

# Fempower

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by Iris Golden, WAVE office, Austria

X **Editorial**  
by Iris Golden, Austria

X **Anti-feminist tendencies in Croatian legisla-  
tion**  
by Mirela Čokešić, Croatia

X **New wave of anti-feminism in Georgia**  
by Elene Rusetskaia, Georgia

X **The fathers' rights movement and anti-  
feminism**  
by Barbara Stelmaszek, Austria

X **Technology and social media: yet more  
tools to threaten, control and coerce  
women**  
by Clare Laxton, UK

X **The shaping of visual discourse on gen-  
der-based violence - Considerations on  
media representations and anti-violence  
initiatives**  
by Birgit Wolf, Austria

## RESPONSES TO ANTI-FEMINIST TRENDS

Anti-feminism has become more manifest and a worrying trend which is endangering the achievements the feminist and women's rights movements have reached for the status of women, including in the fight against gender-based violence.

The condemnation of gender-based violence should be reflected in the legislation of a country – as the Istanbul Convention requires measures to achieve the criminalization of all forms of gender based violence, the protection of victims of violence, and the adequate provision of support services. While acknowledging that comprehensive anti-violence legislation has been introduced in many countries (e.g. Austria), the existence of legal provisions which reflect and foster patriarchal values is also a reality in some European countries: Examples are manifold and include, among others, laws that restrict the sexual autonomy of women,



Content

Imprint

#### Editorial

by Iris Golden, Austria  
page 1,3

#### Anti-feminist tendencies in Croatian legislation

by Mirela Čokešić, Croatia  
page 4-5

#### New wave of anti-feminism in Georgia

by Elene Rusetskaia, Georgia  
page 5-6

#### The fathers' rights movement and anti-feminism

by Barbara Stelmaszek, Austria  
page 6-7

#### Technology and social media: yet more tools to threaten, control and coerce women

by Clare Laxton, UK  
page 8-9

#### The shaping of visual discourse on gender-based violence - Considerations on media representations and anti-violence initiatives

by Birgit Wolf, Austria  
page 9-10

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BUNDESMINISTERIN  
FÜR FRAUEN UND ÖFFENTLICHEN DIENST

## Editorial-Continuation

by Iris Golden, WAVE office, Austria



laws that provide no or too mild penalties for physical violence, rape and other forms of sexual violence, or laws ignoring the aspect of violence in the awarding of joint custody and visitation rights to fathers having exercised violence against the mother of the child.

Also, it can be noticed that anti-feminist movements and activists are more and more assertive in the public sphere: their ideological origin might be diverse, ranging from religiously motivated to right wing affiliated people, as has been shown by a recent research by the Heinrich Böll Foundation<sup>1</sup> – but their aim is the same: the delegitimization and ridiculization of feminist concerns. One of their means is the discreditation of underlying concepts – such as the devaluation of a whole branch of research, the gender studies.<sup>2</sup> Another way of manipulating the public discourse is the “victimization” of men: A growing number of men’s rights movements, and also, more specifically, “father’s rights” movements, picture a society of men being victimized by a “feminized” society, and promote false assumptions, such as the scientifically not recognized “Parental Alienation Syndrome”, and other myths: Research has shown that unlike the myth that domestic violence is rare among custody litigants, 25-50% of disputed custody cases involve domestic violence.<sup>3</sup> Not only are women depicted as perpetrators, but their needs as survivors of gender-based violence are relativized by some men’s rights movements, who are campaigning against women’s shelters and do not refrain from putting women victims of violence at risk by seeking to publish the addresses of women’s shelters on the internet.<sup>4</sup>

The anti-feminist movement also receives moral support from some politicians, who assert that women’s shelters are responsible for the destruction of families and should therefore not receive funding from the State.<sup>5</sup> This anti-feminist trend and the hostility towards women’s shelters that is implied is even more concerning when we consider that women’s shelters are in some countries effectively threatened by budgetary cuts, therefore depriving women victims of violence of a safe place to go to.<sup>6</sup>

What are adequate answers to these phenomena? How should the feminist movement react to such trends? In this issue of Fempower, the authors share their experiences with anti-feminist trends in their national and professional context and discuss possible counter-positions and strategies:

Mirela Cokesic (Autonomous Women’s House Zagreb) shows the need of staying active against legislation in Croatia that weakens and threatens women in their right of living a life free from violence. Then, Elene Rusetskaia

### Iris Golden

on behalf of the WAVE TEAM. Iris Golden is editor of Fempower and WAVE project co-ordinator. She holds an LL.M. with a focus on human rights law (London School of Economics and Political Science) and a Doctorate in Law (University of Vienna).

