

Nasawiya: A New Faction in the Women's Movement

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This article is extracted from an M.A. thesis entitled “Transnational Activism in Lebanon Women’s Movement: Between *Fitna*, *Fawda*, and Feminism” prepared by Sandy El-Hage and submitted as part of the requirements of the Master of Arts in International Affairs at the School of Arts and Sciences, the Lebanese American University. The following excerpt focuses on the creation of Nasawiya, a collective of feminists (women and men) working on gender justice and striving to challenge all forms of gender oppression in Lebanon and the Arab world, and the alternative discourse it offers.

Organizing Nasawiya

Nasawiya: A New Faction in the Women’s Movement

This article documents the transnational features of the feminist collective Nasawiya. It posits that Nasawiya is an alternative feminist social movement within Lebanon’s women’s movement for gender justice and equality because of its grassroots, bottom-up nature, and the organizational structure of this collective which consists of a loose network of activists.

The greatest difference between Nasawiya and other women’s advocacy groups in the women’s movement lies in the campaign approaches and discourse surrounding “initiatives”, or grassroots projects enacted by an individual or group of activists from the collective. This article delineates the various initiatives and campaigns, instigated by Nasawiya activists thus far, and addresses pitfalls in organizing Nasawiya.

Nasawiya’s founding principles aim to sever what is described as the oppressive nature of NGOs and transnational networks that stagger against Lebanon’s unchanging elitist decision-making body. In its formative stage, Nasawiya established a feminist, women’s advocacy group that experimented with various means to organize for an alternative civil society. This alternative is sustained through three approaches unseen in Lebanon’s existing civil society: entrepreneurial feminism, feminist collectivity, and online feminism. The most prominent facet to organizing activism within Nasawiya relies on its inherently grassroots structure:

At Nasawiya, we do not have a traditional NGO structure of boards, staff, and volunteers. We are a member-driven collective where everyone is equal and in support of each other’s activism. We believe that we are stronger together. (Nasawiyas, Who are Nasawiyas?, n.d.)

Among other characteristics, the collective approach is one that sets Nasawiya apart from the prevailing “personalistic style” organizing around a single leader in prominent women’s advocacy groups (Bray-Collins, 2003, p. 76). Furthermore, this collective approach assists in sustaining Nasawiya’s genuinely grassroots, bottom-up movement.

The transnationality of Nasawiya as a movement is evident within two spheres: a domestic coalition of feminist activists; and a social movement with transnational, regional, and international networks. Before delineating Nasawiya as a transnational feminist and a national social movement in Lebanon, the following sections will briefly introduce Nasawiya as a collective based on the movement’s origin, objective, structure of organizing, and the current campaign initiatives enacted by the independent activists of Nasawiya.

Nasawiya has evolved into a feminist movement for the reclamation of public spaces for feminist sensitization in a cultural setting overrun by male chauvinism. Since the movement’s origin, activism has focused on consciousness raising campaigns on feminism and workshops for transformative change at the most grassroots, community level. Founding feminist activists of Nasawiya originally began organizing for bodily rights and sexuality awareness with LGBTQI non-profit groups Meem and Helem and in association with transnational networks in the Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR). Since 2004, the organization Helem¹ has been prominently working to “[lead] a peaceful struggle for the liberation [and awareness] of non-conforming sexuality and gender identity in Lebanon”. Helem’s main objective is to revoke article 534 of the penal code, which upholds “unnatural sexual intercourse” to be punishable by law (Helem, 2012).

