



# Operationalizing intersectionality in the Arab region: Challenges and ways forward



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**Operationalizing intersectionality  
in the Arab region:  
Challenges and ways forward**



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## Executive Summary

Gender inequality is one of the most persistent forms of inequality today, at regional and global levels. Despite significant attempts by governmental and non-governmental actors to address the problem of gender inequality in the Arab region, it remains a major challenge in the achievement socioeconomic justice. Development efforts thus far have not been successful enough in fully empowering all women and girls to achieve gender equality. Therefore, the approaches to understand and achieve gender equality are being challenged and questioned in the ongoing efforts to positively influence the development outcomes.

Intersectionality, a relatively recent approach that has emerged within gender studies and feminist movements, is a useful paradigm to reconceptualize approaches to gender equality broadly, as well as more specifically in the Arab region. It is an established concept in feminist scholarship that addresses the ways in which gender interacts with other social factors and exacerbates existing inequalities.

The present paper focuses on intersectionality as an analytical approach and calls for a multidimensional understanding of gender in the Arab region, positing that this produces a more accurate understanding of the inequalities that Arab States must address. It argues that governmental and non-governmental actors in the Arab region need to become more aware of and sensitive to divisions within society, in order to construct interventions that take into account power relations and social and economic differentials and that achieve maximum effectiveness and reach.

The paper introduces the concept of intersectionality and provides a rationale for its relevance to the region. It then explores how this concept can be mobilized for promoting and accelerating development for all. For this it identifies four guiding principles that can lead to the development of sound policies to achieve gender equality in the region: (1) The structural nature of inequality: to have an in-depth understanding of the structures that produce different identities; (2) Unpacking categorical thinking: to move away from pre-defined rigid categories that lead to excluding various groups and individuals and strategically use categories to achieve inclusion; (3) Contextualizing and historicizing inequalities: to have an in-depth understanding of the context of the existing inequalities and their history; and (4) Building solidarity/cooperation: to build solidarities among defenders of various rights and around groups suffering discrimination to achieve the rights for all.

The identification of these four guiding principles constitutes an important step towards operationalizing the concept of intersectionality and moving it from the academic sphere to the development field, with a particular focus on the Arab region.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Placing those who currently are marginalized in the center is the most effective way to resist efforts to compartmentalize experiences and undermine potential collective action.

—Kimberlé Crenshaw (in Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011)

The Arab region trails behind in its efforts to attain sustainable and inclusive development. Recurrent socioeconomic instability, heightened by conflict and crisis across the region, make addressing development challenges a high priority to achieve peace, stability and social justice. These challenges are further exacerbated by various social, economic and political dimensions within society that render some groups more vulnerable than others. Gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, race and other structural divisions continue to determine the ways in which social goods are allocated, thereby ensuring that inequality persists. Such structural divisions have widened the gap between various groups of society and have resulted in an unequal pace of development within the same country.

Gender inequality is one of the most persistent forms of inequality today at both regional and global levels. Despite significant attempts by governmental and non-governmental actors to address the problem of gender inequality, it remains a major challenge to achieving socioeconomic justice more broadly.

Although the issue of gender equality has been on the agenda of the Arab States for many decades, ongoing conflicts, migration, governance and institutional deficits and unstable economic growth have compounded patriarchal power structures and gender norms and contributed to the persistence of gender-based inequalities in the region.

Since 1995 and following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, efforts to promote gender equality have accelerated. On top of this, the period following the Arab uprisings has seen greater participation of women in the public sphere as well as new constitutions and legislations that enshrine greater rights for women. Despite this important progress on numerous fronts, the gains are still insufficient in light of the persistence of gender inequality in several areas, notably gender-based discrimination in legal frameworks, the high prevalence of violence against women and the low economic and political participation of women.

Development efforts have not been fully successful in empowering all women and girls and in achieving gender equality. Approaches to understand and achieve gender equality are thus being challenged and questioned in the ongoing efforts to positively influence development outcomes. Long recognized as a core aspect of broader social inequality, there have been multiple shifts in the understanding of what gender equality means and how to achieve it. However, a tendency to understand certain groups, such as “Arab women”, and certain terms, such as “gender inequality”, in homogenizing language persists. This tendency has a long history, dating back to colonial rule in the region (Abu-Lughod, 2013). The construction of these categories and the framing of gender inequality in particular ways has, in turn, led to the construction of specific types of solutions. However, increasing inequality and conflict across the region calls for an in-depth thinking on these approaches and on how to reconceptualize these categories and problems in order to maximize the results of the solutions.

Intersectionality, a relatively recent approach that has emerged within gender studies and feminist movements, is a useful paradigm through which to reconceptualize approaches to tackle gender inequality broadly, and more specifically in the Arab region. It is an established concept in feminist scholarship that addresses the ways in which gender interacts with other social categories and has become increasingly popular in research.

Critiques of the ways in which the categories of “woman” and “Arab woman” are deployed within development and calls to take intersectionality into account are central to guiding the ways in which

development can move forward for better outcomes. As early as the 1980s, feminist scholars such as Chandra Mohanty (1984) were raising concerns about the creation of the prototypical “Third World woman” that came to stand in for all Third World women. This entailed ignoring the historical and contextual specificities that produced gendered experiences for different women and worked to create the impression of a monolithic female subject. Development efforts, exerted by various governmental and non-governmental players, have been so far slow to incorporate such a critical and accurate approach in the numerous engagements and initiatives to achieve gender equality. Most of the policies, strategies and programmes concurring to advance gender equality reflect the widespread understanding of “Arab women” as a homogeneous group, disconnected from several other societal groups.

The present paper focuses on intersectionality and provides a rationale for its applicability to the Arab region. It introduces the importance of intersectionality as an analytical approach and calls for a multidimensional understanding of gender equality in the Arab region, positing that this produces a more accurate understanding of the inequalities that Arab States must address.

