



CTDC

مركز التنمية والتعاون عبر الأوطان
Center for Transnational
Development & Collaboration

Political Participation through an Intersectional Feminist Lens

*Practical Tools for Building
Transnational Feminist Movements*



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Practical Tools for Building Transnational Feminist Movements

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Acknowledgments

The development of this toolkit would not have been possible without the invaluable support of partners, interns, and allies. We designed this set of tools after noticing an urgent need to redefine the meaning of women's political participation. Upon researching available Arabic-language materials, we found that they could be placed in two main categories; they either confine politics and political practice to conventional political systems, or they provide critical or theoretical readings and information about political concepts. The former limits participation to electoral politics and representation in conventional political parties and institutions, and the latter does not relate theory to praxis.

In the first phase of developing this toolkit, the Centre for Transnational Development & Collaboration (CTDC) organised a series of training sessions for Dawlaty Foundation's partner organisations that are involved in the field of women's political participation. The tools were initially presented in the form of workshops for trainers. After being introduced to the materials, partner organisations adapted the tools to their respective work contexts and then presented them to women's groups active on the ground. In collaboration with Dawlaty, CTDC then collected feedback and contributions from the partners, and the material was updated accordingly. Some of the material was also presented to other groups in the Arabic speaking region, where we conducted the same process of collecting feedback and making changes based on the groups' different local and national contexts. After writing the initial draft of this toolkit, we discussed it with feminists from different countries in the region and in the Global South, including Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, Pakistan, and South Africa. This discussion enriched the toolkit with further examples and enhanced its adaptability to various contexts.

Finally, we would like to thank all those who contributed to this toolkit and express our gratitude to all feminists who have invested in social change on any level, committing their labour, energy, and bodies to the pursuit of collective social justice. We also wish to express our appreciation for all of the women who contribute daily through their political and politicised practices; outside conventional political systems, in their homes, within their families, and wherever they are. Thank you to those whose hard work is so often overlooked by History, and whose names are erased by oppressive regimes that reproduce hierarchies and stratification among women.

This toolkit was developed in collaboration with Dawlaty Foundation, through their Women's Political Participation Program.

With goodwill and affection,

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Co-Founders and Co-Directors of the Centre for Transnational Development and Collaboration.

About the Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to respond to a variety of needs and achieve the following goals:

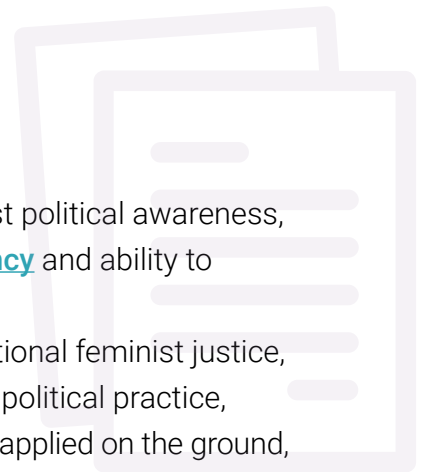
- Expand the concepts of politics and political participation,
- Introduce broader and more comprehensive notions of social justice,
- recognise and value women's labour across our various positionalities,
- Break through barriers of fear related to our understandings of politics and political work, and do away with binary classifications of "political" and "apolitical" work,
- Merging the inseparable concepts of politics and feminism.

This toolkit can be used in several fields and frameworks, including work related to women's political participation, political awareness-raising, grassroots feminist mobilisation, and feminist political organising. It can also be useful for advocacy activities related to women and marginalised groups, especially in the Global South.

We hope that these tools will enable readers to:

- Design trainings and workshops related to feminist politics,
- Facilitate feminist political discussions,
- Use included examples and suggestions to increase feminist political awareness,
- Motivate marginalised social groups to recognise their **agency** and ability to create change regardless of where they are,
- Design awareness-raising media campaigns about intersectional feminist justice,
- Correct misconceptions about the concepts of politics and political practice,
- Unpack intersectionality as a theoretical concept that can be applied on the ground,
- Think about tools for generating feminist solidarity between different social groups and classes,
- Name oppressive systems and their manifestations, and recognise the **agency** we have to deal with such systems,
- Distinguish between conventional and unconventional political work, and highlight the limitations of the former when it comes to attaining **intersectional social justice**.

This toolkit is divided into six main sections, each of which contains various exercises and discussion points with examples. Each section unpacks a number of concepts and terms, including politics and political participation, the personal is political, political practice, hierarchies of power and positionality, intersectionality, power and oppression, and feminist politics.



Introduction

Despite the existence of international human rights organizations that seek to guarantee women's right to political participation, the subject continues to preoccupy a great many women and feminists around the world. Neither these organizations nor the focused, accumulated work done by civil society organisations that seek to involve women in politics in Arabic-speaking countries and across the Global South have managed to create a substantial role for women in what they call "political work" (the traditional definition of which neglects other dimensions of political practice). With this in mind we can derive many useful lessons from the human rights initiatives and organisations that define political work as that which is linked to state institutions¹, international organisations², and multinational governing institutions³. With the aim of being helpful in building true feminist political movements at the grassroots level, this toolkit is meant to offer a corrective alternative to conventional efforts. Such efforts cannot reasonably be considered suitable to the goal of attaining intersectional feminist justice either in the Global South generally speaking, or in Arabic-speaking countries more specifically. Intersectional feminist justice is defined here as a set of practices that seeks to eliminate all forms of oppression with no exceptions or compromises. This form of justice cannot be realized through superficial and tokenistic representation, and it rejects the dilution of social and political struggles in formal politics. Instead, it seeks to realize actual societal change as inspired by grassroots needs, visions, and mobilisations, and involves creating sufficient awareness about the pitfalls of hierarchical power and political classism. All of this towards the goal of eliminating discrimination and inequity produced by hierarchies of power, or at least limiting their impact.

Intersectional Feminist Justice

Intersectional feminist justice is a set of practices that seeks to eliminate all forms of oppression with no exceptions or compromises. This form of justice cannot be realized through superficial and tokenistic representation, and it rejects the dilution of social and political struggles in formal politics. Instead, it seeks to realize actual societal change as inspired by grassroots needs, visions, and mobilisations, and involves creating sufficient awareness about the pitfalls of hierarchical power and political classism. All of this towards the goal of eliminating discrimination and inequity produced by hierarchies of power, or at least limiting their impact.

1. Work done in the context of elections, parliaments, cabinets, diplomacy, etc.

2. Such as international organizations concerned with the discourse of universal human rights.

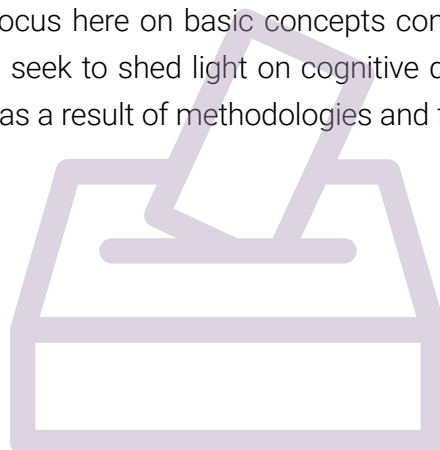
3. These include the United Nations, NATO, and others



Like all feminist works, we consider this toolkit to be a work in progress and one among many forms of feminist political practice that confront all oppressive systems and their intersections, including institutions that are patriarchal, class-based, colonial, etc. Contrary to a concept of politics that is confined to nation-state and electoral frameworks (and thus limited both spatially and temporally), this toolkit seeks to expand the meaning of political work to include processes that occur outside of conventional political systems, and which lead to political, social, and economic change. For example, we consider electoral participation to be a deeply limited form of political work; it is typically done within the confines of institutions that are themselves oppressive and restricted in terms of time, place, scope, and inclusivity. Furthermore, restricting politics to electoral systems and advocacy platforms that are linked to internationally recognised state frameworks excludes both non-citizens such as migrants and undocumented communities and groups considered non-normative due to their bodies, genders, or sexualities. For example, most transgender individuals in Arabic-speaking countries do not have identification documents that allow them to participate in elections. Electoral participation within conventional political systems is also not accessible to differently-abled individuals.