Meem was created by activists who wanted to build a space for sexually non-conforming women to organize, while Helem slowly became a movement for sexually non-conforming men (Meem, 2007). In retrospect, the fact that Meem became an offshoot of Helem was a sign of fragmentation between differing perspectives on gender relations among activists themselves. In a blog post from Nfasharte (2012), a former member of Helem wrote:

I’d like to speak about my experience as a woman inside this organization [i.e. Helem] and my relationship with its members and leaders. A strange feeling crept up on me as I got to know many members better, when I discovered that the way they greet women is not through a handshake, but through grabbing her breasts...This idea in particular, that women’s bodies are public and revolve around men’s sexuality and desire, forms the basis of the patriarchal system that discriminates against me as a woman and makes me pay very dearly for my non-normative personal choices... Among the other things that reproduce patriarchal structures among many members of Helem is the image they have of femininity, the same image in the mainstream social imagination: superficial, gossipy, catty, enemies with other women and obsessed with the world of fashion and beauty with the goal of attracting men. I have always fought against this in my personal life, and I’ve always had my own standards

1. Despite Lebanon’s lack of recognition, Helem is a non-profit, non-governmental organization registered in Canada, France, and the United States with branches in Montreal, Paris, and San Francisco (Helem, 2008).

of beauty and my own non-normative version of femininity. Women who fall outside social norms of beauty and femininity are considered by the men of Helem to be 'abnormal', 'angry lesbians', 'ugly', 'dirty' and 'smelly'... This general anti-woman atmosphere created the perfect breeding environment for sexual harassment.

All of this verbal and physical harassment has bothered me and many other women in Helem. There was never any genuine attempt to solve the problem, and so many women ended up leaving the organization completely. The lack of serious engagement was always tied to a patriarchal structure within the organization that absolves those who discriminate and harass. This structure becomes clear in the reactions that inevitably follow any complaint: blaming the victim, relegating the problem to a just a few bad apples, and mocking the women, among other oppressive strategies designed to silence anyone who dares to speak out. I think today is finally the time for these violations against women's bodies to stop. I am speaking out now so that this doesn't happen again to other women in the future. (Helem and Sexual, 2012)

The experience of this former member of Helem shows that the seed of gender-based violence in Lebanon is even perpetuated between factions who identify themselves as subjects of this discrimination. The pervasiveness of gender-based violence and sexual harassment is attributed to "outside factors" that have shaped the "mechanism" of Helem's organizational structure. Three components of social behavior are described to have caused a schism over gender-based violence between men and women in the LGBTQI community: character assassination, shaming and silencing, and lack of accountability:

As with all previous instances of organization-splitting arguments, the immediate reaction by most of those involved was to sweep it all under a carpet and pretend it never happened. This was done, first of all, by framing it as a 'personal argument' that, apparently, does not reflect negatively on the politics of the organization as a whole. Secondly, there was shameless pride from some of the members and key people in the organization and community in having 'defeated' the 'evil terrorists' by shaming them into leaving. Thirdly, after this event and during Helem's general assembly, the same members who participated in sexist slander suddenly started speaking about 'women's rights' and about how making a 'safe space for women should become a priority for Helem. Those same people refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing or apologize for their hurtful and misogynist remarks and actions, and continued to slander women who spoke up not just in Lebanon, but regionally. While they might think that saying tokenistic phrases about women's rights may shield them from criticism, it is their actual actions that count and that show otherwise. (Helem and the, 2012)

The case of Helem can be seen as a "microcosm of gender-based violence" in Lebanon. Former members who have come forth with testimonies have emphasized that the objective to their narratives is not to slander the organization as a whole, but rather

to contextualize the extent of patriarchal organizing, misogyny, the inherent 'male-privilege' in institutions, and the pitfalls of NGO tactics in Lebanon's civil society. For this study, the relevance of these incidents provides further details of the impetus for grassroots activists in Lebanon to build a genuinely feminist movement.

Although the grassroots community of activists has been organizing for years in Lebanon, the origins of Nasawiya date to 2007. To commemorate International Women's Day on 10 March 2007, activists hosted an event that would be "[t]he first of its kind in being organized by young women and also being able to bring together different women figures and groups [in Lebanon]" (S. A. G., personal communication, August 29, 2012).

The intention to organize for International Women's Day (IWD) 2007 was described as follows:

[We] [i]nvite you to attend, participate and celebrate with us in an event sparking a new initiative within the cultural and social realm of Beirut: 'Women's Day'. An initiative that aims to bring women and women friendly people together so that they may jointly think and explore tools of work having a direct impact in women's lives. Our aim is to celebrate with all of you who have worked, struggled, fought, felt mistreated and marginalized to come together for a second round, with an uprising generation of young women and men determined to bring equality within their present. (Taharar!, n.d.)