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(Women’s Information Center) presents the threat of anti-feminist trends in Georgia and the reaction of the feminist movement. She suggests that a closer cooperation of women’s organizations and the integration of the value of gender equality in culture and traditions could be useful strategies.

The father’s rights movement and specifically, the issue of custody in violent relationships is at the center of Barbara Stelmaszek’s article, in which the author concludes that the development of strategies on how to involve relevant stakeholders, including politicians, and the inclusion of the public in the ongoing discourse would be important step to take. In her article, Clare Laxton (Women’s Aid) shows that the new social media are a forum widely used by ex partners, but also by people with a hostile attitude towards feminist activists as mean for stalking and threat, and suggests recommendations to counteract these trends. Finally, Birgit Wolf presents the result of her research, challenging the visualization of violence against women in the Austrian and Spanish context, which very often reflect a sensationalist and non-empowering view on the victims.

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung – Schriften des Gunda-Werner Instituts (Band 8), *Hinrich Rosenbrock*, die antifeministische Männerrechtsbewegung – Denkweisen, Netzwerke und Online Mobilisierung.

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung – Schriften des Gunda-Werner-Instituts (Band 9), *Regina Frey, Marc Gärtner, Manfred Köhnen und Sebastian Scheele*, Gender, Wissenschaftlichkeit und Ideologie – Argumente im Streit um Geschlechterverhältnisse (2013).

<sup>3</sup> These two examples, along with 8 other examples of myths around custody cases are summarized in a publication of the American Bar Association – Commission on Domestic Violence – 10 Myths about Custody and Domestic Violence and how to Counter them (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung – Schriften des Gunda-Werner Instituts (Band 8), *Hinrich Rosenbrock*, die antifeministische Männerrechtsbewegung – Denkweisen, Netzwerke und Online Mobilisierung, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> See for example a statement from a local politician from the Austrian far right Freedom Party (FPÖ), Brigitte Kashofer, who expressed herself against the funding of women’s shelters as in her opinion, they are responsible for the destruction of families: found at <http://noe.orf.at/news/stories/2541766/> (accessed on 2. December 2013).

<sup>6</sup> For the UK context, see for example the article of Dina Rickman, Domestic Violence: Women’s services Face ‘Disastrous’ Cuts As Councils Slash budgets, FOI Reveals, in Huffington Post, 4.November 2012, available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/31/domestic-violence-rape-crisis-cuts\\_n\\_2049137.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/31/domestic-violence-rape-crisis-cuts_n_2049137.html) (accessed on 2. December 2013).



## ANTI-FEMINIST TENDENCIES IN CROATIAN LEGISLATION

by Mirela Čokešić, Croatia



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is working in Autonomous Women's House Zagreb as a feminist counselor specialized in working with women who survived domestic violence since 2009. Before joining the AWHZ, she was working as a Croatian language and Ethics teacher in several high schools in Zagreb and was active as a volunteer in other civil society organizations in Croatia.

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### Positive developments....

In Croatia, the problem of domestic violence was for the first time institutionally recognized in the year 2000, through amendments of the Criminal Code. Article 215A of the Criminal Code („Violent Conduct in the Family“) was then adopted.. It prescribed a maximum prison sentence of three years for the offense of domestic violence. Three years later, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence (LPDV), which belongs to a misdemeanor legal framework, but at least introduced protection mechanisms for women, through the possibility of issuing protective measures. By adopting these laws, the Republic of Croatia has taken first steps in protecting women victims of domestic violence, and in the following two years, two important documents were passed and adopted: The National Strategy for Combating Domestic Violence and the Rules of Procedure in Cases of Family Violence. Further, the legislator amended the Criminal Code in 2006 by increasing the maximum sentence for domestic violence, now to be five years. Thus, the introduction of Article 215A in the Criminal Code and increasing the maximum sentence for the offense prescribed by that article, was the important breakthrough for Croatia in protecting women from domestic violence and achieving accountability of perpetrators.

