

The Rome Dialogues V

Gender & Identity
on
the
Frontline

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Introduction to the EGIC

The Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) is an initiative that aims to build social, political, strategic, cultural and economic bridges between the people of Europe and the Arabian Gulf.

While the EGIC was only formed on 01 October 2015 as a legal association in Rome, Italy, it draws on the expertise of a multitude of scholars, policy makers, economists and members of European and Gulf civil societies to enhance inter-regional relations.

The EGIC has tasked itself with five activities over the short, medium and long terms:

Publishing Hub—the first objective of the Centre is to act as a publishing hub on information related to the wider Arabian Gulf. This entails the launching of a new journal (re: The Arabian Gulf), book series (the Rome Dialogues), online commentaries, policy papers and newsletters. Literature will be made available in several languages (Arabic, English, Italian, German, French and several of the Slavonic languages) and be done in both hard and soft copy formats.

Seminars, Conferences and Roundtables—in order to continue to attract attention for the Centre, a series of seminars, conferences and roundtable discussions take place on a regular basis.

Specialised Certificate, Internships and Scholarship Programmes—the EGIC will begin a targeted certificate programme for university-ages students, run as Spring Schools. Themes will vary, but stay related to European-Arabian Gulf dynamics. Also, the EGIC offers a three month

internship based on the European ERASMUS Programme. This programme will focus on building the skill-set required of a socio-political organisation and includes: organisational, writing, presentation and innovative thinking skills. Since 2017, in partnership with Universities around Europe, the EGIC offers special Master's programmes on Middle Eastern Studies. Finally, the EGIC will offer monthly and annual scholarships for research on Arabian Gulf-related topics.

Cultural Events—the EGIC strives to offer a comprehensive cultural platform to expose the peoples of Europe and the Gulf to each other's cultural rites, rituals, festivals and writings. From book launches, poetry readings, talks, films and cookery, the EGIC sponsors and organises events to create cultural bridges and bring people together.

Web and Tech—the EGIC has adopted a tech-savvy approach that entails the use of high-tech platforms to generate an interactive platform beyond the physical boundaries of the EGIC headquarters. All EGIC research and events will be made Open Access and the deployed technologies will reflect this approach.

Outreach Activities—the EGIC puts a special effort in organising and coordinating a variety of outreach activities with the aim of building and sustaining people-to-people contacts and professional networks between Europe and the Arab Gulf. The EGIC runs annual Parliamentary Dialogues in both regions and facilitates strategic meetings in all phases and at all levels (business, politics, society) from which joint projects, coordination activities, partnership and cooperation are established. The EGIC offers ideas, support and its good offices to smooth dialogue and collaboration.

Introduction to Rome Dialogue V

The fifth Rome Dialogue, held on 27 May 2016, was planned in partnership with Women in International Security (WIIS) Italy, and was focused on the theme of **the importance of gender issues in peace and war strategies and the many roles of women on the frontline**. As all the other Rome Dialogues, the event consisted in a dynamic conversation between international experts and scholars with a focus on gender perspectives, including:

Irene Fellin – International Expert on Gender, Peace and Security, President of WIIS Italy

Katerina Krulisova – PhD Researcher at Nottingham Trent University

Azzura Meringolo – Journalist and Researcher, Istituto Affari Internazionali.

First, Irene Fellin presented an overview of WIIS Italy, created to support the implementation of the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. She underlined the importance of this resolution, which suggests actions to protect and stimulate the participation of women in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and security institutions, particularly in the Middle East.

Second, Katerina Krulisova, underlined the stark contrast in the media representation of women that are victims of the violence of Daesh in Syria and Iraq, and women that take arms against Daesh. In reality, the borders between the victims and fighters are much more blurred and recognising this could be helpful to have a more comprehensive understanding.

Finally, Azzura Meringolo explored more in-depth this argument, presenting the actions undertaken by survivors of Daesh violence encour-

aging the international community to take actions and fight back. She argued that gender based violence in war or terrorism has a strong psychological component as women are considered and perceived as bearing and embodying the identity of a given nation or community.

From the lively debate with the public, the discussion shifted towards exploring the cases of female foreign fighters departing from all over the world to become jihadi brides with Daesh. What emerged in the conclusion is that many questions remain open for future discussions and research on what pushes women to fight on the frontline, and how to support victims and spur the essential contribution of women as agents of change and peace.

The Opening of the Dialogue

Mitchell Belfer—First of all, thank you all very much for your support, for such an important topic and thank you also to WIIS Italy, our partner for this event.

This is our fifth round table, our fifth Rome Dialogue, and perhaps I shall give you a little bit of a picture of what a Rome Dialogue is, because it is not a conference as you would imagine. The speakers today will give us an introduction about who they are and what are some of their ideas in relation to today's topic: gender identities on the frontline.

Now the Rome Dialogues are also an environment. They are a physical space here in via Gregoriana but also in some of the other events we will organise around this country and around Europe. And they are a space that brings people together. So the whole concept of the Rome Dialogue is to base here in Rome an interaction between people from very different backgrounds with very different identities. But as long as you are here, this is a neutral place, it is the place where ideas are not going to be attacked or criticized but rather are supposed to be built upon.

So will be the Rome Dialogue that we are going to be conducting today. It is this kind of interaction between people from every point of view that we are looking for, and that every idea is somehow going to meet in the middle of this table. This is what is going to produce a positive outcome: more information, more awareness of the “other” point of view, better understanding between people from every corner of the world.

The Panel Speaks

Part 1

Cinzia Bianco—Welcome everyone, it is really a pleasure to have you here. We are very excited for this event, not only because the theme is really interesting but also for the special partner of this event ‘Women In International Security Italy’ (WIIS Italy). For this session of the Rome Dialogues we chose the topic ‘Gender on the Frontline’ and we gathered some of the speakers we admire the most to discuss the issues and interact with our audience. We are very honoured to have these great speakers here.

Mitchell Belfer—Before I begin the role of moderation I would also like to lay down the ground for what the Rome Dialogues are, what makes them different from mainstream events and why we are doing these Dialogue every month. It is our 5th Rome Dialogue: in terms of publications - hard copy - it is not a monograph, or a book, or a research product, it is a dialogue in the true term. It is so in the way that the speakers today - like in all the previous chapters of our Rome Dialogues - will speak to you and to each other about issues that are fundamentally important. And so the expectation is that you also will contribute to the Rome Dialogues. So if you feel strong about something or if you want to make a point, even in the middle, we will be happy to get that into our dialogue. My role here today is the moderator, not a time keeper, and the idea is to keep the discussion fluent. Now I will let the speakers introduce themselves.

