

# ENGAGING WITH THE GENDER, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA IN RESEARCH AND ACTIVISM IN LEBANON

Elizabeth Laruni, Charbel Maydaa and Henri Myrntinen

17/2018



Issues relating to gender, peace and security are a contested field in the Arabic-speaking world. This includes the history and present state of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which local grassroots level actors and critical voices often struggle to influence. Rather, it is often powerful national governments, non-state actors and outside actors – including donor governments, international organisations and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), Global North academia but also powerful religious institutions – that define much of the framework, direction and content of gender, peace and security work. Much of the region is marked by armed conflict, occupation, displacement and rule by authoritarian governments. Increasingly, in a number of the countries the already limited space for civil society and academia is shrinking further, due to an increased securitisation of politics. This is exacerbated by policies of Global North actors that focus on countering violent extremism (CVE) and/or utilise frameworks put in place to address gender inequality (such as the WPS agenda) to address short-term security concerns, which can marginalise women’s rights organisations’ work on redressing gender inequality and its societal impacts.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on the current state of gender, peace and security work in Lebanon in particular, providing a view from a critical academic and civil society perspective, with a strong focus on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) issues. It draws on ongoing discussions and collaboration among a network of academics, practitioners and activists working on gender and sexuality, both in Lebanon and more broadly as part of the Gender Violence Across War and

Peace network co-ordinated by the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security.<sup>2</sup>

While the majority of literature on gender inequality within Lebanon and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region more widely has tended to focus women’s marginalisation, we argue that it is also important to broaden the debate to include diverse SOGI issues. The majority of women, men, and those with other gender identities continue

to find themselves in situations of very limited power and agency at best, and at worst in extremely precarious conditions. Similarly, persons of diverse SOGI, especially those who cannot draw on socio-economically or politically powerful networks, are often placed in positions of particular vulnerability, facing exclusion, discrimination and violence, often exacerbated if they are prescribed other societally marginalised identity markers.<sup>3</sup>



De-politicisation of the women's rights and gender justice movements has occurred through an 'NGO-isation' of the work, whereby civil society organisations become mere service providers, often for outside actors such as INGOs and UN agencies.

## BACKGROUND

While the region is often viewed from the outside as a backwater in terms of gender justice activism, women's political activism in the 'modern' sense dates back to at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Arab World.<sup>4</sup> Women's rights organisations and politically outspoken women were a central part of anti-colonial independence movements in many of the countries. Post-independence, however, women's rights and gender equality were mostly relegated to a position of minor importance by the neo-patriarchal and mostly autocratic governments.<sup>5</sup> Several governments, such as those of Egypt, Syria and Iraq, also sought to 'governmentalise' women's rights through official committees closely linked to the government, in what has been called 'state feminism'.<sup>6</sup> These official state bodies, often including women linked to the political elite, "wrested women's issues from civil society and women's organisations; cover[ed] up problems and [...] essentially served to capture the women's movement and made women activists who chose to participate or cooperate with the system appear to be complicit with the state."<sup>7</sup>

A further de-politicisation of the women's rights and gender justice movements has occurred through an 'NGO-isation' of the work, whereby civil society organisations become mere service providers, often for outside actors such as INGOs and UN agencies. This process continues to transform "mass-based, living social

movement[s], which engaged women from grassroots organizations [...] in working for a combined feminist-nationalist agenda" into interlocutors for the international community.<sup>8</sup> This has hindered, and in some cases precluded previously resistance- and grassroots-oriented organisations from carrying out more political work. Organisations are instead having to focus on short-term fundraising, service delivery, meeting donor reporting requirements and working on serial projects on democratisation, healthcare, peacebuilding and women's rights.<sup>9</sup> Political work for gender equality is often done by outside agencies, be it INGOs, donors or UN agencies, where "weakened states, under the pressure of international agencies and some local constituencies, are pushing for more 'gender-equitable legislation'."<sup>10</sup> This is also linked to processes that Lila Abu-Lughod has referred to as the "internationalization of Muslim women's rights", in which a small group of elites speak on behalf of all women in a language of international rights and obtain funds for projects to target and "empower" women beneficiaries.<sup>11</sup> While this trend has been affecting women's rights movements for over a decade in the region, it is also increasingly happening with organisations that focus on persons of diverse SOGI.