This event will be a scheme where culture and social initiative will be to create and thus build a concrete network working on women and tackling women issues from a different perspective. This space will be mixed between employee women, journalists, politicians, and artists. We will be together to share their experiences and to fix a program to continue their demands on the political, economical [sic], and personal level.²

These promotional descriptions of IWD 2007 in Lebanon reflect the desire for a renewed women's movement. Simultaneously, the means to organize coincided with international interest in funding human rights campaigns in the region.

In 2008, along with the momentum of KAFA's campaign against gender-based violence, Banat Akhir Zaman simultaneously emerged with aspirations to become a proactive, grassroots, feminist campaign for bodily rights. Over the previous year, feminist activists began reclaiming web spaces online to publish feminist critiques of the state of women in Lebanon. From a blog post by campaign members in Banat Akhir Zaman, the feminist campaign was fuelled by the social perception that women in Lebanon are as liberated as their bodies, based on their portrayal in the media:

When one attempts at discussing the status of women in Lebanon these days and comparing it with that of women in the Arab world, challengers ignorantly bring about the stereotypes of the women at the forefront of Lebanese media

2. This description was taken from the event's promotional poster, Retrieved on 05 August 2012 from <http://urshalim.blogspot.com/2007/03/international-womens-day-lebanon.html>

as examples to back their invalid arguments... outsiders believe that the typical seemingly liberated bodies that are circulated around all the music channels actually do represent the whole of the situation of Lebanese women. Wrong. (Banat Akhir Zaman, 2008)

Following the momentum of the mainstream women's movement, and particularly KAFA's campaigns, the 'alternative', feminist women's movement gained traction as a grassroots effort. In January 2009, campaign members of Banat Akhir Zaman bonded with independent activists for a Feminist Collective³ to create a "platform to allow different feminists to work on different groups in one office" (Saade, 2009). By International Women's Day on March 8, 2009, the campaign for Banat Akhir Zaman coalesced into a formative collective of activists among Lebanon's feminists for a social movement and "the first group of its kind in Lebanon" (Goodman, 2009). Known as Beirut's Feminist Collective, the movement organized its first demonstration to commemorate the universal day to protest the status of women in Lebanon. IWD 2009 occurred in the midst of controversial electoral reforms and just before national elections.

IWD 2009 would be the beginning of an annual tradition for feminist activists from Nasawiya to take to the streets and engage the people of Lebanon in grassroots activism. Dubbed as Hello Women in 2012, the campaign for IWD followed very basic structures of organizing seen throughout women's movements across the world. Along with an evening protest to "Take Back the Night" and "reclaim the streets from harassment women face", every year the feminist activists disperse in groups throughout Lebanon to gather societal perspectives from women on challenges they face as women and the changes they would like to see in Lebanon in regards to the social and political status of women. According to members of the collective, the objective of Nasawiya's demonstration is:

1. For us, as feminists, to listen, grow and learn from what women have to say.
2. To let the women we meet express themselves, think about the questions, voice their opinions, concerns, and stories.
3. To let women know that our collective is out there and is supporting them and that they are welcome to join us and work with us (Nasawiya, 2011).

IWD is an opportunity for the collective to publish independent reports on women's opinions of their status as citizens in Lebanon. Usage of social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, and web spaces supply the means to disseminate their data on women's status in Lebanon. IWD in Lebanon has become a popular occasion amongst women's advocacy groups. Although IWD is not a formal or mandated national day in Lebanon, commemoration among women's advocacy groups has become informally institutionalized at university campuses, through the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) and in civil society, and across media outlets. Yet, IWD celebrations in Lebanon are varied across the women's movement. From a distance, the attention IWD has received in Lebanon since 1998 shows that women seem to be celebrated and met with sincere acclamation each year. However, there is a clear discrepancy between how IWD is commemorated among women's advocacy groups. For Nasawiya, IWD serves as an opportunity to protest grievances and demand action from decision makers

3. Before Feminist Collective emerged as a comprehensive social and political movement, members of the collective originated as independent activists from Beirut-based IndyACT.

to recognize the plight of women in Lebanon. This is in stark contrast to how other women's organizations or advocacy groups have utilized IWD as a day to promote superficial or hollow advancements for women in Lebanon.