### ...and backlashes in legislation

However, due to the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, *Maresti vs. Croatia*<sup>1</sup>, significant problems have emerged the implementation of both laws (Criminal Code and LPDV). *Maresti vs. Croatia* is a decision concerning the violation of the right not to be tried or punished twice for the same offense. The consequences of the judgment manifested in the way that institutions, primarily the police and the state attorney's office prosecutors, had to choose in cases of domestic violence, whether the committed offense will be prosecuted under the Criminal Code or misdemeanor LPDV. Given that the criminal proceedings in Croatia last longer, and do not provide protection mechanisms as protective measures which LPDV proscribes, institutions mostly prosecuted domestic violence through misdemeanor legal framework (LPDV). This practise often led to unpleasent situations for women victims of domestic violence: If the victim's protection and the offender's accountability was sought through the Criminal Code proceeding, women would have to wait a long period to get protection, while LPDV offered protection mechanisms, but imprisonment sentences for the perpetrators were substantially smaller, the most common sentences were fines or suspended sentences, and protective measures were mostly issued related to the treatment of the perpetrators from addiction or psychosocial treatment.

Given the serious problems in protecting women against domestic violence and failures in implementation, instead of improving the implementation of the laws, the government amended the Criminal Code again in 2012. This time, the amendments would have drastic consequences. In fact, from January 1st 2013, Article 215A no longer exists in the Criminal Code. It was removed, and has been replaced by the introduction of more aggravated forms of criminal offenses (murder, mutilation, bodily injury, intrusive behavior etc.). Just ten months after the amendments of the Criminal Code, in practice the following happened: proceedings initiated under Article 215A were changed to indictments based on other articles (mainly threat) where sentences are smaller, waivers of prosecution happened in some cases, and some appeals led to the reduction of the sentences. The state has thus failed to protect women victims of domestic violence, since domestic violence cases are often prosecuted under misdemeanor LPDV, where proscribed imprisonment for the perpetrators is much smaller (maximum imprisonment of 90 days). It is important to mention that the maximum sentence is rarely imposed in those proceedings, while the most common ones are financial penalties. In addition, the misdemeanor procedures in cases of domestic violence are full of problematic practices. Just one example is the institute of "facing" in which the victim of domestic violence is required to testify face-to-face and watch her abuser in front of her while doing so. This practise is mostly used if there is no physical evidence that the violence was committed. These problematic practice in the implementation of LPDV and changes in criminal legislation has thereof shown a government's lack of efforts to protect women from violence and state's trivialisation and mitigating the problem of domestic violence.

An additional concern is the new Family Law that is now in procedure to be adopted. The Ministry of Social Policy and Youth (MSPY) is expecting that the Croatian Parliament will adopt the new Family Law in January 2014. The Ministry presented a Thesis for making the draft of new Family Law in May 2013, and in August 2013, presented the draft of the new Family Law. The presented Thesis were full of problematic and anti-feminist language, literally mentioning that in Croatia, one of the main reasons for divorce is that women often have children with someone who is not their husband, that parents who have custody (in Croatia those are mostly women) manipulate with children and child contacts because they want to exercise other rights, and completely ignoring the preva-

lence of domestic violence as a reason for divorce. The draft law presents two new institutes regarding divorce:

- a) mandatory counseling prior to formal court proceedings with the aim of making a parental plan, which would then get power writ of execution in court and
- b) family mediation (in the absence of agreement).

The Draft of the law is based on the false premise that divorces are often reckless and hasty, which is why the state intends to specify the time period of six months in which the spouses who have not reached an agreement are prevented to start divorce proceedings.

Another issue in the draft of the new Family Law is parental custody. The draft proscribes that after divorce, the parent who does not allow an ex - partner to see their child in accordance with their parental plan or court decision, will be punished with a fine of up to 30.000,00 HRK (app 4.100,00 Euro), imprisonment from one day to six months, and changing of the decision on who the child will continue to live with. In this provision, exceptions in cases of domestic violence are also not provided. By comparison, and as already mentioned above, the maximum sentence proscribed by LPDV for offenses of domestic violence is three months. Also, the problem is that in the draft, the centers for social welfare are given too much authority. The draft proposal of the law is based on the presumption that the centers for social welfare are staffed with personnel who takes excellent mediation procedures and interventions in family relationships or cases of domestic violence. Unfortunately, the situation in practice is actually quite different. Of all the institutions working in combating domestic violence in Croatia, women victims of domestic violence are complaining the most regarding the work of centers for social welfare. So, instead of liberalizing, the new Family Law, if adopted, will complicate the divorce process with futile solutions that will unreasonably delay the divorce. There is only one incorporated exception in the law, which would take into account the different procedures in cases of domestic violence, and that is for mediation not to be conducted in those cases, but in a number of other solutions the law does not provide special treatment for women victims of domestic violence. NGO's have strongly reacted to the proposal of the new Family Law through the statements in the media, press releases and other forms of public advocating. However, most of activists are hoping that the law will not pass and will not be adopted in Croatian Parliament in such form as it was proposed. To conclude, apart from problems in practice and implementation of the laws, the current Croatian legislation, through the Criminal Code and LPDV, and also through the new draft of the Family Law, does not adequately protect women victims of domestic violence, but actually favors the perpetrators of violence. Unfortunately, such developments are a big setback for Republic of Croatia in its duty to protect women victims of domestic violence, which the state, among other, is obliged to do, according to international documents that were signed and ratified (CEDAW, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against

Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the Istanbul Convention, etc.).