It argues that governmental and non-governmental actors in the Arab region need to become more aware of and sensitive to divisions within society, in order to construct interventions that take power relations and social and economic differentials into account and thus maximize their effectiveness and reach. Its objective is to determine key elements and insights on how to operationalize the intersectionality approach in the development practice to better focus on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged suffering from multiple inequalities. This understanding aims to support gearing development efforts to advocate for and induce relevant changes in the legal frameworks, policies, strategies and programmes to reduce inequalities and accelerate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This paper introduces key elements of a framework for using intersectionality in the Arab region and explores how these can be operationalized. This framework can then be deployed by development practitioners and researchers as an analytical tool to address inequalities. The paper addresses how intersectionality can be mobilized for research and practice within the field of development in the Arab region and is based on a desk review of the literature in different fields, including intersectionality and gender studies; gender inequality in the Arab context; and histories of gender scholarship in the Arab region. It also benefited from a discussion in an Expert Group Meeting<sup>1</sup> organized for this purpose.

The paper comprises four main sections. The first section traces the emergence of intersectionality, focusing specifically on understanding it as a response to the homogenization of women, as well as looking at key debates such as defining intersectionality; mobilizing categories; and operationalising intersectionality. The next section looks at international perspectives on intersectionality, focusing specifically on the context of South Africa as an important space within which feminist movements have mobilized around intersectionality. It showcases how intersectionality can be mobilized to support defenders of various rights to achieve their objectives. The third section looks at the context of the Arab region; it begins by providing a brief overview of Arab women’s movements over the past century up until the uprisings of 2010/2011, before unpacking what focus intersectionality might take in this region. The final section looks at some of the possibilities and issues around operationalizing intersectionality and sets some principles that can aid in this process. It concludes with recommendations to guide future development endeavours to promote gender equality in the Arab region.

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<sup>1</sup> The Expert Group Meeting on “Leaving No Women Behind: Addressing Gender Intersectionality in the Arab region”, took place in July 2018 at ESCWA in Beirut. The EGM aimed to move the debate on intersectionality from the theoretical and academic spheres to the practical and operational arena, with in-depth discussions to determine how to apply the intersectionality approach to reduce gender inequalities and enhance the overall development process.

## A. THE EMERGENCE OF INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a relatively new theoretical approach in social sciences research. First conceptualized by African American feminists in the United States, it has now been adopted by many other disciplines, as well as widely within feminist movements. The context in which intersectionality arose is important in understanding the theory itself. Soon after the spread of the first wave feminism in the United States and Europe, critiques began to surface from women who felt excluded from the discourses of first wave feminists. Above all, the claim to represent women universally was problematic for women who felt that their experiences were very different from the average white Western middle-class woman involved in the first wave feminist movement. Some feminists “felt that the specifics of their own subordination were excluded: the analyses, often ostensibly generalized to all women, were in fact premised on the experiences and priorities of a minority...” (Denis, 2008). Moreover, black feminists argued that white, bourgeois feminism only brought up issues of white, middle-class women’s experiences of oppression (Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011, p. 2) that often did not pertain to the lives of the vast majority of women.

### 1. *Intersectionality’s roots*

African American feminists were some of the first feminists to argue that mainstream feminism, by only taking gender into account as the most important factor, did not and could not represent their experiences. They insisted that their realities were far more complex: they were women, but they were also black. They were not one homogenous group of black women, they were poor/rich, urban/rural, educated/uneducated (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006). These different aspects of their identities combined in order to create specific realities for each group. The “triple oppression” notion, which argued that black women suffer from three intersecting oppressions—race, class and gender—was created (Yuval-Davis, 2006). This triple oppression eventually became the holy trinity of feminist studies. Later, intersectionality considered other identities such as age, religion and disability, among others. This has problematized the usage of the term “woman”: “Myriad feminist scholars have destabilized the notion of a universal ‘woman’ [...] arguing that the term ‘woman’ itself is a contested and fractured terrain, and that the experience of ‘woman’ is always constituted by subjects with vastly different interests” (Nash, 2008). For this reason, it is problematic to speak of a “universal feminism” or a “universal woman”.

The term intersectionality itself was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African American legal scholar who was one of the founders of the Critical Race Studies movement in the 1980s, which aimed at “problematizing the law’s purported colour-blindness, neutrality, and objectivity,” (Nash, 2008). Crenshaw (1991) wanted to show how the single-axis framework (meaning gender only) often used by feminists and anti-racists should be replaced by intersectionality, which could better demonstrate the ways in which race and gender interact “to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences”. Crenshaw argues that the experiences of Black women are much broader than the categories discrimination discourse provides, and that the “continued insistence that Black women’s demands and needs be filtered through categorical analyses [meaning gender-only or race-only] that completely obscure their experiences guarantees that their needs will seldom be addressed” (Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011). Crenshaw uses the image of a crossroads to explain intersectionality: “Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group tries to navigate the main crossing in the city...the main highway is ‘racism road’. One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street... She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression.” (Crenshaw in Yuval-Davis 2006, p. 196).

Crenshaw presents an excellent example of why it is important to take multiple positionalities into account. Immigrant women in America, she writes, often suffer from multiple marginalizations, including class, gender and ethnicity, among others. However, if one analyses these women’s situations by taking gender as the main source of marginalization, it is easy to miss the ways gender and class, for example, interact. Crenshaw cites the example of the marriage fraud provisions of American legislation, in which one had to remain “properly” married for two years before even applying for permanent resident status in the United

States, making women with abusive partners reluctant to leave violent situations. In 1990, Congress passed a waiver to protect women who were battered by the men for whom they had immigrated to the United States to marry. Crenshaw notes that “immigrant women who are socially, culturally, or economically privileged are more likely to be able to marshal the resources needed to satisfy the waiver requirements. Those immigrant women least able to take advantage of the waiver—women who are socially or economically the most marginal—are the ones most likely to be women of color” (Crenshaw, 1991).

This example illustrates that upper-class immigrant women facilitated by their access to resources, are protected by their class from laws that discriminate against their ethnicity or immigrant status. Thus, it is shallow to analyse *all* immigrant women using the lens of “gender” as the main focus. Often, analyses assume that there is one primary source of oppression, and all other sources are secondary. This leads to a methodology where other sources of oppression are simply added to a “main” source (Denis, 2008). Lumby points out that it is not useful to collect data on discrimination related to gender and in relation to class and then add them together in order to come to an understanding of the experiences of inequality of working-class women (Lumby, 2011). Similarly, in their article on practicing intersectionality, Choo and Ferree (2010) argue that lived experiences cannot be separated into those due to gender and those due to race; rather they are simultaneous and linked.