As of 2012, Beirut's Feminist Collective became known as Nasawiya (i.e. feminism in Arabic). Since its inception in 2010, Nasawiya has grown in membership and in the number of campaigns it engages in. The feminist collective consists of 270 independent activists, and though it began with one campaign for gender-awareness training in 2010, members now work on ten initiatives produced in or around Nasawiya. The collective, however, did not emerge without tribulations. Moawad describes the movement to have begun with Banat Akhir Zaman as:

[A] first attempt at young feminist organizing. [However,] it did not follow through and died out, then [be]came The Feminist Collective and then that became Nasawiya, the final functioning version. (N. Moawad, Personal Communication, September 03, 2012)

Although its origin in Beirut remains a perennial feature, some campaigns by Nasawiya cover the MENA region in solidarity with other Arab feminist movements for gender justice and equality. Furthermore, Nasawiya serves as a headquarter for expansive global networks in campaigns such as the Coalition for Sexual Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR). Along with the growth in its membership, the collective has taken on the role of an umbrella support for any feminist campaign in Lebanon. Thus, members of Nasawiya provide ancillary grassroots activism for both international campaigns and national campaigns for the women's movement. The collective's work is not restricted to any single partnership, institution, or organization, but rather serves as an alternative hub for using social and political issues as opportunities for organizing grassroots activities and services. As a transnational movement from below, Nasawiya works horizontally with national civil society institutions, namely KAFA and CRTD-A to organize grassroots campaigns, demonstrations, and protests.

Part of what makes Nasawiya a unique collective of activists among Lebanon's women's advocacy groups is the movement's outspoken framing of resistance against the hegemony of the state and international order. This article argues that the reordering of the women's advocacy community under a UNFPA-NCLW partnership has only led to a cosmetic improvement in the women's movement, despite the multi-year and million-dollar UNFPA sponsorship. The NCLW's inherent alignment with the state, with the first ladies of the sectarian government (wives of the president, prime minister, and speaker of the house) serving as NCLW leaders, clearly depicts the limitations of the mainstream women's movement.

The goals and values of Nasawiya elaborate on activists' efforts to raise consciousness among women and refute the strategies adopted by the mainstream women's movement. The collective's objectives are intimately intertwined within the declaration of their value system, wherein:

- Sexism, which is a devastating result of the feudal/patriarchal culture that we live in, is a major social problem that we should work to eradicate, especially since it is deeply

related to other social problems, such as classism, heterosexism, capitalism, racism, sectarianism, etc. Therefore, we must fight all forms of violence, discrimination, and exploitation that are based on gender, sexuality, able-bodied, ethnicity, race, religion, class, etc.

- As women, we have the right to a positive self-image and an emotionally, mentally, and physically healthy life.
- As women, we have the right to our bodies and our sexualities. In other words, women should be free to express their sexuality, free to make a choice about engaging or not engaging in sexual acts and/or relationships, free to choose whether they want to marry or not, whether they want to undergo an abortion or not. Women must also have easier access to helpful and non-judgmental sexual health services, as well as sexual education.
- We must work to eliminate all forms of harassment, and all forms of gender-based violence, verbal, physical, and sexual, wherever they happen.
- All women should have equal rights of employment, and equal treatment and pay in the workplace.
- Women should be encouraged to enter the fields of study and work that are currently dominated by men, such as sciences, sports, etc.
- Domestic migrant workers are employees and should have all the rights of employment, starting with respect and equality.
- We have a responsibility to be smart consumers since what we buy and where we buy from are political as well as personal choices that affect us all.
- We should encourage women to start women-friendly, workers-friendly and environmentally friendly small businesses. Women must play an active role in the political process, and lead the way in political reform.
- Women must have all their citizenship rights.
- Women must assume more leadership roles, in the private and public spheres, to reflect their central role in their communities.
- We have to promote feminist art, women-friendly media, and women's studies courses and institutes.
- We should respect our natural environment, as [the] exploitation of nature is parallel to the exploitation of women.
- We should support other feminists in the Arab world, the global south, and the rest of the world, who are working towards a similar vision of a better world. (Nasawiya, Our Values. n.d.)