Irene Fellin—May I start with a question? Who choose this topic and why?

Mitchell Belfer—That is a very good question. Actually, me and my staff here at the Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC), went through some topics that haven’t been covered yet and we opted for this one.

Cinzia Bianco—Indeed. We really wanted to look at gender perspectives and in particular in the context of frontline situations and we wanted to

put the word 'identity' there because we are trying to reason about what it means, in this globalized and conflicted world, to shape a new identity.

Mitchell Belfer—Identity was very important for us from the beginning. All other Rome Dialogues looked at it from different perspectives, and gender identity is an issue that we think is very important especially in contemporary Middle East.

Irene Fellin—I agree. There are people who talk about gender, but not enough. This is one of the reasons why I found it interesting that you chose this topic. Before I start talking about the issue of gender and identity on the frontline, I would like to spend a few words to present our newly-established association. I am the President of WIIS-Italy, which is part of an international network, WIIS – Women in International Security. The headquarter is in Washington D.C. (USA) and it was founded in 1987 by a group of professional women working in the domain of security and defence who considered the number of women working in this area too little. They decided to create a network and to learn from each other, for supporting the leadership role of women in this domain, which is, still today, very much male-dominated. The network is growing more important and now it exists in 21 countries internationally and is stronger in the US, Canada, Brussels and Germany. I had the chance to work with WIIS while I worked in NATO on the Women & Security Agenda and therefore I decided to bring this experience back with me to Italy and to establish an Italian chapter of WIIS. We are an association, so we are open for membership, both to individuals than to institutions and organizations. I would like to thank Mitchell and Cinzia for inviting us to organize this event together and I hope this will represent the beginning of a fruitful cooperation.

I am always glad when people and other institutions are interested in talking about gender issues because it is often the problem that on one side you have institutes, researchers or university courses working on this issue and then you have the rest of the world. The most difficult operation that we have to do is trying to integrate these two dimensions. So it is very important to have events and moments dedicated to gender, but the most important thing that we all have to do, and I invite everybody to do it, is to integrate the gender dimension in your everyday life and professions. This topic is very important to me because as I said I worked as a gender policy advisor at NATO, working of course on women in conflicts and the gender issue. Today I decided to talk about the broader framework that I came to know during my experiences because I think it is very

important for us to contextualise what we are going to say later. When we are talking about gender in conflict the framework is the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the related resolutions. Is anyone familiar with the resolutions?

[The audience is silent.]

Cinzia Bianco—I think it is a ‘NO.’

Irene Fellin—Well, on one hand I will not be able with the time I have to speak into details about the resolutions but I would like to briefly give an overview in order to provide the elements to understand why this is important and what kind of tools we have - we as individuals, and especially government and the UN - to work on women in conflict. Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000 so it will be soon 16 years ago. On October 31st the United Nations Security Council adopted this resolution which is considered a landmark one and an historical achievement because the international community arrived to this thanks to the persistent advocacy of women in civil society organizations. It was a long process and the result was really welcomed both by the UN, who really benefited from the contribution of the civil society, and from the civil society who could see the results of their effort. The real question is: ‘Why is this considered a historical resolution?’

The point is that before that moment, the world leaders had never formally recognized the key contribution that women could give in a conflict and in a post-conflict situation, including the role that they could have in conflict prevention, peace building and peacekeeping process. This marks really a change in how the role and the responsibility of women are considered when it comes to security issues. Thanks to the resolution this aspect was integrated and it became part of the security agenda at the international level and this is something really unique. This is why we refer to the women security agenda always with the number 1325 because, despite the fact that other resolutions were adopted later, this first one remains extremely important from a political point of view. The resolution itself is very complex and quite long, and we cannot go into the details, but I would like to touch two important aspects, the main arguments that are embedded in the document. One is that conflicts affect women and men in a different way and this is due to the fact that women and men have different roles within the society, or gender roles.

You know the difference between gender and sex: sex is something biological and gender is the role in the society and the expectations the society imposes to men and women. These roles are different when it comes

to different countries and cultures and they change with time. This is why women can be more hit than men during the conflict and this is something that is recognized in the resolution. The other aspect, a very important aspect, is that the resolution recognizes that women need to be included at all decisional levels - from the ground to the leadership levels - in conflict prevention, conflict management and resolutions. So in other words the resolution drew the attention on the differentiated impact of conflicts but then also on the exclusion that normally occurred, and unfortunately still nowadays occurs, of women from security decision-making. Equally important, the resolution also drew attention to the need of protecting women especially from sexual and gender-based violence related to conflicts. I use these three words: prevention, participation and protection, the 3Ps. The 1325 resolution is based on the 3 P-pillars and then on an additional concept—the relief and recovery dimension. Those remain the main aspects.

With the changes of the nature of war things and situations for people have changed because we know that a war comes with very high costs and we also know that there are very devastating consequences for civilians. This is especially since the end of Cold War and the nature of conflict shifting from interstate to intrastate conflict, meaning that in contemporary conflicts the majority of casualties are represented by civilians. According to the UN more than 90% of casualties in the major conflicts of the past decades have been civilians and the majority of them are women and children.

The new nature of war led to the revolution of the concept of security, which is very important for us at this context, and to the acknowledgment of the closeness between economic development and security. The focus shifted from the security of the state towards the security of the population - what we call the human security. It is common knowledge that people feel secure when they are physically safe, but this is not the only aspect we need to address when we talk about international security and when we address gender issues. Indeed, people need to feel secure that they can work, provide food for their family, walk home safely and then they can guarantee a future to their children, they want to have a meaningful life and without this, if you do not grant human security, they cannot be secure at all. Unfortunately, the reactions of governments to security threats is usually not that comprehensive and instead they respond with increasingly restrictive state-centred security policies.

The problem is that, due to the gender roles, which I mentioned be-

fore, the first victims of these restrictions are very often women: they lose access to basic services, to education, to economic opportunities and they are very often victims of sexual violence that is used as a tactic and a strategy of war. This hits especially women but it is important to underline that sexual violence in conflicts, or conflict-related gender-based violence is not a problem that concerns women and girls only, it affects also boys and men in many countries. There are there more female victims of this because they bear the national identity of the country. But it is very important that we stress, and maybe it is the key message of the resolution, that women are not only victims – they are powerful voices for peace and they are agents of action – and they have to be considered as agent of changes. So, again, the 3Ps are the pillars and in the beginning maybe there was stress on protection, but now it has been understood that, while we need to keep women protected, we also have to engage them as it is only through the participation of women that we guarantee an inclusive process. Women represent more than half of the society so women's intellectual capabilities and experiences have to be included in the prevention and resolution of conflicts otherwise we will miss the great opportunity to solve our problems in an inclusive way.