<sup>1</sup> European Court of Human Rights, Judgment of 25<sup>th</sup> of June 2009, (final 25<sup>th</sup> of September), Application number 55759/07, available on <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-93260#%7B%22itemid%22%3A%22001-93260%22%7D>.

## NEW WAVE OF ANTI-FEMINISM IN GEORGIA

by Elene Rusetskaia, Georgia

Nowadays, Georgia faces many interesting challenges. Various factors such as political changes, economic instability, traditional mentality of society and at the same time, a constant desire of moving forward make Georgian society contradictory and encourage to take more courageous and categorical attitudes than in former days, to keep pace with the modern world and to express progressive opinions which were not commonly expressed before.

Georgia is a complex country, with its geopolitical location, diverse past and peculiarity. Political changes always reflect public life and of course, feminist and anti-feminist movements.

It is worthwhile, that on the one hand, political will toward women's rights and gender equality is expressed- there are different laws approved, the work about institutional mechanism is in progress and many positive tendencies can be observed, but the Government and politicians are still not taking effective steps. Moreover, some politicians, namely, MPs, initiate anti-feminist laws, such as the prohibition of abortion, which can be considered as a troubling trend. The initiative about prohibition of abortion was followed by protests and a petition. The petition is available on the portal of Women's Information Center:

<http://www.ginsc.net/home.php?option=petsition&id=3&lang=en#.Um4y2HBHLlc>

According to the database of Women's Information Center, more than 200 non-governmental organizations work on women's and gender equality issues. It should be noted, that recently, the feminist movement became more active and new initiative groups of feminist activists appeared and expressed their position through different actions. This form of self-expression leads to varying resonance. In response to feminists' activities, anti-feminist trends became very evident, which still remains as a problem of Georgian society.

We can distinguish three groups of anti-feminists; each of them has different motivations:

- **First group-** Anti-feminists who still do not know the essence of feminism and are fighting against this term. The lack of education and low level of public awareness can be considered as one of the driving forces of anti-feminism.



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- **Second group-** By fighting against feminists, some anti-feminists fight against all people, which do not fit into the frames established by traditional society, including sexual minorities.
- **Third group-** Radically-minded people, which are acting on behalf, and in some cases, with the support, of the Orthodox Church. They believe that feminism destroys traditional religious and national values. We can say that in the concrete case, religion is one of driving forces of anti-feminism.

Aggression of radical groups reached its culmination on 17 May 2013, when a peaceful demonstration turned into physical confrontation and some of participants became victims of violence. This fact humiliated the reputation of the Church on the one hand, and on the other hand, revealed aggression against feminism, which indicates the low level of social culture.

Low awareness of society is the reason of wrong perception of information, which often becomes the basis of confrontation and conflict. The same was the case of the event of 17 May. In order to weaken the anti-feminist wave, it is important to inform society effectively not only about the event, but also generally, about the issue, which requires long term and coordinated work.

In order to eradicate existing problems, it is necessary that women's organizations, women's human rights defenders and other non-governmental organizations have closer cooperation and consolidation. At the same time, active work with society is required, in order to prevent expected results.

It is important to take into account, that the main aim and progress indicator is not radical change of fundamental attitude of society, but integration of gender values into culture and tradition. This is the only way to define correctly priorities and to make progressive steps.