The collective implicitly differentiates itself from its fellow women's advocacy groups. In promoting awareness, Nasawiya's campaigns call for community accountability in lieu of legal frameworks for government accountability, especially in cases of sexual harassment. In a general sense, community accountability requires the commitment of activists and community members to share their common grievances:

This change in ourselves and in our communities is first and foremost one of healing, of openly talking about the multiple sources of our pain – our personal and collective histories, in non-judgmental, women-friendly environments, and then working together to eliminate these problems.

In promoting a culture of community accountability, Nasawiya's objective is to expose the nuances in Lebanon's social and political culture which enable oppression against women and men. The value system of feminism thus serves as a foundation for a critical framework in activism. In the context of Lebanon, this movement begins at the most rudimentary level of social oppression to address pervasive cultural taboos or topics considered shameful or *'ayb*. In an interview with a national newspaper, Nadine Moawad explains how a feminist movement could get women to challenge various social taboos surrounding the issue of women's lack of empowerment:

In addition to the political sphere, society is also a front in the struggle for gender justice in Lebanon... Lebanese women are inundated with expectations of the female body that adhere to certain beauty norms: blonde, straight hair; small, neat noses; large lips and flat stomachs. Under the weight of tremendous social pressure to conform to gender stereotypes, women suffer huge damage to their self-esteem. This is exacerbated... by the complete lack of discussion around these issues... [Re-engaging debates on women's issues in Lebanon] can be achieved... by spreading awareness and promoting debate about sexual health, sexual education in schools and sexual harassment. Through opening up a dialogue around these focal issues [Nasawiya] hopes to encourage women to be more aware of the various forces at play in determining gender norms and expectations. In turn... such a dialogue will enable women to explore different ways in which they can reassert their agency in order to bring about positive change in their lives... On the other hand... the problem of political disempowerment among women in Lebanon continues. Yet along with the empowerment of women in politics per se, the mainstreaming of core feminist values such as equality, solidarity and critical engagement with multi-faceted mechanisms of oppression is the key to breaking away from the endless cycles of sectarian squabbling that continue to mire Lebanese society. (Goodman, 2009)

Regarding its organizational structure, anyone is welcome to join Nasawiya as long as they are self-identified feminist activists⁴ and uphold the collective's *qiyamouna*, or value system. The structure of the collective does not rest upon a formal organizational approach, but is driven by a loose, network-like structure. Castells (2000) proposed a new sociological conception of a network society, an evolved form of social organizing, wherein:

A social structure made up of networks is an interactive system, constantly on the move. Social actors constituted as networks add and subtract components, which bring into the acting network new values and interests defined in terms of their matrix in changing social structure. Structure makes practices, and practices enact and change structures following the same networking logic and dealing in similar terms with the programming and reprogramming of networks' goals, by setting up these goals on the basis of cultural codes. (p. 697)

The collective maintains its cohesive movement through volunteerism and self-initiated campaigns or 'initiatives'. As one member describes the collective: "There is no hierarchy. We have one coordinator for every initiative. Everyone has the right to start

4. "By activists, we mean individuals actively involved in gender justice work. Some Nasawiyas work full-time in women's rights; others volunteer a few hours a month. Some are students and some are professionals in different fields. All of us are activists in different capacities, whether by leading our own feminist projects or by discussing gender with our friends and communities. In our jobs, classes, homes, and daily lives, we advocate for equality and social change" (Nasawiyas, Who are Nasawiyas?, n.d.).

up a new initiative, as long as it has a strong feminist perspective and corresponds to our core values” (Sidiropoulos, 2012). Members often work on more than one social issue at a time. Abandoning any formal structural organizing is an exercise in sustaining a communal movement based on inclusivity and will:

At Nasawiya, we do not have a traditional NGO structure of boards, staff, and volunteers. We are a member-driven collective where everyone is equal and in support of each other’s activism. We believe that we are stronger together. (Nasawiyas, Who are Nasawiyas?, n.d.)