When we look at the state of affairs in Arabic-speaking countries, we find that most elections are pure theatre; such is the case in Egypt, Syria, and other countries. Everyone usually knows who the winner is ahead of time – and it is usually a man. Furthermore, if we turn our gaze to the settler-colonial state that has been installed on occupied Palestinian land, we see that electoral participation is not only limited in terms of impact, but also that it compromises the justice to which most Palestinians aspire. It also marginalises and erases the rights of Palestinians in the diaspora. This form of political participation is nothing more than a legitimisation and normalisation of relations with colonising forces that seek to divide and compartmentalise Palestinian resistance. In the electoral politics of the settler-colonial state, Palestinians living on land that was forcibly occupied in 1948 are treated as though they are minorities rather than the land's rightful owners or its indigenous people. In this context, electoral participation strengthens the colonial position in the demographic war that is being waged by the settler-colony.

This toolkit is the first in a series on feminist concepts that we are developing in the Arabic language, and which is concerned with building social and political movements in the Global South. We focus here on basic concepts concerned with feminism and political participation, and seek to shed light on cognitive dissonance and conceptual errors that have emerged as a result of methodologies and frameworks that have been



unthoughtfully borrowed from the Global North. Not only are certain ways of thinking that are common in the Global North unsuitable to the contexts of the Global South, such conceptual borrowing also constitutes an active obstruction to the pursuit of social justice in these distinct settings. Throughout the design of this toolkit it has been crucial to explore civil society and human rights organisations' failure to actualize a tangible role for women in decision-making positions. Such an exploration allows us to shed light on a central dynamic; the link between civil society organisations and state institutions in many countries. For example, in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates it is virtually impossible to establish organisations that oppose government policies. Accordingly, it is difficult for such organisations to achieve political change, as they are essentially parts of exclusionary nation-state systems that undermine feminist political work. Because these organisations are complicit with ruling regimes, feminist work done within them is connected to what is called state feminism, i.e. a form of feminism that promotes women's rights under the umbrella of the state and ignores the fact that the state itself often oppresses women and marginalised groups.

Thus, we see state feminism as a way of whitewashing oppressive systems. Insofar as it imposes a particular ceiling on political work, state feminism does not seek justice for all. Instead, it is concerned with consolidating superficial rights for women under the umbrella of "women's rights," even if this is done at the expense of working-class peoples. Rights-based methodologies are not equitable across social groups; they discriminate both between and within different groups, and create binary divisions between members of the same community. Such methodologies generalize women's experiences and needs as though they are a single group who share identical experiences, and they do the same to men, treating both categories as single homogenous groups. In turn, this leads to the fragmentation of all forms of social conflict and struggle. For this reason, this toolkit eschews rights-based methodologies and adopts a justice-based methodology instead.

Perhaps one of the biggest reasons for the failure to achieve a substantial role for women in conventional political decision-making positions is the simple fact that the definition of political work has been confined to formal entities. Such entities are contained within a single global system that does not represent the full spectrum of humanity. They use an approach that was designed from the viewpoint of elite classes, and which represents their interests. Their perspective revolves around the further monopolization of financial, human, and natural resources, and of political, economic, and social control. We must remember that these systems are nothing more than the result of negotiations and compromise, and they have not yet managed to resolve the world crises that they claim to address. On the contrary, in every corner of the globe we are witnessing the daily exacerbation of the landscape of oppression and intensification of the inequitable



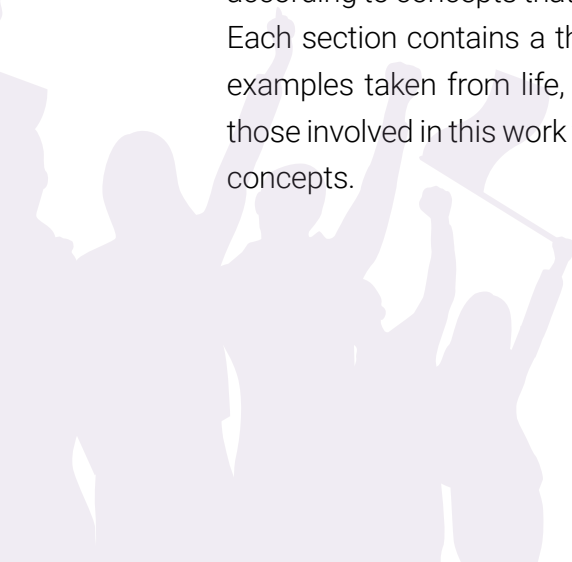
distribution of natural and financial resources. Our research indicates that a primary reason for the failure of accumulated efforts to improve the conditions of life for a large portion of the world's peoples is the restriction of politics and political work to state institutions (be they local, national, regional, international, or transnational). For example, it is completely ineffective in Arabic-speaking areas to focus on doing work through the frameworks of the state or the international community, the latter being represented by the United Nations. Civil society projects that are concerned with women's political participation are used to this way of doing things; writing periodic reports and doing advocacy work, all geared towards formal decision-makers. In these contexts, politics is seen as a form of power that is possessed only by certain classes. Political power is regarded as an inheritance and a monopoly of arms, something that allows for the violent imposition of control on the region's peoples. In these settings, where elections are held only as a theatrical formality, it is imperative that we recognise and promote alternative paths of political participation. In fact, in order to meaningfully pursue comprehensive intersectional justice, we must change our definition of politics and ways of thinking about creating social change.

In this vein, revolutionary uprisings and alternative modes of resistance to the injustice that is caused by the political class must be seen as a basic and necessary form of political participation. We must also depart from conventional and superficial ways of thinking about women's roles in social change. Instead, our findings show the importance of promoting grassroots feminist political mobilisation as a means to reduce violent and discriminatory social practices that emerge from the chaos of wars, military coups, and settler- and intellectual-colonialism.

In challenging the primacy attributed to conventional politicians and power-monopolists, we highlight grassroots social and political work that seeks to raise awareness of feminist (and not just women's) political concepts. We call for the adoption of a feminist political lens that does not revolve around traditional ways of doing politics or women's tokenistic representation. Rather, we encourage women, in their capacities both as individuals and as members of groups and communities, to view themselves as active players in social political systems, quite distinct from those who possess violent, patriarchal, and classist colonial power. This toolkit seeks to overcome the obstacles that arise from fixating on conventional politics and neglecting the political and politicised roles of women and women's knowledges. To do this, we focus on unpacking political concepts and increasing awareness of the political power that we possess as individuals, and which is intrinsic to each of us. Our goal is to increase collective belief in our abilities to affect real societal change from our various positionalities, regardless of the authority granted to us by state systems that have proven unsuccessful in the Global South in general, and

in Arabic-speaking countries in particular. This toolkit also has an important role to play in developing feminist solidarity in the countries of the Global North and discouraging some of the hierarchical practices that Northern feminists frequently adopt in relation to feminists of the Global South. These practices are re-deployed by Southern feminists when they adopt Northern approaches, and all of this leads to political fragmentation. Among its other functions, this text acts as a reminder that practicing accountability and attending to our positionalities are indispensable aspects of doing intersectional feminist work that seeks to eliminate all forms of oppression on a global scale.

