Always Ready

Bodily impact of militarization on Syrian women activists

مستعداً دائماً

About the title:

It is one of al-Ba'ath Party slogans which school students used to reiterate,

مشرف المدرسة: رفيقي الطليعي كُن مستعداً لبناء المجتمع العربي الاشتراكي الموحد والدفاعِ عنه

School instructor: My vanguard comrade, be ready to build and defend the United Socialist Arab Society.

الطلاب: مستعداً دائماً

Students: Always ready!

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr. Domitilla Olivieri for the continuous support, patience, motivation, enthusiasm and immense knowledge. Your invaluable advice helped me throughout the research and writing of this thesis. I could never imagine having a better advisor and mentor for my thesis; شــكراً (thank you).

My appreciation to the Syrian women activists whom I interviewed to discuss militarisation and body, as well as emotional and mental loads, including Maya, Zero, Nisreen and Leen. Thank you all for your openness, transparency and willingness to travel together on this journey. This thesis could not have been real without your shared living experiences and perspectives. I am grateful to Leticia G. Leon for the emotional and mental support. My sincere thanks also go to my team at SFJN in particular to Ana Lomtatidze, same goes to Loujain al-Hathloul and Laila Alodaat for proofreading, to Oula A. Haidar for her creative design, and to Medya Shikh Ayob for her support and kindness. I am also very grateful to an anonymous Syrian woman activist and to the artist Sulafa Hijazi for the artworks.

Last but certainly not least, my heartfelt thanks to my sisters Hana and Iftekar who give me unconditional support and love despite the many borders among us, and to my brother Ahmed, whose death in 2013 sparked all the anger over oppression and khaki, the anger that has motivated me to complete this research.

Abstract

Feminist research has revealed a significant relationship between militarization and patriarchy. This thesis takes that research forward through a gender analysis of the bodily impact of militarization on Syrian women activists. The thesis identifies and interrogates the gendered underpinnings of militarism. In doing so, it examines the contributions of Syrian women activists to our understanding of militarism and gender through a standpoint methodology. This thesis examines the manifestations of militarisation at the ideological and material level in peace and war time, uncovers the assumptions about gender (and ethnicity) that shape dominant perceptions of war and militarism. Finally, the thesis illustrates how militarization affects women's body and emotions, gender identity and psychosocial issues.

Keywords: Militarization, military manifestations, gender, gender identity, body, emotions,psychosomatic,Syria.

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INTRODUCTION

Positionality: Notes on the Politics of Locations

"Groups have a degree of permanence over time such that group realities transcend individual experiences.
Patricia Hill Collins (1990, p. 375).

If I were in Syria today and the 2011 Revolution had not happened, most probably I would not dare to say the word 'Militarism' neither to criticize it in public spaces, nor to say how much I hated myself in the khaki school uniform as my bitter smile shows on the cover of this thesis. The fear of expressing myself, hatred to militarism in everyday life, and the resulted pain of a pressed body; these emotions are the motives behind this research.

I came from a country that has been trapped in war for the past ten years. I was in Syria when the revolution started back in 2011. The pain I felt in khaki school uniform for 12 years that oppressed my body, my femininity and sexuality, I still feel it today and I share it with many other Syrian women who experienced that too. The puzzle of looking like a boy, but I am a girl, the fear of being bullied if I act like a boy, the fear of being called a 'slut' if I show my femininity, was an endless dilemma for a teenage girl. That dilemma turned into the anxiety of not being sure how to act or what to expect for a very long time to come, it is just an example of how to live under militarism and witnessing how a militarized ideology has seized the revolution. The intensity of such pain becomes not a departure from the ordinary, but the ordinary itself.

Fear under militarism is constructed first to conserve power, when we fear to express ourselves freely by believing that 'walls have ears', when we fear to criticize the leader or even not liking him, as one of the participants shared. We (me with each of them, separately) also shared how the fear made our bodies as women shrink in the social public space. Wearing khaki meant readiness to die for all the slogans launched by the 'Father Leader' and al-Baath Party, to be prepared to be a soldier, to die for

the nation, for the homeland, for Arabism[1].

The feeling of constant besiegement and surveillance was overwhelming for years. I would find the face of the Father Leader and his words - that were forcibly made sacred, deep and wise- dotted all around the city, on school walls, in the streets, in public squares, in governmental and private buildings, in public transport, and narrated by the media either directly or in embedded messages. I remember the fear I felt with my Kurdish school girlfriend when she tried to teach me a Kurdish song, we were whispering the song, scared that someone might hear her doing that, as the Kurdish language was and is still forbidden in the Syrian Arab Republic! The fear we felt became part of our history and of the history of our country. In other words, as Sarah Ahmed states, 'Harm has a history, even though that history is made up of a combination of often surprising elements that are unavailable in the form of a totality. Pain is not simply an effect of a history of harm; it is the bodily life of that history' (Ahmed, 2014). The constant surveillance creates anxiety, fear, and depression. It is also exhausting because of the feeling that someone is watching all the time, I remember myself saying to a friend: 'I feel that I am living in a huge prison''.

In that militarized society, I grew up with Kurdish friends who were oppressed, marginalized, and overlooked by the state. I grew up with the fear of the Other; any other who is not us; and "us" as my family used to say is a 'a poor religious minority' that was oppressed by Ottomans because we were not Sunni Muslims, and the French Mandate included us with other minorities in the National Army "for our protection", while in reality it was using us to suppress the Muslim majority as well. The 'Father Leader' created the illusion that we were a targeted minority and declared himself the Protector of the minorities, when he became a president in a military coup. Since then, the males of the sect have been subscribed to the military and security institutions 'al-Assad's Soldiers'. This is the story of my father who left his village to get a stable job in the military and did his duty to protect the sect, other minorities, and the country. I grew up with this story of being secure because we are the same sect as the president, we are the majority in the army and other security institutions, but I could not believe it because I never felt secure in the street or able to express myself freely, I have never been allowed to visit friends who do not belong to the same sect or invite them to my house because my parents always said: 'We do not trust them'. This very short snap of history of my own life in a militarized society made me also remember this sort of system that penetrates the consciousness of a child like me! I used to look up to the sky before going to bed and say, 'Dear God, protect our president Hafez al-Assad, my parents and siblings, and please let me pass the math tests this year, and finally, make all blisters on my face disappear soon'.

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[1] 'The definition of 'Arab' has expanded over the last 150 years from describing tribal nomads (as opposed to townsmen), to the people of the Arabian Peninsula, and finally to those peoples, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Gulf, brought together by the Arabic language and culture' (Robin Yassin-Kassab, Leila Al-Shami 2018).