## THE FATHERS' RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND ANTI-FEMINISM

by Barbara Stelmaszek, Austria

The fathers' rights movement has been around for more than a decade functioning as a loose network of advocates predominantly in the USA and throughout Europe, operating with the said mission of preserving the well-being of children by ensuring that family law frameworks are not discriminatory against fathers. Some in the fathers' rights movement also stand for the lowering of child support payments and protesting against what they say are mothers' frequently made up allegations of domestic violence.<sup>1</sup>

The troubling trend is that segments within the fathers' rights movement have, in a misguided fashion, accused feminists combating violence against women of waging a war against all fathers, by painting all men as perpetrators.<sup>2</sup> Such statements are clearly unfounded as feminists have only pointed to the fact that a significant majority of perpetrators of domestic violence are male, a fact supported by national and international data and research available on domestic violence.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the fathers' rights movement attempts to institute 'equal parenting' custody laws or custody laws that discriminate against the party initiating the divorce,<sup>4</sup> discount the devastating effects such laws would have, when the dissolution of family stems from domestic violence and/or where custody may be granted to a perpetrator of domestic violence.

The fathers' rights movement has visibly increased its attack on feminism as means to discredit the women's movement, which in its mission to protect women and children victims of domestic violence, stands firmly against 'equal parenting' custody laws. To achieve its objectives, the fathers' rights movement must paint itself as feminism's unfairly targeted enemy in order to turn public opinion against feminists and their stance, hence paving an easier path to influencing child custody laws that would be in the least disadvantageous to women survivors of violence and their children and at most severely harmful to them. This method of attack is called a boundary-push back, known as a typical response of a countermovement to a perceived enemy boundary-creep, meaning that a countermovement arises based on its belief of being an unfairly targeted opponent of the original movement, as means of influencing public perception.<sup>5</sup>

### Dangers of custody by abusive fathers

Child custody has been an important topic in feminism in recognition of the fact that in cases of domestic violence, abusive partners may use the continued connection as means of exerting further violence on the mother and/or the child. As a result, joint custody arrangements allow the perpetrator to continue his violence. Furthermore, automatically awarding joint custody to a man who has battered his partner and the mother of his child



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evades the fact that by acting violently towards the mother, the father has also acted violently towards the child. Many children, in such cases, witness the abuse<sup>6</sup> and suffer as a result; therefore they also become victims of violence, even when they are not the direct victims. However, children who grow up in violent homes are more likely to be directly abused as well, and regardless of whether they experience or whether they witness violence, they tend to suffer the same behavioral and psychological problems.<sup>7</sup> As a result, automatic 'equal custody' laws are not only unjust to the mother, but also to the children, as any abusive parent should not be granted further opportunities to harm the children. If fathers who abuse their children are seen as unfit to have future relationship with the child, why would fathers that abuse the mother of the children be seen as fit parents, when such abuse also counts as violence toward the child?

### Survivors of violence face secondary victimization in courts

It is a well-documented fact that separation is a time, when a woman and her children are most at risk for escalated violence by the partner. Intimate partner femicide is often committed at the time of separation. In addition to the dangers faced by the woman and her children, the woman is likely to face financial difficulties<sup>8</sup> and face adversary conditions in the court. 'Equal custody' laws can only add to an already difficult situation, when a woman attempting to escape a violent situation would be forced to remain in it as a result of joint custody and the resulting contact with the perpetrator. Furthermore, judges and other professionals<sup>9</sup> in the European Union lack training in domestic violence,<sup>10</sup> which would help judges to understand the situation of the victim and her children, as escaping violence in the family puts women in vulnerable positions. Without proper training of professionals, women face secondary victimization from State institutions, such as courts.

Stories of women's secondary victimization in courts are too common. A report by Safe Ireland describes a story of a woman survivor of violence, whose violent partner, despite evidence of domestic violence, continued to have access to and abuse the children as a result of a ruling by a judge.<sup>11</sup> Such stories are present in abundance throughout Europe. Women who survived domestic violence and have filed for divorce and/or sole custody are frequently dismissed as being vindictive or mentally unstable,

as if courts did not feel domestic violence to be a grave violation against women's rights and a severe criminal act. Dismissing the claims and appeals of women survivors of domestic violence is not only against the duty of a presiding judge, it may also result in serious consequences for the mother and her children, such as further abuse.

### What can the feminist movement do?

The existence of a feminist backlash has been recognized by women's organizations in the recent years. Feminists have been unfairly targeted by some in the fathers' rights movement as means to lay blame on what is perceived as discriminatory laws. Furthermore, some family court judges have been known to dismiss women seeking to protect their children from abusive fathers. Although the fathers' rights movement's attack on feminism is still to some extent considered a fringe movement, women's organizations especially, who are often the targets of attack, must take a serious look at the threats posed to feminism and hence to the progress achieved by feminism so far.