Intersectionality, on the other hand, functions as a more realistic methodology where different sources of oppression are looked at simultaneously and understood as influencing one another in complex ways. Choo and Ferree (2010,) argued that intersectionality signifies “the importance of including the perspectives of multiply marginalized people, especially women of color; an analytic shift from addition of multiple, independent strands of inequality toward a multiplication and thus transformation of their main effects into interactions; and a focus on seeing multiple institutions as overlapping in their co-determination of inequalities to produce complex configurations from the start, rather than ‘extra’ interactive processes that are added onto main effects”.

## 2. *Defining intersectionality: debates and methodology*

Feminist scholars have defined intersectionality in varying ways. What is clear from all the definitions is that intersectionality is a means of elucidating the complexities of and better understanding the real world by looking at multiple layers of identities in order to analyse how they interact with one another. The issue of power is a recurrent one as intersectionality allows us to understand the agency various groups might have to change the situation of oppression. The critique of the idea that gender should have primacy in feminist analyses over all other intersecting inequalities that groups might face also surfaces again and again. Since its conceptualization, the meaning of intersectionality has led to many debates among feminists. Many feminists disagree on what intersectionality actually is, with views ranging from a theory, concept, heuristic device, to a reading strategy for doing feminist analysis (Davis in Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011). Even more striking is how much disagreement there is in terms of methodology: as Cornelia Klinger notes, “It makes no sense to argue that aspects of class, race and gender overlap or intersect in individuals’ worlds of experience unless you can also say how, and by what factors, class, race, and gender are constituted as social categories” (Bereswill and Neuber in Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2011). Leslie McCall points out that although intersectionality is clearly one of the major paradigms of research in feminist studies today, there has been little discussion of its methodology (Nash, 2008). The reason given for this is the complexity of the intersectional approach and the difficulty of creating a methodology that takes into account the many intersections of multiple positionalities. In what follows, some of these debates are addressed.

One important debate within intersectionality has been on the way it views categories. Hancock (2007) argues that intersectionality calls for new conceptualizations of categories and their role in political life, rather than abolishing *all* categories. However, the critique that has been levelled against this position is that every category can be divided into many other categories in a never-ending process, leading to a “paralysis emerging from the inclusion of increasing numbers of variables” (Hancock, 2007). Yet the use of (often rigid) categories

is also problematic: not only does it neglect the internal hierarchies and differences within groups, it also gives way to a form of identity politics than can impede coalitional politics and broader collective action.

McCall, in her article “The complexity of intersectionality”, differentiates between three types of intersectional analysis, although she points out that not all intersectional research falls into one of these categories. The first approach is anti-categorical complexity and it is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories, as social life is too complex to “make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences” (McCall, 2005). The methodology of this approach takes its inspiration from the moment when hegemonic feminist theories and poststructuralist scholars began to attack the validity of analytical categories. “The premise of this approach is that nothing fits neatly except as a result of imposing a stable and homogenizing order on a more unstable and heterogeneous social reality” (McCall, 2005). This approach also views the deconstruction of master categories as a means by which inequality itself can be deconstructed, and thus be an avenue for social change. The consequences of this approach have been not only to make categories themselves questionable, but also research that employs categories as questionable.

The second approach is inter-categorical complexity, which requires the acceptance of existing categories in order to show relationships of inequality among social groups. The starting point of this approach is that the social relations of inequality between groups are real, and these relationships are the centre of analysis. “The concern is with the nature of the relationships among social groups and, importantly, how they are changing, rather than with the definition or representation of such groups per se...” (McCall, 2005). Since this approach focuses on structural relationships, it is impossible for it not to use categories.

The third approach is intra-categorical complexity, which questions the construction of categories and how this process occurs, but also acknowledges the relationships that social categories create—they may be constructed, but they have a real impact on our lives. Thus, the first approach rejects categories, the second uses them strategically and the third falls in the middle. An important aspect of the intra-categorical approach is the fact that it does not deny the relevance and importance of categories in our daily lives, and instead focuses on *how* they are produced, experienced, reproduced and resisted in everyday life (McCall, 2005). In a response to McCall’s three approaches, Yuval-Davis has argued that she does not see that inter-categorical and intra-categorical approaches as mutually exclusive. She believes intersectionality should combine the dynamism of the intra-categorical approach with the socioeconomic perspective of the inter-categorical approach. This is an important critique of scholars who use only one approach when in fact combining the approaches may lead to more representative research.

Related to the question of how to approach categories is the notion of focusing on a single “main” category. Dubravka Zarkov discusses the concept of a “master category” (Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011). This is the idea that while different positionalities and marginalizations are constantly intersecting with each other to produce complex realities, it is also possible that in one situation, a certain category or positionality will emerge as more important than others. Yuval-Davis discusses something similar when she writes that in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people, there are some social divisions that are more important in constructing specific positionings. In conflicted and transitional societies for example, identity is a critical component of discourses used to fuel conflict. Moreover, some social divisions (age, gender) tend to shape most people’s lives whereas others (disability) affect fewer people (Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2011).

In conclusion to this section, reference is made to Crenshaw’s response to many of the critiques that have been levelled against the lack of a methodology within intersectionality. Crenshaw writes that when she is asked whether intersectionality will develop a methodology, she likens it to asking whether intersectionality will settle down and find a real job (Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011). She points out that the question implies that intersectionality is good in theory but lacks a usable methodology and therefore cannot be applied. However, she does not answer the question and instead simply points out that different disciplines will have different types of methodologies. She adds, “That it is easier to call for intersectional analysis rather than to perform it is not a failing of the concept but a recognition that performing intersectional analysis is neither a simplistic

symbolic signifier nor is it a paint-by-numbers analytic enterprise,” (Lutz, Vivar and Supik 2011). As is clear from this short discussion on methodology, there is a wide range of options and no “right” way of doing intersectionality. Therefore, the importance and value added of the present paper is to endeavour to operationalize intersectionality in the Arab region and to identify guiding principles that can constitute elements of a proposed methodology to mobilizing intersectionality in the Arab region and beyond.