My engagement with this topic and interaction with participants allowed me to see the boundaries of my multiple identities as a female, a woman of color, queer, migrant, a daughter of a former solider, the sect that my family belongs to; Alawites, the same sect as the Dictator's sect and ironically enough, I hold the same family name as the Dictator despite no family ties, I spent endless times explaining myself that I am not from the same family. But all is relational, according to Patricia Hill Collins's (1990) conception of 'standpoint' as relational and including multiple systems of oppression. For me, relational thinking through sharing, learning, addition and articulation constitutes starting points, not the end point. The conversations with the participants to this research created a space of sharing and revealing how we have all experienced the multiple systems of oppression, toxic masculinity, and ignorance. What I share with most of the participants influenced my questions and analyses, but also provided me with the opportunity to practice strong self-reflection that makes me more aware of the meaning of feminist objectivity and strengthen my belief that knowledge and truth are partial, situated, and subjective. It is power imbued and relational (Haraway 1988).

Generously, The women activists who participated in a painful conversation about the bodily impact of oppression, dared to share intimate details about body and emotions. They dared to go with me on such a journey to the past, to the time before the revolution, in search for an answer to: Why we are exhausted today? And why we avoid wearing khaki? The hours of conversation with these activists lead to a more complete understanding of the meaning of collective knowledge production and to gain some answers to my research questions; what is the bodily impact of militarization on Syrian women activists? What were the tools used by women activists to manoeuvre and cope with the manifestations of ideological and materialistic militarism? And, finally, to go beyond the visible impact to the invisible, to explore the emotional and physical impact of militarism. I started this research journey with the intention of offering an alternative narrative on militarism based on the daily experiences of women and, most importantly, to challenge the mainstream discourse that underestimates women's feelings by exploring the bodily impact of patriarchy in a masculine militarized society. I eagerly worked to highlight the fact that Syrian women had been left out of many mainstream research on militarism. By focusing on and listening to women's experiences in this research, I attempted to read, write, and value the perspectives, feelings and lived experiences of Syrian women activists as knowledge in this area. The conversation with each participant was a collective deconstruction of the impact of militarism not only on our daily life but also on our emotions, daily choices, and the relationship with the khaki color and all the metaphors, meanings, and interpretations that it carries. Conversations were interrupted with a lot of laughter and shared memories but also a lot of deep exhale moments. Here again, it is important to recall that relational is essential to this research, because it allows me to be part of it, I am an insider and that holds a lot of pain, hatred and suffering too, but that also offered

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an openness and an opportunity to situate my emotions within collective emotions. Ultimately, their eagerness to share their stories, and my urge to listen carefully and write all that down for this thesis, deserved to open some collective old 'wounds' in the memory and body.

Eventually, the main objective of this thesis is to focus on the impact of militarization on women before the 'revolution' and what was later summarized to be called an armed conflict, but because the context in which the activists participating in this research were placed in is inseparable, it was necessary to listen to their experiences as they lived them and felt their impact on their bodies. Therefore, it must be clarified that the use of the terms; militarization, armament, revolution, conflict and war is nothing but a diversification in referring to the context extending over the time period since Hafez al-Assad's takeover of power in 1973 until today, as explained in the first chapter.

CHAPTER 1
Contextualizing
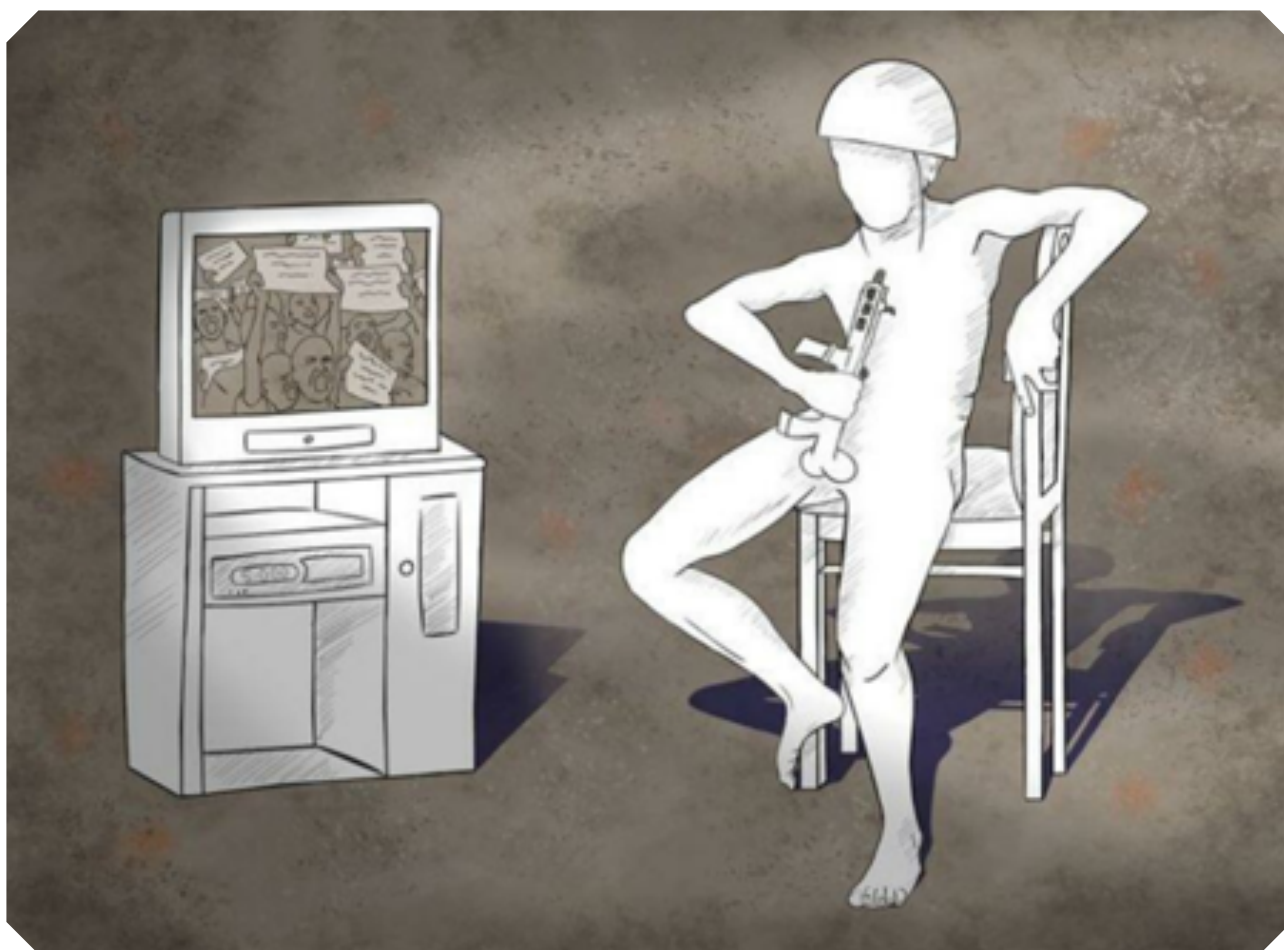
Figure 1 Masterbation by Sulafa Hijazi, 2011.