After extensive review of existing literature, conducting case studies, and experimenting with various materials, we have decided to organise this toolkit around the feminist concept of the personal is political. This principle serves as the main focal point for casting our gaze anew on the concept of women's political participation. We do not consider this text to be a feminist educational tool, as our feminist perspective emphasizes that women themselves are producers of knowledge, regardless of their positionalities and relationship to formal authority. Instead, we see this toolkit as merely a single avenue for dismantling some of the misconceptions that impede our understanding of women's roles and hinder the effectiveness of feminist work. The misconceptions that we unpack herein make feminist work elitist and link it to political, cultural, social, and economic classism. The tools contained herein are designed to suit the needs of all those who are interested in political participation, and they are shaped with the particular intent of challenging elitist hierarchies that are commonplace in training and awareness-raising sessions. We offer this text as an entry-point for opening feminist political discussion and debate, and we encourage the reader to focus on challenging existing hierarchies and to use these materials for the sake of discussion—which may be more useful than the tools themselves. The application of the material contained herein should in no way be limited to formal political action. Political mobilisation through this lens can be informal, taking the shape of conversations and encounters with people from all walks of life. These tools can serve as a key to opening up discussion at various levels and in various settings: with family or friends, in one's neighbourhood, or in a village or city, etc. This type of activism does not require considerable funding. It can be done as part of our daily lives and through our daily personal practices. For ease of use, the toolkit is divided according to concepts that we have deemed essential for feminist political mobilisation. Each section contains a theoretical explanation of each concept, along with clarifying examples taken from life, practical exercises, and discussion topics designed to help those involved in this work to deepen their relationship with and understandings of these concepts.



1. Redefining Politics and Political Participation

1.1 Theory

The connection between women's political participation and women's representation in official decision-making positions has had a major impact on our understandings of both politics in general and feminist politics in particular. As a result, there is great confusion between feminist political work on one hand, and women's work in politics on the other. The latter revolves around the representation of women in institutions of authority, while the former is focused on intersectional feminist justice and examines said institutions instead of pursuing normative or tokenistic representation or obfuscating differences between us. In other words, we see feminist work as that which employs a comprehensive justice-based methodology and includes all social groups, not as something that concerns only women and their rights. Thus, adopting intersectionality as a methodology is important because it forces us to move away from the reification of essentialized identities and the reproduction of stereotypes that view women as nothing more than victims. Women have agency, and like men, it is in their power to adopt oppressive sexist and patriarchal practices. Using this methodology, we aim to address the oppressive practices of any and all parties regardless of their identities. Such practices are not the exclusive domain of men or any other social group. History is full of examples of women who were oppressed by other women as well as by men, precisely because they had access to conventional political institutions. History is also full of examples of women who fought for justice from beyond the walls and confines of these institutions.

Intersectionality as a methodology

Adopting intersectionality as a methodology forces us to move away from the reification of essentialized identities and the reproduction of stereotypes that view women as nothing more than victims. Women have agency, and like men, it is in their power to adopt oppressive sexist and patriarchal practices. Such practices are not the exclusive domain of men or any other social group

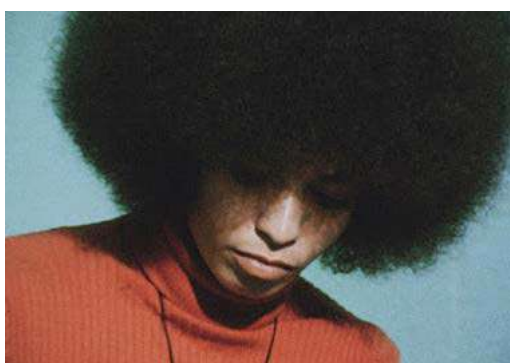
It is important here to highlight that political work done outside of conventional state frameworks is usually erased and obscured by a fixation on state institutions and the regimes that govern them. We rarely hear or read about influential political work that happens beyond the confines of conventional political systems. For example, a large number of women across the world are politically influential but work outside

of traditional frameworks. They may be involved in building political movements, awareness-raising, education, or mobilisation. There are also a great many women who value this kind of political work and prefer to operate on an individual level or within their families and surrounding communities, such as the neighbourhood, village, or city. The below examples demonstrate the fact that politics are not exclusively linked to official frameworks.

1.2 Practice

The following examples shed light on the benefits of working outside of conventional politics. They also demonstrate the way in which women's representation within traditional political institutions does not equal progress towards intersectional justice, or even towards the fulfilment of women's demands. These examples also highlight women's fundamental ability to lead and mobilise without being associated with state institutions or positions of authority.

Examples of women working outside conventional political institutions:



Angela Davis is a feminist political activist based in the United States of America, the settler-colonial state that has been installed on what some of the region's indigenous peoples call Turtle Island. She became known in the 1970s for her activist work in opposition to the prison industrial complex and its targeting of Black, indigenous, and migrant

people in the US. Because of her resistance to the prison system and her involvement in the American civil rights movement, US authorities issued an arrest warrant against Davis. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) listed her as one of its ten most wanted people. After two months in hiding, Davis was arrested in New York in 1970, at which point President Nixon congratulated the FBI for "arresting a dangerous terrorist."

Davis was subsequently released and the charges against her were dropped due to the great deal of pressure that was created by mass mobilisations in her support. For example, organisers were able to raise \$100,000 to bail her out from prison while on trial. Today, Davis is treasured around the world as one of the most important and inspiring contemporary political figures, and her work continues to affect the lives, thinking, and politics of millions of people.

Loujain al-Hathloul is a well-known Saudi Arabian activist and social media figure involved in women's rights. She is one of the signatories of a petition addressed to King Salman that calls for the abolition of the guardianship system that gives male "guardians" the authority to make a range of major life-decisions on women's behalf. Al-Hathloul has



been arrested several times, both for defying the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia, and for her general activism in the name of women's rights. Saudi Arabian authorities kidnapped her in the United Arab Emirates in 2018, and upon publication of this toolkit she was still detained in Saudi prisons along with a number of other activists, including Nouf Abdel

Aziz, Iman al-Nafjan, Samar Badawi, and Nassima al-Sada. These women are political prisoners who have been subjected to torture and incarceration without trial, and as of mid-2020, they have not been released.

In 2019, Saudi Arabia granted women the right to drive, but did not release the activists who fought for that and other rights. Al-Hathloul has not been forgotten. Thousands continue to participate in campaigns that are being organised to demand her release and the release of her fellow comrades in struggle.



Razan Zaitouneh is a Syrian human rights lawyer and civil society activist. She was one of the first women to participate in the 2011 Syrian uprising and because of her activities the Syrian regime accused her of being a foreign agent. Zaitouneh documented human rights violations while working with local revolutionary coordination committees and beginning in 2001 she served as a member of a legal

team that defended political prisoners. Along with a group of her colleagues, she also established the Human Rights Association in Syria, and in 2005 she established the Syrian Human Rights Information Link. Zaitouneh disappeared on December 9th, 2013, and her whereabouts and fate remain unknown to this day.

Examples of women working inside conventional political institutions:



Margaret Thatcher was the first woman to hold the position of Prime Minister in the United Kingdom. She held the office from 1979 to 1990, and during these eleven years she came to be known by the name “The Iron Lady.” The United Kingdom was universally praised for having a female prime minister and it was seen as being ahead of the rest of the world. Margaret Thatcher’s policies, however, were extremely prejudicial against the working-class, migrant, and non-white people of Britain.

Throughout her time in office, Thatcher appointed only one woman minister, and did not give any other senior positions to women. This exclusion made her seem all the more remarkable and deserving of her position, as compared to other women. Thatcher can also be counted among the politicians who actively protected racial apartheid in South Africa. She classified the African National Council for the Elimination of Apartheid as a terrorist organisation.

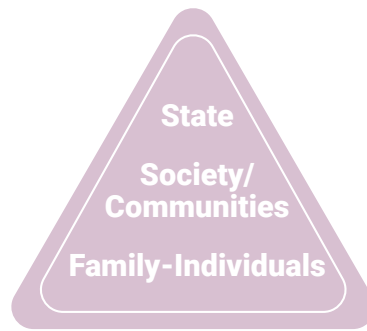


Safa Al-Hashem is the only woman who serves as a member of the Kuwaiti parliament. Despite regaining their right to vote and run in elections in 2005, few Kuwaiti women have been able to enter parliament.

Among the controversies surrounding Safa’s presence in parliament is her clear and frank stance in opposition to migrant workers, and particularly her hostile views towards Egyptian workers. She is quoted to have said; “I have a budget deficit. I have 4 million, 3 million migrants, and a million citizens. Egyptians are the largest community, followed by the Indians and Filipinos. These are marginal workforce; they are extra fat weighing down the body of the Kuwaiti State.”

Discussion exercise:

- What is the relationship between the state, society, communities, families, and individuals as components of the social and political system in which we live?
- Encourage participants to reflect on how the relationship between these components may seem somewhat hierarchical, but that all states exist in the context of larger societies and that no state can exist without communities, families, and individuals. Thus, that which seems to be at the top of the pyramid derives its legitimacy and very existence from us—societies and communities that are made up of individuals.



Discussion exercise:

Ask participants for examples of women political actors inside and outside of conventional political systems. Encourage participants to differentiate between political influence and formal politics by giving examples of women in their lives such as mothers, sisters, etc. At this stage, it is important to lead the discussion towards something that all women have in common: the ability to impact others.

Note:

As part of your discussions be sure to address the general importance of political work and social change when it comes to the task of attaining intersectional justice. From there, the conversation can proceed to the idea that political representation in conventional political systems is only one tool among many for pursuing social change towards justice, and not a goal in and of itself. The same principle and concept of politics also allows us to emphasize the concept of the personal is political.



2. The Personal is Political in Practice

2.1 Theory

The feminist principle that the personal is political holds a great deal of power insofar as it brings attention to the fact that we are all capable of political action through our ability to influence others. Politics cannot be separated from power and the power relations that enable us to influence others. Nor can it be limited to political power at the national, regional, or international levels. Instead, personal, social, societal, and local power relations must be incorporated into our concept of politics. This allows us to recognise our own capacities of political influence, even if these capacities operate mainly in the arena of our individual and family practices.

One of the problems with a discourse that privileges conventional politics as the primary and only form of political practice and decision-making is that it erases the decisions that are made by women in many other realms of life. For example, our research in Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as Nour Al-Mazidi's research on women's political participation in Kuwait, has shown that women's political contributions cannot be confined to conventional politics. On the contrary, women contribute to politics through domestic work, emotional labour, and daily decisions, all of which ultimately influences conventional public politics. These practices, which are often dismissed as "individual" or "personal," are in no way separate from political work, and when we begin to look at things this way, we see the personal become political.

It also follows from this principle that the many forms of oppression to which women and marginalised groups are subjected are political issues. Commonly categorised as merely personal issues and individual cases, the lived experiences of these groups are chronically marginalised and dismissed. It is extremely important that we link the personal and the political in order to refute such claims. Whenever we understand the two terms in a binary sense that sees them as being in opposition to one another, we participate in the marginalisation of countless political experiences and contributions that take place outside of conventional politics. For instance, despite its prevalence, domestic violence is thought of as a private matter in many places around the world (not only in Arabic-speaking regions). In truth, domestic violence is a systemic oppressive phenomenon that disproportionately affects women and should be regarded as a political issue.

2.2 Practice

Many personal stories have political impact. The following examples may not be directly related to feminism, but they can be considered a form of feminist political practice. The following examples illustrate how personal practices can have political effects.

Boycotting



Boycott campaigns are a type of individual and personal practice that consists of boycotting products, services, etc., that are produced or offered by oppressive entities, be they states, companies, or other parts of the private sector.

- Campaigns in support of the Palestinian cause that call for the boycott of Zionist goods.
- Campaigns that emerged to support the end of apartheid in South Africa by boycotting trade with white colonists from the Netherlands, Britain, and other countries, as well as with settlers in South Africa.
- Campaigns to boycott companies, banks, and universities that invest in the arms industry or otherwise collude with oppressive regimes.
- Campaigns to reduce the use of plastic and the consumption of animal products in order to mitigate environmental degradation.
- The campaign to boycott Amazon for its abusive treatment of employees.

Anti-harassment movements



- These are campaigns and stories that shed light on the systemic harassment that women are subjected to. They come from a personal place and personal experiences, but they resonate widely.
- The #MeToo campaign spread through social media and was concerned with ending sexual violence against women by breaking the silence surrounding

the subject. The campaign inspired hundreds of thousands of women to share their experiences and raise awareness about sexual violence.

- The Khalili Masafah (give me some space) campaign was launched by a group of Syrian women in their local communities to stop the harassment of women on public transportation. The campaign started on a very small scale and subsequently spread to neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon.



Personal stories with political resonance



For Sama is a film by Waad Al-Kateab in which she documents her personal experience living in Aleppo over the course of five years against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in Syria. By documenting the stages of her life Waad provided a glimpse of what life is like under these conditions to a global audience. Her film was nominated for four BAFTA Awards.



The story of George Floyd, a Black American man who was murdered by the police on May 25, 2020, ignited rage among Black American communities that have been subjected to unceasing racism, violence, and marginalisation throughout the history of the United States. Demonstrations provoked by the murder of George Floyd continue to this day.

Discussion Suggestions

Open the discussion with these questions:

From your perspective, what is politics? Do you feel like you are a part of politics or that your daily practices have political effects? How?

Continue with the following questions and points:

How do your decisions influence those around you and the socio-political systems in which we live?

Try to shed light on the impact of personal actions on the politics, societies, and individuals that surround us. How can personal decisions be influential on various social and political levels?

Lead the discussion towards the idea that politics is the ability we have to affect others.

Note:

The value of this discussion lies in increasing our awareness of the influence we can have on society as individuals regardless of our positions in the world. This recognition leads to the conclusion that politics is a daily practice that consists of our attempts to influence those around us and practices that we undertake voluntarily.

At this point it is important to emphasize that recognizing personal and individual work as political does not mean placing responsibility on individuals instead of oppressive systems. Certainly, we do not consider settler colonialism on Palestinian land to be an individual responsibility. Rather, we consider boycotting Zionist goods to be an act of political resistance against an oppressive system. We also do not believe that oppressive regimes in Arabic-speaking countries are individual responsibilities. We do believe, however, that as individuals we all have an obligation to think about our positionalities and practices, and about their impact on ruling regimes. Thinking in this way allows us to avoid binary oppositions between individual and collective responsibility. After all, individuals are part of a collective in all cases.

The Personal is Political

Understanding the personal as political prompts us to reflect on our positionalities and the influence that we and other individuals have on society. This leads to an in-depth understanding of the way in which our daily struggles are connected transnationally, regardless of where we are located or the positions that we hold. We can then recognise our agency and abilities to effect change beyond the binary oppositions that have been put in place by unjust regimes. We are not only the passive recipients of oppression. We are also parts of oppressive systems, and our actions can lead either to resistance of those systems or to negotiation and collusion with them.

3. Political Practice

Although it is commonplace, thinking about political practices in terms of direct involvement with state mechanisms marginalises a long history of effective, anti-state feminist political action. In this section, we present a number of examples of feminist political practices that have affected conventional politics by altering laws, changing minds, and raising awareness.

Examples of Political Resistance



Example: The Silent Demonstration, which took place in Jerusalem on October 26th, 1929, is considered the first documented feminist protest in Palestine. Using a convoy of cars that roamed through every part of Jerusalem, women from all over Palestine organised this action during the Al-Buraq revolution in order to protest British colonialism. At the time, colonial

forces were threatening women via their husbands, attempting to force them to remain in their homes. The activists did not submit, however, and decided instead to directly disobey orders, putting themselves at risk by going out into the streets in their cars and executing this silent act of resistance.



Example: The suffragette movement in Britain that demanded women's right to vote was classified as terrorist after activists resorted to violence in order to achieve their demands for political representation. This movement arose in the early twentieth century, and eventually succeeded in achieving its sought-after political gains.

Example: Feminist political activism in Arabic-speaking countries has sought to change legal provisions relating to women, specifically laws taken from British colonial legislation that reduce the punishment of a rapist if he offers to marry his victim. In 2017 such a law was removed from Jordanian criminal code through Article 308.





Example: Families for Freedom is a women's group in Syria that was created to advocate around the cause of detainees, prisoners, and forcibly disappeared persons who have vanished into the catacombs of the Syrian regime. The group was born out of feelings of frustration and disappointment about existing political parties. From these

feelings, women decided to join forces in order to represent their families themselves and to make their voices and demands heard in international forums.

Example: The campaign to abolish Article 153 of the Kuwaiti Penal Code was organised by a small group of women who sought to challenge this piece of legislation. Article 153, which reduces punishments for so-called "honour crimes," was copied from British colonial laws. As part of the campaign, organisers coordinated awareness-raising meetings, seminars, and gatherings to stimulate discussion about violence against women and the role of women in society, as well as to expose the extent of harm done by this law.

Example: The campaign Emme Urdiniye w Jinsiyata Haq Li (my mother is Jordanian and her nationality is my right) started as a small-scale initiative and expanded into



larger pressures on the Jordanian government to provide rights to the children of Jordanian women married to non-Jordanians. The Jordanian nationality law has not yet been amended to grant Jordanian women the right to give citizenship to their children. The campaign did succeed, however, in pushing the government to provide certain benefits and privileges to the children of Jordanian women, including rights pertaining to work, public education, property ownership, healthcare, and driver's licenses. Similar campaigns addressing

these prejudicial nationality laws exist in most Arabic-speaking countries, including Egypt and Lebanon.

Discussion: Forms of Political Practice

If we step outside of legal frameworks a bit and think about politics as our ability to influence others, what are some different forms of political practice and how do these play out on different levels? Try to direct the conversation to the fact that we can exercise our ability to influence others in the following ways:

1. Force: through the use of punishment, threats, and violence.
2. Consensus: through consensus-making and persuasion.

Politics of consensus

At the level of the **family**:
teaching children about
the importance of
certain habits

At the level of **society**:
consultations in order
to make decisions that
meet societal needs

At the level of the **state**:
people's referendums

Politics of force

At the level of the **family**:
forcing certain habits
onto children.

At the level of the **society**:
depriving girls of education

At the level of the **state**:
dictatorships

Discussion Exercise

Think of three examples from your daily life where you make decisions using the politics of power, and three examples where you make decisions using the politics of consensus.

Try to direct the discussion towards the ways in which the hierarchies of power in which we are embedded enable us to impose things on those who have less power than we do.

- We consider the above to be the most comprehensive classification of political practices to date, as it accounts for various levels of political influence, and it does not construe the practice of power as the exclusive domain of a specific political class or of people who hold decision-making positions at the state level. Political practice can be found in all of the ways we exercise power, whether this is by exerting force or reaching consensus. Accordingly, we believe that this formulation is the most consistent with feminist political theory that considers all practices of power, regardless of the form they take, to be a form of **agency**. We all have societal power, and we can all influence and change the oppressive institutions that create hierarchies of power among us.

The Concept of Agency

Agency is a theoretical tool that has been developed in the social sciences. It is derived from the premise that regardless of our positions within hierarchies of power, each of us has agency and the ability to make decisions. The concept of agency allows us to move away from stereotypes that depict women and marginalised groups as victims of oppressive regimes with no power. Despite all manner of oppressive forces, and within the confines of varying material limitations that affect us all, women and marginalised groups can and do make choices in our lives. Even in the worst cases and in the context of oppressive patriarchal institutions we make choices for ourselves. These choices may manifest in direct resistance, or in negotiations to achieve specific outcomes, or in identification with said institutions in order to obtain certain guarantees and privileges (for more on types of agency: Nasser-Eddin, 2011). With this concept, we acknowledge that everyone has space, though it may be at an individual level, for personal agency that enables them to make decisions. When we understand agency, we can engage with women as knowledgeable actors and creators whose knowledge about their situations is greater than ours, regardless of any status we may have as experts in a given field.

4. Hierarchies of Power and Positionality

4.1 Theory

Discrepancies in power that exist between people are formed by a number of factors that are variable and socially constructed, and which are used as classifications that carry social and economic value. Despite the socially constructed nature of these differentiating factors, they have a real and formidable impact on our concrete, material lives. Their intersections also create very distinct personal experiences for different individuals. Some of the factors that make up the discrepancies in power between us are the following: (1) social and economic class, (2) age, (3) parental status and care duties, (4) physical and mental ability, (5) sex and gender, (6) marital status, (7) religion, (8) skin colour, (9) race and ethnicity, (10) nationality and citizenship status, (11) immigration status, (12) education, and (13) political class.

It is important to clarify that while these factors affect our lives and how we understand the world around us, their value and meaning changes in relation to shifting temporal and spatial circumstances. This topic alone could take a full day of discussion with examples and exercises, as it is an integral part of feminist political awareness.

Examples of change in the value of these differentiating factors:

- **Social and economic class:** Any given individual's social and economic circumstances can change for the better or worse due to multiple factors such as war, employment, etc. Individuals are also exposed to various forms of discrimination based on economic and social class. Although a person's economic class-status may change for the better, thus increasing their access to life's basic needs, their social class will often continue to affect the way society perceives them and cause discrimination against them. Social class also manifests itself in life-style choices, clothing, accents, food, etc.
- **Age:** We are treated differently in society depending on changes in our age. Thus, age is a changing factor and different age-groups face different types of discrimination. In some places employers prefer not to employ certain age groups, and sometimes young people are ignored due to their age.
- **Parental status and care duties:** Individuals experience various forms of discrimination due to their parental status and care duties. For example, some workplaces prefer not to employ women or married mothers. Care duties are also a changing factor.
- **Physical and mental ability:** This is also a changing factor, as normative bodies can be considered fully "abled" only temporarily. Our abilities to walk, move, comprehend, and absorb information all vary according to age, gender, and life events. Because the world is built in a way that is incompatible with different physical and mental

abilities, individuals who are not able-bodied in the normative sense are subject to discrimination in access to physical, intellectual, and material resources, as well as social stigma, exploitation, marginalisation, and stereotypes related to differences in our bodies. Hence, when thinking about our differing physical and mental abilities, it is important to take our concrete physical experiences into account. Some groups have no access to employment opportunities because their bodies or ways of thinking are outside of the familiar pattern in these places.

- **Sex and gender:** Sex and gender are also variable, unfixed factors in an individual's life. Women and non-normative persons of all kinds are subject to various types of discrimination due to their gender roles and practices⁴.
- **Marital status:** This is another changing factor that affects how society interacts with us and the expectations it has for us. For example, in some societies divorced women face discrimination due to their marital status, and single women may be pressured into marriage.
- **Religion or faith:** Religion and faith are also changing factors in an individual's life that can cause them to be exposed to violence or discrimination. In some countries, non-dominant religious groups are disadvantaged, such as Muslims in India or Europe and Jews in Europe during World War II. A person may spend a given phase of their life in a location where they belong to a dominant religious group, but this may change if they travel elsewhere.
- **Skin colour:** The disparate values assigned to skin-color also change according to spatio-temporal circumstances. However, people with dark skin face universal discrimination that has a concrete material impact on their lives.
- **Race and ethnicity:** The values associated with race and ethnicity also vary. For instance, a person may be in a place where they belong to a dominant race and then move to another place where they are part of a racial minority.
- **Nationality and citizenship status:** Nationality is a changing factor insofar as it is possible for a person to lose their identification documents and/or nationality, as is the case in situations of occupation and settler-colonialism. Some individuals also obtain different nationalities. Whatever the case, our nationalities (or lack thereof) profoundly affect our material lives. They may determine our ability to move, travel, migrate, and even access resources. To varying degrees, holders of passports and nationalities from the Global South are more vulnerable to discrimination based on nationality and citizenship. It also bears emphasizing that many of us do not have identification papers and are not considered citizens of any country.

4. More on sex, gender, and the body: [exercises on gender, sexuality and the body](#).

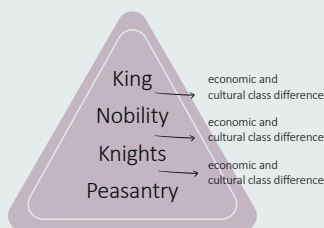
- **Migration status:** As a changing factor, migration status affects our lives in a significant and tangible way that depends directly on temporal and spatial factors. Migration affects our ability to access basic services such as healthcare and education, among others. The most vulnerable group to this type of discrimination in Arabic-speaking countries is refugees and foreign labourers. It is worth noting here that migration status plays a fundamental role in shaping the experiences of immigrants in the countries of the Global North, who are often excluded from services, conventional politics, and the job market.
- **Education:** This is also a changing factor that greatly affects our experiences in the world. Many people suffer from discrimination based on their level of education. Society typically regards women's knowledge as less valuable than other forms of knowledge and marginalises their perspectives. This form of discrimination is also elitist, and in order to achieve grassroots feminist mobilisation, we must hold accountable the hierarchies that create these disparities between us in our concrete, material lives.
- **Political class:** Although political class is a changing factor, in the case of Arabic-speaking countries, it is largely inherited. This can constitute an obstacle for many of us when it comes to obtaining traditional decision-making positions. The political class plays a fundamental role in the course of our lives and choices, and sometimes causes us to be afraid for ourselves when we consider challenging classist and oppressive political regimes. For example, the majority of the Arabic-speaking region's rulers are from specific, usually economically privileged groups. Unless brought down by revolutions, they continue to inherit rule from one another. This limits political participation in the region for all those who do not belong to these classes, be they men or women.

4.2 Practice

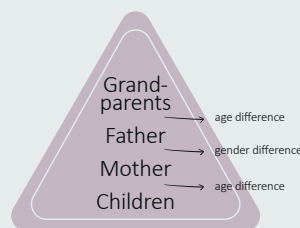
Exercise

After reflecting on the following hierarchical arrangements and power relations, analyse your own positionality according to the hierarchies of power wherever you are. You can choose to analyse the power hierarchies in your home, at your workplace, in your neighbourhood, or in the general political system that is dominant in your location.

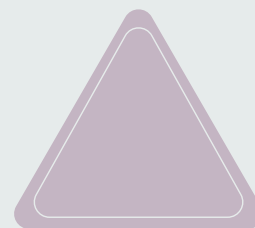
The Power Hierarchy of European Feudalism



The Power Hierarchy of the Family



Analyse your positionality according to the existing power hierarchies wherever you are King



Guiding points for discussion:

In your view, do these differences cause disparities in power and authority?

We are often exposed to situations in our daily lives in which we feel that a form of power is being exerted over us because of the factors discussed above. Can you provide us with two examples of times when power was exercised on you due to one of the factors?

Exercise: Our Positionalities in Hierarchies of Power

Ask yourself and those around you the following questions:

- Do I belong to an economic upper-class?
- Do I belong to a majority or dominant social group (in terms of religion, race, or ethnicity)?
- Do I have any special physical or mental needs?
- Am I a citizen of my country of residence?
- Do I have power (could be psychological or emotional) over anyone in my community?

*Answering yes to any of the above questions indicates social power of some kind, which means that you have influence on individuals in your community. Influencing anyone is a political act, and this is connected to the principle of *the personal is political*.

Note: In discussion, try to highlight how much political impact an individual can have due to our positionalities in hierarchies of power.

Intrinsic Power

In addition to the socio-political power that we derive from our positionalities, as individuals we also possess an intrinsic, intimate power that we acquire through our experiences. This power manifests itself in the form of talents, skills, capabilities, and the ability to persuade others and enlist allies, in addition to other life experiences gained through practicing the politics of consensus, not force. Such strength is most effective when we recognise both our positive and negative traits and face them internally so that we can have influence externally. One of the most important features of feminist work is the ability to remedy issues that are extremely personal in a way that realizes larger political goals pertaining to justice and rights, etc. It is in this way that we can apply the principle of *the personal is political* in practice.

Example: Tala'at Movement

The Palestinian feminist movement Tala'at began on September 26, 2019, under the slogan, "there is no free homeland without free women." Tala'at organisers coordinated numerous protests at the same date and time all over Palestine, from Haifa to Jaffa, Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nazareth, Gaza, Rafah, Taibe, Jish, Arraba and others. The movement made a transnational impact and was enthusiastically received by both Palestinian and non-Palestinian women, and by women in the diaspora. Similar protests were organised in Beirut, London, Berlin, Jordan and other countries. One of the main contributions of the Tala'at feminist movement is its strong stance on the intersectionality of political struggles. Women's issues cannot be separated from other political issues or from settler colonialism on Palestinian land. The Tala'at movement was effective because regardless of their positionalities within hierarchies of power, the women organisers used their intrinsic power to create an environment that was receptive to their causes without any external support or funding.



5. Power and Oppression

The previous section explored the various factors that create hierarchies of power among us. Feminist intersectional theory aims to limit the disparities in privilege that exist between us due to these differentiating factors, and to create an equitable world where justice prevails. It also uses these factors to determine sites of power and oppression and understand how they work. In order to understand oppression, we must develop feminist political awareness, which we define as the ability to do the following: perceive and understand the reality of various structures of oppression and violence, practice an awareness of said structures, call them by their names, and find linkages between them. This also includes having an understanding of our own and others' positionalities in order to make more fair and equitable decisions and avoid abusing power in our daily lives, be it in the public or private spheres. This calls for continued self-reflection and self-criticism wherein we ask ourselves if we are misusing any differentiating factors, such as age, economic or political class, or any other category from which we derive power and authority. This kind of reflection can be applied to every level of our lives. In order to avoid misusing whatever power we possess, regardless of its form or the extent of its influence, we must first understand the types of oppression that result from the abuse of power, as defined by the sociologist Iris Marion Young. Young (1990) summarised oppression in terms of its five faces: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural domination, and violence.

Five Faces of Oppression

1. Exploitation

Exploitation is defined as the use of material, natural, and human resources in an inequitable manner that allows some to benefit disproportionately from labour, work, and resources that should be available to all. Exploitation also manifests in mistreatment, blackmail, and abuse with the intent to monopolise and usurp the hard work and resources of others.



Examples of exploitation:

- Political classes exploiting natural resources in order to obtain profit or power.
- Private and public sectors exploiting migrants as cheap labour.
- Employers exploiting child labour.

- The sexual trafficking of women.
- Systems of slavery, including the sponsorship (kafala) system that is used to exploit foreign workers in Arab-speaking countries.
- Exploiting the abilities and need for income of working class people by depriving them of their labour rights.
- Humans exploiting natural resources, for example cutting down trees and destroying forests in order to acquire land and property because of capitalist, material greed.
- Trafficking in human organs.
- Exploiting animal resources under the guise of scientific experimentation.
- Medical experimentation that exploits the bodies of certain racial and ethnic groups and of people with non-normative sexualities.

2. Marginalisation

Marginalisation is the treatment of certain individuals, groups, or classes in society as though they are insignificant, marginal, or secondary people, and it consists of mistreating certain groups and individuals due to their positionality within hierarchies of power. Marginalisation can be based on gender, age, race, sexuality, class, nationality, or other factors, and it manifests on several levels, including the social, economic, and political.



Examples of marginalisation:

- The fact that the role of women is largely absent from history books is one form of historical marginalisation experienced by women.
- Conventional political participation, decision-making processes, and national narratives all marginalise dominant racial and ethnic groups within state systems in various ways. In Kuwait, for example, as in all parts of the world, non-citizens, stateless individuals, and persons without identification documents are marginalised.
- Children are marginalised with regards to decision-making in the household because of their age.
- Citizens being excluded from certain job opportunities because of the colour of their skin is a form of marginalisation.
- Some families marginalised with regards to celebrations or gatherings

because of their cultural, economic, or political class-belonging.

- People with non-normative mental and physical abilities are marginalised in the labour market.
- Transgender people are marginalised and prevented them from obtaining identification documents that would allow them to work and entitle them to education and health services.
- The voices of ethnic minorities are marginalised and their role in society is overlooked by nation-state systems.
- Indigenous peoples are economically, politically, and socially marginalised in settler-colonial countries such as the United States, Canada, South Africa, and occupied Palestine.

3. Powerlessness

Powerlessness occurs when certain individuals or social groups are stripped of their ability to influence, make decisions, or determine the courses of their lives. Groups that are rendered powerless usually feel weak and like they are incapable of making decisions and choices. Many oppressive practices lead to this feeling of weakness and experience of powerlessness. Depriving people of power may be direct and targeted, or it may be indirect, carried out through other oppressive practices such as violence, marginalisation, and exploitation, all of which lead to powerlessness.



Examples of powerlessness:

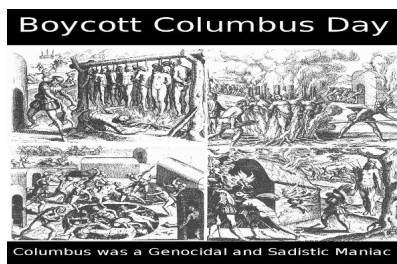
- Imprisonment, arrest, and forced detention are examples of directly rendering people powerless, as they deprive individuals of their ability to have influence and make choices.
- Refugee arrival centres in the countries of the Global North. These centres operate as detention centres insofar as they prevent refugees from engaging in the surrounding community and restrict their freedom of movement and work.
- Due to powerlessness people often feel like they do not have any life options. This may be due to systematic marginalisation and intimidation, as when women feel that marriage is the only option available to them.

- Specific racial and ethnic groups may feel that they are vulnerable due to their economic circumstances, which may in turn make them feel unable to pursue education.
- Individuals with different physical and mental abilities may feel powerless due to the discrimination they face from the state, society, and family.



4. Cultural Imperialism

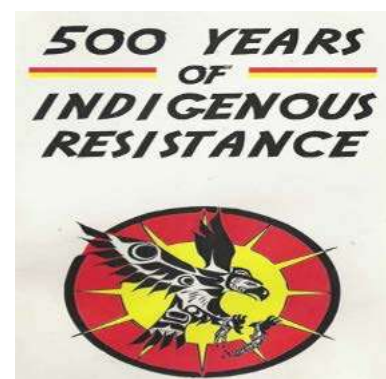
Cultural imperialism is the practice by which a dominant entity that has political, economic, or social power promotes and imposes its culture, ideas, and behaviours onto marginalised and vulnerable peoples. It can take several forms, including the propagation of stereotypes, generalisations, and hierarchical



binaries about the nature of an ideal culture, or the stigmatisation of specific behaviours or practices in order to demonstrate superiority over the "other." This "other" is typically women, a racial group, an ethnic people, or some other group classified as inferior.

Examples of cultural imperialism:

- European colonists have suppressed the indigenous cultures of Turtle Island, which is known today by the name of one such colonist. Colonial forces sought to change the name of the place, erase indigenous traditions, corral, detain and kill the region's indigenous peoples, and to steal their wealth in order to establish colonies on their lands.
- Zionist colonists impose colonial names on Palestinian cities and villages from which Palestinians have been forcibly displaced, as well as onto those still inhabited by Palestinians. On most world maps, for example, you will not find the name Palestine.



- Prohibiting racial, ethnic, and minority groups from using their languages, as was the case of the Kurdish people in Syria.
- Imposing specific clothing on certain social groups, such as banning the veil and niqab in some countries and making them mandatory in others.
- British and French colonialism imposed legal systems on the territories they occupied in order to change the area's culture and assimilate it into hegemonic colonial culture. These laws include punitive provisions for non-normative sexual practices and gender performances, as well as provisions that reduce punishment for perpetrators of rape, marital rape, so-called honour crimes, and other crimes.
- The holiday of Thanksgiving is observed annually in the United States



of America, Canada, and some of the Caribbean islands—all countries that exist on the indigenous land known by some tribes as Turtle Island. Held on the fourth Thursday of every November, Thanksgiving is a national celebration and official holiday wherein a day of remembrance is observed for the colonists' first successful

harvest on those lands in 1621. While the state and dominant social groups consider it a cause for celebration, indigenous people of these regions consider the day of Thanksgiving to be a day of grief and mourning, because it is a reminder of massacres and land-theft.

5. Violence

Violence is the use of physical, symbolic, or psychological force to cause harm and damage, impose dominance and exploitation, and to threaten specific individuals, groups, or communities. There are several types of violence, including: (1) verbal, (2) physical, (3) sexual, (4) emotional or mental, (5) institutional, (6) social, (7) economic, and (8) symbolic.



Examples of violence:

- Forced military conscription is a form of institutional violence committed by states.
- The states' use of military and police force to suppress those who oppose it, including revolutions, protests, and demonstrations, is also a form of institutional violence.

- Using, trading, and manufacturing arms are a form of violence. As practices they have widespread effects because of the serious damage they cause.
- Rape, harassment, and forcing someone to engage in sexual intercourse or sexual acts under duress are a form of violence.
- The stigmatisation of certain groups, such as divorced and single women, is a form of symbolic and social violence.
- All types of blackmail are a form of violence. This includes both emotional blackmail wherein people are compelled to engage in practices to which they do not consent, and direct blackmail wherein people are threatened with exposure, publishing images, or other damage to their reputation.
- Deprivation from work, education, and financial and natural resources are a form of economic violence.



Discussion

Discuss the following statement:

These oppressive practices are usually performed by people, entities, or communities that have positions of authority derived from hierarchies of power that are built according to: social, economic and political class; physical and mental ability; age, sex, gender, skin colour, race; cultural and religious background; nationality and immigration status, and other differentiating factors.

Note:

Try to think of oppressive practices that may be performed by people who do not have power or authority. It is important in general to challenge the myth that women and other marginalised groups cannot practice oppression, and it is important for this discussion in particular to move beyond stereotypes and essentialisation.

Exercise

We all misuse the power that we derive from our positionalities. Think of a situation in which you misused power that you have due to your nationality, race, religion, gender, education, political class, or other factors that confer different levels of power. For instance, you may have hit your child (an example of violence) in order to impose a certain behaviour (an example of cultural imperialism).

Important reminder: psychological and emotional power

Remember that we usually overlook the power that we possess in the form of psychological or emotional influence over others. We may have power because our parents love us or our children are attached to us. We also overlook the fact that this power can be abused, especially if we use it to emotionally manipulate others and impose our desires on them. This way of abusing power is a form of emotional violence that can include cutting off communication, stonewalling, passive aggression, bullying, and belittlement. It is our responsibility to discern the difference between practicing this form of violence (which we sometimes do unconsciously) and using our agency to negotiate the spaces in which we move and express ourselves. There are many women in this world whose situations force them to resort to these kinds of practices in order to survive, carve out some space of freedom for herself, or curb the violence to which she is subjected. If emotional manipulation is taking place as a way for someone to force their preferences on individuals in their lives who do not infringe on them in any way, however, it is considered emotional violence.

6. Feminist Politics

Based on this understanding of the impact of power's abuse, regardless of type, we can conclude that social justice requires us to confront all faces of oppression and all oppressive practices without compromising on one for the sake of another. Only in this way can we ensure inclusion for all and put a stop to the discrimination and oppressive practices that may affect us, and may affect others. In this way we can create real feminist solidarity that is predicated on our understanding of how we are all affected by and involved in global political systems of inequity and oppression, regardless of where we are located. Thus, we view oppression as a practice that can be curtailed, not as something that is tied to a specific social group, race, or gender. Due to the ways in which our experiences and identities intersect, it is all too possible for women to practice oppression and for minorities to monopolise power and resources. It is here that the theory of intersectionality plays a crucial role. We define intersectionality as a political, intellectual, and research methodology that consists of analysing people's different situations as being composed of a set of intersecting experiences. This means examining the intersection of several oppressive structures such as gender, sex, social and ethnic class, and race. Using this methodology, we see that the experiences of all women and men are not homogenous, but rather they vary due to age, social class, level of education, physical ability, and marital status, etc. Within this framework, we cannot consider individuals to be only victims of oppressive regimes, as individuals are also a central component of those oppressive regimes under which we live.



Transnational Feminist Solidarity

The creation of transnational feminist solidarity networks is a crucial tool for establishing an effective feminist political movement. This kind of solidarity is distinguished by its ability to raise awareness about the way in which the core causes of oppression are shared by all, regardless of our locations, backgrounds, or positionalities. We all suffer from the oppression that is inherent to patriarchy, colonialism, and the nation-state's repressive and class-based systems. The specificities of our material life-circumstances differ significantly, however, even as they are generated by these same oppressive systems. Because our lived experiences are different, it is important to carefully avoid appropriating the voices, causes, and spaces of others, and to refrain from diluting our own and others' causes.

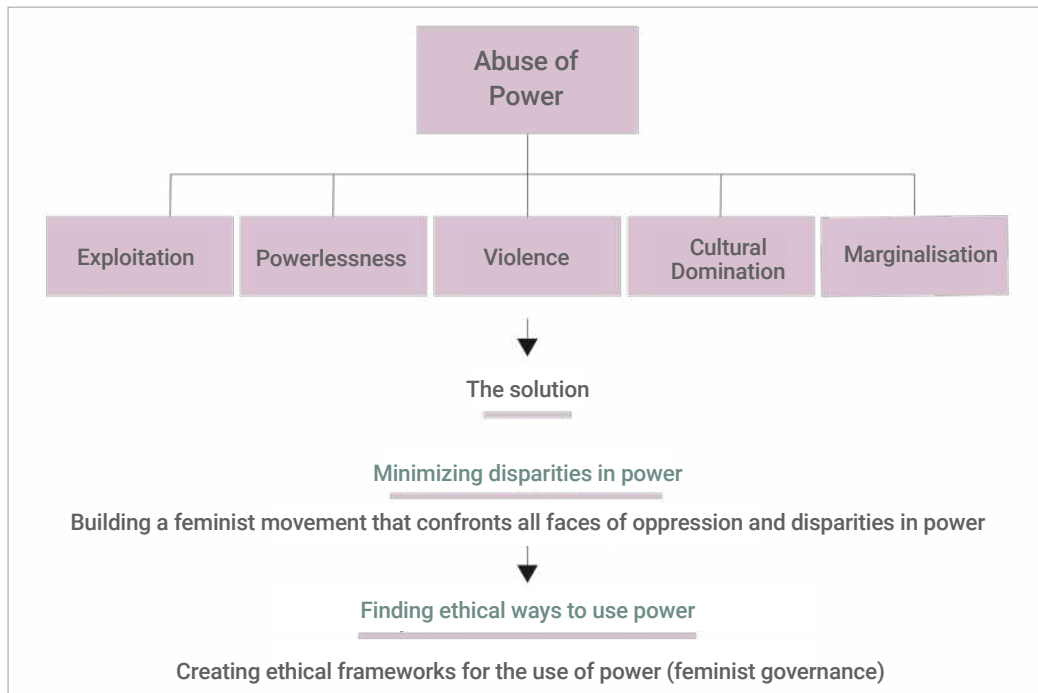
Intersectionality as a Theoretical Tool

Intersectionality is a political, intellectual, and research methodology that consists of analysing people's different situations as being composed of a set of intersecting experiences. This means examining the intersection of several oppressive structures such as gender, sex, social and ethnic class, and race, in addition to colonialism, patriarchal institutions, and repressive state systems. Using this methodology, we see that the experiences of all women and men are not homogenous, but rather they vary due to age, social class, level of education, physical ability, and marital status, etc. Within this framework, we cannot consider individuals to be only victims of oppressive regimes, as individuals are also a central component of those oppressive regimes under which we live.

Example: The efficacy of transnational feminist solidarity

Regardless of where it takes place, the arms trade is one of the greatest causes of global violence. Because the weapons that are used to kill people all over the world are exported from the same international arms companies, opposition to the arms trade is a form of transnational activism. For example, the weapons used by Turkish military forces in Rojava in October of the year 2019 were made in Britain and imported by Turkey. Thus, it would benefit all of our movements to create far-reaching networks of opposition to the arms trade so that we can cooperate to end violence and oppression in all its forms.





Exercise

Keeping the five categories of oppression in mind, answer the following questions:

- Which forms of oppressive practices are you motivated to challenge in order to achieve social justice?
- What is the main cause of these practices?
- What methods do you think could be used to address these practices?
- How can we apply these methods in real life? What resources do you need? With whom should you create networks and solidarity? With whom do we share these forms of suffering?

Note:

This exercise can be applied at the individual, organisational, and community levels.

Exercise

Every day we perform actions that could be classified as challenging oppression, such as minimizing disparities in power, finding ethical ways to use power, or practicing and promoting feminist solidarity. Think of actions you perform that challenge oppression.

Guiding examples:

- Reducing age-based disparities by listening to the demands of different age groups and attempting to get closer to them.
- Reducing class-based disparities by helping others and working for the fair distribution of resources.
- Finding ethical ways to manage money, institutions, households, and families.
- Generally developing ethical forms of governance.
- Supporting women in your community who may have been subjected to violence.

General research question:

Starting with your own location and positionality, identify the following:

- What forms of oppression are you subjected to? How can they be classified according to the categories of exploitation, marginalisation, cultural domination, powerlessness, and violence?
- What is the main cause of this oppression?
- Who else suffers from this form of oppression at the local, national, regional, and global levels?
- Do you share the main cause of this oppression with these groups?
- How can we confront the main cause of this oppression?
- How can your cause intersect with someone else's?
- What useful lessons can be gained by studying the political struggles of others?

Finally, the following three points summarise the methods of intersectional feminist political work that can be used to meaningfully confront forms of oppression that result from the abuse of power. These can be practiced on several levels, beginning with the individual.

- 1. Building a feminist movement that confronts oppression and power disparities.**
- 2. Creating ethical frameworks for the use of power (such as feminist governance).**
- 3. Creating transnational intersectional feminist solidarity.**

Reading List and Resources

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