International Panel on Exiting Violence

CHAPTER 9

GENDERED APPROACH TO VIOLENCE
& EXITING VIOLENCE: MENA REGION
AND DIASPORA

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Gendered Approach to Violence & Exiting Violence: MENA Region and Diaspora

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INTRODUCTION: GENDERED APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE

This chapter presents a gendered approach to understanding violence and ways of exiting violence. Gendered approaches to war and violence conceptualize and understand these phenomena in distinct ways. First, gendered approaches emphasize the importance of studying violence not only in the public sphere but also in the private sphere and understanding the ways they are linked. Second, gendered approaches highlight the differential impacts of violence on women and men because of dominant gender relations, norms, and identities. Third, gendered approaches conceptualize peace as rooted in a social justice perspective, including gender justice, and as 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 male dominance enables the exercise of violence across a variety of contexts, which, in turn, reproduces and normalizes dominant notions of masculinity as associated with violence. Meanwhile, non-violence is associated with women and stigmatized 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. 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, they are disproportionately affected by shortages in food, medicine, and other essential items and by the worsening 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 stigmatized and/or are obliged to masculinize their behaviour in order to be accepted. Equally, men who refuse to fight are stigmatized 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 understands that gender inequality is intertwined 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 violence emphasizes 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 bring about social justice, including gender justice, ending gender-based violence, removing all structural inequalities, and guaranteeing women's equal access to resources. In this respect, this chapter highlights the important work of women in ending violence through their activism against different forms of injustice and inequalities underpinning violence, including, but not limited to, struggling against gender inequality.

Nevertheless, it is equally important not to romanticize women's agency or to essentialize 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 chapter stresses the importance of going beyond binaries of perpetrator/victim, active/passive, and/or agency/victimhood when discussing women (and men) and their experiences of violence and contributions toward exiting violence. The discussion also challenges dichotomous thinking and approaches when it comes to the root causes for violence, moving away from the tendency either to provide culturalist explanations, pointing either to Islam or Middle East culture, or to adopt those frameworks that merely highlight the impact of colonial, imperialist and global neoliberal interventions as the reasons for "women's oppression".

Finally, our 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, the large scale of labour and forced migration, and significant social and economic ties between MENA and Europe, it is important to conceptualize 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 radicalization and Islamophobia in Europe have led to the securitization and criminalization of immigrant communities of MENA background. Thus, strategies for exiting violence in MENA must also include strategies for exiting violence against and within diasporic communities.

The continuum of violence

Conceptualizing 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), and domestic violence, as well as various forms of sexualized violence (Cockburn 2001). Moreover, gendered violence exists both during periods of overt warfare and conflict as well as in post-conflict contexts and during peace times. This does not detract from the fact that there are peaks of exacerbated violence during certain periods. 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 militarized masculinities, which are prevalent in times of war and peace.

With respect to terminology, gendered violence, 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), can lead to psychological, economic, physical, or sexual harm. However, men can also be victims of gender-based violence, which is 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 sexualized,

unwanted, and committed without consent; it includes sexual harassment, which has become prevalent in many countries in the region. Sexual violence can 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 refer only to women and the instrumentalization and control of women's bodies and sexualities, but also to men and 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 are 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", to consolidate the authority of specific political actors or attempts to "break" the opposition (Al-Ali & Pratt 2016: 130). This trend is noticeable in the context of ethnic and sectarian conflicts in which communities instrumentalize 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 historicize violence, avoid essentializing culture and religion, and apply a political economy and intersectional approach to violence, recognizing 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. However, it is important to take into account equally references to colonial legacies and imperialist interventions, on the one hand, 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 and 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, but also attempts to address sensitive taboo subjects, such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, honour-based crimes and killings, as well as reproductive rights. Significantly, in recent years the mobilization 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 toward and Involving Women