In this chapter, the historical and contextual background will explain how the militarization of the Syrian society took place in the last hundred years of the Ottoman colonialism, the French mandate, and the subsequent military coups until the coup of Hafez al-Assad and his family's take control of power till today. This historical overview will also present some aspects of life in the shadow of social and political militarism and the rise in the statues of security and military institutions and highlight the feeling of collective fear of scrutiny of military institutions, in addition to glimpses to how silence and fear were spread. In the second part of this chapter, an explanation of the theoretical framework the participants' profiles.

1.1 'The Republic of Silence'- A Historical Background

A literature review shows that the history of Syria is narrated by men. Moreover, even research studies about Syria were quite limited before the revolution in 2011 because it was difficult to conduct direct interviews with Syrians in 'the Republic of Silence' about politics or public affairs (al-Khatib 2021). Recently, research on Syria has increased focusing mainly on the last decade because of the conflict. Additionally, accessibility to sources is more possible because of technology and Syrians' exodus to other countries. However, these sources, including books and documentaries, are mainly by male story tellers, Western or Syrian, while Syrian women have rarely been interviewed for research unless it is about women's issues. For this very reason, interviews with Syrian women in this research are not only meant to break male-dominant narrative on Syria's history but also to give an insight into the situation in Syrian before the conflict and a glance at how women live under a militarized ideology. To understand today's context and women's experience before and after the conflict, and how militarism is manifested in Syrian women's daily lives and bodies, it was necessary to go for a quick historical journey to review how the Syrian society has been militarized.

In the book of '*Burning Country, Syrians in Revolution and War*', Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami (a well-known Syrian woman activist) have comprehensively described the history of Syria starting from the Ottoman Empire that ruled it from 1516 until 1917. In 1917, the British-assisted Arab Revolt ended the Turkish rule in Syria. The British and the French had already signed the Sykes–Picot Agreement, which carved up the Arabs into British and French zones, and the British, with the Balfour Declaration[2], had granted a section of Palestine to Zionism. According to Yas-

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[2] 'At the post-war conferences of Versailles and San Remo, Sykes–Picot was readjusted and then implemented against the clearly formulated wishes of the people of the region. In July 1919, delegates had attended a Pan-Syrian Congress in Damascus which specifically called for the unity of 'bilad al-sham', a cultural and quasi-administrative unit under the Ottomans containing the current states of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, occupation state of Israel, Jordan and parts of southern Turkey. The French made unsuccessful efforts to dismantle the country, envisaging an Alawi state in the mountains around Latakia and a Druze state based on Sweida in the south. 'Autonomous' puppet governments were set up in Aleppo and Damascus.' (Robin Yassin-Kassab, Leila Al-Shami 2018).

sin-Kassab and al-Shami (2018), the origins of what is called the 'Arab–Israeli', more correctly the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the Lebanese civil wars, and the current chronic instability in Iraq and Syria can be traced to this early twentieth-century bout of imperialist map-making and sectarian engineering, as well the splitting the Kurds between Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. After the liberation from the French Mandate in 1946, the bourgeois democracy which Syria at this stage enjoyed was incapable of redressing the popular grievances of the deprived social classes. Several military coupes took place, irretrievably shifting the centre of gravity in the Syrian polity to the army[3]. At that time the party Al-Baath[4] became the strongest party and started to link the battle against the oligarchy to a romantic version of Arabism. Additionally, Baathism found religious significance in the Arab identity, and this is evident from its slogan 'One Arab Nation Bearing an Eternal Message'. In its effort to spiritualize and mythologize Arabs[5]. In 1961 Hafez al-Assad first appeared during the secessionist coup of the United Arab Republic (UAR) between Egypt and Syria (Ibid).

The Assadist cult

By the 1980s, al-Baath became not a formulator of policy but a patronage machine, a vehicle for personal gain. Membership offered job opportunities and eased promotion and access to state funds, unions leadership, seats in the parliament etc. The party was also an organized proclaimer of the Assadist cult of personality. Grim statues of the Leader watched over squares and campuses; his name was painted on walls and hillsides. Additionally, the army grew to over 200,000 men, in addition to the police, various state-party militias, and at least twelve overlapping security agencies. For a while, Syria looked like an island of calm, surrounded as it was by chaos in Lebanon and Iraq and insurgencies and repression in Palestine and Turkish Kurdistan. The Baathist army suppressed an uprising in 1982 and committed a massacre in Hama[6]. The mukhabarat (secret intelligence services) presence increased again, and the regime developed a post-ideological character. 'Assad's Syria' (as state propaganda called it) was fascist in the most correct sense of the word, was a one-party system, and

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[3] Ibid. 'In the 1950s, there was still a space for political and social action beyond the armed forces. Throughout the decade, urbanization and industrialization created new opportunities as well as further dislocations. Trade unions were set up by the small but growing working class. School and university education expanded greatly; this, as well as employment by the military, explain the upward mobility of rural minority groups. The mechanization of agriculture, on the other hand, led to widespread rural unemployment.'

[4] The Arab Socialist Baath Party (also spelled Ba›th or Ba›ath) was founded in 1947 as a radical, secular Arab nationalist political party. The Arabic word Ba›th means «resurrection» or «renaissance» as in the party›s founder Michel Aflaq›s published works «On The Way Of Resurrection». Baathist beliefs combine Arab Socialism, nationalism, and Pan-Arabism.The motto of the Party is «Unity, Freedom, Socialism». «Unity» refers to Arab unity, «freedom» emphasizes freedom from foreign control and interference in particular, and «socialism» refers to what has been termed Arab Socialism rather than to Marxism. (The Arab Socialist Baath Party)

[5] Ibid. 'In this respect, Baathism should be seen as one of the twentieth century's many attempts to compensate for the collapse of traditional religion and to channel religious energies to political ends.'