The real problem now, 15 years after the adoption of the resolution, is that the objectives are not very clear, many didn't understand that the overall aim is not to provide security for women but to engage women in providing security for all people. So as I said there are more resolutions, that stress the main issues of dimension in the 1325 and then, in some other cases, they also integrate it with new dimensions and new aspects because we are unfortunately living now in a very insecure and volatile world and international policies change accordingly. So this is also why the last adopted resolution – that was adopted in October 2015 – addresses the problem of counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation and the involvement of women in these processes, two extremely important issues considering the events we are now facing. We celebrated the 15th anniversary of resolution 1325 in October last year and during the whole year there were celebratory events organized by different countries and by the United Nations at the same time. It was an important opportunity to have a look at the results of the adoption of the resolution, make an assessment and develop some recommendations on how to work ahead. An independent global study was requested by the Secretary General and presented in October at the open debate of the General Assembly. Unfortunately, the study showed that there is still a long way to go for seeing a

real implementation of the resolution. It is a long process, we cannot say that there is a lack of commitment, but there is still a huge gap between words and deeds. So the resolutions were adopted one after the other, countries and governments – who are in the end responsible for implementing the resolutions – in some cases lack of developing national action plans that are requested by the UN to create a national framework as a powerful tool for implementing the resolutions. Or, alternatively, they develop these action plans but those are weak, not supported by the budget and their missions and objectives are not clearly defined. Sometimes it is done because it looks good to say that it was done.

It is sad to say that this happens very often. One of the objectives of WIIS, as an association, is to bring support to the development of the national action plans. Even though we do not have an official role, as a civil society organization we will be heard during the process of the development of the national action plans. Italy has developed two plans, currently under revision, and is now drafting a third one, and we hope to give our contribution and to provide good recommendations to have a sound and also action-oriented plan that would be also a good example for other countries in the future. When it comes to the global study, although I cannot go into details, there is something I would like to stress, in particular some figures that proved thorough the years that having women sitting at the table during peace negotiations was extremely important and it really made a difference. The study found that the possibility that an agreement lasts more than 2 years increases of 20% when women are sitting at the table and to have one that lasts more than 15 years of more than 35%. In countries where women and gender equality is more present, the possibility that a conflict re-emerges decreases dramatically. Partly because women are more able to detect signs of violence and radicalisation in advance and therefore they become important tools of conflict prevention. Unfortunately, still the participation of women in formal peace processes is scarce: a study made last year of the 31 major peace processes showed that between 1992-2011 only 9% of negotiators were women. This is also a problem of the UN themselves, this is why the Secretary General committed to double this figures in 5 years, and we really hope that we can see the results coming.

Another important aspect is emphasising the collaboration between governments and civil society: this is also why I said that WIIS is willing to provide support for the national action plans and other policies, but, generally speaking, it is still a long way to go. Now when we have the tools

and we have the resolution, I think we could try to allocate more money to research on these issues especially on something that is very interesting and touches all of us – terrorism and radicalisation – which is something that could be studied more in depth. The key message in the end is that we cannot have sustainable peace in the world and have a democratic society if women are not fully included in prevention of conflict, in peace building and peace-making processes at all levels.

Mitchell Belfer—This isn't going to be an important message thorough the debate and thank you for the many points that you have raised. On that note, I would like to move to our second speaker who I believe will broaden even more the perspective.

Katerina Krulisova—Thank you. My area of expertise is two-fold I would say: one is sexual violence in conflict and another one is female violence in the context of global politics. What I would try to do for today is to merge the two of them and look at the representation in the media of women under and against ISIS. So I will actually pick up with the United Nations resolutions just to say that sexual violence has been recognised as a threat to global peace and security recently. We have resolution 1325 and we have 5 more resolutions after 2007, that are concerned with sexual violence in armed conflicts. There has being a process of securitisation of sexual violence, the issue has been brought into the central stage in terms of global security. I think this is a very important point as it relates to human security widening and deepening the concept of security. Indeed, sexual violence is now considered one of the most important issues and even defining issues of modern conflicts.

Before I start I want to go briefly through base of explaining sexual violence in armed conflict these days. There are two main theories of why sexual violence happens in conflict much more than it happens in the peacetime. The prominent theory is that sexual violence is a weapon of war, that means that sexual violence is planned, systematic and widespread. It is designed to control the territory, to install fear and to terrorise the population. Here the word 'identity' is key because it targets mostly women as women are bearers of the identity for the whole nation, for the whole group. This is also the case of ISIS and I will come back to that later. So that is the weapon of war theory which is very mainstream. The second theory is that sexual violence is a by-product of war. It's that sexual violence happens when all the laws fall apart and that rape is just opportunistic. So when there is nothing to stop perpetrators from engaging into rape they will always do it. We have cases of environmental

catastrophes when law breaks apart and there is a chaos and breakdown and rape rises.

Usually sexual violence is connected to women and therefore women are represented as exclusively victims very often, so I was thinking about how female bodies are centred to the portray of global insecurity at the moment, as it relates to the Islamic State (ISIS). Just a tiny little bit of background: although they have been active since 2006, we have only been hearing about the Islamic State for two or three years, when they have received quite an extensive media attention. There is something about them in the news everyday and I think the way they achieved that is by using extreme violence and one of the defining features has been violence against women and girls. I will look into that today and I will also look into the Kurdish female fighters that are actively fighting ISIS. What I'm trying to do is to look into the female identities and agencies on the both sides and how these are presented in Western media.

When I looked into the media representation of the victims and the fighters, I would like to say I was surprised but I was not. You can see very clear, almost binary, opposition between how women are represented when they are victims and how women are represented when they are fighters. I would like to sort of challenge that simplistic representation in the media. We have to keep in mind that media wants to sell – if it bleeds, it leads – and that kind of stuff. The consequence is it gives us a simplistic representation of the reality and, in this case, it can be potentially quite dangerous into what opinion we form on the world around us.

In terms of the victims, the only victims that are acknowledged by the Western media is the Yazidi community and, although this community is certainly being brutalised, there are other victims from other ethnic and religious backgrounds who don't seem to get as much attention. That might be probably because of the statistics, but here is the first simplification. Female victims of ISIS are represented as being abducted, enslaved, raped and tortured: the words like 'shame' and 'stigma' are very often repeated and there are a lot of stories about how the victims have committed suicide because they felt there is no life after they have been violated by ISIS. On the other hand, we have the Kurdish fighters, we have the Women's Protection Unit and the People's Protection Unit of PKK. Interestingly they are portrayed as empowered, independent, in control of their own lives. So the PKK forces – one third of whom are females – are portrayed in a binary opposition to the victims of sexual violence. However, at the same time, they are saying that if they were to be

captured by ISIS they would commit suicide rather than being captured because they know how ISIS treats women.

Both the victims and fighters are portrayed as teenagers, as very young women; in terms of the photographs that are there in these reports. I think they also say a lot. Further, in the pictures, the victims are always hiding their faces: they are veiled, they are sitting, sort of shrugging, crying, whereas the Kurdish fighters are standing proud with their weapons in their uniforms, very often they are smiling and there seem to be quite a lot of description of their physical features - they are described as beautiful, as very young.

Here I would say that the female body is a front line, is a battlefield for both cases: the victims seen as being killed by the sexual violence – even if they are not killed physically, their identity is destroyed, and so is the identity of their entire group – whereas the female fighters are perceived as being empowered, as using their condition to break-out of the patriarchal chains and they themselves are very proud to say that women are the bravest of fighters. There seems to be an interesting discourse in the Kurdish forces: they think that the ISIS fighters are afraid to be killed by women because in that case they won't go to paradise. Although some of the experts say that it doesn't matter if the fighter is killed by a man or a woman, he or she goes to hell anyways, but the PKK female forces seem to believe that if they kill a man he will not go to heaven, and therefore the headlines say 'ISIS are scared of girls.'

I believe you can see how different that sort of female agency is portrayed but at the same time the sort of threat of sexual violence is there for both. For the Yazidi community it is very clear, and for the Kurdish female fighters, there seems to be a trend of them fighting on behalf of those sex slaves' victims. I don't think it is entirely the whole part of the story. Just to conclude, I think what you can see in media is a denial of the independent agency for both. Victims are portrayed as only victims – you know there is no life, there is no agency, there is no prospect in the future after they have been in violated by ISIS fighters – and the same time, although the Kurdish fighters are the perceived as empowered, independent and very brave, it seems that they are fighting under extreme conditions that it is a fight for survival for them and, if this wasn't the case, they wouldn't be allowed by the patriarchal structures to fight.

The element of suicide I think is quite important, to know that there is no life for women after ISIS. What is quite interesting also is the portrayal of masculinity: ISIS' masculinity is embodied by ISIS' men, portrayed

as primitive, engaging in horrific, savage, unbelievable acts of violence. The Kurdish female fighters are almost mocking them, almost challenging their masculinity by saying: 'You are afraid of girls and if you are killed by a girl that is the worst that can happen to you.'

I would like to conclude with questioning that idea of sexual violence being used as a weapon or as the tactics in the case of ISIS. If you take a look at what ISIS says in their reports about sexual violence, they are basically saying they are reintroducing slavery and they are saying that women that are captured by them are spoils of war, so it goes back to my introduction where rape is considered a by-product and women are considered as spoils of war. ISIS doesn't overtly say that there isn't anything strategic or tactical about their sexual violence. Interesting is also the use of contraception: there have been reports on ISIS forcing the women that they captured to use contraception to avoid any pregnancies and out of all the women that have been captured, according to the data – which we know it is very incomplete-, only 5% of women that have been sexually violated became pregnant: a very low percentage compared to the conflict in Bosnia or Rwanda for example. Although it might not be overtly as tactics for ISIS, sexual violence is also a way to get headlines, to get our attention and for us to kind of consider them as overtly cruel, inhumane and to instil fear. So although they may not be thinking about the sexual violence that they are perpetrating as tactical, I think it is tactical in this day and age and this modern era of social media and instant information. They want to be feared, they want to be taken seriously and one way to do that is to engage in sexual violence and to let the world know that they are doing it.

Mitchell Belfer—Thank you for your excellent discussion. We can now turn to Azzura. Please, the floor is yours.

Azzura Meringolo—Thanks a lot to the organizers, it's my pleasure to stay here with all of you. I am a professional journalist. At the moment I work for the National Broadcasting Company and for the Italian Think Tank Istituto Affari Internazionali where I am an Editor-in-Chief of the institute's journalistic outlets. I am also a researcher on the Middle East, focusing mostly on Egypt, where I did my PhD. I am not a gender expert but, as a journalist, I will tell you the story I cover and let you know what the people I met said to me. My colleague was speaking about Yazidi women and that will also be the topic of my short speech, because I met Nadya Murad, a 22-year-old Yazidi woman who spoke to the members of the Security Council at the United Nations Headquarters in New York

last December. She is one of the thousands of Yazidi women who were taken in August 2013 and she finally managed to escape in late 2013. I met her in Germany where she now lives and I invited her to come to Italy for the Human Rights Festival that was just in Milan at the beginning of the month. She was very happy to come here and she asked me to organize for her a kind of advocacy tour to speak about the Yazidi cause and to raise awareness about the Yazidi community. I will say some words about the genocide because this is what the International Community has to recognize. I was thinking to sum up her speech but I found a very short video, so we can watch it: this is what Nadya said during the meeting in the Security Council.

We, women and children, were taken by bus to another region. Along the way they humiliated us, they took us to Mosul with more than 150 other Yazidi families and over there were thousands Yazidi families and children who were exchanged as gifts. One of these people came up to me, he wanted to take me, I looked down at the floor, I was absolutely petrified when I looked up I saw a huge man, he was like a monster. I cried, I cried out loud I said I'm too young and you are huge and he hit me and he kicked me and beat me and then he took me and asked me to change religion. I refused, then he asked me to marry him (so to speak) and I said I was ill. A little bit later he forced me to get dressed and put my makeup on and then, that terrible night, he came and he did it. He forced me to serve a part of his military faction, he humiliated me every day, he forced me to wear clothes that didn't cover my body, I was tortured. I decided to leave and one of the guards stopped me. That night he beat me, he asked me to take my clothes off, he put me in the room with the guards and they proceeded to commit that crime until I fainted. Three months after my abduction I was finally able to escape.

This is what Nadya said in the Security Council. It was very hard also for me to interview her because she was totally shocked, as you can imagine. Even if she really wants to work for the Yazidi community and even if I found her very fragile, I think she's doing a really great job. In Italy she also went to the Parliament and, after her journey here in Rome, the Senate decided to pass a motion asking for the recognition of the Yazidi genocide. This is very important. After I interviewed Nadya I also had the opportunity to speak with Carla Del Ponte, a member of the committee on Syria, and she confirmed all what Nadya said to me. She collected different testimonies from other people and other women outside from Syria, because the committee cannot work inside the country, and she

told me that the committee is going to prepare a report for the European Human Rights Commission and they will call what happened to the Yazidi genocide. Also I think this debate will follow in next months and maybe years for the Yazidi community.

Let's go back to gender issues and to Yazidi women because there is another part as Nadya told me: rape was used to destroy women and girls and to ensure that they could never again lead a normal life. I think this is when sexual violence becomes a weapon of war and I would say ISIS is conducting a separate campaign of femicide against Yazidi women, subjecting them to additional levels of violence, other than the violence that they are also facing as the result of the genocide campaign among the community. I think that femicide can be resulting in this context from patriarchal negative perception of the women, gender and sexuality As I told you for my background I also made studies in Arabic cultures and Quranic texts and I have to say that the so-called Islamic State has been inappropriately interpreting the Islamic facts and the historical presences concerning for example how to deal with Muslims that are deemed Kafir—non-believers. Most critically ISIS it bypasses Muslim laws prohibiting rape and targeting women and children in conflict. I think it is very important for us to understand that this is not allowed by the Muslim religion itself, because otherwise, sometimes, also we as journalists do not clarify what some people are doing in the name of Allah, and Islam, and what Islam actually says.

My colleague just said that in 2014 ISIS published information on conflict allowing having sex and also abusing child and allowing the raping and exchanging of non-Muslim women and that evidence has been made that ISIS fighters use contraceptives to control women used as sex slaves, ensuring that as few victims as possible become pregnant. I think that this is a modern solution to the mediaeval injunction: according to an obscure ruling in the Islamic law, quoted by the Islamic State Imam, men must ensure that the women slaves are free of child before having intercourse with them. So this is another information to be taken into account.

However, when we speak about ISIS and women, we have to remember they are not just victims, but also perpetrators, in that there are several women who joined the ISIS militants and serve as international recruiters for them. There are lots of stories about them, including one about one about Bushra Haik, born in my home city, Bologna from a Syrian-Canadian family. She now lives in Saudi Arabia and is under

international arrest warrant for jihadist recruitment. Her story is really exemplary because Bushra was formerly known as a Quran teacher and now she is accused of international terrorism because she reportedly has been involved in the recruitment of women to be sent to the territories of Syria and Iraq where the so-called Islamic State is working. It is just one example, yet she seems to be a key person in order to understand contemporary jihadism and the significant participation of women in it. Bushra used to lead online meetings between women and, during the Skype calls, Bushra would usually propose to her followers the path towards radicalization. She went from criticizing the situation of women and men living in a country like Italy – a country of not believers, which is not acceptable – to introduce the idea of the necessity to make the Hijrah, the migration to the so-called Islamic State.

This story led me to one conclusion: maybe because I am a media actor and I am working with media, I was interested in what was the role of social media, and in general the Internet, in the recruitment activities of ISIS. We know a lot about it, but I think there is more: for example, the Internet seems to work more for women than for men in some cases. First, because it allows women to get in touch with the jihadists without even leaving their houses, or without breaking their habits and traditional laws regarding gender mixing. Secondly because it allows them to maintain invisible identities. The computer screen is a sort of niqab that protects you from interaction or from others looking at you: it hides faces, bodies and names but at the same time opens up the doors to online public space. So I think that, on some occasions, being a woman really helps you to know more about specific cases and about the gender perspective of any problem. Just a short note to close with: in December I went to Saudi Arabia. When I said to my colleagues that I was going to Saudi Arabia, they were saying I was crazy, that it was not a country for a woman. When I came back, I told them that actually for the first time being a woman, as a journalist, was better, because I could speak with a lot of women that my men colleagues could not reach. It is a funny note but we, as women, sometimes have direct access to primary sources and I think we have to exploit this advantage to provide more insight.

The Dialogue

Part 2

Mitchell Belfer—Thank you, it was an excellent panel. There is one issue I think should be addressed too. We have talked about many perspectives - about the role women play and do not play for example in peace processes and negotiations, about the victims, about the perpetrators but what about the regime? Maybe one of the ways to enter into this is to think about ISIS. Well of course ISIS is not the first time that women have been raped systemically or used either as a spoiler of war or even strategically. Indeed, when you have an extremist ideology typically it means that you are going to deploy it and you are going to be extreme, and that usually includes rape. In terms of comparisons, it brings up to mind women Nazi soldiers who helped in the humiliation of Jewish, Roma or Slavic captives. If you compare them to the way that ISIS are behaving also vis-a-vis the Yazidi minority and their captives, perhaps the first question is to ask what is the relationship between a radicalized regime and their use of sex and sexual violence?

Katerina Krulisova—Well, I would say that ISIS is a wannabe state, they are claiming to become a state, and if you want to create a state you do need both men and women and you need women to procreate. I think that kind of ties your point to recruitment and to our shock of British girls, very young British girls, being lured into ISIS. I think the way that ISIS is portrayed in the media - as being a perpetrator of savage rape - is a very different image to what it portrays to its followers. I think it portrays itself as a free state, as a state where Muslim girls that are unheard, unrepresented, that might be living under strict parental controls in Britain or anywhere in Europe, can be free. Free in an ideal Islamic State where they would get social security, they would get a house, and all of what they need, which, obviously, is a promise that very often is not fulfilled. Nonetheless, if you want to create a state, even if it is a radicalized re-

gime, you need to have the support of the women. I think half of the world's population are women, and approximately half of the population living in ISIS' territory are women, therefore there needs to be support of these women. At the same time, it is very well possible that these women are as radicalised as the men that are supporting ISIS. It is a very complex question, and I don't think I am able to draw any conclusions, but they might be as bad as the men are.

Irene Fellin—I would like to make a point. When we touch these issues we more often talk about women as victims and women as actors and agents of positive changes, but then I believe we also have to tackle the issues of female terrorists. Women can be as bad as men, women are not inherently peaceful as it was said in some research. You can have some individuals that are more peaceful than others but the simple fact of being a woman doesn't mean that you are more peaceful than a man.

Audience – Bianca Pomeranzi—My name is Bianca Pomeranzi, I am working at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Development and Cooperation in Italy and I am a member of the UN Committee Against Discrimination Against Women. In the UN context, we have many chances to talk with the Syrian community because of course Syria was examined by the Committee and all the time we have direct dialogues with the NGOs of women representing their community. A few things have emerged. Some of these are still related to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Let me start by going back a little bit to the history of the 1325: it comes out from the Beijing Platform for Action, where several women from different generations wanted to transform the world. The feeling of the female subjectivity was positive because they were women that freed themselves from the stereotypes cultural constrains. Five years later the 1325 was translated in a policy of the Security Council and it was considered the highest achievement for gender development because gender became a policy of the UN. So the 1325 is drawing on the idea of female identity as a good agent of change. The Italian delegation negotiated the part dealing with rape and abortion in war times, with the Vatican. There was a woman from Italy that had a good relationship with the Vatican, and, alto thanks to her support, we negotiated the issue and our outcomes were taken to the International Criminal Court and then in the 1325. I would like to say that up to now, as Irene said, the 1325 is not implemented in the main area – i.e. having women as peacekeepers. One other thing I would say is that, according to me, when we look at women in this con-

flict and in the ISIS areas, the first thing we have to do is fact fighting. It is hard to do it only through the media, you can try to do it through social media, but we should also speak to these people and do some fact finding investigations.

Azzura Meringolo—That's why it was really strong for me when Carla Del Ponte told me the same thing Nadye had told me two days before. She interviewed a lot of women coming from the same area. You have to double check, because sometimes these women can tell you something that is not really what happened to them. Even research based on the social media can be misleading. Undoubtedly, there is an evolution on the reliability of social media. In the beginning for me, as a journalist, social media were very important sources but, after a while, they became more dangerous sources. It is not very easy but maybe you need some good contacts and then know which one you can use. It costs a lot of energy to know this and I have to say that now I get a lot of my information from WhatsApp chats, because I know people that trust me, and they add me to their conversations. Sometimes they ask me to go out from the chat, especially if they are mainly activists, but in the end these are safer and more reliable sources for me.

Mitchell Belfer—I would like to go back to the topic of resolution 1325 and its very low degree of implementation. I believe it is the problem of UN resolutions in general to actually create a mechanism through which countries around the world are going to accept and adopt new rules. But when it comes to this specific issue – gender - in this specific region and unfolding right now as we speak, I think it's almost criminal that countries in some ways continue to hide behind other issues of politics, of challenging sovereignty or others where it is clear, I think, that one particular community - the Yazidis - were targeted with sexual abuse, rape, torture and killing. What I also find shocking is that the information about what happens inside the Islamic State is well-known. You don't need to meet somebody from the Islamic State to know that they throw homosexuals off of the top of the buildings, or that the girls who come from the West are very often raped. For example, the story of the American girl who ended up being under the head, under Al Baghdadi, is very well known. Stories are verified along the way by so many different sources: independent sources as well as ISIS itself, which has no problems in telling us their stories because it is part of their image and identity. And here come my question. When we look at identities we are often looking at it from a positive angle, but what about an identity that is based

on rape, that is based on sexual violence? And, moreover, what is our identity vis-a-vis the identity that the Islamic State is trying to make for themselves?

Katerina Krulisova—Well I would say our identity is being human because their identity is being inhuman. However, if you kind of take the discussion back a little bit - is it one in five, or one in six of European that will be sexually assaulted in their lives and one in three will be physically assaulted? I have seen an article where there has been a research in American Colleges, Universities asking men if they would rape women if there were no consequences and about 32 or 33% said yes. So we tend to portray ourselves as better, as more civilized and that notion of us, the West or whomever, being more civilized is based on the treatment of women. But, at the same time, we do face this patriarchal misogynistic rape culture. Former Yugoslavia, it was very clear. So I think it goes sort of back to the binary oppositions, we tend to present ourselves as much better than ISIS but my question would be: 'Are we that much better or are we just better at hiding it?'

Cinzia Bianco—The thing is, I've been wondering when we read about cases of women from Europe going to ISIS, I've been wondering why is the portrayal of the identity of a female ISIS militant so successful? What kind of appeal does it have on a European woman in terms of the identity that is suggested and the narration that is portrayed? Isn't it an identity of submission? If you speak of gender, the gender, the role that women play in ISIS is very clearly one of submission. It's very clear that a woman will be more submitted to the man than she is in the European society. What I am wondering is why is this idea of submission appealing to women in the Western world.

Bianca Pomeranzi—In 1985, during the third UN conference in Nairobi I went to an Islamic group where there were many women from Iraq, and they were all veiled. So I went into the discussion with them and a woman addressed me saying: 'We are free, yet we have a strong identity. This is something that the Western women cannot understand.' She was introducing the idea of Western women not having an identity, arguing that they have freedom but not an identity as women. That is very strong I guess in the Muslim states, perhaps in particular due to their religion but. And indeed, if you think about it, in some cases we don't have any more the strong feeling of being a woman. The new generations, in particular, seem to have rejected gender roles. I can understand why that is the case but I still believe we have to face this.

Irene Fellin—It is much more complicated than we could imagine.

Mila de Simone—I am a journalist, based here in Rome, but I would like to speak mostly as a scholar of psycho-sociology as I am in the field. In this task, with some youngsters, I'm working to change a situation that is honestly not acceptable. I was listening to the words said by Nadya: it is quite impressive the fact that she sounded very much alike to any other young person in Europe that has been a victim of bullyism. Now, we are talking about a very old problem, which is the role of women in our societies, and we shouldn't forget the main element: society. It's useless to pretend that it doesn't concern also our societies. Moreover, it is important to remember that it is an old problem, started many centuries ago, and really it would be a mistake to argue that what is happening in the Middle East is only about religion. It is something that has been happening for centuries, religion is used for political purposes and it is not anymore religion but it is something else. It's a political strategy.

The point is, I was quoting bullyism because actually this is the keyword to understand many social problems, especially considering that most of the problems that we bring into society as adults emerge during childhood. I would like to underline the point that, for example, bullyism in the past was something which concerned only men but, recently, in the last 20 or 30 years, the phenomenon is involving women more and more. This is due to the fact that there is a model of success which is pretty masculine, that is becoming increasingly popular with women too. If women renounce their identity as women in society, then I guess it might be a big loss not only for society but, most importantly, for women themselves. Just to be clear: if I would cut an apple into halves, it would be easy to put the halves back together, but if we cut it into small pieces, they are automatically too complicated to put together. So the point is neither men or women alone can change the situation, only if there is a strict cooperation between the two parts the problem can be tackled. Many women for example think that the way to find their personal identity is to act like men: honestly, in my opinion, it is the defeat of the role of women, because they engage in emulation instead of remaining what they are. Moreover, losing femininity would be losing one of the richest part of the human kind. That same part that can benefit greatly decision-making processes. We can already witness what can be a society where women have no influence over decision-making, when we look at situations where women are excluded from politics or refuse to go into that because they are reject a world that has become absolutely aggressive.

Irene Fellin—Yes, but they should transform the world.

Bianca Pomeranzi—That is exactly what the feminism has done in the last 40 years. In particular, European feminism has specific answers to your questions, that don't include gender stereotyping. Originally, European feminists were not talking about a confusion or fusion of gender roles, but of having an equal value for different sexes. Gender equality should not be perceived as men and women being equal, but as men and women being different but entitled to equal rights.

Mitchell Belfer—Okay, but in the West then that concept means that there is a separation of roles that can be played in the society between men and women. How is that different from ISIS? Because they are also saying that men and women have different roles to play. And women are very proud of that: they join ISIS also on the basis that they are going to be treated specifically as women and very differently from men.

Irene Fellin—I think this goes back to what somebody said before - they are looking for an identity and they reject that lack of a strong gender identity that perhaps we are currently experiencing in Europe. Maybe they look for something different.

Mitchell Belfer—What if ISIS women want that role. From my reading into ISIS women you have two types and they are valued differently by ISIS men. You those coming from outside ISIS region, democratic countries like Europe and Tunisia, and then the locals. Of these two groups, ISIS men value women from the first group more, much more. They value all the women who are voluntarily leaving a democratic country to join ISIS, not forced but voluntarily leaving their families, usually without husband, very often with children and are just appearing in ISIS's territory. This is because of course they can then claim that their model is more attractive than the democratic ones for women.

Bianca Pomeranzi—Regarding female ISIS recruits, I would like to ask: can they decide by themselves? Or are they part of the family when the husband decides? Do they move without husbands or with husbands? And what are the numbers? In Italy we know it is one or two, not more.

Irene Fellin—That we know of.

Cinzia Bianco—Well, they are deciding or themselves mostly. As for numbers, for example in the UK, I am sure that the highest numbers are from the UK, and just from the regular media, I think I have read about dozens of cases.

Mitchell Belfer—There are 25 cases from one area of East London. There are over 250 cases of women picking up from the United Kingdom and

moving to the ISIS's territory. Mostly without husbands. Just couple of years ago there were these three young teenage girls, 17-year-olds, picked up in Turkey on their way to Syria. Everybody knows that these things are happening to these girls and yet more women are going. Just to be clear, there is still a survey taken at the beginning of this year, in January, that mentioned that, among British Muslims, one in five have sympathy for the Islamic State. Sympathy doesn't mean that they are going to go there and yet amongst those one in five sympathetic there are going to be cases of people who voluntarily go to ISIS. So I think it is very important for us to try to understand what it means for a person from the West to hold a failed identity - to believe that their identity and the ability of projecting an identity in ISIS is going to be better and easier for them than in the West.

Mila de Simone—Mostly it is our generation, the frustration, especially among women is very high and this is a possible potential reaction. As I was saying before about bullyism, I think it is a way to somehow borrow the masculine model, a very aggressive one, just because they think it is the only way to survive in this situation.

Mitchell Belfer—But they are not aggressive. They are going to fulfil mother roles, they are not going there to fight. The ISIS women are not fighters. You have a police force of women who are security, who check on other women, and they do often post pictures of themselves, veiled, with machine guns but they are not fighting.

Irene Fellin—Some women could choose this model, perhaps they feel the need of protection. It is the need of protection the attractiveness of the so-called traditional roles. We challenge the identities and the gender roles because, as I said in the beginning, gender roles are different from society to society and they change with time. If we look at our parents and their grandparents we had different roles as women and as mothers and as professionals. The fact that we are moving in the Western society towards more freedom or complete lack of boundaries, doesn't make this the perfect model for everybody. What were the origins of the cases we mentioned about people leaving the UK for ISIS? Is there any study if they were British origin or not?

Katerina Krulisova—Mostly they were second generation or third generation.

Irene Fellin—Second or third generation. This would confirm a few studies that say that the second generation- immigrants prefer to go back to their origins. While the mother took off the veil when she moved to

the Western society, in spite of the fact that they were born here, they want to go back. I believe this contradiction, which is quite intimate, can be destabilizing and therefore push young people to look for a kind of protection. I am not saying that this is correct but this is also part of being independent and free. I discussed similar issue often in everyday life normal situations: women are not all the same, some of them prefer to have a man who takes care of them. Still there are those women and we should not be shocked with it. I think there is a lack of research, we really need to do research on this, as we do not have elements for really making an assessment of what pushes young women to leave. I will say however that I believe researching personal history will be important, as well as the fact that violence is an integral part of the majority of women's life and it is often considered as normal. Once when I lived in Turkey and I was studying gender studies, we were talking about domestic violence. The opinion of most my colleagues in the Master's of Gender Studies was that domestic violence was not an issue, but something normal in a relationship between a man and a woman normal, if it didn't occur too often. On one hand my first reaction was of rejection but then, at a second thought I realised that this was a key testimony and should have encouraged me, us, to carry on our research efforts into how gender roles are different in specific society until we have enough elements for understanding this phenomenon.

Cinzia Bianco—I think that once there is a conversation on 'why women leave to join ISIS' it always comes up. Maybe we should look at how gender roles have become in Western society, especially for the younger generation, maybe we should look better into if there is a confusion, if there are frustrations, if the young women are not happy with what society has projected on them - to achieve success at all costs, to have a good career at all costs, or the opposite. So I wanted to turn the table over to some of the members of our audiences of the younger generation to kind of talk about it, about the frustrations of young women in the younger generation and if we are not happy with the identity and the role that is portrayed on us.

Mitchell Belfer—I think nobody here is going to be joining ISIS.

Katerina Krulisova—Yes, but why is that? Why is nobody going to be joining ISIS?

Silvia De Marchi—From my point of view, what I mostly find frustrating is the widespread mentality, that young girls experience frequently at work, whereby you constantly receive compliments from men on your

physical appearances just because you are a woman. Everyday we experience some form of sexism. I feel this, this is my perception as an Italian girl who lives in Italy.

A woman from the audience—Well my opinion on what is frustrating me is that there is no more a strong difference between being a woman and a man in terms of the role that we play in today's Western society. I feel that women are looked down to if they want to live their lives in a more traditional manner.

Mitchell Belfer—I am wondering if there is a distinction to be made between a male interpretation of why women go to ISIS and a female interpretation of why women go to ISIS. I am sure this will be something very difficult to qualify, but I am wondering if the same reasons that a woman, for example a Muslim woman, would feel uncomfortable in the way that her life at home, pushing her to go to the Islamic State to find solace of some kind, could also be the same mechanism as to a man being a Muslim or non-Muslim would view that woman going to the IS. From my point of view, I have the impression that when a woman leaves her husband and runs away from the house what she is actually doing is rebelling. Especially if she feels imprisoned in the way that her family life has developed. Of course, in the end, she is moving from one type of imprisonment to another.

Mila de Simone—As you said a few minutes ago there are many women that cherish the idea to be dependent on somebody else. And even though we might not think this is normal, we shouldn't forget, normal is something that is artificial, social rules are an invention they are not natural. Personally, most of the times I feel that there is not a real natural way to measure the things among us, that there will be always something that is enormously frustrating stressing and so on. And I believe the pressure to be normal also triggers the kinds of extreme reactions that can be difficult to understand.

Carlotta Nao—Good evening, I am Carlotta Nao, and I'm a Press Officer of two Senators. Lately I've had a chance to meet a teacher who deals with drop-out kids in Naples. Basically he works with teenagers from 12 to 17 trying to keep them at school. One of the things that he is doing is theatre classes. Once was talking about this very young woman, who was 15, who had to leave the theatre class because her boyfriend and his boyfriend's mother asked her kindly to leave theatre, because it wasn't appropriate for her. This is 2016, Italy, and we still have to address these kind of things. I don't know if we can look at our cultural schemes in order to

understand ISIS, but we definitely still have our issue to address, so the Western society is not equal freedom for everybody. I don't know if this can really help to understand but I think it is relevant to think about this case, and many like this, whereby a young Italian girl is blocked within her system very strongly. First she has to answer to her mother, her boyfriend, and her boyfriend's mother. She could not do theatre because she has a boyfriend who earns a wage so he's a well-respected man and she's going to marry him. So are these constraints enough for extreme appeals or claims reach our society? Is there a cultural answer? Do we have a key to address, to change the scenario? Do we have answers really?

Mitchell Belfer—We said this at the beginning that we will have many more questions than answers at the end.

Mila de Simone—I would like to introduce some perspective on what has happened in last 70 years. One model is USA, another model is China, another one is USSR - the Soviet Union. It is amazing what has happened. In the US, if you go and watch some of the movies reporting what was life in the 50s and the 60s, you will realize that women were very subdued: most were only asked to be beautiful and efficient at home, but nothing else. However, in the past decades, the liberalisation of women has made its way through somehow, but it is not yet completed. It is a model that is changing in the society before it changes politically, the politicians have been obliged to follow it. Now let's see the example of what has happened in China. The revolution in China has brought women to be completely equal to men by law. So there was no limitation of their access to the important roles, actually when you look at the very top management in China you will suddenly see women being present. So what has happened actually, that women are so independent economically that they are starting to move away from failed marriages with a lot more ease and there has been an increase of divorces that is impressive. This is a case in which society followed politics. Now let's have a look at the case of the USSR which ended a few years ago – 1992. Very few people know that the number of men in the Soviet Union was much lower, incredibly lower than the percentage was in other countries, because of the fact that the Soviet Union has been involved in many wars and many men died. Stats show 65% of women in some places, especially in big cities, compared to only 35-40% of men. Therefore, most of the jobs that typically are hold by men in our countries, in our societies, were managed by women in USSR. Without women in the Soviet Union there would not be a nation. Yet, you can see now how many women are in

power in today's Russia, for example in the political field, very few. What I want to underline is that the solution to gender equality typically comes from the society, rather than imposed from politics.

Mitchell Belfer—Now I would like to ask our speakers for concluding remarks and invite all of you to carry on with our conversation in a less formal environment after our session.

Irene Fellin—I believe the history of UN Security Council resolution 1325, of which we talked a lot, has shown us that change is a long process. Change doesn't happen just because one day a group of women pushed for it, the pushing has to go on for years. At the same time, of course we cannot analyse the changes in our society thinking that they will come in two days, two months or two years. We have been talking about ISIS on the basis of what has just happened but the broader theme, the patriarchal structure of society, is the same everywhere as a root problem. It has different forms and it has different evolutions, in some places it has changed faster than in another, religion and economic growth is a factor. I am glad that we had this discussion and that we are leaving with open questions because we really need to research on this. I believe that the way to do this is to talk to these women because we cannot have the answer, we cannot know what they really think and why they are going there. There must be some deeper cause that we haven't seen yet, and then our role as gender experts, researchers and journalists is really to find an answer.

Katerina Krulisova—We talked about identity, agency, choice and motivation in the second part of the debate, and an underlying sort of crisis of identity. I don't think it's only gender-based, I think it is very closely related to race, religion, class and so on. I think we need to sort of perceive all of these as connected to each other. It doesn't make our aim of finding answers any easier, it makes it very difficult but I would say simplifying the crisis of identity as being a failure of feminism in a way in the West - I don't think it's a very good way. We need to see every single case individually. Every single girl, woman or a boy or a man who leaves for Syria, who is a part of the Islamic State, who is a part of PKK fighting against the Islamic State, they all have their own set of motivation, their own set of argumentation of why they do it and that is formed in the family, in the culture throughout the bringing up. So I think finding generalizations would be very difficult for us.

Azzura Meringolo—I have more questions than answers. I would shift from more general gender issues to issues about my society, the Italian

society. I think that Irene you are right, we have the opportunity to speak to these women because there are women who decided to join ISIS and then suddenly decided to come back to Europe. Of course there is a big debate on how to deal with them - from a security point of view. But there is also an opportunity to engage them and try to understand why they decided to join ISIS. And what Carlotta said made me think about what is going on in Naples, because Naples is one of the cities where there is an increasing number of conversions, and they are not just people who decided to convert because they got married to a Muslim woman or man but just because maybe they do not find any answer on how our social model works. Well, if I think about myself, sometimes I am also unable to find real answers to my personal problems with the model that my Western society has given to me. I think that we should really think about it a little bit more. Speaking about society that is changing, in this we are new in Italy. The UK is more used to immigration and they have a tradition of generations with different layers of identities, while we are still new. If you think about citizenship problems and laws - we are now approaching these questions and maybe we can learn from the mistakes of other societies and from the good stuff that they did. I also think that, speaking about gender, also in our society where we think that we are really more advanced than the others, there are lot of sets or rights and behaviours, that we still have to work on a lot. I think that events like this one give us, the civil society, the opportunity to make a reflection and then maybe be more engaged and more prone to make proposals to the others.

Mitchell Belfer—I think I have to say I am leaving this event with the willingness to know more: just the idea of gender by itself is going through incredible changes when you add in society or class it is even more complex. We actually didn't even start scraping the surface of the role of working family versus a more elitist family, people that have more opportunities of exploring other cultures versus those that are not, and many other elements, and each element is going to add a different layer to identity formation. I think we had a very rich discussion here but my thought is that we have so much more to explore. Therefore, as the last statement for the Euro-Gulf Information Centre, please expect that there will be a lot of follow-up events because I think that not only do each one of our speakers today offered something interesting, each one of the members of our audience also offered important perspectives to the same issue. Yet, it is like a drop of water in the ocean of research, investigation

and debate and discussion in a public forum that really needs to start. I am thankful to everybody for coming today and taking that first drop of water and throwing it in the ocean and hopefully we can start putting more in the next future.

End

