

Women, violence and exiting from violence with a gendered approach: MENA region and diaspora

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Abstract

This report presents a gendered approach to understanding violence and ways of exiting violence. It emphasises the importance of studying violence in the private and public spheres, as well as gender-based violence wherever it may occur. These different types of violence are linked by the thread of gender and can be analysed under the concept of the 'continuum of violence'.

A gendered approach also emphasises the need to address social injustice and structural inequalities all round: ending gender-based violence, guaranteeing women's equal access to resources and addressing all forms of inequalities, oppressions and exploitation. This report highlights examples where women have been active in contributing to ending violence and injustice, as social actors in their own right, in the region, locally, nationally and internationally.

Keywords

Exiting violence, gendered approach, social actors, MENA region

Violence et sortir de la violence une approche genrée : Afrique du Nord, Moyen Orient et diaspora

Résumé

Ce rapport propose une perspective genrée pour comprendre la violence et comment en sortir. Il souligne l'importance d'une étude incluant à la fois la sphère privée et publique, ainsi que la violence genrée où qu'elle se produise. Ces différents types de violence sont liés à travers le prisme du genre et leur analyse fait appel au concept de continuum de violence. Une approche genrée insiste aussi sur la nécessité de répondre à l'injustice sociale et aux inégalités structurelles en général : mettre fin à la violence genrée, garantir un accès égal des femmes aux ressources et lutter contre toutes les formes d'inégalité, d'oppression et d'exploitation. Ce rapport met en lumière des exemples de femmes qui sont des actrices sociales de plein droit et se sont activement engagées pour éliminer la violence et l'injustice au niveau régional, local, national et international.

Mots-clefs

Sortir de la violence, approche genrée, actrices sociales, Afrique du Nord et Moyen Orient

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Introduction: Gendered Approaches to Violence

This report presents a gendered approach to understanding violence and ways of exiting from violence. Gendered approaches to war and violence conceptualise and understand these phenomena in a distinct way. Firstly, gendered approaches emphasise the importance of studying violence not only in the public sphere but also in the private sphere and understanding the ways they are linked¹. Secondly, gendered approaches highlight the differential impacts of violence on women and men because of dominant gender relations, norms and identities; and, thirdly, gendered approaches conceptualise peace as rooted in a social justice perspective, including gender justice, and addressing structural inequalities.

A key overarching concept in a gendered approach to violence is that of the ‘continuum of violence’, which understands violence in the public sphere (such as conflict between armed groups and political violence), violence in the private sphere (domestic violence and other forms of violence against women) as well as gender-based violence wherever it may occur (in the home, on the street, in the workplace and in public institutions), as linked through the thread of gender. By this we mean that the exercise of

violence is deeply embedded in gender hierarchies and dominant gender norms. In particular, we highlight how masculinist domination enables the exercise of violence across a variety of contexts, which, in turn, reproduces and normalises dominant notions of masculinity as associated with violence. Meanwhile, non-violence is associated with women and stigmatised as weakness and passivity, both socially and also in international politics.

As a result of gender hierarchies and gendered divisions of labour, women and men experience violence in different ways. For instance, women (and children) make up the majority of refugees fleeing conflict and violence while men make up the majority of fighters. Furthermore, because women are generally deemed responsible for social reproduction within the family, women are disproportionately affected by shortages in food, medicine and other essential items and the augmented deterioration of public services that often accompany violent conflict. That is not to say that all victims are women (and children) and all fighters are men. However, dominant gender norms may mean that women who do participate as fighters are stigmatised and/or are obliged to masculinise their behaviour in order to be accepted. Equally, men who refuse to fight are stigmatised and may be targeted for violent punishment.

In discussing the process of exiting from violence, a gendered approach proposes a comprehensive vision of peace compared to some mainstream approaches, which generally focus merely on the cessation of armed violence. In this respect, another important concept is that of intersectionality, which is based on the recognition that gender inequality is intertwined with, and cannot be separated from, other forms of social, political and economic inequalities pertaining to class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality and generation among other axes of social difference. A gendered approach to exiting from violence emphasises the need to address other forms of inequalities, oppressions and exploitation based on class, race/ethnicity and/or religion as well as guaranteeing human rights for all, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, religion and class. This implies the implementation of positive measures to

1. While we use the terms of public and private spheres, this report recognises that the notion of the public versus the private sphere is socially constructed and the boundary between them is fluid and changeable over time and space. Adra contends that the public-private binary as understood in Europe and the United States does not apply to MENA, and that its use serves to homogenise gender relations in MENA. She argues that this binary is based on a Euro-centric division in which the ‘public sphere’ is a male dominated space where political discourse occurs and important decisions are made, while the ‘private sphere’ is the domain of women. According to her, in much of MENA, in contrast, especially in the Arab Region, public and private are blurred, with considerable flexibility afforded to women and men on negotiating space and time. Political and policy discussions often occur in homes which act as both public and private spaces according to context and event. These spaces are largely controlled by women who dispense hospitality. Women either participate in, or listen to, these discussions, and their opinions are often consulted. Women and men render ‘public’ space ‘private’ and vice-versa by manipulating their clothing. These contrasts in symbolic space have gender implications that need to be recognised. As Suad Joseph defends, the public/private divide is a ‘purposeful fiction’ that is integral to state building (1997: 73).

bring about social justice, including gender justice, ending gender-based violence, removing all structural inequalities and guaranteeing women equal access to resources. In this respect, the report highlights the important work of women in ending violence through their activism against different forms of injustice and inequalities underpinning violence, including *inter alia* the struggle against gender inequality.

Nevertheless, it is equally important not to romanticise women's agency nor to essentialise women as 'peace loving'. Women have participated in violence, sometimes as part of armed struggles against oppression but also as members of dominant groups seeking to repress and exploit other groups, whether based on class, race, ethnicity or religion. Overall, this report stresses the importance of going beyond binaries of victim/perpetrator, active/passive and/or agency/victimhood when discussing women (and men) and their experiences of violence and contributions towards exiting violence. The report also challenges essentialist and deterministic approaches to understanding the causes of violence, such as structuralist explanations for violence that focus solely on the impact of colonial, imperialist and global neoliberal interventions or on culturalist/religious explanations for gender-based violence. While cultural norms and customs and specific religious prescriptions and interpretations cannot be altogether dismissed as contributing to violence, it is important to recognise that neither culture nor religion are static but are socially constructed and contingent on specific historical, political and economic contexts and developments, nationally, regionally and internationally. Meanwhile, various forms of violence may be related to deprivation, poverty, and insecurity caused by imperialism and neo-colonialism, these processes being mediated by socio-cultural and (geo-) political contexts.

Finally, this chapter takes a transnational approach to gendered violence in relation to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Given the long history of political entanglements, large-scale labour and forced migration and significant social and economic ties between MENA and Europe, it is important

to conceptualise MENA beyond its geographical boundaries. Within Europe, the recent 'refugee crisis' but also more long-standing politics of immigration as well as growing fears of radicalisation and Islamophobia have led to the securitisation and criminalisation of immigrant communities of MENA background. Thus, strategies for exiting from violence in MENA must also include strategies for exiting from violence exercised against and within diasporic communities.

Women and violence

Conceptualising violence from a gendered perspective rests on the recognition of a 'continuum of violence', experienced by women through the thread of gender that includes overt armed conflict, warfare, structural violence (linked to differential access to resources and power), domestic violence as well as various forms of sexualised violence (Cockburn 2001:13–29). Moreover, it is important to take note that gendered violence exists during periods of overt warfare and conflict as well as in post-conflict contexts and during peace times². Patriarchal gender norms and relations in conjunction with heteronormativity are central to the creation, reproduction and reinforcement of authoritarian hierarchies of power and the privileging of militarised masculinities, which are prevalent both in war and peace times.

With respect to terminology, gendered or gender-based violence (GBV) refers to violence against a person based on the normative roles linked to each gender contributing to and reproducing unequal power relations in a given society. GBV, often used interchangeably with violence against women (VAW) leads to psychological, economic, physical or sexual harm. However, men can also be victims of gender-based violence, often linked to their non-normative masculinity and/or sexuality. Sexual violence is one specific continuum of gender-based violence that refers to a wide range of threats, behaviours and acts that are sexual or sexualised, unwanted and committed without consent, such as sexual harassment which has become prevalent in

2. This does not detract from the fact that gendered violence tends to take on specific forms with respect to their characteristics and degree during periods of extreme generalised violence.

many countries in the region. Sexual violence might exist on an individual level but is often used more systematically to control, dominate and reinforce gender-based oppression and heteronormativity.

Gender, crucially, does not only refer to women and the instrumentalisation and control of women's bodies and sexualities, but also to men, hegemonic forms of masculinities and their bodies and sexualities. However, as several feminist scholars have demonstrated cross-culturally (Yuval Davis 1997) and more specifically in the context of the Middle East (Al-Ali & Pratt 2016) women's behaviour and appearance is considered to be symbolic of the national, the religious and the ethnic community and therefore, women are often the target of legal or informal mechanisms or even physical violence with the aim of imposing dress codes, controlling sexual behaviour, and limiting access to the public sphere, all in the name of "restoring authentic values" but operating to demarcate boundaries of 'us versus them' with the aim of consolidating the authority of specific political actors or 'breaking' the opposition (Al-Ali & Pratt 2016: 130). This trend is noticeable in the context of ethnic and sectarian conflicts in which communities instrumentalise women's bodies and women's sexualities as a way to demarcate boundaries and reify differences.

Critical approaches have demonstrated that it is necessary to historicise violence, avoid essentialising culture and religion and apply a political economy and intersectional approach to violence, recognising the ways that multiple local, national, regional and international factors linked to the state, economic conditions (such as poverty and exclusion), political developments and contestations over resources and power contribute to the relative levels of gender-based violence at any given historical moment (Al-Ali 2016, Al-Ali & Pratt 2009, Al-Ali and Pratt 2016, Kandiyoti 2013). However, it is equally important to take into account references to colonial legacies and imperialist interventions on the one hand and alongside local patriarchal power, on the other hand (Al-Ali 2016). Moreover, Deniz Kandiyoti (2013) has pointed out that we cannot simply explain away

the targeting of women's dress codes, their mobility, their sexuality, their participation in protests and political action as routine manifestations of patriarchy and misogyny. In her view, patriarchy no longer functions 'as usual' and currently requires a higher level of coercion together with the deployment of more varied ideological state apparatuses to ensure its reproduction. Therefore, the high levels of violence against women since 2011 are evidence of attempts to reinstate a patriarchy that some men feel is under threat. Nevertheless, many men have started to grasp the connections between patriarchy and political authoritarianism, often mediated through militarism and gender-based violence.

In the context of rapid political transformations and struggles over power and authority since late 2010, women's and men's bodies and sexualities have emerged as key sites of contestation and control in the region. Prior to that, there has been a long history of struggles and campaigns in relation to the personal status code governing marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance, and attempts to address sensitive subjects, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, honour-based crimes and killings, as well as reproductive rights. Significantly, in recent years mobilisation and activism around bodily integrity have been linked to the acknowledgement that bodies are at the core of families, economies, and social and political institutions, shaping states, civil society, and citizenship.

Different types of violence involving women

Different forms of violence at any given historical time impact on women's lives in the MENA region, as elsewhere in the world. The above-mentioned 'continuum of violence' requires a holistic approach not only in terms of identifying the range and variety of violence but also its different sources and perpetrators. A complex picture emerges: on a national level, state and non-state actors, including the military, the police, militia, armed gangs, Islamist organisations, tribes, the general public, colleagues, family and friends are all perpetrators of various forms of violence experienced by women (and men) in the region. Moreover, conflicts and wars contribute to the emergence of regional and international perpetrators, especially invading

and occupying armies/soldiers, mercenaries, security personnel, and Islamist militants.

Historically, the state has been identified as one central perpetrator of violence in the MENA region. Authoritarian states and dictatorships have used force, such as arrests, torture and executions, to repress political opposition and dissent. This has often comprised sexual violence against women as a way to punish dissent and deter their involvement in political opposition. The state has been identified as a prime perpetrator of violence in the context of war and conflict, as we have seen most recently in Syria and Iraq. Non-state actors have also become major sources of violence in the MENA region. The most visible perpetrators of particularly gender-based violence are currently the so-called Islamic State (IS) and other Islamist militant groups, prominent in Syria, Iraq and Libya. While the scale and level of violence perpetrated by IS are unprecedented, the violence committed by IS does not emerge in a vacuum, given the long history of gender-based violence perpetrated by Islamist groups. Meanwhile, militia, armed and criminal gangs are also rampant and responsible for various forms of gender-based and sexual violence, including forced prostitution, trafficking, harassment and rape.

Rape, one of the most extreme forms of gender-based violence, is perpetrated both at the level of state and non-state actors during war and conflict, and during periods of relative peace. This form of gender-based violence not only is used to violate and harm individual women but also to humiliate and annihilate entire communities as a systematic and collective weapon of war. One can cite the cases of Bosnian Muslim women collectively raped by Serbian troops, Saddam Hussein's atrocities against Kurds in the 1980s, the Turkish state's repression of Kurds in the 1990s, the rape and torture of Ezidi³ women at the hands of IS. Violating and potentially impregnating women (sometimes deliberately) result in long-term consequences and often affects entire communities whether

they be ethnic, religious or political because women are generally seen as both the biological and symbolical markers and reproducers of communities. It is important to mention here that rape is also used as a weapon of war against men as experienced by Iraqi prisoners of war following the invasion of Iraq and opponents to the regime in Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Turkey; and there have been accounts of rape of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons. The rape of men often constitutes an even more suppressed issue and source of shame and has thus remained underreported and even silenced.

An array of gender-based and sexual violence might be classified as a social form of violence, rooted in communal, religious and family contexts and prevailing gender norms. These range from early and forced marriages, honour-based crimes and killings to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that neither culture nor religion are static nor can be analysed in an essentialised manner. Instead, they are contingent on the specific historical and political economic contexts and developments, nationally, regionally and internationally. Moreover, all of these forms of violence are in various ways related to deprivation, poverty, and insecurity.

In recent years, verbal and physical harassment has become a much-debated topic in academic, activist and media circles. Indeed, sexual harassment has increasingly become a political tool and counter-revolutionary measure by authoritarian governments to suppress dissent and control its populations through the police and military and/or via paid thugs as illustrated in Egypt currently. However, this form of violence has existed prior to recent political developments. In addition, the street, the work place and the home are sites in which women experience different forms of harassment other than those orchestrated by the state and related political groupings.

Underlying these different forms and perpetrators of violence are structural inequalities, which frequently make women more vulnerable. Economically, the past decades have seen an emergence of the 'feminisation of poverty' in several countries. The transition

3. Although the term Yezidi is more commonly used in the literature, community activists prefer the Kurmanji term Ezidi. Ezidis are an ethnically Kurdish religious minority that originated in Northern Mesopotamia.

from Keynesian to neoliberal economies, coupled with an international division of labour that is reliant on cheap female labour, while women remain in charge of reproductive work and domestic labour, has affected the MENA region as other regions in the world. Privatisation and restructuring have in many locations, most notably in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, led to lay-offs that have affected women disproportionately (UNDP, Arab Human Development Report 2016). Employed women face similar challenges as elsewhere in the world: lower wages than men, the double burden of employment and domestic work (ibid), employment in the informal sector and part-time labour which increases their precarious economic positions. This is compounded by women's difficult access to resources and legal rights if they are members of ethnic or religious minorities. Increasingly, populist as well as institutionalised sectarianism have contributed to gender-based violence as women are perceived to be boundaries of both ethnic and religious communities as witnessed among Kurds, Berbers, Ezidis, etc.

Furthermore, women are facing a number of legal challenges. Historically, one of the most debated set of laws with gendered implications has been the Personal Status Code which governs marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance and enshrines unequal gender relations based on a patriarchal bias. Although laws vary greatly from country to country, legal protections against domestic violence are rare, and those that exist often fail to be applied as social pressures tend to result in the protection of men at the expense of justice for women.

Hegemonic narratives of 'otherness'

One form of symbolic violence affecting women in the MENA region and in the diaspora has been their representation through what can be called an orientalist narrative. Women have been portrayed as the foremost embodiments of the radical, intrinsic 'otherness' of Muslims in the MENA region and in diaspora communities. These representations partly stem from a colonial and post-colonial history as testified by the unveiling ceremony in Algiers in 1958⁴, that marked

the politicisation of gender in the context of colonial relations and, in France today, the focus on the *hijab* and a true 'politics of the veil' (Scott 2007, Joly and Wadia 2017). These representations pertain to colonial and postcolonial history, and to a neo-orientalist imaginary. They tend to reify and culturalise gender domination: Muslim women become simultaneously victims in need of liberation and markers of 'otherness', the incarnation of 'them' in the face of an emancipated exemplary 'us', as part of the power relations of an asymmetrically structured global society. In this process, gender domination tends to be transferred onto an 'other' eschewing gender inequalities in western countries. This is naturalised through hegemonic processes, disregarding situational heterogeneities in Muslim-majority countries and diasporas as well as histories of prevailing gender norms. Moreover, the situation of women in Muslim-majority countries has been used as an argument to legitimise external interventions. For example, 'the military and humanitarian intervention into Afghanistan in 2001 advertised "liberating" the women of Afghanistan as one of its key objectives (...)', thus locating women's struggle for their rights in Afghanistan within a transnational narrative and 'a narrative about interventions as necessary measures' (Koloma Beck 2018).

These representations affect current western policies on Muslim populations. Nonetheless, interrogating those stereotypes should not detract from the fact that women face oppressive situations and combat them in their own countries and communities. Indeed, imperialism and its impact should not be overplayed or allowed to gloss over national power configurations and forms of oppression. This would risk undermining the work of national feminist activists. The instrumentalisation of struggles for women's rights within imperialist power relations is intricately linked to key national and local issues in the same way as perceptions of gender issues and racialisation intersect. Struggles for women's rights have often been reinterpreted within the context of this power relationship with the West. Lamrabet thus refers to a 'hostage' problematic

4. It may be useful to compare these numbers with a mere 18

per cent female participation in the United States Congress and 22 per cent in the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

(Lamrabet 2012). Hence, opponents to the struggle for women's rights have deemed it tantamount to a 'betrayal' of their own society or of their community in minority contexts, as best proclaimed by Islamist movements who denounce what they instrumentalise or perceive as collusion with imperialist powers. A kind of confiscation of struggles for women's rights thus operates in the form of minority/majority, or hegemonic relations (Larzillière 2018).

Various circumvention strategies have sought to dissociate the two questions. Some branches of Islamic feminism have, for example, drawn on the reinterpretation of Islam to dismiss gender-based inequalities as custom rather than religious requirements. In so doing, they circumvent disputes over 'authenticity' versus 'betrayal'. Sometimes, gender differentiation may be reinforced by essentialist forms of feminism, attributing to women a specific but positive role. Other branches of feminism position themselves in the struggle against authoritarianism within a broad approach akin to the struggle for emancipation. This allows them to turn to a globalised public for support, transcending the frame of othering and references to intrinsically oppressive cultures, thus making a transnational theme out of gender inequalities.

Case Study 1 – The impact of external interventions on local violence within Yemen

This case study presents changes to the security of women in tribal Yemen with increasing exposure to, and acceptance of, imported notions of hierarchy and women's subordination. Despite the proliferation of arms in Yemen and an expressed ideology of male prominence, tribal customary law places obstacles to, and severe sanctions against violent conflict (Adra 2011; Weir 2007). Disputes at all levels were historically, and largely continue to be, resolved through mediation (Adra 2011). Yemeni constructions of honour differ from those reported in Mediterranean societies. Crucial to men's honour is the protection of unarmed populations with strong sanctions against assaulting women. Prior to the current conflict, domestic violence was extremely rare, and married women often exercised their culturally accepted rights to leave the marital home to seek mediation

whenever they felt insulted or assaulted by their husbands or in-laws. In most communities in Yemen, divorce was not stigmatised. Women's active roles in the agricultural subsistence economy provided them with mobility and economic decision-making as well as important voices in community politics and conflict resolution. Mass labour migration of men to countries in the Gulf during the 1970s and 1980s left most women in total charge of agriculture and economic decisions (Adra 2013a). Social life in rural communities was not gender segregated, and in most rural areas women and men danced together at weddings and other celebrations until the early parts of this century (Adra 2016).

Several events beginning in the late 1980s and continuing to the present have led to increasing violence in general, and towards women in particular – at the personal, community and national levels. Increasing economic dependence on imported foods reduced dependence on and the value of rural women's agricultural work and limited some women's mobility. The forcible return of nearly a million Yemeni workers from Gulf countries in 1991 added serious economic stress to the burgeoning cash economy. Many returned migrants brought with them the strictly patriarchal ideology of the Gulf. Development projects, funded by international and regional donors largely focused on introducing cash cropping by men. These projects not only contributed to the rapid decline of water tables in Yemen but also ignored women's important contributions to agriculture. Projects directed at women emphasised sewing and cooking skills despite rural women's repeated requests for agricultural extension and vaccination for their livestock (Adra 2013a).

During the War on Terror (since 2001) all external development funding to Yemen was redirected to providing arms and support for a corrupt government. Neoliberal policies increased poverty and exclusion throughout Yemen. Consolidation of land led to illegal land grabs and new exclusive social hierarchies (Carapico 1993; Adra 2006). These changes not only increased poverty but seriously impacted health and education services for rural women. Corruption and the co-optation of powerful tribal leaders threatened

tribal institutions. Tribal feuding increased, and time-honoured laws, such as those against harming women or fighting in urban contexts, were increasingly breached.

The penetration of an imported politicised Islam through government ministries and the media (Adra 1996, 2016) had significant negative impacts on women. Because the externally-funded Islah party controlled the Ministry of Education and curricula, the significant increase in school attendance for girls and boys did not necessarily translate into quality education or greater empowerment for the graduates. Textbooks repeatedly asserted women's subordinate position in the home, criticised women's traditional work in the fields, traditions of women's public poetic expression and their community participation. Many young secondary school graduates, women and men, now consider veiling, seclusion and wifely subservience 'modern' in contrast to 'traditional' women's mobility and participation. The new conservative interpretations of Islam declare men's ultimate authority at home, encourage husbands to 'discipline' recalcitrant wives and severely criticise customs that allow women to leave the matrimonial home to seek mediation. Since the early 2000s, dancing, song and mixed wedding parties have been curtailed or stopped in most villages. Most disturbing is the new violence against children, who are now regularly hit with sticks at school and slapped by their parents, leading to an unprecedented normalisation of violence, whereas during the 1970s and 1980s, it was considered a serious breach to strike a child. Many older rural women and men disapprove of such changes and complain that they do not reflect Islam, but illiteracy limits their capacity to fight back (Adra 2016 and field notes 1978-79, 1983-86, 2001-05).

Beginning in the 1990s, uneven distribution of resources and government manipulation have led to increased feuding and internal armed warfare. The current conflict, which involves international actors, each with its own geopolitical and geoeconomic agenda as well as multiple parties with diverse grievances, has had disastrous impacts on communities, especially women and children. Historic protections of women are routinely

ignored, with a reported 63% increase in domestic violence and incidents of rape. Severe poverty and a humanitarian crisis have increased child marriage and trafficking of women and children. Kidnapping and the forced militarisation of youth will leave long-lasting impacts on the construction of self - manhood and womanhood – as well as on traditions of mediation and consensus formation. All of the factions involved in violent combat in Yemen are pressuring women to remain in seclusion, either to protect them from harm or, equally, to restrain the work of activists (Heinze and Baabbad 2017). Despite the impacts of warfare, however, attitudes against harming women are so entrenched that even al-Qaeda has refrained from directly harming women in the communities they control, presumably because they fear local reprisal.

Case Study 2 – The Turkish-Kurdish conflict: Intersections of state-based and patriarchal violence

Historically, Kurdish women have been marginalised and side-lined as ethnic minorities in the context of the Turkish Republic's nationalist ideology. Different waves of state violence have affected women civilians living in rural and urban communities, as well as female political activists and militants belonging to the Kurdish political movement. The Turkish government's wave of attacks on Kurdish towns needs to be understood in relation to the establishment of militant resistance (Kurdistan Workers Party or PKK), and the growing strength of the Kurdish political movement. The 1990s were particularly bloody with more than 3,000 Kurdish villages forcibly evacuated and more than 3 million Kurds displaced. A counterinsurgency campaign involved thousands of extra-judicial killings (Bozarslan 2001; Tezcur 2013). During this period many Kurdish activists (women and men) were imprisoned and tortured in Turkey's notorious prisons (Zeydanlioglu 2009).

After a period of relative peace, following high levels of state induced violence in the 1980s and 1990s, violence has escalated since 2015. In the wake of elections in which the Erdogan-led government failed to achieve an absolute majority, with significant

gains for the progressive Kurdish-led People's Democratic Party (HDP), a severe crack down on Kurdish towns in communities in south-eastern Turkey involved unprecedented levels of violence, killings and arrests. The violent state repression intensified following the failed coup against the government in July 2016, escalating to a level beyond the worst violence of the 1990s.

As Al-Ali and Tas (2017) demonstrate, Kurdish women activists experience and conceptualise conflict and violence in intersectional ways. They refer to patriarchal male bias and conservative gender norms within the Kurdish political movement as another significant source of conflict and violence. Moreover, they see patriarchal control as equally dangerous and debilitating as state-induced violence. Honour-based crimes and killings are among the most extreme forms of gender-based violence Kurdish women are experiencing within their own communities. Many Kurdish women activists perceive the control of women's sexuality, dress codes and mobility as another form of gender-based violence.

Kurdish women's rights activists and militants involved in both the political and armed movement stress the importance of gender-based equality and justice for their political struggle. For them, challenging patriarchy within the Kurdish movement and within Kurdish communities is as important as challenging the Turkish state. For Kurdish women, exiting from violence at all levels is clearly linked to the struggle for what they call 'radical democracy' with gender-based justice and equality at its heart. Developments within the Kurdish women's movement need to be contextualised within a wider shift from armed struggle for an independent Kurdish state, the main aim of the PKK when it was first founded in the 1980s, to the aim of radical democracy and equal citizenship rights for Kurds within the boundaries of existing nation states.

Over the past decade, Kurdish women activists linked to the wider Kurdish political movement in Turkey have been involved in the attempt to transform decision-making processes and the content of politics within that movement and Kurdish-led political

parties. Moving beyond sheer token inclusion of female MPs and political leaders, the Kurdish political movement now systematically includes women at all levels of decision-making with a system of co-chairing, not only involving a man and a woman but also people of ethnic minority background and younger people. Moreover, education and consciousness-raising sessions and programmes are addressing women as well as men.

Kurdish women activists stress that peace will mean much more than cessation of armed conflict and advocate that the struggle against gender-based discrimination and forms of gender-based violence, as key to their strategy, is at the heart of sustainable peace. A political and legal Kurdish movement has increasingly emerged over the past years in parallel to the armed movement linked to the PKK. Many women in the political movement see their main means of struggle as political and non-violent. At the same time, there is a widespread recognition that armed struggle is still necessary in a context where the state violently cracks down on Kurdish towns and civilians, and also arrests and marginalises elected Kurdish politicians and representatives.

Moreover, the threat of Islamist militancy, especially the recent waves of brutality in the region at the hands of the so-called Islamic State, has also mobilised Kurdish women. Many Kurdish women linked to the PKK, from Turkey (northern Kurdistan) and other Kurdish regions, have joined the armed struggle against IS in northern Syria (Rojava). In fact, Kurdish women fighters were at the forefront of defending the city of Kobanî (Ayn al-Arab) as well as liberating Raqqa from IS militants. The case of Kurdish women militants illustrates the fact that it would be too simplistic to conceptualise women simply as peacemakers and proponents of non-violent tactics. Furthermore, the case of Kurdish women fighting IS forces us to acknowledge that in certain contexts violent armed struggle and conflict might be the only strategy for a long-term vision of peace.

Women's activism and social justice, beyond the binary of agency/victimhood

Women's activism in MENA is varied and wide-ranging, both in terms of the causes defended and the types of collective action adopted. They comprise political struggle, including pro-democracy struggles against occupation and inequality, nationalist women's rights campaigns, welfare and charity initiatives and environmental campaigns. Women activists' involvement in the recent uprisings was notable, as has been their participation in the occupation of public places in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. These activists can be found in political parties and trade unions and as candidates for elected positions. But they are especially involved in associations and the voluntary sector. Altogether these civic and political commitments are part and parcel of broad political visions and social projects.

These different forms of women's activism contribute to struggles against injustice and challenge violence, conceptualised here in a social continuum. Gendered approaches highlight the ways in which gendered inequalities shape the experience of these activists and the ways in which perceptions of their commitments are marked by gendered assignments and binaries.

Women as social actors, a gendered approach to civic and political commitment

Decision makers and men in positions of power tend to assume that women are not significant actors of public and political life and are little interested in politics: 'they think that politics is mainly a man's thing, because everything encourages them to think this: tradition, family life, education, religion, literature' (Duverger cited in Allwood and Wadia 2000: 140). Women in MENA and Muslim or Middle Eastern women of migrant background in diasporas in Europe and North America have been portrayed through the same lens. Mainstream media have fed a public imaginary of those women as victims of domination and violence, thus consolidating prejudices which depict them as submissive, subjugated, apathetic or uninformed beings, confined to the home and family. The implication is that they are unable or unwilling to

act as subjects and hence not entirely worthy of the many rights accruing from social, economic and political participation. Feminist scholars have vigorously challenged these views. First, they have shown up the multiple obstacles that stood in the way of women's political participation. They also have put forward that the classical definition of politics, that is political parties and electoral politics, has excluded other forms of participation which are precisely the ones that tend to attract women's participation: 'Women do not participate less than men; instead, they participate differently [...], more ad hoc and unstructured community associations, voluntary organisations and protests groups' (Githens et al. 1994:5–26). Women participate at grassroots levels in social movements, protest politics, informal community groups and voluntary organisations (Joly and Wadia 2018). Indeed, women in and from MENA have been noted participants in political actions in their neighbourhoods while remaining largely barred from sites of decision-making (Amiriaux 2003: 90, Christy 1994; Allwood and Wadia 2000; Randall (1987).

In addition, women often express their acute sense of justice and ethical considerations, which project them into meaningful action. Against the violence which attacks their physical and moral integrity and hinders their capacity of action, women have constituted themselves as social actors and subjects in their own right (Joly and Wadia 2017). As we currently see in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq, women are recurrently the ones who, in times of crisis and war, have kept communities alive and children fed through concrete acts of solidarity at the ground level. Moreover, their engagement has gone far beyond gender issues to fight for social justice against all forms of inequality

However, the realm of activism is fraught with the same gender-based inequalities that pervade society (something not unique to MENA countries) (Larzillière 2018). In western as in Muslim majority countries, MENA women represent the 'particular' in relation to an apparently neutral 'universal' while the latter is traversed with categories of differentiation. As a matter of fact, the 'neutral' individual embodying these 'abstract universal

principles' proves rather masculine (Scott 2005) and one might add, within a patriarchal definition of masculinity. Gender inequalities also intersect with the impact, in western countries of the 'Arab' or 'Muslim' categories of differentiation (Ajblí 2016). Activists face, side-step or challenge these questions in various ways. Firstly, having a lived experience of inequality, domination or violence may foster the decision to take action if a field of opportunities for struggle emerges (Larzière 2004). And the gender-differentiated reception to women's engagement has occasionally been utilised by the activists. For instance, Sahrawi activists who positioned their engagement as part of a national political struggle were perceived in the West as 'mother' activists, thus gaining special media coverage and another form of legitimacy (Allan 2016).

Finally, gender inequalities also impact on activist organisations, in particular classical political organisations, where women activists encounter specific difficulties in obtaining recognition and accessing leadership positions. Among Islamist parties in particular, those women tend to be separated and oriented towards 'women issues' (education, charity work, etc.) (Larzière 2016). For example, professional women in Jordan who run for elections do not attain senior positions; even the presidency of the nurses and midwives association – whose vast majority are women – is generally held by a man. In Islamist voluntary organisation meetings in Jordan, women sit together at the back of the room. Such inequality and glass ceilings, particularly prevalent in classical political parties, are general features in all activism involving women. This partly explains women activists' more numerous presence in civil society and the voluntary sector (even though gender inequalities persist everywhere) as well as their search for new forms of engagement.

Gender and Nationalism

One context in which women's mobilisation and political participation have flourished in MENA is that of nationalist movements. Women in MENA have a long history of involvement in nationalist movements against European colonialism that emerged across the region in the beginning of the

twentieth century and gained ground thereafter. Women contributed to these movements mainly through women's associational and philanthropic work – providing services and welfare for the poor and particularly for women and girls. At times of national crises, such as the Egyptian uprising against British rule in 1919 and the Lebanese protests against French rule in 1945, women also participated in street protests and other forms of explicitly political activities, transgressing dominant norms concerning female modesty and propriety. They even took part in armed resistance against colonial rule, predominantly in auxiliary roles. During the Great Arab uprising of 1936–1939 against British rule and Zionist colonisation in Palestine, the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925–1927 against the French, and the Algerian struggle for independence, also against the French, women played an important role by smuggling weapons, planting bombs and providing food to the fighters.

Although some feminists view nationalism as an inherently masculinist ideology wherein women are reduced to cultural symbols and biological reproducers of the nation underpinning their second-class citizenship, we posit that a more nuanced approach to nationalist movements is required. Within nationalist movements, women have emphasised the importance of their role alongside men in the struggle for national independence and freedom while maintaining their commitment to women's rights and freedoms. Their experiences in nationalist movements and male nationalist leaders' failure to support women's equality have motivated women to put forward gender specific demands, such as women's suffrage, greater political inclusion and family law reforms. Women who experienced human rights violations based on their national belonging and their gender have thus often promoted an intersectional approach that addresses injustices at national and interpersonal levels.

It is important to draw a distinction between the nationalism deployed to dominate and exploit other groups/communities on the one hand, and the nationalism that mobilises resistance against exploitation and oppression on the other hand. We also highlight

differences between nationalist ideologies that promote progressive attitudes from those displaying conservative attitudes towards gender issues. Nationalism has played an important role in struggles for self-determination against colonialism in former European colonies as well as in contemporary struggles for the self-determination of Kurdish and Palestinian peoples. Across these contexts, strategies of both armed violence and non-violent resistance have been pursued separately and/or simultaneously.

New forms of feminist engagement

Historically, feminist activism in the region took place along a continuum of initiatives and organisations closely tied to governments and state structures on the one hand, and independent activism, often critical of the state's gender policies on the other. Within so-called 'state feminism', particularly in relation to Tunisia, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt, feminist activists were often co-opted by authoritarian regimes pursuing modernising projects that involved women's education, labour force participation and increased public presence, as well as formal political participation. The perceived collusion between women's rights' proponents and authoritarian regimes involved in political persecution and human rights' oppression had devastating impacts on feminist claims and credibility in the region.

Nevertheless, throughout the region and at different historical moments, feminist activists have also combined opposition to political authoritarianism and repression and the promotion of women's rights and gender-based equality. This engagement has forced many activists into exile, as in Iraq and Iran. Currently, feminist activists have been notable for challenging existing forms of governance, especially in terms of their patriarchal and authoritarian aspects. This is particularly evident in Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Turkey and Iraq. Much of contemporary feminist activism takes on board the various ways gender-based inequalities intersect with other structural forms of inequality, such as class differences, economic exploitation, discrimination against ethnic minorities and sectarianism, as illustrated by women's rights' activism in Iraq and Kurdistan. In Kurdistan-Iraq,

women have progressed the promotion of their rights and obtained the promulgation of 'The Act of Combatting Domestic Violence in Kurdistan Region-Iraq' (Act No 8 2011) (Al Ali and Pratt 2011, Joly and Bakawan 2016, Hardi 2013). In Israel, women are active participants in the peace movement. In Syria, Kurdish women are committed political participants in the development of a progressive societal project and have joined the armed struggle to combat the threat of massacre and enslavement by IS, several of them occupying high positions of responsibility. This is well illustrated by the battle of Kobanî in Syria where the leading military commander for the defence of the town was a Kurdish woman. In Tunisia, women have mobilised to change the law on violence against women (Ben Achour 2016). Moreover, many feminist activists in the region have a transnational feminist perspective and struggle against the impact of globalisation, particularly global capitalist expansion, neo-liberal economics, imperialism and neo-colonial power configurations.

More recently, novel forms of feminist engagement, particularly prevalent among the younger generation of feminist activists and organisations, frequently revolve around body politics and involve innovative forms of organising outside of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) structures, including online activism. Young feminist activists engage in new alliances with broader political movements, as particularly evident in Morocco, Iraq, and Egypt. This engagement sometimes includes greater links between feminist and LGBTQ activism, particularly noticeable in Turkey, Lebanon, Tunisia and Egypt, while LGBTQ activism remains largely non-existent or underground in other countries, such as Iraq and Yemen. All of these novel forms of feminist engagement stress the intersections between structural forms of violence, symbolic violence and body politics, frequently presenting a much more holistic approach and strategy to exiting from violence than previous generations of feminists.

Case study 3 – Activism of Tunisian women against violence

Tunisian women have been subjected to different types of violence despite positive laws promulgated after independence in

1956, including the Personal Status Law of 13 August 1956 that prohibited polygamy. Women have been subjected to social and political violence in its different forms, one of them being the diverse forms of repression at the hands of the regime before 2011. Aware of this situation, activist women have challenged these forms violence for many decades.

Against Ben Ali's violence

Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, president of Tunisia from 7 November 1987 to 14 January 2011, established a police state. Over 110,000 policemen were marshalled by Ben Ali to spread repression. For two decades, Tunisian women activists fought Ben Ali's political violence through their engagement in associations, political parties and trade unions, among others. Many Tunisian women challenged and contested violence, repression, censorship and torture. The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women played a significant role in this struggle. Maya Jribi, General Secretary of the Progressive Democratic Party, one of the most famous opposition parties to Ben Ali, maintained a hunger strike for a month (20 September 2007 - 20 October 2007) to challenge Ben Ali's decision to close down her party's headquarters. Lawyer Radia Nasraoui defied torture in prison. She campaigned relentlessly for human rights, especially denouncing police torture in prison and for many years used several forms of protest to gain legal recognition for the association she had created to protect victims of this form of violence. It was only after the 2011 revolution that the organisation was authorised. Nejiba Hamrouni, who campaigned for the creation of a journalist's trade union, was prosecuted in 2008 and questioned by the economic police intent on dissuading her.

Post Ben Ali mobilisation

Women in Tunisia continued to fight against different types of violence after Ben Ali's departure, 14 January 2011. Feminists mobilised during the period of the troika (2011–2014) to condemn the growth of violence and terrorism in Tunisia. On 13 August 2013, some 200,000 protesters denounced the political murders of Chokri Belaid (6 February 2013) and Mohamed Brahmi (25 July 2013). Women were concerned about

their rights, judging that the troika, dominated by an Islamist party Ennahdha, was threatening Tunisian women's achievements. Women participated in the 'departure' sit-in, which forced the troika to cede power to a technocratic government and compelled the National Constituent Assembly to promulgate a new Constitution in January 2014. As a case in point, Besma Belaid and Mabrouka Brahmi, the wives of Chokri Belaid and Mohamed Brahmi respectively, denounced terrorism, violence and radicalism. Mabrouka Brahmi contributed to the creation of the Foundation Martyr Mohamed Brahmi, which aims to work for human development and promote an agenda of non-violence. Besma Belaid created the Foundation, Chokri Belaid Against Violence whose mission is to campaign against all forms of violence in Tunisia, create an Observatory of Violence and set up schools, public programs and mechanisms to raise awareness against violence in Tunisian society.

The mobilisation of Tunisian women against violence and extremism continues. By the end of 2016 and in 2017, women campaigned against the return of Tunisian jihadists from Syria, Iraq and Libya, when the Minister of Interior declared in February 2017, that 800 Tunisian jihadists should return home (5,000 had joined terrorist groups in Syria, Iraq and Libya since 2011).

Campaign and strategy on violence against women

There is statistical evidence that Tunisian women suffer from diverse forms of social violence. A report of the 2010 National Survey revealed that '47.6% Tunisian women, aged between 18 and 64 declared that they had being victims of some form of violence during their life' (Ben Achour 2016). Moreover, the Centre for Research, Studies, Documentation and Information on Women (CREDIF), published a study entitled 'Gender-based violence in the public space in Tunisia' (2014). It showed that '53.5% of women involved in this study of 3,873 women declared that they had suffered some kind of violence in the public space between 2011 and 2015' (Ben Achour 2016: 14). 'Ninety per cent of these women have been submitted to sexual violence in public transport, out of which

78% of them experienced physical violence and 64% psychological violence' (Ibid). On 25 September 2017, the CREDIF launched a campaign in the public transportation system to attract attention to this phenomenon and encourage women to denounce acts of violence in the various means of transport. This campaign encouraged a woman who was victim of sexual harassment by a man on a train to denounce the perpetrator through social media. The campaign and her action launched a debate on the media and the internet.

The engagement of feminist associations and the formation of the National Strategy to Fight Violence against Women in 2008 led to the promulgation on August 2017 of the 'Organic Law to Eliminate Violence against Women'. This law forms part of the global strategy to fight violence against women and includes four main components:

1. The production and use of data to monitor and evaluate violence against women.
2. The creation and improvement of various well-adapted services to care for women victims of violence.
3. A social mobilisation and awareness campaign against violence on women with a view to changing social mentalities, behaviours and institutions.
4. Advocacy designed to reform and apply laws preventing and eradicating violence against women.

This strategy was based on a participatory and inclusive model. Many departments such as the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Women and Family, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs have been involved in the policy adopted to fight violence against women. The decades-long engagement of feminists and associations defending the rights of women, including the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development (AFTURD) and the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD), have succeeded in changing the law and developing the National Strategy to Fight Violence against Women after the revolution. Unfortunately, however, actual practice and

implementation of the law leave much room for improvement.

Case study 4 – Yemeni women and the Arab spring

When demonstrations against Yemen's former regime first began in January 2011, observers were surprised to find that these were organised and led by women. Nobel laureate Tawakkol Karman was only one of many female leaders and participants (Adra 2016; Shakir et al. 2015). Yet Yemeni women's activism has a long history. The first documented example of Yemeni women's activism in modern history occurred in Aden when members of the Aden Women's Club, not satisfied with the club's dressmaking, embroidery and cooking activities, added to the club's agenda social and political discussion and advocacy of women's rights to work. Ironically, this move shocked and disturbed British colonialists. In 1956 the club's members and other women in Aden demonstrated to remove the *hijab* and later participated in anti-colonial demonstrations (Al-Ashtal 2012: 209–211; see also Ahmed 1982). In 1961, students at the British-run secondary school for girls held an eight-month strike which spread to other schools in Aden, to demand curricula of the same academic level as the boys' schools (Al-Ashtal 2012:213). These student demonstrations are believed to have inspired and accelerated the 1962 revolution in the North against the Imamate (Al-Ashtal citing Al – 'Alis 2005:119, n.57).

The armed struggle against British colonialism was actively supported by women in Aden who organised sit-ins in response to British arrests of male nationalist political leaders (Al-Ashtal 2012:217). Rural women, less constrained by urban seclusion and more accustomed to economic and political participation (Adra 2016) took up arms to fight alongside male combatants. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s women's organisations in Aden connected and cooperated with regional and international women's organisations (Al-Ashtal 2012:215–216).

In the North, during the Imamate, 'Atiqa al-Shami established Yemen's first nursing school, and organised a demonstration in 1960 demanding women's rights to education

and work. The Imam's response was to close the school (Al-Ashtal 2012:208). During the civil war, 1962–1969, women working at the textile factory in Sanaa were trained to use weapons to defend the factory against a possible takeover, because the men who worked in this factory had joined active combat. In 1965, the Yemeni Women's Organisation was formed in Taiz. It provided classes in literacy and health as well as discussion of social issues. The organisation expanded to Sanaa where it enjoyed a considerable media presence through newspapers, radio and television programmes. Many of these concerned health and hygiene. Very popular in the 1970s were television shows produced by women that drew attention to political and social abuses including domestic problems (Adra 1996). Women's NGOs proliferated in both North and South Yemen throughout the 1970s and 1980s. With unification in 1990, the major women's organisations of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and North Yemen united into the Yemeni Women's Union and reorganised in 2001–2003 to focus on increasing women's roles in development, legal protection, family guidance, health awareness, and women's economic and political participation (Al-Ashtal 2012:236; interviews with Yemeni activists).

Although women's activism continued in Yemen, growing conservatism in government curtailed many of their gains. In 1990, the Islah Party, an unlikely union of Brotherhood, Wahhabi and Salafi groups, was formed, largely through Saudi funding, in order to counteract the influence of Yemen's Socialist Party. Islah was active in the 1994 civil war and received greater representation in Parliament and the Presidential Council after the war. Due to the growing influence of the Islah party, PDRY's progressive family law was replaced by the 1992 Personal Status Code. This was followed by increasingly regressive amendments in 1997 and 2001. Nevertheless, girls' school enrolment grew exponentially during this period due to International Non-Governmental Organisations's (INGO) interest, and women's visibility in political parties increased due to Yemen's Law of Participation that mandated the inclusion of women in all legally recognised

political parties. In the 2003 elections, 43% of women throughout Yemen voted. Despite improved visibility, however, women still do not hold decision making positions in any political party.

The Arab Spring demonstrations included the largest participation of women in the history of Yemen. Like men, women lived in tent cities in segregated tents. When Islah took charge of the demonstrations, they also segregated the demonstrators and selected vociferous women for public beatings. The women took them to court and won, but Islah's message was clear. Nonetheless, women formed 26 per cent of Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (NDC), four percentage points short of the agreed 30 per cent⁵. Women chaired committees and were influential in the NDC. As Carapico suggests, the NDC drew on 'indigenous precedents and activism' (2014:47; see also Adra 2016). The NDC proposed a draft constitution and 30% representation of women at all levels of government. Unfortunately, the transitional government, organised according to the UN-brokered Gulf Corporation Council agreement, ignored most of NDC's recommendations.

Case study 5 – Egyptian women's mobilisation against violence

The topic of violence against women began to be addressed by Egyptian women activists in the 1990s as a result of preparations for the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and the International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 (Al-Ali 2000). Prior to this, the topic was generally suppressed as it was regarded as relating to family matters and considered a challenge to patriarchal privilege and dominant religious teachings⁶. Women activists drew on international women's rights conventions and increasing international recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation to advocate for legislative reforms criminalising violence against women. Largely

5. It may be useful to compare these numbers with a mere 18 per cent female participation in the United States Congress and 22 per cent in the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

6. For example, Nawal El Saadawi's first book, *Al-mar'awa-l-jins* ('Women and Sex'), which discussed violence against women, was banned when it was published in 1972 and El Saadawi was fired from her position in the Ministry of Health.

as a result of women's activism, the Egyptian government criminalised FGM/FGC (Female Genital Cutting) in 2008.

After 2011, women's activism against violence greatly increased to include not only women's NGOs but also more grassroots and ad hoc mobilisations. This was a direct response to the use of violence, including organised sexualised violence, against women protesters in Tahrir Square (Langohr 2013). As a result of these efforts, sexual harassment and violence against women have now been incorporated into the state feminist agenda, sexual harassment was criminalised for the first time by legal amendments in June 2014 and a number of universities have established anti-sexual harassment units (Pratt 2015).

As a result of the growing authoritarianism since 2013, when the Egyptian army ousted the Muslim Brotherhood president Mohamed Morsi and massacred Muslim Brotherhood supporters, women's activism has largely subsided. High profile women's rights activists Azza Soliman, Mozn Hassan, together with other human rights activists, have been subject to harassment by the authorities under the guise of stopping foreign funding of NGOs. Moreover, women activists have been caught in the political polarisation that has afflicted Egyptian society more broadly. Many women's rights activists have failed to speak out and a few have even supported the state crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, while also neglecting to address the gender-based violence perpetrated by the security forces and police against women affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Case study 6 – Iraqi women's rights activists at the forefront of the struggle against sectarianism & authoritarianism

Set against a background of ongoing conflict, escalating sectarian and criminal violence, lawlessness and corruption, Iraq has experienced a devastating increase in different forms of gender-based violence, including forced marriages, trafficking, forced prostitution, harassment, rape, domestic violence, honour-based crimes and killings as well as Female Genital Mutilation or Cutting. In this context, Iraqi women's rights activists have mobilised across ethnic and religious divides

to address, challenge and stop these various forms of violence. They link the violence happening in the context of armed conflict with violence happening at home. Particularly noteworthy is the Iraqi Women's Network which consists of many groups and organisations across the country that are involved in advocacy, campaigning and lobbying around women's rights and against gender-based violence. Given the failing state, the lack of adequate resources and welfare provisions and the escalating humanitarian crisis, particularly in relation to Iraq's large number of Internally Displaced People (IDP), women's rights organisations have also played an important role in providing services and addressing humanitarian needs. In fact, most organisations are involved in welfare, charity and income-generating projects and services.

Women's rights activists in Iraq have also been at the forefront of challenges to both authoritarianism and corruption in post-invasion Iraq. They have participated in public demonstrations, sit-ins and other events to criticise the ongoing lawlessness, corruption, authoritarianism and incompetence of the Iraqi regime, particularly in relation to the prevailing insecurity. Simultaneously, many Iraqi women's rights activists have been critical of the sectarian policies and attitudes of Islamist organisations, including the various elected Shia-dominated governments. Early on, Iraqi women's rights activists recognised that their struggle against gender-based violence had to be articulated and fought by challenging sectarian policies which utilise women's bodies, mobility and dress codes, as well as wider gender and sexual norms, to demarcate boundaries between 'us versus them'. Shi'a and Sunni Islamist militia and politicians have all instrumentalised gender norms and relations to mobilise support and to signal control over communities. They have forced women to wear 'Islamic dress', tried to limit their ability to move freely and monitored their whereabouts and relationships. While the struggle against sectarianism is essential for the struggle against gender-based violence and forms of discrimination, the reverse is also the case: exiting from sectarian violence requires a gendered approach and a recognition that contestations around prevailing norms of masculinities and

femininities are essential to combatting sectarian politics and violence.

Case study 7 – Turkish and Kurdish feminist activism against patriarchal and state violence

Feminists in Turkey have not only challenged widespread gender-based forms of inequality and gender-based violence but have been at the forefront of challenging and opposing wider political violence, state repression, ethnic and religious discrimination and authoritarianism. The new generation of Turkish feminists diverges radically from earlier generations who were often inspired by nationalist Kemalist ideology that often resulted in patronising attitudes towards their Kurdish counterparts. Many Turkish feminists today are not only critical of the Turkish state and Turkish nationalism, but are in solidarity with Kurdish women's rights activists who have experienced different forms of exclusion and state violence for decades.

As discussed earlier, the Kurdish women's movement, linked to the wider Kurdish political movement associated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey and transnationally, is explicitly intersectional in approach. Kurdish women's rights activists have defied and struggled against Turkish state violence, political authoritarianism and repression, while also challenging patriarchy and gender-based injustices within their own communities and movement. Both Turkish and Kurdish feminists stress the significance of a 'continuum of violence', not only before, during and after violent conflict, but also linking the increased militarisation of society, growing political authoritarianism and the privileging of militarised masculinities, which tend to go hand in hand with conservative gender norms and various forms of marginalisation of women. Political authoritarianism and violent government repression has increased even further following the failed military coup in July 2016. President Erdogan has instrumentalised the post-coup period to push through a presidential political system through a narrowly won referendum, eradicated all forms of opposition by detaining political activists, MPs and journalists, and fired thousands of teachers, academics, lawyers, judges and police.