[6] Ibid. 'The most traumatizing of repressions, when much of the Old City was destroyed and up to 20,000 people were killed. The opposition of the late 1970s and early 1980s started as leftist as well as Islamist but degenerated under harsh repression into a sectarian assassination campaign by the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood which alienated the minorities and most Sunnis. By the time the Brotherhood staged their armed uprising in Hama, the rebellion had been isolated there. In the post-Hama years, Syria became a kingdom of silence, a realm of fear.'

the party was controlled by one man. The state cultivated a surveillance society, everyone spying on everyone else, and no one is secure in position, not even the top Generals and security officers. Hafez stood alone at the apex – the Struggling Comrade, the Sanctified One and the Hero of War and Peace. By the end of Hafez's reign all organized political opposition, and democratic institutions including unions and syndicates had been crushed[7]. In 2001 Eternal Leader died, and his Son Bashar took over the control. At that time there were some optimisms that would be possible to revive the suffocated public space. Extraordinarily, Kurds remained a key target of the 'Arabist' regime which, despite its opportunistic support for Kurdish movements in Iraq and Turkey, had always repressed its own Kurdish minority. The arms of the police state were regularly raised against Kurds, striking heavily against political and cultural expression[8].

الشعب يريد اسقاط النظام

('The People Want the Fall of the Regime')

In March 2011, people took to the streets to challenge the Assad rule, motivated by similar uprisings in Tunis, Libya and Egypt, collectively labeled as the Arab spring. Many Syrians speak of their first protest as a moment of personal liberation (all the participants in this research share memory of the first protest as one of the very important events in their lives so far). Women played, and continue to play, a key role in the civil resistance, sometimes women were the only ones who could protest[9]. The revolution was challenging the traditional and patriarchal gender roles. Civil resistance led to a real recognition of women's roles in the society, but it wasn't always easy, especially in more rural or conservative areas. As the revolution was being militarized, women were being marginalized in many ways, though in other fields they became even more important. Many provided logistical support to the Free Syrian Army (FSA), and some formed female battalions to fight the regime. Understanding this context helps to understand the interchangeable use of the term's militarism, conflict and war, and how militarism and armed conflict intertwine and generate each other. However, the interchangeable use of the terms: state, regime or government is also an evidence of the complexity of this context and the difficulty of separating the manifestations of militarism in peacetime from wartime. Therefore, the feminist standpoint methodology is the most appropriate to use in this research to understand and deconstruct this context through the experiences of four Syrian women activists.

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[7] Ibid. 'The Eternal Leader's death was announced on 10 June 2000. In the following hours an atmosphere of barely suppressed panic oppressed the country. The fear was that Assad's generals would fight in the streets for power (...). As the organized crowds mourning Hafez turned to celebration of Bashar, the constitution was amended to reduce the head of state's minimum age from 40 to 34 (Bashar's age). The Baath Party met and unanimously elected him as a leader. Then came the people's turn in the theatre; standing unopposed in referendum.'

[8] Ibid. 'The 1962 exceptional census had stripped 120,000 Syrian Kurds of their nationality, rendering them and their descendants stateless. Those affected were categorized as either foreigners (ajanib) or unregistered (maktoumeen). The latter faced the worst discrimination, prevented from voting, travelling or accessing higher education or health care. They were barred from many professions and from owning land, housing or businesses.'

[9] Ibid. For examples, in Bayda (a small city on the cost), where most men had been detained, women demonstrated alone. In Zabadani, women regularly organized demonstrations, veiling their faces to avoid recognition by security forces, and worked in medical and humanitarian assistance. In Aleppo, women founded the first independent radio station (Radio Nasaem).. In several communities, female coordination committees were established to focus on issues specific to women.

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1.2 Theoretical framework

The pivots of this thesis, Women Activists and Militarism, motivate the practice of feminist epistemology and standpoint theory. Based on this, the thesis uses knowledge obtained from and with Syrian women activists, avoiding the systematic silencing the often face especially in the field of militarism. Evidently, feminist empiricism has made important contributions in uncovering the androcentric bias in social research by encouraging the practice of 'good' science. But instead of seeking to improve the accuracy, objectivity, and universality of mainstream research by including women, feminists started to challenge the viability and utility of concepts such as objectivity and universality altogether. Knowledge is achieved not through 'correcting' mainstream research studies by adding women, but through paying attention to the specificity and uniqueness of women's lives and experiences (Hesse-Biber 2011).

In such an area of examining women's bodily experiences in a militarized society, empiricism is a limited methodology because adding women to correct mainstream research studies may inadvertently fall and may overlook women's material experiences. Thankfully, feminist standpoint theory offers an alternative and allows me to interrogate basic questions, namely, who can know and what can be known about women's experience inside a militarized society? In the Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis, Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, citing Dorothy Smith (1987), an early proponent of the standpoint perspective[10], stresses the necessity of starting research from women's lives: taking into account women's everyday experiences through paying particular attention to, and finding and analysing the gaps that occur, when women try to fit their lives into the dominant culture's way of conceptualizing women's situation, by looking at the difference between the life of the oppressor and the oppressed. Women's lived experiences are essential to understand the impact of militarism on socializing and creating homogenic narrative about what value the most in society. Inevitably, the question of objectivity of this research arises for several reasons, including the intersection of religion, class, age, gender and geographical location and the position of women activists from militarism. Various scholars, such as, for example, Donna Haraway (1988), Sandra Harding (1993) and Kum-Kum Bhavnani (1993) argue that objectivity needs to be transformed into 'feminist objectivity.' Donna Haraway defines feminist objectivity as 'situated knowledges': knowledge and truth are partial, situated, subjective, imbued in power and relational. Additionally, the denial of values, biases and politics in scientific research is seen as unrealistic and undesirable (Bhavnani, 1993, p.96; Harding, 1993, p.49). For these reasons and to avoid producing a generalization about women's

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[10] Ibid, p.11. 'Feminist standpoint scholars argue that it is a woman›s oppressed location inside a society that provides more complete insights into society as a whole; women have access to an enhanced and more nuanced understanding of social reality than men do, precisely because of their structurally oppressed location vis-à-vis the dominant group, or men'.

experiences with militarism, it was necessary to adopt a feminist objectivity in this research, so that the produced knowledge would be localized and included in the values and biases of the participants in the research, including myself, the researcher, from the principle of realism and not limitedness.

According to Harriet A. Jacobs (1987), starting from the experiences of individuals is the main place from which knowledge is built and social change is provoked (Hesse-Biber 2011). However, 'experience' must be viewed as a complex concept that intersects with the sites and contexts of the individual, and it must be considered carefully and critically. While Historian Joan Scott (1999) asserts that experience is shaped by one's own context by specific circumstances, conditions, values, and relations of power, each influencing how one articulates 'experience' (Ibid). In addition to valuing women's unique and situated experiences as knowledge, some feminists make the case for validating the importance of emotions and values as a critical lens in research endeavours. Alison Jaggar (1989) recognizes emotions as a central aspect of knowledge building. According to Jaggar it is unrealistic to assume that emotions and values do not surface during the research process. This perspective grants space for me and for women to express our emotions as part of the lived experiences inside a militarized society. In addition to that, this perspective helps to reveal the false dichotomy between rationality and emotions when covering the bodily impact of militarism.

Whilst it is important to give voice to women who were left out of the homogenic narrative, where women's experiences and perspectives are not valued or considered, and to recognize women's life experiences as knowledge, it is essential to be aware of not reducing all women in one category with shared characteristics. Therefore, it is important to use intersectionality (Davis 2008) as an analytical lens to avoid generalization, but also to consider women's experiences through their contexts and challenges. In the Syrian context, it is necessary to consider not only the intertwining of gender[11] and militarization but also other aspects of a person's social and political identities that create different modes of discrimination and privilege. To analyse Syrian women activists' experiences with militarization, gender analysis and queer theory (chapters 3 and 4) are essential to understand the impact of militarization and armed conflict on women's bodies. Furthermore, to overcome ignoring women's experiences that are often left out of any discussions of militarism and war. According to Carol Cohn (2013), gender never stands alone as a factor structuring power in a society, but rather is inflected through, and co-constituting of, other hierarchical forms of structuring power, such as ethnic, national, geographical, sectarian, class, age, sexuality, political affiliation, education, social martials and physical and psychological capabilities. It is the intersection of these structures that produce multiple

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[11] 'Gender is, at its heart, a structural power relation. Just as colonialism, slavery, class, race and caste are all systems of power, so is gender. Each rests on a central set of distinctions among different categories of people, valorizes some over others and organizes access to resources, rights, responsibilities, authority, and life options along the lines demarcating those groups'. (Cohn 2013, p.4)

masculinities and femininities, and concomitant power differentials, within each category. According to Cohn, whichever specific term is used to connote gender as a structural power relation, there are two key points to keep in mind for the purposes of this thesis. First, it is important to notice that, in no case, is gender ever reduced to a monolithic picture of one unified category of people, men, having power over another unified category of people, women. Instead, each of these terms points to the necessity of seeing that there are not only power differentials between the two categories, but also within each. Second, to remember that the many different phenomena in which the word 'gender' is used become coherently linked only when they are seen as facets of the way in which gender functions as a system of power (Ibid).

To gain an in-depth understanding of women's experiences with militarism, a quantitative approach that relies on interviews with women activists is the primary source of this study's data collection, additionally interview provides the possibility of meeting between women with common interests, who would share knowledge. (Marjorie L. Devault and Glenda Gross 2006). This quantitative approach offers more in-depth knowledge of the subject matter by analysing specific case studies of women who experienced militarization. The process of interviewing those women creates the base of knowledge for such a marginalized experiences. Beyond the scope of this study, the collected data and its outcome (analysis and conclusion) will help reclaim the narrative of these women and their peculiar experiences, which could be expanded into different public discourse.

The interviews provided me with space to be part of the conversation and to learn from their experiences. Most importantly, to tangibly see the unseen oppression of women bodies under militarism and conflict in the Syrian context. The interviews were carried out remotely, using safe online platform (Zoom) that offers a recording feature. The interviews were semi- structured to allow follow up questions, and were conducted in Arabic, the common language between me and the participants. Additionally, recording the interviews allowed me to be an active listener, to focus on the conversation and ask follow-up questions when needed, as well as to transcribe the interviews in a later stage and to quote the participants accurately. I tried to translate as honestly as possible and preserve the meaning. I also shared the quotation in Arabic and English with some activists upon their request, in addition to including the quotations in Arabic in this thesis to keep the original quote accessible.

Carrying out online interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic created a safe space to a certain extent, in terms of selecting the suitable time for each activist. For example, when they are alone or children are at school, in early morning or after work in the evening. It also offered the time flexibility to talk longer about other stories they wanted to share, to have a break and to be comfortable in the space they choose to have the interview from. Some of the participants preferred to have the call from home while others preferred the office. Notwithstanding, safety or safe space through the digital world are

still questionable.

Some pre-interview ethical options were made, including a consent form for recording the interview and introducing the interview topic for the participants. During the interview, I stressed that stopping the interview or taking a break was an option, as well as not using any participant's real name for security reasons. After conducting the interview, I checked on some participants who felt overwhelmed or exhausted because of the memories, reflections and / or realization of a certain experience because of the identity or social location under the oppression of militarism.

1.3 Meet the Syrian women Activists: Participants' Profiles

This section presents the participants in this research, who are four Syrian women activists. This sample represents four different geographical regions of Syria, of varying ages, ethnicities, and economic classes.

Considering that the main research question is about the effect of militarization on women's bodies, it was necessary to stop at the participants' understanding and definition of physical and psychological abilities; notably intertwined for a couple of them. The purpose of the use of the psychological[12] ability here is the emotional and mental state in the general sense and for a later analysis of the psychosocial issue[13] (Chapter 4). Remarkably, the question about gender identity intertwined with the participants definition of their sexuality. It was evident that gender and sexuality are complex and inevitable. The answers vary between pansexual, to prefer not to answer, to questioning their gender. In addition to giving answers varying between a spectrum and percentage on how they feel about their gender. Finally, and for security reasons, all the participants prefer to use pseudonyms.

Below are excerpts of the women's interviews where no alteration of their answers were made to illustrate how they perceive themselves as activists, today:

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[12] 'Psychology is the science of mind and behavior. Psychology includes the study of conscious and unconscious phenomena, as well as feelings and thought. (Fernald 2007, p. 12-15)

[13] 'The expression "psychosocial issue" shall be used for descriptive and informative purposes. As such, it alludes to the combination of psychosocial harms and confrontation strategies that have arisen from the experience of defending human rights. Given the social, political and cultural implications of women leaders' actions, and the fact that these leaders' community, family, emotional and erotic relationships are also impacted, it is necessary to take an ethical position on what we understand by "harm" in order to recognize and highlight the clear impact that violence, aggression and negative dynamics have on the lives of these women. In the words of Martha Bello and Ricardo Chaparro (2011, p.31), these should be understood as "processes that put human dignity at risk ¬ they negatively affect satisfying relationships upon which the human subject is built and sustained, and that cause deficiency situations such as the negation of the dignified human subject" (López 2020).

Leen

is 26 years old, a Muslim, an Arab, single, middle class. She did not pursue her education after the 3rd year at Law School. Politically, she is against any type of oppression. Physically, she is able. Psychologically, she is exhausted, especially after returning to Raqqa after its liberation, she lives there today.

Leen syas; *" During ISIS era, my activism was online, cynically criticizing the situation. I left the university because I was more curious and concerned about my city. I started to volunteer and participate in any training related to journalism. "*

" خلال وقت داعش ، كان نشاطي عبر الإنترنت بينتقد الوضع بسخرية. تركت الجامعة، لأنني كنت أكثر فضولًا وقلقة ع مدينتي. بلشت بالتطوع والمشاركة في أي تدريب متعلق بالصحافة "

Zero

is 41 years old, born Muslim, but she does not identify herself with any religion. She is Kurdish and Arab. She holds a university diploma in non-violence and human rights. Economically, Zero comes from a middle class that works to live. She has been married twice. She has a child from the second marriage, being a mother, she notices that she has barriers because of her anxiety over her child's future. Politically, Zero considers herself a revolutionist, feminist and social liberal. As for her physical abilities, she is able but with a chronic disease; asthma and rheumatism that disable her. As for her psychological abilities, Zero is in a burnout. She has lived in Turkey, close to the Syrian borders, since 2014. Zero has a touristic permission since 2014, which gives her more flexibility than other types of residencies for Syrian refugees, who fled the war in Syria. She is from Damascus and Homs, Syria, and already has a tattoo with the names of these two cities on her body.

Zero says; *" Today, I am a feminist activist and a women's rights defender "*

" اليوم أنا ناشطة نسوية ومدافعة عن حقوق المرأة. "

Nisreen Ahmad

is 29 years old, not religious, Kurdish, holds a bachelor's degree. Economically, she considers herself fine nowadays, but it gradually happened during the last ten years. Not married and her gender identity is 'not clear.'Politically, she is with any political system that fights for democracy, non-violence, and respect of human rights, under which she can live as a woman. Physically, Nisreen considers chronic diseases as a disability; she has thyroidectomy and a blood disease. Psychologically, 'who does not have issues in Syria.' She is from Qamishli, Syria, and she lives there today. She has an official ID card (in the past, Kurds used to be registered as Arabs or they were stripped of their ID cards by the government).

Nissern says; *" I am one of a few activists who dare to speak publicly about women's rights and feminism in the area [a Kurdish region in Syria]. I do not participate in any political activities, but I prefer to engage in public matters like women's rights. It is hard to talk about women's rights in my region because people think that [Kurdish] women have all the rights. "*

" أنا من الناشطات القلال بالمنطقة يلي منتجرأ نحكي عن النسوية وحقوق المرآة، مابشارك بنشاط سياسي، بفضل احكي بالآمور العامة متل حقوق المرأة، صعب نحكي عن هالقضايا لأن الناس هون بفكروا أنو المرأة أخدت كل حقوقها. "

Maya Abyad

is 37 years old, a Muslim, and it was hard to tell the ethnicity (believing that she is mixed race). She holds a master's degree in Media, from an upper-middle-class, a single woman. Politically, Maya is progressive, close to left-wing politics, anticolonial and feminist. Within the Syrian context, she is on the oppositional side. When it comes to abilities, she is physically able, but has Disc in her back because of the bad sleeping conditions during her detention by the government. Psychologically, she does not have issues that are classified as medical or legal. Other than that, 'all of us are mentally deformed with PTSD.' She is based in south Europe with a work permit. She is from Damascus.

Maya says; *" The professional is interwoven with the personal and public. I used to be a volunteer then I had a paid job as a journalist and documentary filmmaker. I volunteer to train revolutionary activists, and I participate in campaigns and networking "*

" بيختلط المهني مع الشخصي والعام. اعتدت كون متطوعة بس بعدين صرت اشتغل بشكل مدفوع الأجر كصحفية ومخرجة أفلام وثائقية. بطوع لتدريب النشطاء الثوريين ، وبشارك بالحملات والتشبيك "

Conclusion

As result, relational is central, it is certain that denial of values, biases, and politics is seen as unrealistic and undesirable in a feminist research (Hesse-Biber 2011). Undeniably, experience is formed from specific power relations, positional and individual circumstances, and collectively, these determinants interact with each other forming an experience that can be considered, to a certain extent and circumstances, as a collective experience with nuanced perspectives. The relational in this thesis helped to deconstruct the mechanisms underlying oppression within the militarized society in this case and helped to provide a more accurate examination of the impact of oppression on women, mechanisms of resistance, coping and even survival, as we will see in the next chapters.

CHAPTER 2
Gender and Militarization

Figure 2 Waxing by Sulafa Hijazi, 2013.

This chapter establishes the ground for understanding militarism from an academic theoretical perspective and from the perspective of Syrian women activists through their lived experience with militarism in Syria. Throughout this chapter, we will explore how Militarism, militarization and arming intertwin in the Syrian context, in addition to learning about the 'power-over-the-other' perspective (Burke 1998) and how a militarized ideology motivates conflict to be armed easily. Additionally, this chapter provides an overview of feminist approaches to gender into empiricist, standpoint, and poststructuralist approaches (Harding 1991; Sylvester 1994; Hansen 2010). It also covers feminist scholars' perspectives of the interconnection between militarism and patriarchy, in the sense that militarism through military institutions reinforces the notion that social stability is best achieved through hierarchical gender relations (Khalid 2014).

2.1 Definition of Militarism

In this section militarism and militarization are used interchangeably. According to Elveren and Mogham (Burke 1998, Enloe 1998), 'Militarism is the set of material and ideological manifestations that promote militaristic values - such as a belief in hierarchy, obedience, and the use of force - in the political, social and economic domains. From this definition, it can be concluded that militarization is the mentality of justifying violence, including wars and military interventions. In this sense, a 'natural' result of this mindset is militarization, the domination of military rule in a society through a sizeable armed force with a disproportionate budget. Also, in this sense, militarization is the quintessence of militarism' (Adem Y. Elveren, Valentine M. Moghadam1 2019, p.3). That means, according to Cynthia Enloe (1983), that in peace times, militarization affects women's wellbeing in the private and public spheres. While in the private sphere, militarism reinforces and perpetuates women's subordinated roles, in the public sphere, militarization results in disproportionate defence budget at the expense of basic civilian expenditures such as education and health (Adem Y. Elveren and Valentine M Moghadam 2019).

While from the perspectives of lived experiences, women activists define militarization based on their own experiences and understanding. Some of them define militarization starting from the bodily impact as they feel fears when hearing the word, as Nisreen, says:

'' *To begin with, when I hear the word militarization, I feel scared, I feel that something bad is happening, especially during the last 10 years of [war].*''	''أول شي وبصراحة ، وقت بسمع كلمة عسكرة بخاف، بحس أنو في شي مو منيح رح يصير، خاصة بالسنوات العشر الماضية ''

Whereas for Zero, it was quite complex to separate militarisation from the armed conflict in the Syrian context. She states:

" When militarization takes over and becomes the main source of power/ authority, arms became one of its tools. Militarization becomes institutionalized and systematized to serve the goals of the militarized regime. "

"وقت بتسيطر العسكرة بتصير قوة / سلطة، بصير السلاح أحد أدواتها. بهالمعنى العسكرة بتصير مؤسسة وممنهجية لخدمة أهداف النظام العسكري "

On the other hand, Maya, defines militarism from a power-related perspective, and says:

" In the Syrian society, militarization is a conviction that any problem can be solved by force. Hence any further problem can only be solved by force, and eventually that the sacred struggle for a cause can only be carried out by force. "

"العسكرة في المجتمع السوري، هي القناعة المشاكل بتنحل بالقوة. وإنه المشاكل، بالمرحلة يلي بعدها، بس بتنحل بالقوة ، والمرحلة يلي بعدها أنو النضال المقدس {الدفاع عن قضية ما} بكون بس بالقوة. "

This definition resonates with 'power-over-the-other' perspective (Burke 1998), as a basic value of militarism. In a militarized society, such as Syria before the conflict, the ideological manifestations of militarism are more difficult to identify out of the governmental institutions because they often are internalized by society in every daily detail. Ideological manifestations, according to Colleen Burke, include 'dissemination of military values, symbols and language among the civilian population which promotes acceptance of hierarchies, nationalism which defines the 'other' as the enemy, violence as a legitimate means of resolving conflicts, and strict division of proper masculine and feminine roles' (Burke 1998, p.2). When such an environment is established, she adds 'the population begins to accept the idea that 'might is right' and that society should be founded on 'a dominant-submissive mode of relationship' and has ramifications for interpersonal relationships, this hierarchy is seen as a prerequisite for social stability and not as a form of repression' (Ibid). Notably, women activists' definition of militarism intersects with its materialistic manifestation (arming, both by the government to oppress the uprising population in 2011 and later by some of the revolting groups) is not self-generated or accidental, it is an inevitable result of a militarized society. Therefore, the bodily impact of militarization on women activists is not limited to the ideological manifestation but it extends, intensively, to the last ten years of the Syrian armed conflict as well. As a result, militarism, militarization and arming are used interchangeably throughout the conversation with the women activists.

2.2 Gendered Identities in the Context of War and Militarism

Because the main pivot of this chapter is to clarify the gender function in militarism, it is necessary to expand on what is meant here by gender as an analytical tool, that can be used to detect power configurations that form identity categories for men and women, masculinity, and femininity in different contexts. Therefore, it is useful to divide feminist approaches to gender into empiricist, standpoint, and poststructuralist approaches (Harding 1991; Sylvester 1994; Hansen 2010). In the Feminist perspectives on militarism and war, Maryam Khalid provides detailed explanation starting with empiricist feminist approaches that take gender as a biological given and assume that gender differences between men and women are the result of differences between natural biological sex. She adds, however, that this approach leaves unproblematized the binary distinction between men and women, as simply, according to Penny Griffin (2007) 'assumed by the body and not assigned to it according to a variety of cultural practices' (Khalid 2014, p.2). Consequently, according to Lene Hansen (2010), an empiricist feminist approach to militarism is focused on interrogating mainstream concerns about the behaviour of states and the differential impacts of their policies on women and men rather than expanding the parameters of militarism beyond the priorities and actions of states (Ibid, p.3).

The second approach is the standpoint feminism, that is essential for this research as mentioned in the methodology section, because it does not stop at interrogating mainstream concerns but it is conceptualizing the state as a 'set of patriarchal practices'. For example, promoting certain roles and suitable jobs for women and men, and through uncovering the impacts of these practices on 'real living women' (Hansen 2009, p.21). This approach emphasizes that biological sex is given, while gender as masculinity and femininity is socially and culturally constructed. While the added value of the post-structuralist feminists in this regard is the critiques to the 'refer to a 'given' sex or a 'given' gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given' (Butler 1990, p.6). As such, poststructuralist feminists seek to interrogate both the biological and social as constructed. This approach views sex and gender as discursive constructions, meaning that they are not intrinsically fixed or binary. As Judith Butler explains, gender is not simply the cultural construction and inscription of meaning onto a pregiven sex but should be seen as 'gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive / cultural means by which 'sexed nature' or 'a natural sex' is produced and established as 'pre-discursive,' prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts' (Ibid, p.7). In this regard, men and women are not 'pre-discursive' but rather they are what society, historically, establishes and expects from men and women.

As a result, gender is thus a set of relations of power. This is reflected in the interviews I conducted as none of the women activists gave a simple or easy answer on their gender identity as stated in the beginning of this thesis. This is a confirmation that gender is not monolithic. In addition to that, women activists' experiences showed the power of gender as a discursive mechanism in reference to the militarizing of daily life (non-war time) and to war in Syria. For example, Maya interprets her gender as 'tomboy' since she was a child, insisting that adopting 'tomboy' attitude was not influenced by the

society. Later during the interview, she gives examples of how that influenced her life when she grew up and became a woman according to the society standards. She adopted the notion of 'masculinized' body and tried to oppress the feminine side to be taken seriously as a photojournalist. She states,

> *"Partly, it can be why I was more comfortable with tomboy style, because that keeps these attentions that would have been amplified (by dressing femininely) away from me."*

> "يمكن جزء ليش كنت مرتاحة أكثر بلوك الحسن صبي، هو إني ببعد عني هذه الشبهات (أتزين وبلبس حلو). "

While gender is tangle with ethnicity for Nisreen, who is Kurdish. The situation inside the Kurdish community is as complex as other ethnic communities in Syria when it comes to gender. Due to the Kurds' long history in the region (chapter 1), Nisreen explains how she grew up in a militarized community; for her it was a double militarization, because the state system and the Kurdish community are both militarised, with the Kurds' struggle to be independent and establish the 'Kurdistan State'. Her experience with her gender performance changed between 2015 and 2018 [the period when her area was under the control of Islamic State in Iraq and Sham "ISIS"]. She says,

> *" I did not wear makeup with the hope of looking like these women [Kurdish women fighters] who were fighting ISIS and liberating Kobani[14]. I also wore clothers similar to a military uniform; dark colours, loose pants (sherwal), short hair, didn't remove facial hair [eyebrows / over lips], didn't wear nice bras, and I was an avid defender of them. "*

> "ماكنت حط مكياج حتى اتشبه فيهون [المقاتلات الكرديات] هدوك يلي عم بقاتلوا داعش وعم يحرروا كوباني. كمان تيابي كانت متل اللبس العسكري. ألوان غامقة، شروال، شعري قصير، ما كنت شيل شعر الوجه [الحجبين / فوق الشفتين]، ما كنت ألبس حمالات الصدر الحلوة، حتى طريقتي في الحديث والدفاع عنها). "

She adds,

> *" We were masculine, fearless, rebels, smoking cigarettes in the street and public areas. That was not a feminist motivated behaviour but one that is aiming to look like these women."*

> "كنا مسترجلات ، ما منخاف من شي، متمردات ، مندخن سجائر بالشارع والأماكن العامة. وقتها مل كان هذا السلوك نسوي ولكن كان آكثر ليشبه هؤلاء النساء {المقاتلات}. "

These examples demonstrate the function of gender as a discourse, in terms of its power to (re)produce and naturalize and challenge dominant notions of what it means to be masculine and feminine and to attach them to sexed bodies. As Khalid states, 'Reading gender into militarism, and understanding militarism as configured by gendered logics, thus entails viewing gender as encompassing not only men and women but also masculinities, femininities, sex and sexuality as constructed and

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[14] Kobani was a battlefield between the Islamic State (IS) militants and Kurdish fighters in September 2014, when IS fighters overran the small northern Syrian town, forcing almost all of its civilians to flee to Turkey. (BBC 2015)

contingent' (Khalid 2014, p.3). Certainly, as well as other aspects such as ethnicity, geopolitical and political affiliation, marital status, ability, class ...etc. Feminist scholars consider militarism to be closely linked to gender relations, and they emphasize the interconnection between militarism and patriarchy. According to Y. Elveren and M. Moghadam, militarized states and societies are shaped around the notion that social stability is best achieved through hierarchical gender relations typical of military institutions and practices. Militarism stems from patriarchy, and patriarchy reinforces and legitimizes the effect of militarization (Enloe 1983). In this sense, Enloe underscores that the oppression of women is a fundamental part of militarism, not just a consequence of it (Ibid). That theoretical frame resonates with the women activists through their life experiences in a militarised society. For example, Maya's understanding of the interlocking between patriarchy and militarization resonates with Enloe's concept. For Maya, the line between patriarchy and militarism is almost impossible to define, as through her experience, she argues that it is not possible to separate masculinity away from militarization, she even gives 'a logical sequence' in how each system generates the other, saying,

'' *in terms of power, militarization comes from the masculine society, ... for me this is how I see it: masculinity, patriarchy, militarization then the military as a reality.* ''	''العسكرة إجت من ذكورية المجتمع، من منطق القوة. إذا بدي احكي بالعناوين الواسعة: عنا الذكورية بعدها عنا الأبوية بعدها العسكرة وبعدها واقع الجيش. ''

That means in a patriarchal system, women are at the bottom of the hirarchy, and they need protection from 'men'.

To conclude, feminist approaches provide alternatives to understand war and peace in militarized societies. The standpoint feminist values the lived experience of women, which in turn helps understand the position of women within the context of militarization and conflict in Syria. This perspective also allows to get closer to the experiences of women activists, and helps to understand the relationship between masculinity, patriarchy, and militarism, with its ideological and material aspects, as we will see in the next section. Likewise, the use of gender as a tool of analysis has allowed to deconstruct the function of gender in militarism and to discover the power formations that constitute the identity categories of men and women, masculinity, and femininity.

CHAPTER 3
Women Activists' Experiences Under Militarism

Figure 2 Dall by Sulafa Hijazi, 2013.

This chapter aims to elucidate the construction and function of gender in militarism. Furthermore, it will examine the ideological manifestations of militarism and deconstruct how the Syrian society 'internalized' it through the women activists' experiences, in addition to examining the link between militarism and patriarchy. In a later stage, it will further elaborate the effects of militarization on women's daily life through militarized socializing at schools and institutionalized violence in the public and private spaces. At the end of this chapter, will examine the role of women in non-governmental militarized groups after the 2011 uprising.

3.1 Militarized Socializing

> " *I still remember the feeling of the khaki suit on my body, especially in summer, sweating, the color is disgusting. I did not feel comfortable* "
> **Nissren**

Notwithstanding the fact that the ideological manifestations of militarism are more difficult to identify because they are often 'internalized' by the society (Burke 1998). Plausibly, women activists dismantle some of the ideological manifestations by giving examples from school time, in particular, the relationship with the khaki school uniform, the ideology behind dressing up similarly at schools, photos of the former president Hafez al-Assad everywhere, calling him the 'Leader Father', acclaiming al-Baath Party slogans[15] every morning, children being indoctrinated with al-Baath ideology at school, the songs that glorify the 'Leader Father', the media top news being the achievements of the 'Leader Father' in a day including a regular meeting with the Prime Minister (my memory on news of state media). Militarized socializing at school was built through two school subjects related to militaristic nationalism: the nationalism class, and the military training class. These two subjects perfectly demonstrate the ideological and materialistic aspect of militarisation at school. While the nationalism subject focuses on Arabism (we), the military class[16] teaches military practices and weaponry uses. For Maya, this ideology is manifested in how life looks like in non-war times in Damascus, she says,

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[15] 'One Arab nation with an eternal message, our goals: unity, freedom, socialism. My vanguard comrade, be prepared to build and defend the Arab socialist society, Arab, Baath' (Muhannad Hadi, Mohab Zaidan 2015).

[16] In 2003, military uniforms and military education were abolished from schools, while maintaining the military system in general to control and organize students, not only as a general mentality for dealing with students, but also as a way to end breaks and enter classes through organized military movements. (Brksieh 2017)

> *" Syria was controlled by arms, school students were controlled by arms. The color used for police uniform was not different, for me, from the military uniform color. Students were wearing khaki and the former president's, