique to Lebanon alone. They do not happen because Lebanon is "backwards" or "culturally violent" as a result of the 15-year civil war. They do not happen because of Islam and people's religious affiliations. Gender violence systemically occurs in many parts of the world with little or no legal repercussions in many nations. KAFA's campaigns address the larger global structures that permit such violence, while also addressing the local institutions and discourses on gender. Importantly, KAFA never positions "Lebanese men as oppressors" and "woman as the oppressed." Instead of placing blame on individual men, or Lebanese culture, they address the absence of protections of women by the government. In doing so, they rightfully accuse the Lebanese government of being complicit in the violation of women's human rights. By addressing the larger political and government structure, KAFA places blame on the larger institutional inequalities that give rise to human rights violations, successfully challenging systems of oppression.

As transnational scholars, we need to acknowledge the challenges groups like KAFA face in cultural, social and politically rich contexts such as Lebanon. We need to pay attention to how groups like KAFA form coalitions across fractured communities of identification. In the Middle East context such as Lebanon, where regional and religious identifications are often stronger than national identities, successful campaigning should include careful attention to culture work, attention to competing discourses, and attention to the effectiveness of transnational movements that may resonate within local practices. Further research on the nuances of how this process is employed through various mediums in differing locations and political landscapes may help us further understand the complexity of how discourses are shaped on the ground. As KAFA has illustrated, transnational concepts, such as women's rights, are constantly being negotiated within local contexts and used in grassroots activism within marginalized communities as powerful language that can challenge oppressive discourses. Working within a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and often fractured political climate, KAFA is a shining example of grassroots activism that has formed coalitions across political and religious identifications to emphasize the importance of feminist issues.

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