The feminist movement is long standing and while facing an adversary road in the future, the movement must evaluate the challenges ahead and especially develop strategies on how to involve the relevant stakeholders, including political and legal decision makers and the broad public in overcoming these challenges. As related to custody, the public is still to a large extent uninvolved in the issue of domestic violence against mothers and its effect on children and must therefore be included in the ongoing discourse among feminists. This must also include politicians as well as justice professionals to ensure that victims are fully protected from violence.

<sup>1</sup> Washington Post. (28 August 2013). Available on: [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-08-28/local/41535971\\_1\\_rights-groups-rights-movement-terry-mcauliffe](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-08-28/local/41535971_1_rights-groups-rights-movement-terry-mcauliffe).

<sup>2</sup> Crowley, Jocelyn Elise. Fathers' Rights Groups, Domestic Violence and Political Counter-mobilization.

<sup>3</sup> Women against Violence Europe (WAVE). (March 2013). WAVE Country Report 2012: Reality Check of Data Collection and European Services for Women and Children Survivors of Violence – A Right for Protection and Support? Available on: [http://www.wave-network.org/sites/default/files/02%20WAVE%20COUNTRY%20REPORT%202012\\_0.pdf](http://www.wave-network.org/sites/default/files/02%20WAVE%20COUNTRY%20REPORT%202012_0.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Washington Post. (28 August 2013). Available on: [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-08-28/local/41535971\\_1\\_rights-groups-rights-movement-terry-mcauliffe](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-08-28/local/41535971_1_rights-groups-rights-movement-terry-mcauliffe).

<sup>5</sup> Crowley, Jocelyn Elise. Fathers' Rights Groups, Domestic Violence and Political Counter-mobilization.

<sup>6</sup> Haaland, Thomas et al. (May 2005). Vold i parforhold - ulike perspektiver Resultater fra den første landsdekkende undersøkelsen i Norge. [norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning]. Oslo. Available on: <http://www.nibr.no/filer/2005-3.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Haarr, Dr. Robin n. and Dr. Milika Dharmo. (March 2009). Domestic Violence in Albania: A National Population-Based Survey. [national Institute of Statistics (In Stat) Albania].

<sup>8</sup> Women against Violence Europe (WAVE). (2009). The Poverty Risks of Women Affected by Violence and their Children: Report on the Socio-Economic Situation in Austria. Available on: [http://www.wave-network.org/sites/wave.local/files/wave\\_povertyreport.pdf](http://www.wave-network.org/sites/wave.local/files/wave_povertyreport.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality. (2012). Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States: Violence against Women Victim Support. Available on: <http://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/Violence%20against%20women-Victim%20support-Main%20Findings.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> The training is either provided but is not mandatory or regularly conducted, or is not provided at all. Sources: United Nations Secretary-General's Database on Violence against Women. Country Pages. Available on: <http://sgdatabase.unwomen.org/home.action>.

<sup>11</sup> Safe Ireland. (2013). On Just One Day: The 6th of November 2012. Available on: <http://www.safeireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/On-Just-One-Day-6-Nov-2012.pdf>.

## TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA: YET MORE TOOLS TO THREATEN, CONTROL AND COERCE WOMEN

by Clare Laxton, UK

For many women the abuse, harassment and stalking they experience online is just another disturbing example of the violence they receive from their partner or ex-partner. Far from being the one-off incident of online abuse that is perceived by the police – this behaviour by perpetrators is just another way to control, threaten and coerce women. Online stalking and harassment is part of a pattern of behaviour which encompasses online abuse and street harassment as well as domestic violence and murder.

Emma's\* ex-partner stalked and harassed her online after they had broken up.

*"Ultimately he sent me several hundred messages, texts, emails, and Facebook chats – more than ten messages every day in one medium alone. It was only when I contacted the police, who went to talk to him, that he stopped trying to contact me. For years afterwards, I wouldn't answer a call from a number I didn't know, wouldn't open emails from unrecognised email address, and was nervous about Facebook because I was scared I've have messages from him. My privacy settings are as high as they can be, I never check in, and I approve all posts before they go on my timeline, because he would contact me talking about stuff I'd done as though he'd been there, and I knew he'd seen it on Facebook even though I'd blocked him."*

A Women's Aid survey of over 300 women survivors of domestic violence in 2013 showed that nearly half of them (45%) experienced some form of online abuse during their relationship. 48% also reported experiencing harassment or abuse online from their ex-partner once they'd left the relationship. There were also issues raised with how police responded to reports of online abuse with 75% of women survivors reporting concerns that the police did not know how best to respond to online abuse or harassment.

