

Map Room

THE SADDEST KIND OF SISTERHOOD

JILL FILIPOVIC

Sisterhood, Robin Morgan wrote, is powerful. That rallying cry of second-wave American feminism is compelling, but this concept of sisterhood—shared experiences, shared values—doesn't exist on a global scale. There is no universal experience of womanhood. Women around the world live vastly different lives, our experiences often shaped as much by our location, race, economic standing, nationality, age, and religion, as by our sex. But there is one thread that cuts across all dividing lines—violence.

One in three women experiences sexual or physical violence in her lifetime. In some countries, the figures are as high as seven women in 10 victimized by violence. Violence against women takes a variety of forms, all centering on the belief that women are not entitled to control over their own bodies, and in particular their own sexual and reproductive lives. Much of the violence women face centers on the sex organs, reproduction, and sexuality. It ranges in extremes, but no society is untouched. In the eastern Congo, 48 women are raped every hour. Around the world, 140 million women and girls have undergone genital cutting. Four and a half million people are forced into sexual exploitation every year, 98 percent of them women. And sexual harassment and unwanted sexual advances at work impact up to half of women in European Union countries.

While news stories often detail horrific acts committed by strangers—mass


rapes in the wars in Bosnia and the Congo, sexual harassment and assault on the streets of Delhi and Cairo—an equally disturbing truth is that most violent assaults against women are committed by people those women know and even love. Between 40 and 70 percent of female murder victims in the United States, Australia, Canada, Israel, and South Africa are killed by intimate partners. A European woman has a 5 percent lifetime risk of being the victim of sexual violence by a person not her partner. Her risk of being assaulted by a partner is five times greater—25 percent.

Violence against women isn't just about hitting or raping, although certainly there's plenty of that. It's about denying a woman's most basic right to feel safe in her own body and control what she does with that body. Political violence against women spares few nations, with women's reproductive freedoms and sexual functions up for perpetual debate and legislation. The harm is twofold. There's the cultural message that women's bodies are unworthy of full respect and autonomy, and it often results in women suffering serious physical injury.

Pregnant women are one of the most at-risk groups for intimate partner violence. And underlying sexual assault is a fundamental assumption on behalf of assailants that they deserve full sexual access to a particular woman, whether she agrees or not.

Gender-based political restrictions routinely result in physical injury to wom-

Jill Filipovic is an attorney, a columnist at The Guardian, and a journalist who covers gender, law, and human rights.



en. Limitations even on contraception are common, with many places, including Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, requiring that a woman get her husband's consent to be sterilized or obtain birth control, or barring access to contraception for unmarried women. Even where contraception is legal, such as in Kenya and Kazakhstan, it is often out of reach for low-income women, and its access low on the national legislative priority agenda.

That lack of access often results in a higher abortion rate. Abortions face even tighter regulation than contraception, so nearly half of abortions worldwide are illegal and unsafe. In Africa, 97 percent of abortions are unsafe, and the procedure is outlawed in wide swaths of the continent. Europe demonstrates the global health benefits of widespread access to contraception—where easily accessible, affordable, and often even free, it's widely used. As a result, Western Europe has the lowest abortion rate in the world. Eastern Europe, by contrast, with its long history of