## B. INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Intersectionality has become well known as an academic intervention in debates around gender inequality. Nonetheless, it is rooted in grassroots movement. Its roots also lie in postcolonial and African American feminist histories as well as Third World liberation movements. For example, the women of Third World liberation movements spoke of a “triple oppression” or “triple jeopardy” and Arab feminists articulated a feminist politics that saw nationalism, class, gender and religion as creating differences between women that must be taken seriously. These instances show that the idea of taking difference seriously was very much an international reality by the mid-twentieth century. In the contemporary era, this focus on intersectionality within feminist movements has grown, and it has become a central framework through which organizations and movements strive to create inclusive environments.

This section focuses specifically on the context of South Africa and the ways in which intersectionality has been mobilized in feminist movements there over the past decade.<sup>2</sup> It provides a useful lens to trace the ways in which intersectionality travels between theory and practice. It offers a reference and an insight on how to model engagements with intersectionality.

The context of South Africa – as a settler colony and a deeply racialized society – is an interesting case study through which to explore the utility of intersectionality. In particular, it is here that we see the usefulness of Zarkov’s “master category” (Zarkov in Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2011). While we all experience multiple social categories simultaneously, there is something to be said for the context we find ourselves in at any given moment that may bring one category to prominence. The master category concept proposes the idea that whilst different positionalities and marginalizations are always intersecting with one another to produce complex realities, in certain situations a certain category or positionality will emerge as more dominant than others (Zarkov in Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2011). This echoes Yuval-Davis’ similar argument that in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people, some social divisions may emerge as more important (Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2011).

In the context of South Africa, the category of race could be understood as a master category that has been most influential in determining access to social goods than other social categories. This is not to suggest that race can be understood separately from class, gender or other categories; rather, it is to posit that in the particular context of South Africa as a settler colony, race functions as an especially powerful category:

Race is often foregrounded as a category of oppression because of the structural racial inequalities that position people in certain power relations through the intersectionality of their identities (for example, a white middle-class woman will not suffer the same deprivations and oppressions as an African rural woman, even though they are both women).<sup>3</sup>

Race is critical to understanding the different positionalities between these two groups of women; their differences cannot be solely understood through a gender lens alone.

The case of South Africa also suggests that intersectionality is not about identity as a stand-alone reality. Instead, intersectionality is about structures of power that then produce different identities.

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<sup>2</sup> This is based on an oral presentation by Amanda Gouws at the Expert Meeting in July 2018. The related PowerPoint presentation is available at <https://www.unescwa.org/events/expert-group-meeting-gender-intersectionality-arab-region>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

“Relations of power are constantly reproduced through categories such as race, gender, sexuality and class. Intersectionality therefore is not only about identities but an attempt to expose power relations among identities.”<sup>4</sup> This means that intersectionality is not additive either. It is not about adding one identity to another, but rather about understanding how when different categories come together, they produce something *new*.

To contextualize these theoretical points, reference is made to Amanda Gouws’ article on recent protests at South African universities and the role of intersectionality (2017). She writes:

Intersectionality as used by the students refers to intersectional (interlocking) identities of oppression: race, gender, class, sexuality, sexual orientation, disability and others. But women students also understood it as more than identity - it drew on subjectivities and experience.

This explores the evolution of the student protests at South African universities, positing that intersectionality was central to how students understood their experiences and the movement more broadly:

When #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall started it was black African students presenting their exclusion from racist and white hegemonic institutional culture as a racial form of othering, for which they wanted to create counterhegemonic discourses, drawing on a black consciousness tradition [...]. The #EndRapeCulture campaign foregrounded race, gender and sexuality and the dynamic and fluid relations among them (Gouws, 2017).

Here the concrete ways in which intersectional identities are understood in feminist activism can be seen. On the one hand, race is central to understanding the exclusion of Black students from universities; on the other hand, gender and sexuality are also central to understanding the culture of rape that exists within these universities. These campaigns were therefore not about one “issue” or one axis of oppression (meaning race *or* gender); they were about both, and more.

Specifically, young South African feminists mobilized the idea of intersectionality in very concrete ways. One was through demands such as the decolonization of colonial symbols integral to institutional cultures, such as removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the campus of the University of Cape Town (UCT) through their #RhodesMustFall campaign. Students at Stellenbosch University made demands around changing the language of instruction. Both of these campaigns eventually came to demand a reduction in student tuition fees. Such examples highlight the ways in which students were conscious of the role of colonial history, race, class, and gender in educational institutions. Moreover, following an incident of rape, female students mobilized against rape culture, adding another dimension to the protests. Intersectionality gave students the language of inclusion for multiple experiences, allowing them to call for educational institutions to be more inclusive. As Gouws (2017) notes, there was a “praxis of *acting* intersectionality”. Central to this was the focus on forming coalitions. This crucial idea from intersectionality—that there should be connections between different issues—allowed students to connect amongst themselves, based on different ideas of what social change meant.

This snapshot of the role intersectionality has played in recent feminist mobilizations in South Africa provides an example to think through the specificities of the Arab context.

### C. THE CONTEXT OF THE ARAB REGION

Intersectionality is an approach that is very much dependent on context and history in understanding which social categories to focus on and unpack. This section provides a brief history of feminism in the Arab region, before discussing the post-2010/2011 context. It then suggests some of the ways in which

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

intersectionality as an approach can provide a lens to understand different social inequalities in the region today, and the ways in which this approach can aid in reform interventions.

### 1. *Changes in the understanding of gender concerns over time in the Arab region*

The early and mid-twentieth century was a period of immense political, social and economic change across the Arab region, largely due to the rising momentum of nationalist anti-colonial movements. Much has been written about the involvement of women in these movements, usually highlighting their active involvement during the movement and then their rapid side-lining following independence. In the context of Egypt, for example, women such as Huda Sha'rawi, Nabawiya Moussa, Malak Hifni Nassef and Ceza Nabarawi were calling for women's rights as early as the 1900s. Across the region, the issues many of these early feminists focused on included questions of education, work, seclusion, veiling and issues of marriage and divorce — these were the issues that collectively became known as the “Woman Question” (Baron, 2005). However, as some have noted, this betrayed a “class bias” – these issues did not necessarily represent issues *all* women were concerned about, and instead tended to be the concerns of middle- or upper-class women. Thus, the questions of intersectionality started to emerge at the moment when socioeconomic status differences between women impacted the issues presented as important.