Women's Aid held a national conference on this issue in September 2013 which heard from experts in stalking and online abuse and harassment. The conference also heard from Caroline Criado-Perez, the campaigner that experienced what can only be described as an onslaught of online abuse and harassment following the victory of a campaign to get a woman on UK banknotes in summer 2013. Caroline talked about the graphic, sexist, misogynistic and violent abuse that she received via Twitter and the impact it had on her.

*"The impact of all this on my life has been dramatic. When it was at its height I struggled to eat, to sleep, to work. I lost about half a stone in a matter of days. I was exhausted and weighed down by carrying these vivid images, this tidal wave of hate around with me wherever I went."*

Caroline also talked about the response of the police when she reported this online abuse and harassment. Initially she was told that there was nothing they could do about the rape and death threats she was receiving online. After national media coverage

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they did investigate what was after all a crime – the hate speech and harassment that she had been a victim of.

It is nearly a year since the new offences of stalking were introduced in the UK yet it appears that there remains much progress to be made in the police's understanding of the new offences and how to respond to victims of online abuse, harassment and stalking.

From our conference, Women's Aid have identified areas for change to prevent online abuse, harassment and stalking happening in the first place and to improve the response and support women get when they report online abuse, harassment or stalking.

- Online abuse, harassment and stalking must be recognised as part of the spectrum of domestic violence perpetrated against women. Particularly by the police and other criminal justice agencies.
- Reports from women of online abuse, harassment and stalking should be believed and taken as seriously as reports of offline abuse, harassment and stalking. They should not be looked at in isolation but in conjunction with other reports of abuse or harassment against a certain perpetrator.
- There should be effective and comprehensive training provided for all police officers and criminal justice agencies not only on dealing with reports of online abuse, harassment and stalking but also on the new offences of stalking that came into force in 2012.
- Relationships and sex education, which includes education on healthy and respectful relationships and internet safety, should be made a statutory part of the National Curriculum for all primary and secondary schools in England.
- Social media providers like Twitter and Facebook need to offer improved support to victims of online abuse, harassment and stalking and faster curtailment of perpetrators of these crimes. Without proper safeguarding of its users we don't believe Twitter is currently fit for purpose – an issue that should be considered by the company before it is publicly launched.
- Women experiencing online abuse, stalking and harassment need support services that meet their needs. Gender specific specialist domestic violence services for women are vital in en-



abling them to cope and recover from the violence. Their holistic women-only support provides a safe space in which women and their children to rebuild their lives. Between 2010/11 and 2011/12 domestic and sexual violence services saw funding cuts of 31%. These cuts are drastically affecting gender specific specialised services and the women they support. Women's Aid calls for funding to these services to be maintained. We will be running a joint campaign with the TUC from the 25th November calling for the Government to commit to maintaining these services by ratifying the Istanbul Convention without delay.

Women's Aid strongly believes that until these changes are made women will continue to experience the devastating impact of online abuse, harassment and stalking as part of a campaign of control by domestic violence perpetrators.

\*Names have been changed to protect identities

## X THE SHAPING OF VISUAL DISCOURSE ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE - CONSIDERATIONS ON MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS AND ANTI-VIOLENCE INITIATIVES

by Birgit Wolf, Austria

Considering the efforts to resolve the widespread societal phenomenon violence against women, information, awareness raising and the role of the media comprise one of the key targets by the most important conventions and declarations to overcome violence against women. The women's anti-violence movement since the 1970s has made essential contributions to the recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation, and is a crucial player in the field of violence prevention and awareness raising issues. Therefore the respective initiatives including the audio-visual material is of major importance, even more so as among the Europeans, television counts for the most important source of information about domestic violence against women, the most frequent form violence against women.<sup>1</sup> Looking at the media representations in general, we can observe how different programmes and formats are depicting rather similar (visual) narratives of clichéd imagination on intimate partner violence, whereas the systemic nature of the problem mostly remains hidden<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, there is a lack of clarity within audio-visual media discourse enabling the comprehension of the social complexity of male-to-female intimate partner violence. Evidences of these results are shown in the author's paper "**Gender-based violence and its challenge for visual representation**"<sup>3</sup>, and focussing on information media only, in the paper "**Gender-based violence and the media. Representations of intimate partner**



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**violence: Information or disinformation?**"<sup>4</sup>. In the latter I conclude "The crux considering media coverage on violence is that it has to include a violence-free vision, a 'peace' perspective. However, media fail in concerns of transmitting the complexity and systemic nature of intimate partner violence."