At any given historical time, different forms of violence have had an 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, militias, armed gangs, Islamist organizations, and tribes, but also the general public, colleagues, family, and friends, are 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 included 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, this violence does not emerge in a vacuum, given the long history of gender-based violence by Islamist groups. Meanwhile, secular militias and armed and criminal gangs are also rampant and are 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. In war times, rape is often used as a weapon. This form of gender-based violence is used not only 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 and the rape and torture of Ezidi 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 more of a 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 tribal, communal, religious, and family contexts and prevailing gender norms. These range from early and forced marriages and honour-based crimes and killings to female genital mutilation (FGM). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that neither culture nor religion are static, nor can they be analysed in an essentialized manner. Instead, they are contingent on 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, at the hands of 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 workplace, and the home are sites in which women experience different forms of harassment outside of 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 "feminization of poverty" in several countries. The transition 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 well as other regions in the world. Privatization 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 here 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, all of which increase 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 institutionalized sectarianism has contributed to gender-based violence, as women are perceived to be barriers of both ethnic and religious communities as witnessed among Kurds, Berbers, Ezidis, and so on.

Furthermore, women are facing a number of legal challenges. Historically, one of the most debated sets of laws with gendered implications in the region 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.

Case Study1–Yemen: Impact of external intervention on violence in a domestic environment.
Case Study2– The Turkish-Kurdish conflict: Intersections of state-based and patriarchal Violence.

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 of 1958[1] in Algiers, which marked the politicization 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 & Wadia 2017). These representations pertain to colonial and postcolonial history, and to a neo-orientalist imaginary. They tend to reify and culturalize gender domination: Muslim women become, all at once, 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 naturalized through hegemonic processes, discarding situational heterogeneities in Muslim-majority countries or diasporas as well as the historicization of prevailing gender norms. Moreover, the situation of women in Muslim-majority countries has also been used as an argument for 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 inscribing women's struggle for their rights in Afghanistan within a transnational

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1. On May 13, 1958, an unveiling ceremony for Algerian women was organised. Under pressure from partisans of French Algeria and to support 'French fraternity', the women were invited to publicly unveil on the Algiers Forum (Shepard 2004, Gaspard 2006)

narrative and "a narrative about interventions as necessary measures" (Koloma Beck 2018).

These representations affect current Western policies on Muslim populations, but they do 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, glossing over national power configurations and forms of oppression and running the risk of undermining national feminist activists. It works as a parameter within an intersectional approach. The instrumentalization 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 racialization intersect. Struggles for women's rights have often been reinterpreted within the context of this power relationship with the West. Lamrabet (2012) thus refers to a "hostage" problematic. Hence, opponents of the struggle for women's rights have deemed the movement 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 instrumentalize or perceive as a collusion with imperialist powers. A type of confiscation of struggles for women's rights thus operates in the form of a minority/majority or hegemonic relation.

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 a custom rather than as a religion-based requirement. In so doing, they circumvent disputes over "authenticity" versus "betrayal". Sometimes, gender differentiations 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 can also allow them to turn to a globalized public for support, transcending the frame of othering and reference to intrinsically oppressive cultures, thus making a transnational theme out of gender inequalities in a political, contextualized reading.

Women's Activism and Social Justice: Beyond the Binary of Agency/Victimhood

The current forms taken by women's activism in the MENA region are extremely varied and wide-ranging, both in terms of the causes defended and the types of collective action adopted. They include political struggles, struggle against authoritarianism and for democracy, struggle against occupation and inequalities, nationalist women's rights campaigning, welfare and charity initiatives, and environmental campaigns. Women activists' involvement in the Arab uprisings of 2011 and 2012 have been noticed, as has their participation in the occupation of public places in Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen, in particular. Female activists can be found in classical political organizations (political parties and unions, running for election, and attending parliament) but are most particularly involved in the voluntary sector and locally based associations. Altogether, these commitments are inscribed in broad political visions and social projects.

These different forms of women's activism contribute to struggling against injustice and to challenging violence, conceptualized here in a social continuum. Gendered approaches highlight how gendered inequalities shape the experience of these activists and how the perception of their commitments is marked by gendered assignations and binaries that are contested by our research and case studies.

Women as Social Actors: A Gendered Approach to Civic and Political Commitment

Decision makers and men in positions of power tend to consider that women are not significant actors in 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 & Wadia 2000: 140). Women from the MENA region as well as those of migrant background in diasporas in Europe and North America who either belong to Muslim communities or are of MENA background have been portrayed through the same lenses. Mainstream media have fed a public imaginary of these women as victims of domination and violence, thus consolidating prejudices that depict them as submissive, subjugated, apathetic, or uninformed beings, confined to the private realm of 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. Moreover, feminist scholars 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 organizations and protests groups" (Githens *et al.* 1994: 5–26). Various studies have found that women have participated at the grassroots level in social movements, protest politics, informal community groups, voluntary organizations, and so on. Indeed, women in and from the MENA region have been noticeable in actions on the ground in their neighbourhoods, while remaining largely barred from sites of decision making (Amiraux 2003: 90; Christy 1994; Allwood & Wadia 2000; Randall 1987).