A second generation of feminists across the region began to focus their activism towards the goal of national independence. This shift led to confrontations between Egyptian and Western feminists over the question of imperialism, a question not all Western feminists were comfortable confronting (Badran, 1996). The issue of the State of Palestine, in particular, led to major disagreements that eventually culminated in Arab feminists turning towards Global South feminism as a new space within which to build feminist solidarity. During the moment of decolonization, nationalism became a major lens through which feminist demands were articulated. This culminated in a discourse of “state feminism” in various Arab countries after independence. A key paradox of feminism under “state feminism” was that it simultaneously gave women access to spaces in society they had long fought for—including work and education—while also closing down political space and extending State control over independent organizations.

The period from the 1970s to the 1990s can be understood as another distinct phase in Arab women's movements. The rise of civil society and foreign donor funding has led to a process Islah Jad refers to as “NGO-ization”. It has been noted that the expansion of NGOs and the development of an Arab ‘civil society’ has occurred in parallel with the authoritarian State so is not necessarily a sign of democracy in the region (Chandhoke in Cornwall and Eade, 2007). Gender equality began to constitute one of the principle areas of donor funding, a process which has led to what Mohanty has called a discourse of the “average third world woman” who is a passive object of development (1984). Lila Abu-Lughod (2013) and Naila Kabeer (1994) have written extensively on the ways in which these constructions are intricately linked to power within the development industry where women's lives and gender issues are underfunded. Indeed, through the commodification of Arab women and their oppression, donors are allowed to feel as though they are intervening in “indigenous patriarchal domination” to save women (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and others, 2014). Overall, the increasing focus on development meant that gender concerns were integrated into development, rather than development being integrated into gender concerns. As Sara Ababneh (2017) notes in her unpublished paper, the composition of NGOs and development organizations more broadly reflects a shift in socioeconomic status, with those in leadership positions from the middle or upper class and their constituencies being primarily the recipients of aid, as well as a clear move away from the leftist, anti-colonial feminist trend of the 1950s and 1960s.

A combined effect of these two historical processes has been the emergence of leading nationalist figures who are seen as representative of all women in a given context. In Arab Republic of Syria, for instance, there has been contestation over who represents the demands and concerns of “Syrian women” more broadly, with some alleging that some groups, namely the elite and well-off, have dominated over others. Similarly, in Libya, leading national women figures are often perceived by other women as only concerned with high-end women's empowerment on the national level by nominating themselves in the national elections, by pressuring to occupy

seats in the cabinet, and by pressuring to occupy senior positions in the state apparatus.<sup>5</sup> This, in turn, meant that women of ethnic minorities felt disappointed in the national women leaders who were not voicing their local community problems. It is at this point that the Amazigh movements among Berber women emerged. According to Fatima Langhi, there was a growing belief that “not all women can represent all women”. Focusing on Libya, she argues that instead, local women leaders should be seen as more powerful:

Women local leaders in far remote and marginalized cities have played much wider roles especially in mediating in local reconciliations. Women local mediators took brave local initiatives and organized community dialogues between armed groups and community leaders to build trust among them and build a common vision of how to disarm and disband militias. Women mediators continued to call for an inclusive constitutional process which would recognize the languages of all cultural components. They called for an inclusive dialogue between the cultural minorities (Tabu, Amazigh and Tuareq) who were boycotting the constitutional process and encouraged the parties to forsake a discourse which respects inclusivity as well as multi-diversity.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. *Gender concerns in the post-2010/2011 phase*

The 2010/2011 revolutions heralded the contemporary phase of Arab gender activism. This phase is marked less by a focus on NGO-ization as a means of advancing the status of Arab women, and more on questions of social justice and political freedom. As Ababneh (2017) noted, “The Arab uprising activists (women and men) provided a challenge to issues commonly referred to as ‘women’s issues’”. This does not mean that issues related to gender equality are no longer central, or were not part of the demands of the 2010/2011 uprisings; rather, it is to suggest that gender inequality is not always framed through the language of “rights,” a language, Ababneh and Jad show, that has emerged from a certain class politics around gender issues in the Arab region but is by no means the only way of thinking about gender inequality.

Ababneh (2017) identifies several reasons as to why there is a gap between women’s rights activists and popular protest groups, including:

(1) Shifts in global discourses on gender and women’s rights in addition to the attempts of various Arab states to coopt and fight local Arab women’s movement have affected how Arab women’s movements have developed historically. (2) The legacy of colonial and neo-imperial claims to liberate Arab women have put many women’s movements in uncomfortable positions between attempting to aid women and resisting neo-imperial policies. (3) In the post-Beijing context, which defines women’s rights in a context of development, women have been pitted against their communities. And finally, (4) the NGOization (Jad, 2007) of many of the Arab women’s movements has resulted in pushing these movements further and further away from ordinary women and their communities.

There is a necessity thus to challenge the colonial understandings of gender and colonial attempts to “liberate Arab women”, as well as the definitions of women’s rights that are simplistic or that do not take the local context into account. It is therefore clear that among women, various other social categories combine with gender to produce specific forms of experience and inequality.

## 3. *Intersectionality: a lens to understand inequalities in the Arab region*

The “Arab region” is complex and is home to numerous diversities that are imbedded and manifest in several dimensions including religious, ethnic, tribal and linguistic. These diversities, stemming from the history of the region, reflect the social and power structures. The regional economic disparities within countries

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<sup>5</sup> This is based on an interview with Fatma Zahra Langhi in July 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

bring an additional layer of complexity; it creates a new layer of inequality for some groups in specific localities. The conflicts widespread throughout several countries in the region compounds existing inequalities in conflict settings. The Arab region witnesses also large waves of migrants, labour migrants as well as forcibly and internally displaced. Gender intersects with all these multiple inequalities and make it inaccurate to address the concerns of “Arab women” as one group.

The central claim of intersectionality is that it addresses epistemic exploitation and disrespect on the part of mainstream feminism. That is, by consistently representing women of colour in a certain way, mainstream feminists ended up creating a homogenous category of women that as a representational strategy was ineffective at best and harmful at worst. In their article on Afghan women and neo-colonialism, Ayotte and Husain argue that representations of the burqa rhetorically construct women of Afghanistan as oppressed (2005). This, moreover, had concrete effects on the security of these women, as it ended up being used to justify a war and neo-colonial violence. The authors go on to discuss how the diverse ways in which the neo-colonialism of some western discourses about the Third World, and specifically Third World women, create the epistemological conditions for material harm (Ayotte and Husain, 2005). This is an extremely important point: epistemological ideas about women of colour and people of colour have very concrete effects on their lives. Moreover, this epistemic violence needs to be addressed, in order to resolve violence both at the discursive and lived level. Intersectionality is one attempt at this.