Moreover, I assume the visual of gender-based violence as constituting a crucial account of discursively created social meaning, emerging from the initiatives to overcome the societal phenomenon as well as from an ongoing and rather clichéd discursive practice in the media. Accordingly, the imagery disseminated by the players of the women's anti-violence movement build the core object of my PhD project, based on the thesis to obtain insights about the supposed alternative representations appropriate for contrasting the 'malestream' gaze of the media on the subject. Recognising the direct, structural and symbolic dimensions of gender-based violence and applying a feminist and dispositive perspective, I analysed the contributions to visual discourse through the (audio)visual material of anti-violence initiatives in a five years time period from 2007 to 2011 on the European level, as well as on the country level of Austria and Spain. As the transposition of the complexity, the social roots and contexts of intimate partner violence constitutes a rather ambiguous under-

taking, the analysis aims to disclose how anti-violence initiatives shape the social accounts of male-to-female partner violence, identify good practice examples and underlying ideological concepts enclosed in their material.

**Good practice of visualising: Video spot “Elige vivir autoestima [choose to live -selfesteem]” by Gobierno España, 2011:** *The spot establishes a scene of having dinner with friends at home, when one of the men humiliates his female partner, but the other male friend speaks up defending the affected woman, who speaks up as well stating that she will leave. The victim/survivor leaves the flat and all her friends accompany her. This is an example where both, witnesses and victim take agency. (Source: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhQA4CvdcFo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhQA4CvdcFo))*

The results show significant differences in representing violence against women as a societal problem in Spain and representations as a rather individual problem in Austria. The majority of Spanish initiatives and campaigns use contextualising depictions of (potential) victims or survivors, pointing beyond the individual dimension, establishing intimate partner violence as a societal problem rooted in and emerging from patriarchal structures<sup>5</sup>. The (audio) visual material in Austria to a significant extent sticks to a rather narrow approach, focusing on the protection of victims missing contextualising representations and the societal dimensions. On the European level, from 2007 to 2011 only two pan-European campaigns explicitly addressed the topic of male-to-female intimate partner violence, “which therefore until seemingly constitutes a ‘non-issue’ for the European Union not having implemented any campaign at all” . As a matter of fact, the women’s anti-violence movement provides essential and indispensable contributions to shape the audio-visual discourse on gender-based violence, therefore there is an urgent need for reflection on the actual practices and the messages behind. (Details of the research results will be published in 2014, please contact the author for further information).

**This article is based on the recent publications of the author on visual discourse on male-to-female intimate partner violence:**

- Wolf, Birgit (2013a) **‘Shaping the visual’ of gender based violence.** *How visual discourse on intimate partner violence and European anti-violence initiatives construct accounts of the social world.* PhD Thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain.

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- Wolf, Birgit (2013b) **Gender-based violence and the media. Representations of intimate partner violence: Information or disinformation?** In: Oliveira, Victoria (ed.), *Intercultural Communication, Representations and Practices: A Global Approach.* Book CDRom, ISBN 978-989-98240-0-3, Centro de Estudos Interculturais (CEI), Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração, Instituto Politécnico do Porto (ISCAP): Porto, Portugal.

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- Wolf, Birgit (2013c) **Gender-based violence and its challenge for visual representation.** *Comunicació. revista de recerca i d’anàlisi*; ISSN 2014-0304, ISSN-e: 2014-0444, n.30, vol. 1, Maig, p. 193-216

(Full paper available as PDF: <http://revistes.iec.cat/index.php/TC/article/view/67175/66970>)

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<sup>3</sup> WOLF, Birgit (2013c) **Gender-based violence and its challenge for visual representation.** *Comunicació. revista de recerca i d’anàlisi*; ISSN 2014-0304, ISSN-e: 2014-0444, n.30, vol. 1, Maig, p. 193-216.

<sup>4</sup> WOLF, Birgit (2013b) **Gender-based violence and the media. Representations of intimate partner violence: Information or disinformation?** In: Oliveira, Victoria (ed.), *Intercultural Communication, Representations and Practices: A Global Approach.* Book CDRom, ISBN 978-989-98240-0-3, Centro de Estudos Interculturais (CEI), Instituto Superior de Contabilidade e Administração, Instituto Politécnico do Porto (ISCAP): Porto, Portugal.

<sup>5</sup> WOLF, Birgit (2013a) **‘Shaping the visual’ of gender based violence.** *How visual discourse on intimate partner violence and European anti-violence initiatives construct accounts of the social world.* PhD Thesis, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain, p. 306.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 301.



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