It is not atypical to find activists in Nasawiya who were once part of formal non-governmental organizations and more traditional women’s advocacy groups. An activist at Nasawiya and a previous member of a well-known formal women’s advocacy group describes the contrast between activism and NGO work in women’s advocacy groups:

My own observations as an activist and a former NGO worker made me reach the conclusion that informal organizations that are less professionalized, are more flexible and can adapt more easily. Networks and collectives also leave the door open for creative, dynamic initiatives that will be sustained by the commitment of the activists rather than by grants. Nasawiya is a loose organization within the women’s movement that had made the conscious choice to avoid ‘NGOization’ and professionalization in order to allow the maximum of independence [for] its members within their initiative, thus enabling a wider independence for the organization as a whole. Talking with other Lebanese activists, it has become very clear that many of them working in more professionalized structures struggle with the issue of resources: they loathe the competition donor funding creates between organizations (who they would tend to see as natural partners in ideology but who become rivals when it comes to access to resources), they have issues with the agenda-bending that donor trends entail, often estimate the system of donor funding [to be] unsustainable and almost all of them draw a line to what kind of funding they’re ready to accept. (Daher, 2011)

Nasawiya reemerged from an unsuccessful campaign for bodily rights and sexuality awareness to eventually flourish into a burgeoning feminist movement when the women’s movement needed a renewed impetus for change. Initially, the collective’s expansion came with an influx of young activists seeking to join a movement with a consistent outward focus on progressive change. The collective structure of Nasawiya seems to appeal to young activists who experienced working under the restrictions of organized, professionalized, and institutionalized work in Lebanon’s women’s advocacy groups. Part of this impression is directly related to the friction and rigidity between donors’ agendas and pressure on grantee partners to meet expected criteria for campaigns and activities. The appeal of flexibility, creativity, and dynamism in a social movement is theoretically an attractive setting for a feminist collective of activists seeking to challenge the very organizational structures that have done little to mobilize an effective constituency for women’s rights in Lebanon.

Activists at Nasawiya are typically between 18-30 years of age and consist of women and men of various demographic backgrounds in Lebanon. However, as a social movement, Nasawiya often collaborates in protests, campaigns, conferences, and demonstrations with various groups and organizations that aim to further causes through a feminist perspective. The notable attraction between Nasawiya and young feminist activists in Lebanon is an indication for the need of positions that support the emergence of young leaders. Khattab (2010) characterizes the women's movement as previously being an inopportune environment for fresh activism, where even leftist women's advocacy groups were not particularly interested in mobilizing young people in Lebanon:

Despite the fact that these associations advanced reformist agendas and challenged the sectarian status quo, their institutional makeup failed to attract young leaders in the post-war period. In particular, they were increasingly controlled by a group of women who were involved in every aspect of the associational work but refused to delegate power to the newer generation (Khattab, 2010, p. 105).

In comparison to the institutional makeup of other women's advocacy groups, the collective's organizational structure relies on support and leadership by every member to sustain its flexible, creative, and dynamic work. Most importantly, Nasawiya is effective in mobilizing activists around new ideas in campaigns and initiatives by young people in Lebanon as a result of receiving funds and grants from women's transnational organizations that support the establishment of local feminist movements. Commonly referred to by scholars of social movement theory and organizational theory as social movement organizations [SMO], these transnational organizations provide seed grants to diffuse a template of activism. Before Nasawiya, in 2008, 18.6 percent of reported organizations in the region worked with young women on women's rights work. Those organizations that reported a target group of young women under thirty-years of age were most cognizant of the need to integrate young women's rights work into their context. Yet, of the surveyed organizations, only 49 percent, less than half, admitted to having young women in managerial roles.