Women, often express their acute sense of justice and ethical considerations that project them into meaningful action. Against the violence that 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 & 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 actions of solidarity at the ground level. Moreover, their engagement has gone far beyond gender issues to fight for social justice against all forms of inequalities.

However, the realm of activism is fraught with the same gender-based inequalities that pervade society (something not unique to MENA countries). Activists face, circumvent, or challenge these limitations in various ways. First, having a lived experience of inequality, domination, or violence may nourish the decision to take action if a field of opportunities for struggle emerges (Larzillière 2004). For those in a minority situation in Western countries, gender inequalities intersect with the impact of the "Arab" or "Muslim" categories of differentiation (Ajbli 2016).

In Western as in Muslim majority countries, MENA women represent the "particular" in relation to an apparently neutral "universal", which in fact is traversed with categories of differentiation. In this sense the "neutral" individual embodying these "abstract universal principles" proves rather masculine (Scott 2005) and, one might add, within a patriarchal definition of masculinity. This encourages a particularized, differentiated reception to women's engagement, which is sometimes utilized 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 have an impact on activist organizations, in particular classical political organizations, where women activists encounter specific difficulties in obtaining recognition and accessing leading positions. Among Islamist parties in particular, women tend to be separated and oriented toward "women's issues" (education, charity work, etc.) (Larzillière 2016). For example, professional women in Jordan who run for election do not reach senior positions; even the presidency of the nurses' and midwives' association—where women are in a large majority—is generally held by a man. In Islamist voluntary organization meetings in Jordan, women sit together at the back of the room. Such inequality and glass ceiling effects, which are particularly prevalent in classical political parties, are general features in activism. They partly explain women activists'

more numerous presence in civil society and the voluntary sector (even though gender inequalities persist everywhere) as well as the search for new forms of engagement.

Gender and Nationalism

One context in which women's mobilization and political participation have flourished in MENA countries is that of nationalist movements. 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. Here, we draw a distinction between the nationalism deployed to dominate and exploit other groups/communities, on the one hand, and the nationalism that mobilizes resistance against exploitation and oppression, on the other hand. We also highlight differences between nationalist ideologies that include progressive attitudes and those displaying conservative attitudes toward 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 the Kurdish and Palestinian peoples. Across these contexts, strategies of both armed violence and non-violent resistance have been pursued separately and/or simultaneously.

Women in MENA countries 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 colonization 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.

Within nationalist movements, women have emphasized 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.

New forms of feminist engagement

Historically, feminist activism in the region took place along a continuum of initiatives and organizations 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 modernizing 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 has had devastating impacts on feminist claims and credibility in the region.

Yet, 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. Such involvement has forced many activists into exile, as in Iraq and Iran. In the current context, feminist activists are noticed for their challenges to existing governance, especially in terms of its patriarchal and authoritarian aspects. This is particularly evident in Tunisia, Yemen, Egypt, Turkey, and Iraq. Much of contemporary feminist activism take on board the various ways gender-based inequalities intersect with other structural forms of inequalities, such as class differences, economic exploitation, discrimination against ethnic minorities and sectarianism, as illustrated in women's rights activism in Iraq and Kurdistan. Many examples of women's activism can be cited. 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 & Pratt 2011; Joly & Bakawan 2016; Hardi 2013). In Israel, women are active participants in the peace movement. In Syria, Kurdish women are active 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-responsibility positions. In Tunisia, women have mobilized 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 globalization, particularly global capitalist expansion, neoliberal economics, imperialism, and neocolonial power configurations.

More recently, novel forms of feminist engagement, particularly prevalent among the younger generation of feminist activists and organizations, frequently revolve around body politics and involve innovative forms of organizing outside of 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 is still largely non-existent or underground in other countries, such as Iraq and Yemen. All these novel forms of feminist engagements stress the intersections between structural forms of violence, symbolic violence, and body politics, frequently presenting a much more holistic approach to and strategy for exiting violence than previous generations of feminists.

Case study 1. Activism of Tunisian women against violence
Case study 2. Yemeni women and the Arab spring
Case study 3. Women's mobilization against violence against women in Egypt
Case study 4. Iraqi women's rights activists at the forefront of struggling against sectarianism and authoritarianism
Case study 5. Turkish and Kurdish feminist activism against patriarchal and state violence
Case study 6. The Palestinian women's movement: struggling on two fronts
Case study 7. Female suicide bombers in Palestine and Iraq

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 regions. As a case in point, gender-based representations are central to Western hegemonic narratives regarding the populations of

both the MENA countries and diasporic communities. In Muslim-minority contexts, that is, in the diaspora, the situation of MENA women is fraught with widespread discrimination, prejudice, and hostility. Women from the MENA regions who are in Western countries belong to populations who live in a minority situation as ethnic and religious groups. They have to steer through the complex interconnections between their cultural and religious groups and wider society and also to contend with the numerous obstacles thrown in the path of their autonomization and activism within each of those three main collectives of reference. In addition, those women face injunctions of loyalty, which are sprung upon them both by majority societies and by their own communities.

Diasporic women from the MENA region perceive the collective where their immediate socialization took place, the ethnic group, as an ambivalent source of restrictions and support. Although they mostly value their closeness to the immediate family, the extended family and the community have been considered a source of restrictions and norms grounded in patriarchal traditions. Consequently, many women contest any authority claimed by the community, invariably led by older men, to interfere in 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 policymaking.

Within majority society, minority Muslim women are faced with the increased prejudice and constraints inflicted on Muslims in the wake of the September 2001 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, and on gender grounds generally but also because of specific stereotypes to which they are subject, portraying them as passive, submissive, and uninterested in civic and political life. Obstacles to their engagement have crystallized around two major themes in Britain and France—respectively, the securitization of Islam and that of national identity, while both issues arise throughout the Western world, with differentiated 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, in Britain, for instance, through their participation in anti-war campaigns, and in France through their mobilization against the 2004 law that 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 project and engage in civic and political life. While not ignoring conventional channels of politics (notoriously less accessible to women), they favour associations as their main domain of action. MENA women have created their own Muslim associations or ethnic based support groups outside men's control, and they have built or joined neighbourhood and locally based associations—indeed, the 21st century has witnessed the multiplication of a great variety of such associations. These organizations 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 an answer to injunctions of loyalty from both the ethnic group and majority society[2].

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2. Data drawn from a large ESRC research project (Joly & Wadia 2017)

Case study 1. Negotiations in the family/community in the diaspora in Britain
Case study 2. Mobilization of women from Muslim communities in the UK and in France

TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

MENA women have not circumscribed their struggles to their own geographical area. They have also mobilized across countries through the development of transnational feminist organizations, and they have taken action to influence international law concerning women and violence.

Women in Muslim majority countries

Women in Muslim contexts have been engaging in transnational feminist activism (Balchin 2012) and have challenged numerous stereotypes about the political context and engagement of women in Muslim communities. For instance, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML), an international solidarity network, links women in over 70 countries from South Africa to Uzbekistan, Senegal to Fiji (Shaheed 1994). Musawah, a 47-country-strong transnational movement for equality and justice in Muslim families, was launched in 2009 to campaign for equality between men and women in the family and the right to equal and fully fledged citizenship (Musawah 2009).

Transnational women's activism to end violence

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

Yet, transnational feminist solidarity with women in the Middle East has had a troubled history. In the era of colonialism, European and North American feminists failed to stand in solidarity with women resisting colonialism and took a rather "maternalistic" attitude toward 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 emphasized women's legal equality, while the USSR promoted a "peace" agenda in which women's roles in struggling against imperialism and capitalism were prioritized. The Soviet agenda resonated much more with women in the Global South. Indeed, women's conferences during the Cold War witnessed sharp divisions between Western feminists, who resisted what they regarded as the "politicization" of women's issues, and women in the Global South who believed that western feminists were trying to universalize their concerns around legal equality and sexual politics, thus ignoring the important issues of economic inequalities and imperialism affecting women in the Global South. In particular, the United States 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, much transnational women's activism has been dedicated to ending violence against women in all its different manifestations. As a result of their participation in the Beijing Women's Conference in 1995 and other UN conferences, MENA women activists became more aware of the issue of violence against women and adopted it in their work. In this work, they have faced resistance from religious leaders and politicians, who have labelled this as a "foreign agenda". In some cases, such as FGM, the latter have supported violence against women in the name of protecting the moral fabric of society.

Transnational solidarity remains flawed, however, insofar as it is largely limited to Western NGOs providing funds to selected women's NGOs in MENA and other countries of the Global South for programs and projects, often reproducing international hierarchies. Moreover, women activists in the MENA region have also had to challenge some Western feminists who have presented violence against women in the Global South as a marker of a "backward" culture, despite the evidence that violence against women is universal. Meanwhile, Western NGOs are frequently reticent to criticize wider structural causes of violence that may be linked to their own Western governments' foreign policy and military interventions in the MENA region.

Women and International Agencies

Women compose broadly 50% of the populations in all societies, which suffices to provide a cogent reason to include women's participation in all levels of peace building. Further, there is a growing consensus among international agencies that women's active participation in peace building has a positive impact on the sustainability of peace frameworks (Coomaraswamy 2015). However, simply adding women to the negotiating table does not impact the results if the women are not influential and do not have decision-making powers (Paffenholz *et al.* 2016:22; Coomaraswamy 2015:15). Women's rights activists worldwide have pressured the UN into the adoption of resolutions on women and violence. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was the first United Nations resolution to mention women and gender-based violence, express support for women's participation in peace negotiations, and consider the needs of women refugees. Many women's organizations hailed this resolution, while others justly criticized the resolution for essentialising women and failing to recognise that women's victimization as a tool of war is tied to wider forms of exclusion and violence (Adra 2013). The Security Council remains selective in the inclusion of women in some of its resolutions, for example, resolutions involving Saudi Arabia. One substantial failing of UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions is that they are not legally binding and thus are not enforceable (Coomaraswamy 2015: 14-15; Hafner-Burton *et al.,* 2015: 28; see also Oxfam 2017: 89). Nevertheless, there is a 'shame' factor that women's organizations can leverage in lobbying national actors and political parties for women's representation in peace building. For women activists, knowing that an international organization has taken a moral stance on behalf of victims has been empowering (Najwa Adra interviews with activists 2013-2017).

Conclusion: Exiting Violence, a Holistic Gendered Approach

Strategies for exiting violence require a reconceptualization of both violence and peace from a gendered perspective. As our discussion illustrates, exiting violence for women 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 gender inequality and marginalization as well as other forms of disadvantage during conflict and outside conflict. Thus, exiting violence involves the recognition and support of women's activism, organizations, and initiatives that challenge diverse structures of domination and inequalities, and also ensuring social justice in the regions concerned. This is what our gendered approach to exiting from violence proposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

What follows is a list of specific recommendations that have emerged out of our research and analysis.

1. The analysis of all forms of violence, whether ethnic, religious, political, social, domestic, or economic, needs to be gendered.
2. Acknowledging the "continuum of violence", the notion of violence must be expanded to include all forms of physical, verbal, symbolic, and structural violence in the public and private spheres.
3. The specific needs of women facing gender-based violence and gender-specific vulnerabilities during and outside of conflict must be addressed.
4. Women's organizations must be recognized as fully fledged political actors.
5. Strategies for exiting violence must include support for women who are already working to challenge gender inequalities and dominant gender norms as well as other social inequalities and injustices.
6. In line with UNSCR 1325, and a growing body of social science research, the meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making roles in all levels of peace-building activity, including negotiations, conflict resolution, reconciliation, and reconstruction, must be ensured.
7. Women from the grassroots and at all levels of organizational hierarchies must be included in all phases of peacebuilding, including women combatants.
8. Stereotypic assumptions about women in MENA countries must be challenged through working with media, international agencies, and policymakers.
9. There must be recognition that the struggle for women's rights and gender-based justice cannot be separated from the struggle for national self-determination and freedom.
10. Women activists in the Global North must avoid maternalistic attitudes toward women in the Global South, and respect difference and the priorities of women activists on the ground.

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