The twin trends of governmentalisation and NGO-isation of gender justice work have led in part to Islamist women's groups proliferating where NGOs have co-opted the leaders of the secular mass movement.<sup>12</sup> However, post-Arab Spring, the space for these groups and movements to work has been radically reduced: for example, in Egypt this has occurred due to real or perceived links of these groups to political opposition movements.

Over the past decade, however, there have also been numerous advances in terms of increasing awareness about and spaces for persons of diverse SOGI across the region; locally developed transformative

- 1 See also, International Alert, Oxfam and UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Now is the Time: Research on Gender Justice, Conflict and Fragility in the Middle East and North Africa* (London: International Alert, 2017), [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/rr-gender-justice-conflict-fragility-mena-050617-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/rr-gender-justice-conflict-fragility-mena-050617-en.pdf); Kvinna till Kvinna, *Suffocating the Movement: Shrinking Space for Women's Rights* (Stockholm: Kvinna till Kvinna, 2018), <http://thekvinnatillkvinnafoundation.org/files/2018/03/kvinna-till-kvinna-suffocating-the-movement-report-eng-2018.pdf>
- 2 Between August 7–8, 2017, MOSAIC, and the LSE Centre for Women Peace and Security co-organised a workshop in Beirut which brought together 25 activists, academics and practitioners to discuss how academic research and NGO work can be used as a tool for emancipation.
- 3 Henri Myrntinen and Megan Daigle, *When Merely Existing is a Risk: Sexual and Gender Minorities In Conflict, Displacement and Peacebuilding* (London: International Alert, 2017), [https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Gender\\_SexualAndGenderMinorities\\_EN\\_2017.pdf](https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Gender_SexualAndGenderMinorities_EN_2017.pdf)
- 4 Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).
- 5 See for example, Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- 6 Nadje Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East: The Egyptian Women's Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 7 International Alert et al, *Now is the Time*: 35.
- 8 Islah Jad, *The Demobilization of Women's Movements: The Case of Palestine* (Toronto: Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2008): 2, [https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing\\_their\\_world\\_-\\_demobilization\\_of\\_womens\\_movements\\_-\\_palestine.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/changing_their_world_-_demobilization_of_womens_movements_-_palestine.pdf); see also Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine - The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 9 International Alert et al, *Now is the Time*.
- 10 Jad, *The Demobilization of Women's Movements*.
- 11 Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Active Social Life of 'Muslim Women's Rights': A Plea for Ethnography, Not Polemic, with Cases from Egypt and Palestine", *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 6 (1) (2010): 5-6.

approaches to transforming masculinities; and the emergence of more radical, secular feminist movements. These new movements go beyond the limited, and previously dominant state feminism, seeking a more intersectional and comprehensive approach to gender equality. These processes have not been uncontested, however.

## GENDER AND RIGHTS IN LEBANON

Lebanon is often considered to be one of the more socially progressive and open societies in the MENA region, including in terms of gender norms. Women in the country have enjoyed a greater level of social and economic freedom than their regional counterparts, and have been playing active roles in public life. The country has a comparatively strong civil society working on gender equality issues as well as on diverse SOGI rights, the latter more so than in other countries in the region.<sup>13</sup> Through court rulings, there has been a de facto decriminalisation of same-sex sexual activities and of trans identities and practices, although legal provisions previously used to criminalise persons of diverse SOGI remain in place.<sup>14</sup>

However, in spite of this relatively progressive environment, the country paradoxically has one of the lowest rates of women's political engagement in the MENA region.<sup>15</sup> The barriers to Lebanese women's political representation and participation has been attributed to its sectarian, patriarchal and paternalistic political order where men are legally legitimised as the heads of the household. Furthermore, because political representation in Lebanon is proportionally divided among religious communities, the combination of these two structural systems creates and reinforces "a male dominated, clan-based system of clientelism (replicated within party politics) that not only discriminates against women but creates a sense



The perception of Lebanon's 'progressive' status in the MENA region tends to be informed by an urban, upper class, Beirut-centric view, drawing on romanticised tropes of 'the Paris of the Orient'. This masks the socially conservative, highly patriarchal and often socio-economically harsh realities that continue to define the lives of most people living in Lebanon.