The tendency to homogenize Arab women as a group continues to produce research and policymaking that is not focused and specific enough to make interventions in inequality where it is most needed. Intersectionality is thus necessary in order to break down the broader category of Arab women and understand how different marginalizations are included within it. Categories such as socioeconomic status are central to the ways in which women experience the State, the economy and political institutions and determine a whole range of relationships women have within society. A more effective approach to gender equality would therefore centre these dimensions in order to achieve a fuller picture of the intersecting causes of gender inequality. Finally, intersectionality is relevant to the Arab region because it allows for a focus on the lived everyday experiences of women and men. This type of information can shed light on forms of marginalization that are sometimes invisible from an aggregate view of women as a single category.

In order to better understand the multiple forms that gender inequality assume, it is important to disentangle the overall situation and disaggregate the broader category of gender. Differences between and among women are equally central to understanding equality, and frameworks for addressing these differences can be better placed to address the complexity of social life. These differences can be highlighted in multiple ways. While women in the Arab region have a lower labour participation rate in the formal job market than men, it is less likely that migrant women can access the formal job market compared to native-born women; migrant women thus suffer double marginalization based on their migrant and gender statuses. Likewise, it is likely that older women are more vulnerable than older men to poverty because of the structure of the job markets and its relation to social security. It is most likely that older women living in urban slums and rural areas are even more vulnerable to poverty and deprivation compared to those living in cities. Similarly, it is more difficult for women with disabilities to participate in the public sphere than for men with disabilities. And it is even less probable for rural women with disabilities to access and participate in these spheres. Minority women may suffer even greater compounded hardship. Religious belonging, coupled with social norms, often leads to further gender discrimination and inequalities. Understanding how inequality perforates the everyday lives of people in the Arab region would lead to an important new research agenda that could inform more focused and relevant policies.

#### **D. OPERATIONALIZING INTERSECTIONALITY**

The question of operationalizing intersectionality is considered complex. On the one hand, it should be noted that intersectionality does not easily lend itself to being operationalized. Its fluid and dynamic nature mean that it is better understood outside of rigid frameworks or approaches. On the other hand, there is a clear need to operationalize intersectionality in order to be able to capitalize on its added value, whether through

research or practice as demonstrated in the examples above showing that it is both possible and productive to do so. This section discusses some of the challenges in operationalizing intersectionality, before suggesting possible ways forward in thinking through an intersectionality lens for the Arab context.

Intersectionality arose as a direct response to the exclusionary nature of much of mainstream feminism in order to reach a broader range of women. Thus, its main accomplishment has been to be more inclusive of varying experiences, realities and identities, as well as to become more aware of the way power functions in order to exclude/include. Intersectionality works towards this in several ways. Jennifer Nash has listed a few of these. First, intersectionality theorizes identity in a complex fashion. Second, intersectionality provides a vocabulary to respond to a narrow understanding of identity politics that focuses on advancing the interests of a homogenously defined group while ignoring the different needs and realities of individuals within the group and prevent broader coalition with other marginalized individuals or groups. Third, intersectionality presses feminists and other scholars to come to terms with the legacy of exclusions of “multiply marginalized subjects” and the impact of these absences (Nash 2008).

Unilateral analyses forced scholars to choose one area of discrimination at the expense of others. Intersectionality, on the other hand, can function as a more grounded methodology where different sources of oppression are looked at simultaneously and how they influence each other in the real world is understood. Choo and Ferree have argued that intersectionality signifies “the importance of including the perspectives of multiply marginalized people, especially women of color; an analytic shift from addition of multiple, independent strands of inequality toward a multiplication and thus transformation of their main effects into interactions; and a focus on seeing multiple institutions as overlapping in their co-determination of inequalities to produce complex configurations from the start, rather than ‘extra’ interactive processes that are added onto main effects” (2010).

From these various extrapolations on the uses of intersectionality, it can be summarized as a theorization that allows for a *more complete and accurate* analysis of people’s lived realities, that takes into consideration not only various marginalizations (in an additive manner) but that analyses how these marginalizations and positions intersect in order to create unique situations. Thus, intersectionality, at its core, is a process of enhancing and improving research through addressing the way multiple positionalities intersect with one another. It is also clear that intersectionality is a fluid, constantly expanding theoretical notion. As more scholars and activists engage with it, more intersectionalities emerge. Intersectionality has moved past the classic race/gender/class configuration and has adopted many other marginalizations and positionalities that are often neglected, such as masculinity, disability, age, transnationality and so on.

Returning to the Arab context, the importance of multidimensionality in implementing intersectionality is key. Empirical research should be the driving force behind this approach to multiple dimensions, as well as to understanding and using different social categories. The context—in this case the Arab region—should determine which social categories are used and how they are defined. Since inequalities are multifaceted and operate at different levels, it is necessary to build on people’s collective and personal experiences and develop a framework that can be used practically to include all excluded groups at both national and subnational levels. The centrality of working from a bottom-up approach is particularly important. The historical lack of autonomy in the Arab region and the reliance on concepts and approaches developed elsewhere is key here, as it underscores the importance of indigenizing concepts such as intersectionality before they are used.

One concrete methodological approach that can be used to guarantee intersectionality is the use of narratives. McCall points out that narratives take as their subject an individual or an individual’s experience and “extrapolate illustratively to the broader social location embodied by the individual” (McCall, 2005, 1781). Personal narratives aim to situate the subject within the full network of relationships that define their social locations, but McCall points out that usually it is only possible to situate them from the partial perspective of the specific social group being studied. “In personal narratives and single-group analyses, then, complexity derives from the analysis of a single location at the intersection of single dimensions of multiple categories, rather than at the intersection of the full range of dimensions of a full range of categories, and that is how

complexity is managed” (McCall, 2005). Ann Phoenix uses narrative analysis and comes to the following conclusion: “In analysing narrative extracts, it has demonstrated that processes of racialization, gendering and social class differentiation are routine, mundane and implicit aspects of familial (micro), school (meso) and societal (macro) practices” (Lutz, Vivar and Supik, 2011). Case studies are another example of how intersectional approaches can be applied. McCall argues that many feminists use the case study method to identify a new social group and the categories which they constitute, and then “proceed to uncover the differences and complexities of experience embodied in that location” (McCall, 2005, 1782). The example of narratives goes some way in thinking through the operationalization of intersectionality, as it touches on the question of empirical information. The first stage of any research agenda centred on intersectionality in the Arab region must be an investment in empirical data based on various intersections.