To build upon its twenty-one feminist causes and initiate such a challenge to the status quo, Nasawiya members engage in women's issues across the following initiatives: Ghayreh 'adatik: Feminist Tools for Change, Sawt Al Niswa, Adventures of Salwa, Take Back the Tech, coalitions with KAFA (to support the Law to Protect Women from Family Violence) and Zolah (to promote an Arab network of young feminist activists in the MENA region), The Gender Databank, International Women's Day, Labor Day, Anti-Racism Movement, Delete Article 522 campaign, and most recently the Nasawiya Café, an entrepreneurial feminist venture to provide a sustainable income for campaigns while reclaiming a space in Beirut for feminist activists to congregate. In my view, each initiative varies in transnational ties, but ultimately contributes to disseminating transnational feminism.

The Pitfalls of Externalization: The International is Personal

Nasawiya is not exceptional in that the collective requires external funding, just like other women's advocacy groups in Lebanon do. Similarly, as mainstream women's

advocacy groups have been affected by transnational politics and institutional structures, transnational processes have also affected Nasawiya as a movement. The phenomenon of transnational activism in Nasawiya emerged with the influx of external interest to fund young women's rights movement. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), MamaCash, and the Global Women's Fund (GWF) are prominent supporters for multi-year initiatives. Multi-year financial support through transnational feminist SMOs allowed for the transnational diffusion of resources, whether of funding or mobilization structures, for young feminist movements in developing countries. In Lebanon, the LBQT community became the source of feminist diffusion amongst young activists. LBQT support group Meem brought forth a renewed movement for queer and feminist discourse amongst young people and initiated campaigns for raising awareness on women's rights in Lebanon, their lack of rights, and the imposed traditional, often patriarchal ideals that often give false notions of liberties, such as the means to drive, the wearing of revealing clothes, and attending public spaces along with male counterparts. Much of these awareness campaigns have been made possible through funding support from external organizations for feminist movement building and with the use of the Internet for organizing and disseminating information on activities occurring at grassroots level. Nasawiya's transnational structure is heavily maintained and connected through the Internet and social media sites.

Nasawiya: A Model for Transnational Feminism

If Nasawiya has proven itself as a social movement, the feminist collective has proven to be a resistance movement against the patriarchal and sectarian political system in Lebanon. Its transnational features are broad, varied, and carry the seeds of becoming a model across the MENA region's women's movements. As a Lebanese feminist activist and coordinator of Nasawiya explains:

We understand the fact that many problems are Lebanon-specific, but many problems are common to the region. We, as Arab women, face challenges that have the same root, and this is why, early this year, many of our members in their individual capacity were part of the launching of the Young Arab Feminist Network in Cairo. We don't like how the situation for women in Lebanon is always compared to that of women in Saudi Arabia, supposedly saying that women here are much better off when they are not even aware of what is happening. So yes, we focus on Lebanon, but at the same time, women in other countries are inspired by our work and have contacted us. There is a mutual inspiration between women here and those in the rest of the region. (Sara, 2010)

Years after its inception, Nasawiya continues to be a grouping of activists who have experience in feminist activism, yet face the challenge of mobilizing and organizing a movement as pronounced as their rhetoric. Surely, activists of Nasawiya have experienced personal backlashes in organizing within communities that do not uphold feminist values as a social framework (such as the very public sexual harassment offenses within the LGBTQI community). However, there is a great consequence to cultivating an impenetrable community within a feminist bubble. Feminism, just as the women's movement as a whole, has not generated any historical or sweeping

achievements in Lebanon. Furthermore, feminism popularly carries negative connotations for being a 'Western' product, irrelevant or inapplicable, and a radical paradigm for human rights to which is still a conservative and traditional society. In Lebanon, the feminist movement needs to address the bulwarks in society and family life by moving from the realm of the Internet to work more on the ground in order to create a lasting movement and achieve success.

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