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Women's Activism and Political Participation in Conflict Areas: Lebanon as a case study

Final Report ITP/JSPS/ OFIAS (2010-2011)

First I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to the OFIAS office and for the JSPS fund for the opportunity they gave me in enhancing my research skills and enriching my dissertation. My research along this fund went mainly into two phases, first the one in Lebanon at the Lebanese American University (LAU/ May 2010- Sep 2010) and the second in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS/ Oct 2010-March 2011).

It was necessary at the first stage which extended from May 2010 till the end of September 2010 to collect primary data as well as secondary data about the Lebanese women's political participation, both in terms of forms and in terms of activism. Hence, to put women in the Lebanese context I had to look into the frameworks of first the nature of the confessional Lebanese state, second the nature of conflict and thirdly the status of women in general. . I collected data and non-circulated research material at universities such as the Lebanese University, Universite de Saint Joseph (USJ), Lebanese American University (LAU), and the American University of Beirut (AUB) and I built a network and conducted interviews with women at formal and informal levels.

To look at the gender political debate I looked into the women friendly issues that were raised by women NGOs and studied the process by which these issues were raised to be of public interest. Hence, I collected data on the issues raised by women politicians, women in political parties' vis-à-vis the ministerial statements and how they fit within the general feminist political debates and interests. As such I had also to look into the main political perception of gender issues and their relevance within the Lebanese case. I interviewed women in the political bureau in political parties, and women head of the women issues branch in political parties.

It was important to look closely at the issue of citizenship, nationality, Violence against women and the personal status law issues that women NGOs were tackling, the strategies, mechanisms, networking, mobilization that they used versus the political/legal/religious/ social structure.

In addition to that, I attended seminars on women's political participation. For example, I attended a seminar that was funded by UNIFEM by which I was able to contact participants and meet many of actives.

The collection of data was the basis for moving to the next stage where I was affiliated with SOAS from October 2010 till March 2011. The gender department at SOAS seemed to offer the best combination of gender and Middle Eastern Studies. To better situate my fieldwork data within the gender academia, I attended classes such as "Gender and the Middle East", "Gender Theories" and "Human Rights of Women" .Giving the fact I come from an international affairs background, such classes were necessary in developing the usage of gender as an analytical tool and for the framing of gender in the political

studies debate. Hence, I was able after attending these classes to utilize the theories and the terminologies that were used in the classes within the data that I have collected.

In addition to the classes, I was able to attend lectures that were held by the gender department at SOAS. Among these events were; one by the Nobel Prize Winner Dr Shirin Ebadi on the Role of Women in Promoting Peace in the Middle East; another one was by Professor Saskia Wieringa on Sexual slander and the post o genocide in Indonesia. I attended a lecture on citizenship, autochthony and the intersected politics of belonging by Nira Yuval-Davis. in addition to that, I was able to attend seminars that were conducted outside SOAS such as the Agha Khan University; "Gender and Identity in Muslim Context", and women's NGOs networks "Feminism in London" and "10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325". Moreover, I was able to meet and discuss my work with professors who work on gender and political participation. As such I was able to put the parameters of my work within a better framework.

Now after a year of getting the ITP/JSPS fund though my accumulation of knowledge of scholars and concepts has increased, yet I was not able to get my dissertation into paper yet. I still need time to finish writing my thesis. However, the basis of my work was built perfectly through the fieldwork which I have carried out in Lebanon and the concepts and gender theories that I have learned in London. Add to that, now I am known as a researcher on Lebanese women and as such I will have an opportunity to present in the coming conferences that will be organized on women or on the Middle East. Though I was accepted to present a paper at the 10th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 at the United Nations University in Tokyo at the end of October 2010, however, I didn't go cause of administrative procedures of ITP and the short term notice that I knew about the acceptance of my paper. There was no conference to which I could have applied while I was in London and add to that, the conferences that I attended were already agreed upon and organized before my arrival to London. However, I was able to deliver a presentation at a seminar that I was attending on the Human Rights of Women. My paper was on the political Participation of Women in Lebanon. Nevertheless, there is proposed conference that will which will be delivered at the Agha Khan University (London) within the Series of lectures under the theme construction of knowledge. The date is not set yet; however, it will be within the academic year 2011-2012. Another presentation will be held in July in Costa Rica in a conference on women and peace where I will present a paper on women and Food security: Lebanon as a case study.

I would like to take the chance to propose to the ITP/OFIAS committee my willingness to present a paper, if the topic they choose for the conference is related to either gender or political participation.