of citizenship based on one's communal and religious identity as opposed to individual rights."<sup>16</sup> In the field of economic participation and opportunity, Lebanese women are also marginalised, and despite their high literacy rates, women's economic participation remains low.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the perception of Lebanon's 'progressive' status in the MENA region tends to be informed by an urban, upper class, Beirut-centric view, drawing on romanticised tropes of 'the Paris of the Orient'. This masks the socially conservative, highly patriarchal and often socio-economically harsh realities that continue to define the lives of most people living in Lebanon, be they Lebanese citizens, Palestinian or Syrian refugees, Ethiopian or Filipino migrant workers or others. In Lebanon, civil rights are to a large degree dependent by law on one's status, both in terms of nationality and religious affiliation, and in practice on connections to powerful individuals and political and social actors.<sup>18</sup> Persons of diverse SOGI still face widespread discrimination and harassment privately and publicly, and the police raids at the time of Beirut Pride 2018 may signal a return to more oppressive police tactics against them.<sup>19</sup>

Consultations with activists, practitioners and academics in Lebanon have also highlighted the limitations of legal approaches, both with regard to the criminalisation of domestic violence and

- 12 Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of Her Own: Reconsidering Religion and Secularism in Women's Islamic Movements* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); International Alert et al, *Now is the Time*.
- 13 See for example Sanaa H, "A Political Movement in Lebanon? A Conversation on Feminism and Queerness", *Kohl: a Journal for Body and Gender Research* 1 (1) (2015): 92-104.
- 14 Recent police crackdowns, in particular against trans persons, have tended to use suspicions of drug dealing or sex work as legal 'justifications'.
- 15 Lana Khattab, *Gendering State-Citizen Relations in Lebanon – The Case of the Family Violence Bill 2014* (London: International Alert, 2016), [https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Gender\\_StateCitizenRelationsLebanon\\_EN\\_2016.pdf](https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Gender_StateCitizenRelationsLebanon_EN_2016.pdf)
- 16 International Alert, *Emerging Voices: Young Women in Lebanese Politics* (London: International Alert, 2011), <https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/publications/092011LebanonGenderFINAL.pdf>
- 17 William Robert Avis, *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Lebanon* (Brighton: K4D, 2017), <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/175-Gender-Equality-and-Womens-Empowerment-in-Lebanon.pdf>
- 18 While Lebanon has a secular legal system, issues relating to family rights (e.g. marriage, divorce, custody rights, inheritance) are regulated separately for the officially recognised religious groups by the respective religious authorities themselves. For a discussion of the implications of this for women's rights, see for example Khattab, *Gendering State-Citizen Relations in Lebanon*, and Maya Mikdashi, "Sex and Sectarianism: The Legal Architecture of Lebanese Citizenship", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34 (2) (2014): 279-293.
- 19 Trey Strange, "Beirut Pride Was Forcibly Cancelled. Lebanon's LGBTQ Community Remains Undeterred." *Huffington Post*, 11 June 2018, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/beirut-pride-cancellation\\_us\\_5b1bdc4ee4b09d7a3d72d7d7](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/beirut-pride-cancellation_us_5b1bdc4ee4b09d7a3d72d7d7)



the decriminalisation of homosexuality, as these measures on their own would not be enough for shifting gender discourses and power dynamics, or prevalent gendered attitudes and biases.

## **GENDER WORK UNDER THE SHADOW OF WAR**

The various past and present wars in the region have had major impacts on Lebanon. The country hosts around 450,000 Palestinian refugees, while Lebanese society and party politics continue to be largely defined by the legacies of the 1975-1990 Civil War, the subsequent de facto Syrian occupation and the 2006 war against Israel. The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011 has also had numerous impacts on neighbouring Lebanon. Fighting has spilled over occasionally into northern Lebanon as Syrian armed groups have used it as a fall-back area, and thousands of Lebanese have participated as combatants in the war, either as part of political party militias or as individuals. The greatest impact, however, has been the mass influx of Syrian refugees. While no exact figures are available, at least one million Syrian refugees are estimated to be living in Lebanon, adding to the already-present Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations in a country of around 8 million Lebanese citizens. Relations between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host population have been at times strained, and local authorities have started restricting Syrians' mobility. The war and the influx of refugees has also had major consequences for Lebanese civil society organisations (CSOs) and for academic research, as well as for the gender justice movement and diverse SOGI community.

For research and CSO work in Lebanon, which is often dependent on outside funding, the Syrian war has meant that donor interest and funding tends to now be squarely focused on Syrian refugees

in Lebanon. Work in and on Lebanon and Lebanese society itself, including on issues of gender and sexuality, are receiving far less outside interest and support than previously. The war and refugee influx have also brought in major international actors to Lebanon, such as UN agencies and large INGOs as well as private sector companies, which largely dominate the field, including in terms of data collection and analysis. The fact that the data is increasingly being collected by private sector companies involved in the Syria response, and the tendency of international actors to keep data to themselves, reduces transparency and accountability to beneficiary communities and reduces the possibilities for local researchers to compete for funds.

Due to the internal logic of the aid sector, these external agencies and large international organisations often place local NGOs into subordinate positions as service providers and implementers of agendas, plans and programmes designed and decided upon elsewhere. Local actors' input from 'on the ground' tends to be neglected and their autonomy is often minimal, limited to small acts of subversion. This can, for example, mean adhering to the minimum requirements necessary to be compliant with donor demands while doing as much as is possible within the limitations to address locally identified needs not prioritised by the donor. Qualitative data drawn from focus group discussions and consultations with activists and academics working in Lebanon shows that while respondents did not feel that the donor focus on Syria and Syrian refugees was problematic in and of itself, it was often a source of frustration, as the outcomes of the research on Syrian refugees often did little to better the lives of intended beneficiaries. The outputs and outcomes of more theoretical or policy-focused research, for example, are mostly inaccessible to beneficiaries due to language barriers and lack of

access (e.g. lack of internet access, confidentiality issues or pay walls), nor do they usually lead to concrete improvements on the ground. More practice-oriented data-collection, such as needs assessments by humanitarian agencies, tend to be highly repetitive and have led to research fatigue among refugees who state their needs time and again but often do not have these met by the aid agencies.

At the beginning of the Syrian refugee influx, a number of Lebanese gender and diverse SOGI NGOs pushed back on conditional funding by donors that was for Syrian refugees only, as their doors were already open to people from all nationalities, including Syrians. The focus of aid to Syrian refugees has led to tensions between refugees and local communities, where the INGOs and funders consider the local communities as privileged, and therefore do not provide them with the services that they might also need. This is seen as not only being the case more broadly, but also between Lebanese LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or queer) individuals and communities and Syrian LGBTIQ refugees.<sup>20</sup> Tensions have also been exacerbated by the perception that LGBTIQ refugees have easier access to medical support services and stand a much higher chance of resettlement by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) than Lebanese applicants. The inclusive approach of Lebanese NGOs has attempted to reduce and counteract these tensions by continuing to provide services to all and by actively seeking to bring together Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian and other beneficiaries.

In terms of working in Lebanon on gender issues and in particular on diverse SOGI issues, a key issue that has emerged over the past years is that of a lack of local data, in particular on hard-to-reach communities. These include especially the trans community, intersex persons

and individuals who rely on invisibility for survival, but also communities and parts of the country where access needs to be negotiated through powerful gatekeepers such as political parties. Furthermore, research on gender in Lebanon has not always taken an intersectional approach, leading to a lack of nuance and reflection on the complexity of gender dynamics in the country. This lack of intersectionality has led to an invisibilisation of particular and compounded vulnerabilities, as well as power differentials within gender categories. Adopting an intersectional approach allows for a deeper understanding of how gender inequalities intersect with other forms of socio-economic inequality, including age, class, disability, race, ethnicity, location and sexual orientation, frequently exacerbating the injustices associated with them.<sup>21</sup> This in turn enables the inclusion of those who are often absent from conventional global frameworks of analysis.

The response to the Syrian War and attendant displacement crisis has also had an impact on research agendas in Lebanon. Given the research needs of donors who fund the studies, this has led to a greater focus on Syrians in Lebanon rather than on Lebanon itself, and for Lebanon to become a more accessible and safe place from which to research Syria. The resultant research has at times been excellent, be it on Syrian women's changing gender roles,<sup>22</sup> sexual and gender-based violence,<sup>23</sup> or men's and women's vulnerabilities.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, large gaps remain. Research on gender issues has mostly focused on vulnerable people, and there is little research on people in power and the elites more broadly from a gender perspective. The role of class privilege and socio-economic status has therefore been under-researched and under-theorised, including for women and LGBTIQ individuals. As mentioned above, these factors also play

20 For more background on LGBTIQ refugees in Lebanon, see also Henri Myrntinen, Lana Khatib and Charbel Maydaa, "Trust No One, Beware of Everyone' – Vulnerabilities of LGBTIQ Refugees in Lebanon", in *A Gendered Approach to the Syrian Refugee Crisis*, eds. Jane Freedman, Zeynep Kivilcim, and Nurcan Özgür Baklacioğlu. (London: Routledge, 2017): 61-76.

21 The term 'intersectionality' was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw ("Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: a Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1) (1989): 139-167). She has described it as "a way of framing the various interactions of race and gender in the context of violence against women of color" (Kimberlé Crenshaw "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence Against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review* 43 [1991]: 1296). It has since been used more widely as a way of analysing how gender identities and expectations interact with other societal markers such as ethno-religious background, age, social class, sexual orientation, marital status, disability or the like to create differentials of power and oppression.

22 See for example Claire Harvey, Rosa Garwood and Roula El-Masri, *Shifting Sands: Changing Gender Roles Among Refugees in Lebanon* (Beirut: Oxfam and Abaad, 2013), <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/10546/300408/1/rr-shifting-sands-lebanon-syria-refugees-gender-030913-en.pdf>

23 See for example Sarah Chynoweth, "We Keep It in Our Heart" – *Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in the Syria Crisis* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2018), <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60864>; Christine Chinkin and Madeleine Rees, "I Lost My Dignity": *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Syrian Arab Republic – A Commentary on the Conference Room Paper of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* (London/Geneva: LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security and WILPF, 2018), [https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Syria-Col-23rd\\_May2018\\_CChinkin-MRees\\_FINAL3.pdf](https://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Syria-Col-23rd_May2018_CChinkin-MRees_FINAL3.pdf)

24 International Rescue Committee, *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugee Men in Lebanon - Investigating Protection Gaps, Needs and Responses Relevant to Single and Working Syrian Refugee Men in Lebanon* (Beirut: International Rescue Committee, 2016), <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/464/irclebanonrefugeemensvulnerabilityassessment.pdf>; Kimberly Howe, Roxani Krystalli, Vaidehi Krishnan, Jon Kurtz, and Reimar Macaranas, *The Wages of War – Learning From How Syrians Have Adapted Their Livelihoods Through Seven Years of Conflict* (Washington DC: Mercy Corps, 2018), [https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/RD\\_SyriaReport\\_d1\\_FINAL\\_US-web.pdf](https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/RD_SyriaReport_d1_FINAL_US-web.pdf)

a key role in terms of access to services but also to justice and personal security in the country. Some of the issues raised by activists and researchers that have been under-researched and addressed were those of misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and racism within the Lebanese LGBTIQ community, which are reflective of broader societal trends. This has manifested for example in tensions between men who have sex with men (MSM) and trans persons, but also in discrimination against Syrian LGBTIQ persons within the LGBTIQ community.<sup>25</sup> A further issue which has come up both in our research and the work of others has been a preference among some who could theoretically be seen as part of the LGBTIQ community to see their sexual orientation as practice rather than as identity, as tends to be the case in the Global North.<sup>26</sup>

Much of the current research and CSO work is being done in moments of crisis, not only in terms of the Syrian Civil War but also with regard to internal developments in Lebanon. This has multiple impacts on the work itself, including a constant 'tyranny of urgency' of responding to one crisis after the next, which often makes analysis, reflection and debate extremely challenging. Furthermore, given how dynamic the working environment is, the time lag between research and the findings coming out might mean that community needs have changed by the time the research is published – as might have security-related concerns around consent. The sense of continuing crisis, exacerbated by a highly politicised environment and struggles for resources also negatively impact working relations between individuals, institutions and organisations. Disagreements can easily flare up and are catalysed by quick turn-around times for comments on social media. Apart from increasing tensions between those who could otherwise be allies, these dynamics also contribute to an inability to take time for self-care among activists and researchers.

## LEGACIES OF (NEO-)COLONIALISM

What is visible in the region, as elsewhere in the Global South, is the enduring legacy of colonialism and post-colonial power structures and dynamics. These impacts are different for different parts of the world, although a number of different characteristics are visible in different settings. For Lebanon and Syria, as well as neighbouring countries in particular, this includes the long-term impacts of nation-states whose national borders were drawn up by colonial powers, legislation (e.g. on sexual practices) introduced by colonial powers, the neo-patriarchal state apparatuses which arose in the post-independence period, and continued direct and indirect interventions by outside powers.

Perhaps less visibly but not less influentially, uneven global power structures also permeate relationships in academia and civil society. In order to be 'taken seriously' in global academic circles, and to access funding as junior partners to Global North universities, regionally based universities need to engage with academic discourses defined by the Global North and publish in Global North outlets, preferably in English. This, along with pay walls and restrictive intellectual property rights policies, makes much of the research that is produced inaccessible to the communities who are researched, but also to many service providers and policymakers who could benefit from the findings. Thus, the data that is being produced locally is sent abroad and is not being used locally most of the time, with very little real or perceived positive practical or immediate impact for the research subjects. In part, this is due to the nature of research itself. In terms of more theoretical research, be it on gender or other issues, hypotheses and findings are expected to speak mostly to Western academic debates instead of local ones, and there is little expectation of concrete outcomes. Policy-oriented

25 See also Sabiha Allouche, "IR and the Instrumentalization of Sexuality in the Reproduction of Political Leadership in Lebanon: On Being Queer Syrian and Refugee in Contemporary Lebanon", paper presented at the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention, Atlanta, 16-19 March 2016; Raja Farah, "Muscles and Glitter", *Muftah*, 2015, <http://muftah.org/muscles-and-glitter>; Adirana Qubaia and Mathew Gagne, "Sexualizing and Villainizing Male Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", *Muftah*, 2014, <https://muftah.org/sexualizing-and-villainizing-syrian-refugees>

26 Nour Abu-Assab, Nof Nasser-Eddin and Aydan Greatrick, *Conceptualising Sexualities in the MENA Region: Undoing LGBTIQ Categories. Implications for Rights Based Advocacy Approaches* (London: Centre for Transnational Development and Co-operation, 2017), [http://www.academia.edu/32117904/Conceptualising\\_Sexualities\\_in\\_the\\_MENA\\_Region\\_Undoing\\_LGBTIQ\\_Categories\\_-\\_Implications\\_for\\_Rights\\_Based\\_Advocacy\\_Approaches](http://www.academia.edu/32117904/Conceptualising_Sexualities_in_the_MENA_Region_Undoing_LGBTIQ_Categories_-_Implications_for_Rights_Based_Advocacy_Approaches)

research tends to focus more on outside actors (e.g. UN agencies, donors) rather than national or local actors, and is designed to have an indirect rather than direct effect. The type of research with the most direct impact is that of NGOs who can use the findings to adjust programming to meet the direct needs of intended beneficiaries, but this type of research also often feeds into lengthy decision-making processes and needs to be balanced against donor demands. Co-operation between local and Western academia, as well as research co-operation between local and international NGOs, has at times been marked by uneven power relations, including extractive practices in which local researchers' and NGOs' data is used with little or no acknowledgement or compensation.

For local CSOs, funding is often dependent on adhering to donor priorities and/or those of more powerful Global North NGO partners. Local researchers' knowledge is side-lined and they often merely occupy positions as data gatherers for Global North actors, who then claim ownership of the data. These dynamics greatly reduce the possibility of local or even regional actors setting agendas independently or critiquing activities of Global North actors and their allies.

A particular problem for gender work in the Arab-speaking region has been harsh critique of both academia and academics by other academics, often based in Global North universities, for allegedly furthering Western agendas with their work and for accepting Western funding. As in other Global South societies, there is also an on-going tension between the risk – and realities – of implicitly Orientalist essentialisation of findings or of societal dynamics by outside actors and the potential excessive reification of 'local knowledge' merely because it is locally produced and therefore seen as 'authentic' and thereby beyond critique.<sup>27</sup> Examples of how (neo-)Orientalist



Our discussions with local activists suggest that human rights NGOs ought to adopt a more inclusive approach, engaging more with LGBTIQ issues, and women's organisations in particular could be more open to addressing the needs of lesbian, bisexual and trans women.

imaginings can shape policy and practical implementation include highly problematic approaches to countering violent extremism that seek to enlist Muslim Arab mothers as 'natural' de-radicalisers of men in their families and communities and draw on stereotyped, racialised notions of Arab and more broadly Muslim masculinities;<sup>28</sup> lack of engagement by INGOs and UN agencies with Syrian men and boys on gender issues due to persistent stereotypes and pre-suppositions about 'Arab men';<sup>29</sup> or the exoticisation and fetishisation of gay Arab men and their bodies.<sup>30</sup>

## WAYS FORWARD

Our research and engagements with Lebanese researchers and activists underscore both the need to recognise and respect different approaches, and the need for more cross-sectoral engagement – as well as for spaces for academics and CSOs to discuss their concerns and frustrations frankly. While there is a need for alliances, these should not come at the cost of restricting a plurality of views and approaches. There is a clear need for differentiated approaches to research, where academics and activists have different needs, aims and possibilities for conducting it. Our discussions with local activists suggest that human rights NGOs ought to adopt a more inclusive approach, engaging more with LGBTIQ issues, and women's organisations in particular could be more open to addressing the needs of lesbian, bisexual and trans women.

27 More broadly on this issue, see for example Suzanne Clisby and Athena-Maria Enderstein, "Caught Between the Orientalist-Occidental Polemic: Gender Mainstreaming as Feminist Transformation or Neocolonial Subversion?", *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 19 (2) (2017): 231-246. In terms of diverse SOGI in the Arab region and debates around Orientalism, the most prominent one is likely the one surrounding Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007) – see for example Sahar Amer, "Joseph Massad and the Alleged Violence of Human Rights", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16 (4) (2010): 649–653; Amr Shalakany, "On a Certain Queer Discomfort with Orientalism, Proceedings of the Annual Meeting", *American Society of International Law* 101 (2007): 125–129. More specifically on Lebanon, see for example Allouche, "IR and the Instrumentalization of Sexuality".

28 See Ramzi Kassem, "Gendered Erasure in The Global 'War on Terror': An Unmasked Interrogation", in *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism – Human rights perspectives*, eds. Margaret Satterthwaite and Jayne Huckerby (New York: Routledge, 2013): 15–35; and Katherine Brown "Gender and Counter-Radicalization: Women and Emerging Counter-Terror Measures", in *Gender, National Security, and Counter-Terrorism*: 36–59; also Jasbir Puar, *Territorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

29 Lewis Turner, *Challenging Refugee Men: Humanitarianism and Masculinities in Za'tari Refugee Camp*, PhD thesis, (SOAS University of London, 2018).

30 Allouche, "IR and the Instrumentalization of Sexuality".



Conversely, LGBTIQ organisations need to adopt a more intersectional approach to advocating for rights.

In our conversations with local activists, a point that has consistently emerged is that, in terms of both research and activism, there is a need to go beyond the 'usual suspects' and make greater efforts to contact hard-to-reach individuals and populations, particularly the trans community. Research on Lebanon must extend outside of Beirut, and its parameters should be defined based on local debates, needs and concerns, rather than be imposed from outside or cater primarily to Global North concerns and debates. This research needs to

be conducted ethically, not only in the narrow sense of adhering to best practices and standards, but also in ways that are more transparent to the research subjects and intended beneficiaries, with possibilities for their increased agency and participation. Researchers, agencies and organisations commissioning and funding research also need to take more seriously the reality and/or perception of the extractive nature of research, as well as research fatigue, and engage in earnest in debates as to what a different approach might look like. In terms of publishing findings and ensuing public debate, respectful, constructive criticism is needed, to allay fears of public smear campaigns and bullying.

In terms of broader power structures that define the parameters of on-the-ground work on gender, peace and security in Lebanon, local activists have highlighted the need to change funding policies that create competition amongst NGOs, research institutions and researchers. This requires more selective approaches to funding by recipients, being critical and pushing back where necessary on donor demands: more locally-grounded research can help with this by providing better context analyses. Academics and local CSOs could also use what leverage and leeway they have to use external funding in ways that reflect local needs and concerns, and resist extractive and plagiaristic practices by INGOs, Global North academia and others.



This is paper 17/2018 in the LSE Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series. The paper draws on workshops and discussions organised in Beirut and London as part of the ESRC Strategic Network on Gender Violence Across War and Peace, supported by the Global Challenges Research Fund.

The Centre for Women, Peace and Security Working Paper Series is an outlet for research findings, position papers and policy briefs. The editorial board is led by Dr Paul Kirby and Professor Laura J. Shepherd. [lse.ac.uk/wps/wps](http://lse.ac.uk/wps/wps)

Design by LSE designunit ([lse.ac.uk/designunit](http://lse.ac.uk/designunit))

Centre for Women, Peace and Security, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

[lse.ac.uk/wps](http://lse.ac.uk/wps) + [blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps) + [@LSE\\_WPS](https://twitter.com/LSE_WPS)