A second concrete approach to intersectional research comes from an expansion of the human rights discourse (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Yuval-Davis argues that in the human rights tradition, the tendency has been to: first, collect data that focuses on various social, legal and identity categories of women; second, contextually analyse in order to go deeper than a single identity in order to uncover other identities that contribute to marginalization; and third, carry out an intersectional review of policy initiatives to determine whether they are effectively dealing with the multiple problems faced by individuals. All of this leads to a fourth step, which is the implementation of the intersectional policy initiatives. Yuval-Davis critiques the collection of data based on individual categories as this reduces them when in fact even simple categories can be complex. Moreover, she points out that this approach does not differentiate between positionality and social identities, which could have an impact on social and political struggles and organizing. Finally, there is the critique that intersectionality is not about looking at different social identities that may be hidden underneath one main identity; rather, the point is to look at *how* different social identities intersect and interact with one another and how they are constructed around one another; and finally, how this concretely affects the experiences of people. These critiques by Yuval-Davis point to the usefulness of extending this human rights framework. Alongside narrative analysis, these two concrete methodological approaches go some way in operationalising intersectionality.

In thinking through its usage in the Arab context and building on the intersectionality research methods suggested in the literature, this paper proposes four guiding principles that can be used to concretize and operationalize intersectional research and development even further.

(a) The structural nature of inequality

Intersectionality as an approach has a strong structural focus. It is not only about identities and difference at the subjective level, but also about the different structures that produce these different identities. The assumption is that individual values and norms are produced by society and social institutions. The structural dimension of intersectionality matters because otherwise it can be misread as an approach looking only at identity in an individualistic manner. Instead, intersectionality aims to connect oppression to the systemic level. Intersectionality is therefore not about gender, class, or race alone, but about patriarchy, capitalism and racism. For example, intersectionality would not necessarily see individual economic solutions to poverty, such as microfinance loans, as the complete solution to inequality, as this leaves the broader structure that creates poverty intact. Another example is that intersectionality would not see awareness raising around racism, which functions at the level of the individual, as enough without targeting the racism embedded within institutions as well. These connections between the interpersonal and institutional define intersectionality, and the connection between structure and identity is key in how intersectionality imagines inequality. One outcome of such a definition is that it calls for a redistribution of resources and wealth across society.

If intersectionality arguments are followed through and accepted by policy instruments, it significantly affects the redistributive dimension of a society and is not limited to changes in attitudes; hence, the necessity of developing solid, objective and convincing arguments targeting governments. For example, changing attitudes around gender inequality is not enough without also targeting the economic and legal inequality women face. Breaking stereotypes and gender norms in the Arab States should be accompanied measures to

reform the existing legal frameworks that discriminate women in the region. Raising awareness around a woman's right to work, for instance, needs to happen alongside creating spaces for women to work in the private and public sector, and ensuring legislation is in place to support this. Another outcome is that it then becomes important to think about context and history in understanding how specific structures and cultures work in specific times and places. Because the focus is not just on individuals, the time and place that is being focused on matters. Economic inequality does not manifest itself in the same way in Saudi Arabia and in Morocco; therefore, context becomes key.

(b) Unpacking categorical thinking

Categorical thinking reduces and erases the complexity of human history and human society. There is a tendency in scholarship and development work to focus on single categories and use them as the basis of research. Take, for example, the often-used category of "Arab women" and the ways in which it implies a similar set of experiences across a vast group of people. Instead, intersectionality argues that categories should be seen as unstable and as historically and contextually specific. Categories are always changing; what we mean by "Arab" today, for example, may not have referred to the same meaning as it did two hundred years ago. Similarly, the category of "the poor" is constantly shifting in terms of what it means to be "poor" in the Arab region today is different by what it meant before the 2010/2011 political developments.

Intersectionality by nature is anti-categorical, thus it can challenge the problems associated with categorical thinking and its exclusions. Following on from this, it is useful to think of intersectionality in a flexible and responsive way. An intersectional framework should not be seen as a tool to map all inequalities because these inequalities can evolve and related categories can always shift. Once categories are seen as fixed, it appears as though they can be organized into an unchanging framework; what happens, then, when meanings change, or when circumstances change? This poses a challenge to rigidly operationalizing intersectionality, because it is a moving target. Instead, moving away from categories such as "the poor", we might try to focus more on opening the category up and describing what being poor means to different people, and how interventions can alleviate these conditions.

Related to the notion of undoing categorical thinking is the idea of inclusion. Moving away from homogenous notions of "the Arab woman", for example, means opening up the category to including many different experiences and realities. For instance, rather than assume all Arab women face gender inequality in the same way, it might be more productive to ask how class alleviates some forms of gender inequality and what kinds of mixed or new experiences this creates. The inclusion of these different experiences is an important element of intersectionality, which calls for increased attention to those experiences that have often been excluded and marginalized.

(c) Contextualizing and historicizing inequalities

Understanding which intersections to focus on and understanding the history of those specific forms of inequality can only be accomplished through a process of contextualization and historicizing. For example, understanding the particular form of inequality women face in the job market means first understanding how the job market and broader economy is structured in that particular context. It also means understanding the gender dynamics and patriarchal relations in the Arab region and how they are rooted and serve as a key obstacle for women involvement in the formal sectors and concentrate more in the informal economy. In a place like Egypt, where there is an economic crisis, gender inequality in the labour force will manifest differently than in a place like the United Arab Emirates, where the economic situation might alleviate inequalities in the job market. At the same time, different social norms around work may exist in these two contexts and may thus be a part of the explanation. Given the historical tendency to homogenize Arab women, it is especially important in this particular context that attention is paid to understanding the particular forms of gendered inequality women in the region face.

