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## **KIP Research Project**

# **Sectarianism and National Emergencies: Barriers or Facilitators for Women, Sexual Minorities and Transgender People**

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## Executive Summary

This study investigated the relationship between moments of heightened national crisis and sectarianism and the possibilities for feminist and LGBTQ interventions into public discourse in Lebanon. It focused on the national crisis surrounding the You Stink Protests of 2015. These protests were concerned with the garbage crisis, government corruption, the centralization of services, and new parliamentary elections. They called for alternative solutions and management and committed to exposing the corruption of the government. The research entailed interviews and participant observations with feminist activists who participated in the 2015 You Stink protests including broad political coalitions that formed during this period such as Al Sha'b Yurid [The People Want] as well as the feminist coalition, The Feminist Bloc.

This research produced three major research findings. **First**, it illuminates that a distinct type of feminist and LGBTQ activism that is often obscured within dominant Lebanese discourses and policy-based initiatives related to feminism, gender justice, and sexual rights became publicly visible during this moment of national crisis and intensified sectarianism. While the more visible and recognized frameworks for addressing gender injustices in Lebanon operate through a singular analysis that prioritizes gender or sexual equality and rights and rely on strategies such as gender mainstreaming or legal advocacy and reform, feminist and LGBTQ activism within the You Stink movement operated through what this research names as “an intersectional and embedded” feminist approach. Many of these feminist and LGBTQ activists are involved in movements that are not explicitly “feminist” or “LGBTQ” focused, including the migrant workers and anti-racist movement or grassroots movements against state violence. The research



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maps the ways these intersectional and embedded feminist and LGBTQ interventions emerge with and through various social movements and highlights how these activists conceptualize patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia as co-constituted with multiple axes of power and inequality in Lebanon, including sectarianism, classism, and racism. The first research finding thus illuminates and maps what intersectionality means as a distinct form of feminism in Lebanon and a political force that connects and transforms various movements.

**Second,** this research illustrates how moments of national crisis and intensified sectarianism can open up new possibilities for the consolidation of intersectional feminist and LGBTQ interventions. It contributed to the formation of a feminist coalition called the Feminist Bloc, which inspired intersectional feminist discussions and collaborations across intersectional feminist activists that extended far beyond this period of national crisis and helped consolidate an intersectional feminist agenda.

**Third,** the research illustrates that this period of national crisis produced the context for an intersectional critique to gain visibility within political movements for social and structural change and broad public discourses more generally. In other words, the 2015 You Stink protests contributed to challenging the marginalization of intersectional feminism/LGBTQ activism from public and political discourse in Lebanon. Indeed, the patriarchal political system in Lebanon obstruct most forms of feminist activism and advocacy to access public audiences in Lebanon. The national crisis of 2015 created an opening into public discourse that many feminists had been pursuing all along. This opening emerged when those who marched with the Feminist Bloc had the opportunity to create highly visible protest signs and banners (including, for instance, the



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banner that linked state violence and domestic violence through the banner, the Patriarchal Regime is Lethal [al nizam al abawi qatel]). The You Stink protests also opened up new opportunities to publish widely circulating news articles from an intersectional feminist perspective. In addition, the intersectional feminist slogans that circulated during the protests generated conversations between many grassroots activists about whether and to what extent broad movements against state violence should prioritize and integrate feminist and LGBTQ concerns. The protests also led to a change in the government elections following the protests whereby a commitment to equal gender representation became essential to the election process.

The research has the following implications: It intervenes in feminist literature that overlooks the significance of periods of mass protest to feminist and LGBTQ studies and assumes that since resistance movements are heteropatriarchal and require unity along gender lines, they contradict feminist and LGBTQ agendas. The research also contributes to scholarship about mass social movements that ignores the role of feminist or LGBTQ perspectives in efforts towards ending state violence (sectarianism, violent nationalism, etc). The research additionally alerts policy-makers to moments of intensified national crisis as important moments for assessing and understanding intersectional feminist and LGBTQ agendas. Also, since the research maps how feminists working with marginalized communities understand the impact of racism, immigration, sectarianism, and poverty on sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in Lebanon, it can serve as a tool-kit for policy-makers committed to addressing the struggles of diverse women and LGBTQ people, especially those who are also migrants and/or are among the poor.