Meanwhile, and despite the repressive political context, a growing and strong LGBTQ movement is refusing sexual identity politics. Rather, its approach to sexual orientation and gender identity is more intersectional and closely aligned with the feminist movement in Turkey. In other words, LGBTQ activists in Turkey, by and large, seem to reject a liberal rights-based and identity politics that involves an exclusive focus on their sexualities and gender. The close cooperation between the feminist and LGBTQ movement in Turkey have contributed to their significant role in facing up to the state's political authoritarianism and diverse forms of state violence.

Case study 8 – The Palestinian women's movement: struggling on two fronts

Palestinian women have a long history of activism resisting Israeli violence and dispossession, within historic Palestine and in exile. As discussed above, they have participated alongside men and within the framework of the Palestinian national movement. In addition, women have established their own organisations, often focused on providing welfare, social services, relief work and community development. Although some women have been involved in violent resistance, most have participated in non-violent forms, such as protests and boycotts.

Israeli settler colonial dispossession and violence has had a direct impact on women. As in other violent conflicts, women are especially affected by the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including home demolitions, which places additional pressures on them in their roles as carers for the home and family. The Israeli checkpoint and closure system and the siege on Gaza further exacerbate these pressures, whilst Israeli laws and regulations governing Palestinian residence rights preclude a normal family life for many Palestinians (Middle East Monitor 2015). Palestinian women living in refugee camps, particularly in Lebanon where Palestinians are particularly vulnerable, also face the challenges resulting from poverty, overcrowding and lack of basic services. The difficulties faced by Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian Territory and in exile render women more exposed to violence perpetrated

by men in their communities and also make it more difficult to speak out against this violence for fear of feeding into an Israeli discourse that characterises Palestinians as 'backward' and 'uncivilised'. Nevertheless, since the 1990s, coinciding with the signing of the Oslo Accords and the establishment of a Palestinian Authority for the first time in parts of historic Palestine, Palestinian women's organisations have also struggled to end violence against women perpetrated by Palestinian men. Palestinian feminists generally put forward an intersectional concept of violence, which perceives the violence perpetrated within the home as linked to the violence of the Israeli occupation and dispossession (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009).

After the signing of the Oslo Accords, many Palestinian women's organisations participated in people-to-people dialogues with Israeli women's organisations as part of the wider peace process. These were fraught with tension as Palestinian women wished to address not only women's rights but also the Israeli occupation and Israeli violations, whereas Israeli women only wanted to focus on women's rights and shared experiences of patriarchy rather than 'political issues' (Richter-Devroe 2009; Sharoni 1995). In the context of the Second Intifada and the massive violence perpetrated by Israel against Palestinian civilians, Palestinian civil society announced an end to people-to-people dialogues and other normalisation initiatives. Many Palestinian women activists and women's organisations, including the General Union of Palestinian Women, support the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement as a means of pressuring Israel to end apartheid rule and its ongoing dispossession of Palestinians.

Case study 9 – Female suicide bombers in Palestine and Iraq.

Women have only recently been involved in suicide bombings in Palestine and Iraq, with the first female suicide bombing in Palestinian Territories in 2002. In general, women average 15% of suicide bombings⁷. Although their number is currently growing around the

world, this is chiefly due to the actions of the Nigerian group Wilāyat Gharb Ifriqiyah and not to suicide bombings in MENA. The framework for action and the issues at stake, such as they are presented in the testimonials of female suicide bombers, or would-be bombers, are clearly political (Larzillière 2017). Indeed, Palestinian women who have been incarcerated and charged with planning suicide bombings have voiced their political motivations and rejected the notion of a personal crisis or external pressure, which they could have used as 'justifications' (Latte – Abdallah 2013 : 23). In Palestine, they stress how women are to become involved in the struggle⁸. Gender issues are thus manifest in this context, which are directly addressed in the women's statements. Furthermore, women who have dropped out of planned bombings have also discussed how hard it is within the organisations to gain the same levels of respect as men for their political engagement. Some even cite this as a reason for not having gone through with the act⁹. Several Palestinian women claim to have been turned away by one group and gone to contact another one. The organisations themselves have drawn specific lines addressing the engagement of women and men in bombings. Hamas, for instance, has changed its position: after initially ruling out women's participation, it began sending them into action in 2004, possibly because women were subject to less stringent controls at checkpoints. This appears to have been a decisive factor in Iraq (Speckhard 2009). While women's suicide bombings remain highly marginal, they do attract particular media attention (Campana 2014), most comments focussing on the suicide bombers' gender, which completely alters popular perceptions of suicide

7. From 1980 to 2003, according to data from Robert Pape (2005). This percentage is, however, currently increasing.

8. Dar in Abu Eische, a twenty-one year-old woman who blew herself up on 27 February 2002 in an operation for which the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade claimed responsibility, said in her personal statement: 'the role of Palestinian women will no longer be confined to grieving the death of their husbands, brothers or fathers; we will turn our bodies into human bombs and demolish the Israeli people's illusion of security' (Larzillière 2017).

9. According to Arin Ahmed, for example, who decided not to set off her bomb and was arrested in 2002: 'I expected some training and questions about why I wanted to kill and die. Instead of which they told me I was going to join my fiancé in paradise. An idea that even at that time I found completely stupid' (Bennet 2002).

bombings (Brunner 2006; Rajan, 2012). As a consequence, political motives are set aside, irrespective of what the women say in their statements, and the focus immediately turns to motives of a more personal nature or the idea of escaping a life of patriarchal subordination. Evidence is sought to reveal a personal crisis: this woman was divorced; that one could not have children; another had been a victim of sexual violence and was defending her family's honour, and so on. This does not mean that such crises and situations play no part in the decision to commit a suicide bombing, but personal situations and family crises are patently highlighted when the bombers are women and brushed aside when they are men. Whatever the available data, this trend towards 'gendered-cultural' explanations can be widely observed in media coverage of suicide bombings. They point out that such actions appear doubly transgressive when committed by women. In addition to the transgression manifested by sacrificial violence, a gender-specific transgression is signalled, namely that women, usually seen as victims or peacemakers in times of war, are playing the opposite role as perpetrators of political violence (Brunner 2006: 29; Dauphin and Farge 1997; Larzillière 2017; Sjoberg and Gentry 2007).

Women in diasporic communities in non-Muslim majority countries

Middle East and North African countries are not isolated and should not be portrayed as such. Indeed, it is important not to consider them as independent cultural areas but to take into account the wider context of their long relationship with western countries, in particular with regards to the history of violence and the social history of activism within MENA. As a case in point, gender-based representations are central to western hegemonic narratives regarding both the populations of MENA and diasporic communities. In Muslim minority contexts, that is in the diaspora, the situation of women of Middle Eastern background is fraught with discrimination, prejudice and hostility. Women from MENA living in western countries belong to minority populations differentiated by their ethnicity and religion. They have to steer through the complex interconnections between their

cultural and religious groups and wider society, as well as contend with the numerous obstacles thrown in the path of their autonomy and activism within each of these three main spheres of life (July 2016). In addition, these women face accusations of disloyalty sprung upon them both by their majority societies and their own communities.

They perceive their ethnic groups, in which they were first socialised, with ambivalence, as sources of both restriction and support. Although most value their closeness to the immediate family, the extended family and the community are considered restrictive, with norms grounded in patriarchal traditions. Consequently, the women contest any authority claimed by the community, invariably led by older men, that interferes with their plans - whether to pursue education, undertake employment or become involved in civic and political life. The patriarchal pattern displayed by the ethnic community tends to be replicated in the Muslim sphere whereby mosques and Muslim associations are dominated by men who control power to the exclusion of women. Moreover, collusion can occur whereby elder men, leaders of ethnic or Muslim associations are treated as privileged interlocutors by governmental entities, thus excluding women from policy making.

Within majority society, the women are faced with the increased prejudice and constraints inflicted on Muslims in the wake of the September 2011 events in New York, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and terrorist attacks in several countries. Therefore, MENA women suffer from multiple disadvantages, on racial and religious grounds, on gender grounds and in connection with specific stereotypes to which they are subject, portraying them as passive, submissive and uninterested in civic and political life. Obstacles to their engagement have crystallised around two major themes in Britain and France, respectively the securitisation of Islam and that of national identity, while both issues arise throughout the western world with diverse emphases. The legislative and cultural counterpart to the 'War on Terror' in Britain has been the onslaught on women's Islamic dress in France, with the full force of the state being deployed. However, state

policy has also spurred Muslim women to enter the public arena, for instance in Britain, through their participation in anti-war campaigns and in France, their mobilisation against the 2004 law which prohibited headscarves in schools.

Within this adverse context, MENA women have developed their capacity of action and elaborated a repertoire of strategies to pursue their life projects and engage in civic and political life. While not ignoring conventional political channels (notoriously less accessible to women in general), they favour civil associations as their main domain of action. MENA women tended to create their own Muslim associations or ethnic based support groups outside men's control, and they built or joined neighbourhood and locally based associations. The 21st century has witnessed the multiplication of a great variety of such associations. These organisations provide social welfare, legal and other services, according to their members'/clients' needs. Thereby, the women express a keen interest in attending to diverse social issues on a national or international scale: gender inequality, ethnic/racial discrimination and Islamophobia, poverty, social inequality and human rights. For those who are believers, Islam represents a powerful motivator of engagement, linking politics and ethics. It is held up as a source of values, an ethical guide for the conduct of their actions over and above traditional ethnic norms and provides many of the women concerned with responses to demands for loyalty from both their ethnic groups and majority society¹⁰.

Case study 10 – Negotiations in the family/ community in the diaspora in Britain

A large population of Muslim background settled in the UK after World War II, mostly from the Indian subcontinent and those immigrants were subsequently joined by populations from MENA. Their mode of social organisation has taken the form of ethnic groups within a multicultural framework and, to an extent, they have continued

to follow practices that obtained in their countries of origin. A good number of women from such communities, especially those who are educated and have grown up in the UK, readily recognise the intersection between the modes of socialisation in their countries of origin and the country they live in. The women comment on a certain kind of patriarchal model and its power relations which subordinates women to men, in general, and to elder men in particular through a complex hierarchy that ranks people according to their place in the immediate and extended family. Women of Muslim background frequently blame their community for many of the constraints they face. They comment on the community's influence in highly concentrated ethnic neighbourhoods and strongly object to the community's interference in decisions that affect their lives (Joly 2016b). Moreover, the women are aware not only of the obstacles to their autonomy within their immediate social environment but also of the role of British politicians who often reinforce patriarchal modes in order to secure ethnic communities' votes. Such a collusion is predicated on western prejudices regarding Muslim women who find themselves caught up between community domination and wider society's orientalist tendencies, confining them to the home and child care rather than facilitating their participation in the public arena. Meanwhile, the prominence of Islam in the public realm has led Muslim women to examine religious practice within the community and apprehend the closely enmeshed cultural and religious dimensions involved. Consequently, they must overcome myriad barriers in order to further their aspirations to engage in civic and political initiatives. These women demonstrate dynamism and creativity as they chart out an assortment of strategies in complex combinations to achieve their goals of more extensive participation in the public arena and engagement in civic and political initiatives. Their strategies include *confrontation* and radical breaks with family and/or community (although this is not widespread) alongside *cooperation* with the full approval of the family, for example in the pursuit of higher studies. The most frequent option is compromise that allows women to gain some autonomy without necessarily breaking with

10. Data drawn from a large ESRC research project (award reference: RES-062-23-0380), led by Danièle Joly and Khurshed Wadia. See the publication arising from the project: Danièle Joly and Khurshed Wadia (2017) *Muslim women and power* London: Palgrave MacMillan.

their family or community: thus some women may agree to take on the entire responsibility of the home, the care of children and perhaps parents-in-law as a ticket to their outside involvement. Women may adopt a *lateral* strategy, circumventing obstacles without losing sight of objectives; this could mean postponing an arranged marriage in order to buy time to consolidate their bargaining power through studying and gaining employment. Within the community, women may form or join women's associations rather than attempting to wrench the control of mosques and ethnic associations from male leaders. Some women wishing to challenge ethnic traditions often denounce them in the name of Islam to which all Muslim communities purportedly adhere: they then quote sacred texts in order to claim the right to choose their husbands, pursue their studies, earn a living or participate in the public arena. This *reversal* strategy turns the tables against the system from within. In short, women choose modes of negotiation according to their evaluation of the strategy most likely to succeed with the least emotional and/or material cost.

Case study 11 – Mobilisation of women from Muslim communities in the UK and in France

The UK military intervention in Iraq

The 11th September 2001 (9/11) events in New York and the 7 July 2005 (7/7) suicide bombs in the London transportation system spread fear among Muslim communities in the UK and generated enhanced suspicion and hostility towards Muslims. They also produced unexpected consequences in terms of Muslim women's opportunities to participate in the public arena. Muslim communities' leaders, mostly older men who were accredited government interlocutors, kept a low profile and initially failed to protest against Britain's military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Muslim women, hitherto kept back by most community leaders, thus found a window of opportunity to engage in political action through the Stop the War Coalition (Stop the War). They seized upon this opening, motivated by a heightened sense of outrage at what they considered an unjust war. A young Muslim woman rapidly rose to lead Stop the War, and many more followed as active members, participants in

demonstrations and/or secretaries of local branches. In this instance, some sectors of British society acted against gender and ethnic stereotypes, according Muslim women a place in a movement where Muslim men would normally have been expected to dominate. It is worth mentioning that Stop the War (and the British Marxist left active in this movement) extended its full support to Muslims and their claims on the grounds that they were at the receiving end of discrimination in British society: such a position facilitated the participation of Muslim women, including hijab wearing women. The 7/7 suicide bombs in London's trains and bus further contributed to the expansion of Muslim women's participation in the public domain. Politicians so far had not shown an interest in reaching out to Muslim women, probably on account of western prejudices about the passivity of Muslim women and their presumed disinterest in politics. The 7/7 events were a wake-up call, confronting British society and the polity with urgent demands for a response. The fresh involvement of Muslim women in political activism prompted the government to develop policies designed to harness Muslim women's participation in the fight against terrorism, on the assumption that they could constitute a moderate, peaceful element in their communities. A number of Muslim women were invited to consultation forums, and funding was awarded to their associations through the Prevent Programme which, although very controversial, boosted Muslim women's associations. This enabled a number of Muslim women's organisations to take their projects forward with an exponential development of activism among Muslim women, alongside the multiplication of their associations. As a result, the British government's 'War on Terror' and its military intervention in Iraq alongside the USA elicited an upsurge of mobilisation among women of Muslim background and encouraged their active participation to challenge violence at home and abroad.

Dress code restrictions in France

In France, the 9/11 events were superseded by the debate over women's Islamic dress, placing women of Muslim background on the frontlines of anti-Islam legislation.

Since 2002, right-wing politicians were set on a course to seduce voters away from the Front National, largely on an anti-Muslim ticket; right wing parties followed suite, and left-wing politicians broadly failed to challenge this agenda. The legislative parallel to the 'War on terror' in the UK has been the onslaught against Muslim women's dress code in France in the name of *laïcité*. Many women from Muslim communities denounce the ideology that underpins a reinterpreted *laïcité* and its instrumentalisation by politicians. Moreover, those women find that displaying visible markers of their faith precludes or hinders their engagement in public institutions. The legislative apparatus banned the headscarf in schools in 2004 and from the entire public employment sector in 2007 (thus barring women who wear headscarves from 30% of the employment sector). In 2010, a law forbidding face concealment in all public spaces including the streets was put in place at the same time as the launching of a national identity official debate designed to exclude Muslims (July 2017b). These legislative and societal moves have had a significant impact on Muslim women's capacity of action. Although the full range of potential participatory opportunities is formally open (if not always in practice on account of multiple discrimination) to women who do not choose to wear distinctive signs of their faith, a good number of participatory avenues are closed to those who deem it important to wear a *hijab*. Their predicament has been compounded by the fact that a majority of the feminist movement supports those dress code restrictions. Although some women of Muslim background adopt a secular/*laïc* outlook, the 2004 Law banning the headscarf at school fostered widespread mobilisation among women from Muslim communities, such as the Collectif Une école pour tous-tes, campaigning against the banning of the *hijab* at school which staged various forms of protests and demonstrations. This movement stood on an anti-discrimination platform and in the name of freedom of choice for the preservation of democratic freedom. In some schools, mothers who wore a headscarf were not allowed to accompany their children on school outings on account of the 2012 Luc Chatel Circulaire. This

resulted into a great deal of arbitrary negative decisions on the parts of school heads and generated the mobilisation of mothers' groups, one of which won a significant court case restoring their rights (Kassir and Reitz 2016). Those movements assembled a good number of women of Muslim background, bringing together believers and non-believers to defend the right of all women to participate in education and in public institutions.

Transnational perspectives

MENA countries are not isolated and should not be portrayed as such. Indeed, it is important not to consider them as independent cultural regions but to take into account the wider context of their long relationship with western countries. This is especially true with regard to the history of violence and the social history of activism within MENA. One dimension of this relationship concerns diasporic communities whose situation is increasingly perceived by host countries solely through the prism of securitisation. Transnational and global perspectives are especially important for a gendered approach since gender-based representations are central to western hegemonic narratives about the populations of MENA countries and diasporic communities. The circulation of these narratives is part of the context surrounding the activists. One counterpart to this kind of hegemonic transnationalism has been the development of transnational feminist solidarity and activism as well as the evolution of international law concerning women and violence generated by this solidarity.

Transnational women's activism to end violence

There is a long history of women's activism against war and violence, including solidarity with women in conflict zones. A very important international women's movement is the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILFP), which has campaigned against war and militarism since the First World War. This movement brings a specific gender dimension to transnational solidarity, promoting women's rights and women's voices as part of calls for peace. In recent years, WILFP has worked with Syrian women to lobby for their inclusion in peace talks.

Yet, transnational feminist solidarity with women in MENA has had a troubled history. In the colonial era, European and North American feminists failed to stand in solidarity with women resisting colonialism and took a patronising attitude towards women living in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America. During the Cold War, the international women's movement was divided along East-West and North-South lines. Western feminists emphasised issues of women's legal equality, whereas the USSR promoted a 'peace' agenda, prioritising women's struggle against imperialism and capitalism, perceived as the main causes of women's oppression. The Soviet agenda resonated with women in the Global South, including women's movements in MENA, many of which were still struggling against European colonialism or neo-colonialism and economic dependency. Indeed, women's conferences during the Cold War witnessed sharp divisions between western feminists, who resisted what they regarded as the 'politicisation' of women's issues, and women in the Global South, who believed that western feminists were trying to universalise their concerns around legal equality and sexual politics and, in so doing, were ignoring the very important issues of economic inequality and imperialism faced by women in the Global South. In particular, the U.S. and its allies resisted discussion of the question of Palestine and the role of Israel in perpetrating violence against Palestinian women (Ghodsee 2010; Moghadam 2005: 85).

Since the end of the Cold War, the western feminist agenda has become hegemonic, as illustrated by the Beijing UN Women's Conference in 1995. Nonetheless, Beijing and other UN conferences have provided important opportunities for women in MENA to join transnational networks seeking to promote women's rights, primarily through the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Moghadam 2005). Much of transnational women's activism has been dedicated to ending violence against women in its different manifestations. In MENA, many women's organisations took up this issue (discussed in some of the previous case studies), bringing violence against women into

public discourse for the first time. However, in so doing, they have had to navigate between western discourses that characterise violence against women in the Middle East as a marker of backwardness, on the one hand (Abu-Lughod 2013) and, on the other hand, local discourses that seek to deny or minimise the problem, or even justify it in the name of protecting national sovereignty. Western feminist discourses have often undermined, rather than supported, MENA women's activism in this regard by reproducing a culturalist discourse that blames violence against women in the Middle East solely as a product of religion and culture (Mohanty 1991).

Activism and international law: United Nations Security Council resolutions

Women rights' activism and movements worldwide have pressured the UN into adopting resolutions on women and violence with some success. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was the first United Nations resolution to mention women, the first Security Council legal document requiring parties in conflict to prevent and avoid gender-based violence against women, express support for women's participation in peace negotiations, respect local women's peace initiatives, and consider the needs of women refugees. WILFP, that had lobbied for years for such a resolution, and other women's organisations hailed this resolution for inserting discussion of women on the Security Council agenda. Others, on the other hand, justly criticised the resolution for essentialising women and for failing to recognise women's victimisation as a tool of war tied to wider forms of exclusion and violence (Pratt 2013; Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011, 2013).

A review of UNSCR 1325's implementation record was conducted in 2015 at the request of the Security Council and the Secretary General. Among the problems noted in this review is the lack of a legal instrument to prosecute peacekeeping forces or others accused of sexual crimes against women (Coomaraswamy 2015:14–15). In response to criticism, UNSCR 242 was adopted to improve implementation and increase the allocation of peace-building funds devoted to gender equality projects. Despite 242 and

subsequent resolutions, however, the Security Council remains selective in the inclusion of women. For example, women are less likely to be mentioned in resolutions that involve Saudi Arabia. Peace negotiations on the current conflict in Yemen have not included the active engagement of women who would have spoken for themselves. Women who have been incorporated represent political parties, and they have not been permitted to negotiate together in the same room with men. NGOs have not failed to indict 'International actors and regional governments [are] failing to follow through on gender equality and on embedding the principles of resolution 1325 in humanitarian response paradigms' (Oxfam 2017:89). Another problem is that UN Security Council resolutions are not legally binding, which severely reduces their effectiveness in implementing change (Hafner-Burton et al. 2015).

On the other hand, the UN review noted several perceived successes, including 'the adoption of a comprehensive normative framework with regard to sexual violence in conflict', a better understanding of the importance of national and communal healing post conflict, more mention of women in peace agreements, and a greater number of senior women leaders in the United Nations (Coomaraswamy 2015:13–14). Proponents add that the resolutions' language has provided tools for INGOs and women's organisations to pressure governments to address and support issues pertaining to women's security and human rights. Some 69 countries have developed National Action Plans to implement UNSCR 1325. Many argue that more women have been included in peace negotiations since the resolution's ratification. Even lacking legal 'teeth', women's organisations can leverage a 'shame' factor in lobbying national actors and political parties for women's representation in peace building. The resolutions insert an element of fear in governing bodies that would prefer not to come under scrutiny in case a problem or situation within their jurisdiction receives media attention. For instance, although Yemeni activists interviewed complain bitterly that UNSCR 1325 cannot be enforced, they see the resolution as providing standards for local leaders to emulate. For them, knowing

that an international organisation has taken a moral stance on behalf of victims has been empowering (Adra 2013b and interviews with activists 2013–2018).

Transnational solidarity remains flawed, however, insofar as it is largely limited to western INGOs providing funding to a selection of national NGOs in MENA and other countries of the Global South for programmes and projects that fulfil international geopolitical agendas but do not necessarily support local needs. Moreover, western INGOs, who are often dependent upon their respective governments' funding, limit their solidarity to gender-specific issues and, unlike the anti-war movement or WILPF are often reluctant to criticise wider structural causes of war and violence, which may be linked to their own governments' foreign policies. More recently, there have been more grassroots initiatives, such as the One Billion Rising movement against sexual violence, in which some women in MENA have participated.

Women in Muslim majority countries

Women in Muslim contexts have engaged in transnational feminist activism (Balchin 2012) and challenged stereotypes related to the engagement of women in Muslim communities. For example, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) is an international solidarity network founded in the mid-1980s by women activists and linking women across 70 countries from South Africa to Uzbekistan, Senegal to Fiji (Shaheed 1994). Another group, Musawah, is a transnational movement for equality and justice in Muslim families, formally launched in 2009 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with over 270 participants from 47 countries. It campaigns for equality between men and women in the family and for equal and fully-fledged citizenship rights, including total participation in all aspects of social life (Musawah 2009). Both initiatives have scored a fair amount of success through their mobilisation (Balchin 2012). Many other examples of women's activism can be cited. In Iraqi Kurdistan, women have achieved progress in the promotion of their rights and obtained the promulgation of 'The Act of Combatting Domestic Violence in Kurdistan Region-Iraq' (Act No 8 2011) (Al Ali and Pratt 2011, Joly and Bakawan

2016, Hardi 2013). In Tunisia, women have mobilised to revise the law on violence against women (Ben Achour 2016). In Israel, women actively take part in the peace movement. Following a different scenario, Kurdish women in Syria contribute to the development of the societal project to combat the threat of massacre and enslavement by the so-called Islamic State: they are dynamic participants in the political arena, regularly holding positions of leadership, and some have joined the armed struggle on a par with men.

Diasporic communities: Relationship to Islam and activism

In the diaspora, women's activism encompasses a wide range of causes straddling borders and territories in connection with their family's countries of origin or to the MENA region and beyond. They focus on issues of social justice and human rights and combat discrimination based on ethnic, class, national, religious and gender criteria, among others. The tensions surrounding Islam and Muslim communities warrant an examination of women's relationships to Islam within their communities, which do not necessarily correspond to those obtaining in Muslim majority countries. As members of Muslim minority communities, those women are subject to the widespread discrimination affecting Muslims, prejudices and hostility against Islam and accusations of disloyalty levelled at them both by majority societies and their own communities. Women's relationship to Islam is relevant when examining their activism because it largely informs their modes, themes and sites of engagement in civic and political arenas, whether they are believers or not. These women, from a variety of countries of origin, display a complex relationship with Islam and a good number of similarities across Europe as testified by recent research (Joly and Wadia 2017).

In the first place, these women denounce Jihadist and terrorist acts. Barring very rare exceptions, non-believers and believers alike voice total condemnation of terrorism. Moreover, believers tend to emphasise that terrorist acts transgress the letter and spirit of Islam. A diversified set of positions can be discerned. A number of women reject or simply discard religious identification. This category comprises

four types: women who hold a philosophical/ideological stance opposed to religion, such as atheists or Marxists; women whose main objections to religion relate to gender equality as they deem that Islam intrinsically allocates women an inferior, dominated position; women who declare themselves 'political' Muslims against discrimination and Islamophobia; and finally, women who are not religious but wish to be recognised as 'cultural' Muslims. The latter reclaim Islam as cultural heritage and display a secularised relationship to their religion. This whole tranche of Muslim women is active in a variety of initiatives across wider society and sometimes in their respective ethnic groups but they are likely to remain unconnected to any religious reference except when they oppose Islam or defend Muslims against religious discrimination. Their involvement tends to focus on issues of social justice and on gender-related questions.

Women who are religious widely quote Islam as an ethical guide and inspiration for action while offering differentiated profiles. One group of women follows religion in an individualised manner, their Islam being based on a personal relationship with God, some of them pursuing a personal spiritual quest while developing research into their religion. This group includes women from different branches and schools of Islam who may participate in wider society's initiatives and also join or create Muslim women's study groups. Two other groups of believers search for authenticity and proceed to criticise Islam from within, from an Islamic viewpoint: one set of women opposes comprehensive prescriptions and technical instructions from political reformist branches of Islam while the other aims to divest Islam of ethnic traditions, both seeking alternative insights to the prevalent Islamist agenda which they do not hesitate to defy because they perceive it as interpreted by men and for men. As many of those women assess political reformist Islam as an instrument of control over people, women taking the brunt of most constraints, only few engage with Islamist movements. Others who establish a distinction between what they call 'cultural' or 'traditional' Islam and the Islam they embrace, cast off an Islam which in their view is steeped with customs

dressed up as religious injunctions with the purpose of better controlling women. They espouse an Islam they deem 'genuine', dissociated from ethnic traditions and thus generally avoid participation in Muslim community institutions dominated by tradition and patriarchy. Hence, Islam is seized as a lever of emancipation since they deem that religious values hold a higher moral ground than traditional norms and the women call upon sacred texts against forced marriages, polygamy, excision, the separation of sexes in public arenas or quote them to defend the right to education and the control of their earnings. One objective pursued by these women is to overcome community constraints so that they can participate in the public arena and in civic and political projects. This critical position also enables them to maintain links with their families and origins while distancing themselves from oppressive traditions, some of these women finding in Islam a solution to the complex negotiation between their countries of origin and their participation in their western society. For these women, Islam seems to provide a response to an identity and a loyalty dilemma, a response that overcomes the 'hostage' position discussed above (Lamrabet 2012).

A good number of women prioritise the ethical message in Islam and many emphasise its humanist vocation through a double ethical and universalist aspiration. In the main, religious women hold Islam as a source of values and an ethical guide for the conduct of their actions, which play a significant role in the meaning of their engagement and the themes pursued. This engagement may be exercised in wider society and/or within the Muslim arena according to the opportunities available, which are conditioned respectively by the legislative framework or male community control. These women's activism encompasses a wide range of causes that straddles borders and territories with regard to their countries of residence and/or to MENA and beyond.

Conclusion: Exiting from violence, a holistic gendered approach

This chapter argues that a holistic gendered approach is necessary to analyse both violence and exiting from violence as parts of a continuum of violence straddling all spheres of social life. This continuum includes transnational and intersectional dimensions. It is important to reiterate that overcoming violence relies on addressing issues of inequality across the board, including socioeconomic inequality based on gender, class, race, ethnicity and/or religion as well as guaranteeing human rights for all, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, nationality, religion and class. As our report illustrates, for women, exiting from violence cannot simply be equated with ending armed conflict but needs to address specific gender-based violence as well as underlying structural forms of violence and injustice. It means redressing both gender inequality and marginalisation and other forms of exclusion during and outside conflict.

Militarisation, often rooted in poverty, unemployment and the unequal distribution of resources, negatively impacts women as well as men. Violent conflict directly affects women's security, livelihoods and capacities to care for their families. Militarisation also justifies male violence in all its forms within and outside the home. It reinforces and legitimises the identification of men and strength with violence, demeaning nonviolent men and women and subverting norms that might otherwise protect women and children.

Women compose broadly 50% of the populations in all societies, a cogent reason to include women's participation at all levels of peace building. It is also argued that women often provide alternative perspectives to men's due to differences in gender roles. Women's networks are important resources to inform on and deal with social relations, community tensions, sources of extremism as well as the flow of small arms and light weapons (Shakir 2015:26). These networks can be crucial to the success of efforts to exit from violence.

Women activists are important contributors to exiting from violence. Women's activism takes place in a variety of geographical arenas that interact and cross-fertilise, including a

transnational framework of women in MENA and among Muslim and Middle Eastern women in diaspora who challenge diverse structures of domination and inequalities and work towards ensuring social justice.

Consequently, strategies for exiting from violence require a reconceptualisation of both violence and peace from a gendered perspective. They involve the recognition, support and inclusion of women's activism, organisations and initiatives. Despite these persuasive arguments, women are not often represented in national or local peacekeeping efforts. This means that it is important to advocate for the meaningful involvement of women at all levels of peace building including regional, national and international negotiations as well as local mediation.

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