Conflict and instability that are key features of the Arab region also constitute a special context for gender inequalities in the region. In contexts such as Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic or Yemen, the heightened forms of insecurity have direct effects on gender inequality and cannot be neatly separated from it. In terms of war or conflict, some societies may open up and social rules may relax out of necessity to allow women to work for example; at other times, it could be the opposite. The importance of intersectionality in post-conflict contexts should be highlighted, specifically in areas such as the security sector, transitional justice mechanisms, resettlement, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. In particular, it is crucial to note that if different forms of marginalization are not addressed, the lack of inclusion could potentially lead to another conflict. In places like Rwanda and South Africa, we have seen intense efforts to include women in post-conflict society and government institutions; this model is important in thinking through equality in the vulnerable context of post-conflict. Only a detailed understanding of both history and context will allow us to trace the particular nature of inequalities. It will also allow to address the challenges of inclusion as conflicts generally consolidate identity discourses and make women's strategic alliance building more difficult and sometimes impossible.

(d) Building solidarity/cooperation

Solidarity and collaboration are central to the advancement of rights. Historically, solidarity between defenders of various rights and around groups suffering discrimination has been crucial to the attainment of freedom and rights across the world, and especially across the postcolonial world. In particular, moving past a "national" perspective allows for new forms of solidarity based on a bottom-up approach. Connections between different movements allows for the sharing of both histories as well as tactics and strategies for advancement. In this way, inequalities across different groups and issues can be addressed. Sharing histories is an excellent strategy for conversation across difference.

One example where cooperation is important is in conflict and post-conflict zones. Much of the focus in promoting women's participation in both conflict and post-conflict zones has been centered on national level elections and formal peace processes. Too little attention has been paid by comparison to women's participation in local governance structures and informal peace processes and local mediation.<sup>7</sup> In places like Libya, this has marginalized communities such as the Amazigh and Tuareq. It is often local spaces that enjoy more primacy depending on different factors social status, age, and ethnic background.<sup>8</sup> Paying attention to issues of gender alone without looking at ethnicity, as in this example, may raise problems later in terms of exclusion. One way to avoid this is to engage in cooperation and solidarity between diverse women's groups and other marginalized communities, right from the start. Women's groups may themselves form alliances across different political, ethnic and class identities and positions but, at different times, some groups may not be in a position to do so. Maintaining engagement with disparate and isolated groups may be vital to the potential for future solidarity. Another example is solidarity and cooperation between women's groups and groups working on issues around masculinity; bringing these together could potentially provide a stronger basis on which to fight patriarchy, which affects both men and women.

Empirical research in particular is needed in order to deepen solidarity and collaboration. Empirical data on different types of inequalities and the different intersections of inequality that are based on an intersectionality approach can shed light on different forms of marginalization, which can in turn help to create solidarity among groups working on different issues. On occasion, mutually beneficial alliances around a certain project for instance, may be a major achievement that spills over into forms of mutual alliance-building. For example, how exactly do both class and gender impact the ability of a woman in Upper Egypt to access the labour market? Part of this means a focus on a bottom-up and participatory action approach to social inequality. Another part means taking seriously the voices and agency of Arab women, especially in light of their silencing in the past. How does

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<sup>7</sup> Based on interview with Fatima Langhi in July 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

this woman from Upper Egypt understand her position, and what forms of inequality does she think are most acute? Intersectionality emphasises a collaborative and agent-driven form of analysis.

## II. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has attempted to set out the beginnings of a regional understanding of intersectionality in the Arab region. As such, it focused primarily on discussing intersectionality and its historical roots, as well as thinking through some of the ways in which it could be a useful optic through which to approach gender inequality in the Arab region. It has argued that intersectionality functions as a critique of the historical and contemporary tendency to homogenize Arab women into a single category and erase differences between them. Because of intersectionality's tendency to emphasize the importance of context and history as well as its assumption that structures produce inequality, it promotes forms of research and practice that take the particularities of Arab contexts into account. Moreover, intersectionality provides a more comprehensive approach through which multiple layers of inequality can be understood and addressed. Because of this, it allows for cooperation, solidarity, and an agent-driven approach to inequality more broadly. It ultimately allows to inform social policy development.

Looking back at her work, Crenshaw writes that intersectionality was an attempt to create a prism that revealed the confluence of structure and identity, and sees intersectionality as a more effective way of dealing with difference than approaches that reject categories or the study of categories: "Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and negotiate the means by which these differences will find expression in constructing group politics," (Crenshaw, 1991). The reality is that categories exist as a principle means through which we articulate and organize our lives, and thus our experiences are invariably shaped by them. Intersectionality provides a way to both be critical of categories as well as show how they create social relationships of power and inequality that shape the experiences of everyday experiences of marginalization.

There is little doubt that intersectionality is still an evolving field of study within feminism, as well as the social sciences. Theoretically, the importance of analysing multiple, contradictory social positionalities, understanding how they are constructed and how they affect one another in concrete ways, is clear. However, resolving the issue of *how* to apply this is more difficult, as can be seen from the many methodological debates presented in this paper, as well as the section on operationalizing intersectionality. The fact is that there is no simple way to do intersectional research because intersectionality is such a complex theoretical proposition. Instead, it is highly dependent on the context from which it emerges.

This paper flagged that much more evidence-based analysis is needed to lay the basis of such an approach in the Arab region, which can practically help identify the important intersections that will form the ground for future policy interventions. This paper highlighted that intersectionality is a way to navigate the complexities of gendered forms of inequality in the Arab region, and to ensure that the experiences of marginalized groups are brought into the frame of discussion. Most importantly, the paper had suggested four guiding principles to operationalize intersectionality with relation to the Arab region. These four guiding principles can contribute to the development of sound policies to achieve gender equality in the region: (1) to fully understand the structures that produce different identities; (2) to move away from pre-defined rigid categories that lead to excluding various groups and individuals and strategically use categories to achieve inclusion; (3) to fully understand the context of the existing inequalities and their history; and (4) to build solidarities among defenders of various rights and around groups suffering discrimination to achieve the rights for all.

Taking this approach forward in the region entails working on specific case studies to provide examples and models to think through and further rely on this approach to influence developments outcomes and achieve gender equality for all.

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