

**GENDER, PEACE & SECURITY
NEXT GENERATION SYMPOSIUM
2021/2022**



WIIS

**WOMEN IN
INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**

**RESEARCH
SUMMARIES**

CYBER AND TECHNOLOGY GROUP 1

DATE: OCTOBER 22ND
TIME: 9AM EST

BALSAM MUSTAFA:

CYBER-FEMINISM IN IRAQ

I will be researching how gender intersects with ethnicity, class, politics, and religion through cyberfeminism in Iraq. Social media activism has played a vital role in the ongoing protest movement in Iraq; with activists challenging the post-2003 power-sharing system, political Islam, militias, and foreign interference. This has opened space(s) for Iraqi women to engage in socio-political mobilization, debate feminism, and advocate for women's rights. With the rise in cases of domestic violence during the national curfew imposed because of Covid-19, young female activists have been campaigning on Twitter platforms for the legalization of an anti-domestic violence law. The threat by militias and the opposition of conservative Islamist parties have posed immense challenges for Iraqi women. Who are those female activists? Can their activism produce change and result in the emergence of a coherent feminist movement in Iraq? These are the core questions of my project.

Few research projects have addressed the interaction between digital spaces and activism in the Iraqi context. This project is unique in its approach to examine online women activists as embodied activists whose material experiences in the real-world are not disconnected from their virtual spaces. It asks crucial questions about how they attempt to (re)-claim the cyberspace and what challenges they face in the process. This embodied dimension is vital because of how it relates to context. Online women's rights activists live in contexts characterized not just by conservatism and political repression but also by violent conflict sectarianism. The proposed research aims to answer questions about how women deal with adversity in their social media spaces.

I employ an interdisciplinary mixed-method approach. This approach will provide salient insights into how the socio-political contexts impacts women in online activism and will situate local feminist struggles within a broader context of transnational feminist networks. In doing so, the study has the potential of reshaping our understanding of cyberfeminism and contributes to the fields of Feminist International Relations and Feminist Media Studies. This study will benefit from my original perspective as a female Iraqi scholar taking a feminist approach. The researcher's positionality and identity are of utmost importance for this type of research, which will enable me to approach and interact with participants.

GAIA PALLECCHI

CYBER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Cyber (or technology-facilitated) violence against women and girls (cyber-VAWG) is a growing international concern that remains for the most part unaddressed. This category of violence includes several forms of “online violence” such as image-based sexual abuse; online stalking and harassment of women and girls; spying and other invasions of privacy; online grooming for the purpose of violent extremism and trafficking of women and girls; “doxing” or sharing of private information online without consent, defamation of women and girls online; the use of digital platforms to incite politically-motivated violence against women and girls. Cyber-VAWG has wide impacts across the globe, deep consequences on survivors, and became prevalent well before the start of Covid-19 pandemic. In emergency-affected and fragile contexts, women and girls are most at risk often due to a lack of legal protections and remedies. Survivors often have difficulty knowing what options are available to stop the abuse or do not have alternatives to ensure their safety and seek support. Moreover, national and local jurisdictions miss opportunities to understand the effects of cyber-VAWG and to effectively engage with social media and online industries. Community attitudes and engagement around the issue may also be problematic and have a chilling effect on women and girls feeling safe in coming forward to report abuse and seek protection and/or remedies. The cumulative impact of these violent online behaviors carries a huge risk not only for women and girls but also for national and international security.

This writing project is situated at the nexus between cyber-VAWG and national and international security and explores what specific threats cyber-VAWG women and girls face in humanitarian settings. Looking at three specific case-studies (Myanmar being one and other two to be decided), this project considers how political instability and the Covid-19 pandemic have altered how social media vectors harm in fragile contexts. Building on those examples, this writing project seeks to analyze how the specific heightened risks to women and girls to survive cyber-VAWG also translate into wider impacts for entire families and communities as well as other forms of political instability.

Analyzing available evidence from international organizations, UN agencies, communities of practice and other research institutions, this writing project aims to address the following questions:

- What particular risks does technology create for new and exacerbated forms of violence to women and girls and how are these unique or heightened in humanitarian settings?
- How can humanitarian actors, social media platforms and decision-makers reduce digital risks and create safe environments for women and girls in conflict-affected societies?
- How to effectively react and respond when a risk related to cyber-VAWG is identified?
- How to adequately support survivors of cyber-VAWG?

This writing project seeks to provide practical recommendations for humanitarian actors, social media platforms and decision-makers to prevent, mitigate, and eliminate the risks of cyber-VAWG, in view of hampering those risks, protecting women and girls who can be exposed to cyber-VAWG in humanitarian settings and in turn contribute to more stable and democratic communities and societies.

REYHAN TOPAL:

BRINGING THE WOMEN BACK IN: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF THE GENDER GAP IN TECHNOLOGY AND CYBERSECURITY

Research on technology and cybersecurity has recently flourished. Although a great deal has been written in the scholarly literature about the growing importance of technological advancements and cybersecurity for political science, there is a dearth of studies that examines the gender gap and underrepresentation of women in those fields. Current studies show that women graduating from technology-related departments do not always have access to jobs about their profession, a phenomenon which is widely called the “leaking pipeline.”. Furthermore, women are underrepresented in different social science disciplines where social, political, and economic aspects of technology are discussed by male-dominant research clusters.

In this writing project, I will examine why and how female researchers are excluded from an ever-expanding field of technology and cybersecurity, and the political consequences of this exclusion. I will first review the theories of women’s exclusion in technology-related fields: including ability differences, relative ability strengths, career preferences, lifestyle preferences, field-specific ability beliefs, and gender stereotypes and bias. Second, I will examine the relevant op-eds, interviews, and speeches of established female scholars in technology and cybersecurity to understand which theory of exclusion best explains the challenges female scholars face in these fields. Third, I will analyze the consequences of gender gap in those fields. I will discuss how the exclusion of women leads to algorithmic bias towards gender and race in Google’s, Facebook’s, and YouTube’s computing systems. Lastly, I will provide recommendations to eliminate the gender gap in technology and cybersecurity.