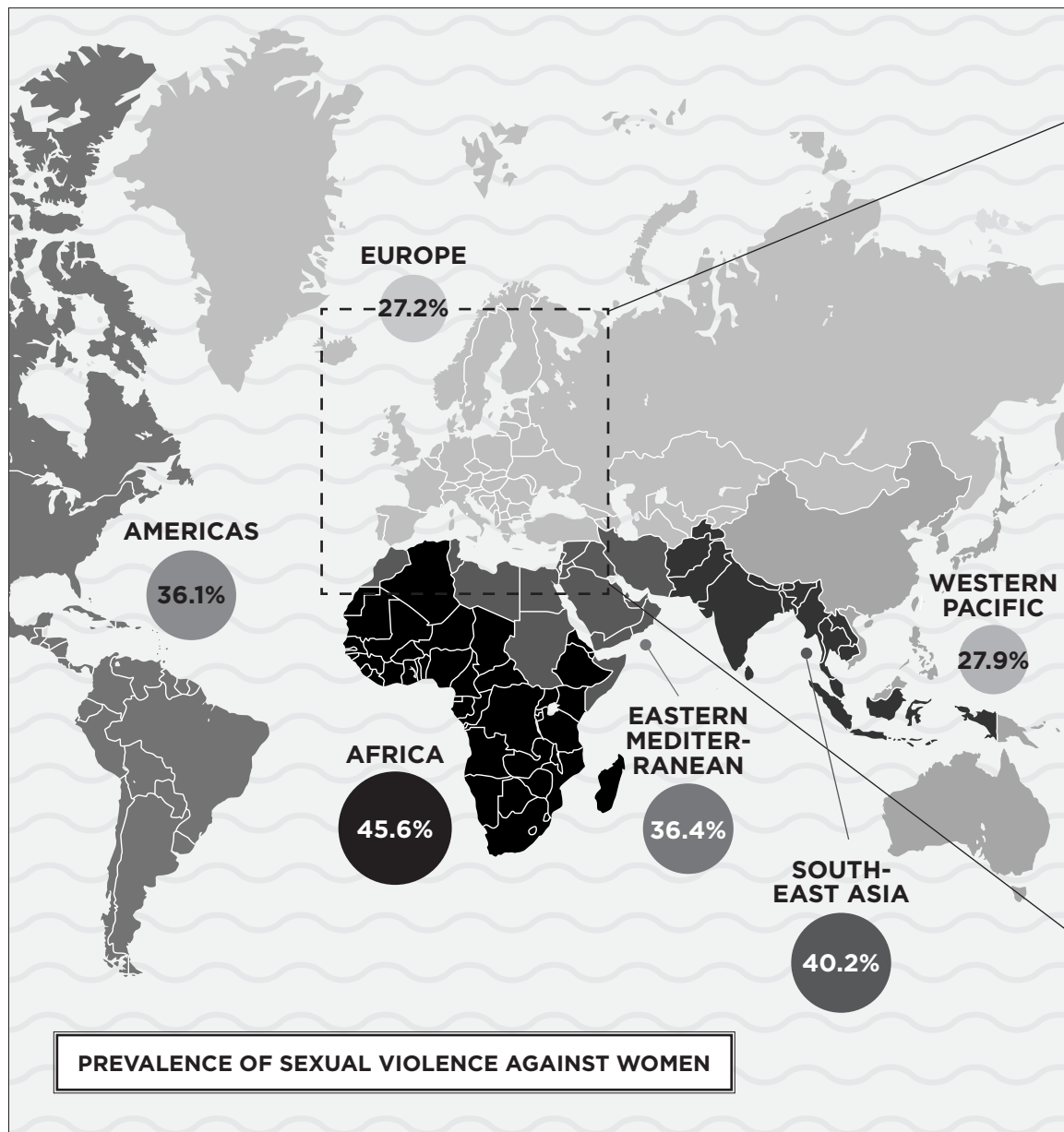
limited access to contraception, sees more political fighting about abortion and contraception, low political commitment to contraceptive security, and a general distrust of modern contraception methods. As a result, contraceptive usage rates are significantly lower in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe, and abortion rates significantly higher—Eastern Europe has one of the highest regional abortion rates in the world.

Violence against women represents a continuum of behaviors, stemming from gender inequality and lopsided power structures. The factors underlying the rape of a Rwandan woman by genocidal militants are very different from those leading to the sexual assault of a Swiss woman at her office, but they exist because in societies around the world, women are simply valued less than men. Our bodies and our rights are seen as malleable, debatable, and relational to men—anything other than fundamental and unassailable.

It's the saddest kind of sisterhood. But it may be the one thread that unites us. ●

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In this map room, *World Policy Journal* depicts the percentage of women who experience intimate partner and non-partner violence across the globe. The data available reveals an alarming trend of sexual violence in every corner of the world. Even in Europe, the continent with the lowest prevalence of violence, several shortcomings exist in ensuring and maintaining women's safety. European countries are labeled according to whether or not they meet basic standards in preventing violence against women. It is important to note, however, that the data does not take into account the under-reporting of sexual crimes, the enforcement of laws prohibiting such violence, or the prosecution of those convicted of violence against women.



Compiled by Sarah Lipkis and Marguerite Ward

Sources: The World Health Organization, Violence Against Women; Global Picture Health Response, 2013; Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence of 2011; World Bank Women, Business and the Law, 2013. European data provided by the Women's Lobby Barometer on Rape in the EU, 2013.

Designed by Meehyun Nam-Thompson

- ▲ No national helpline for women
- \$ National helpline exists for women, but calls are not free of charge
- Legislation does not meet the Council of Europe minimum standards. (Istanbul Convention)
- * No information available on legislation

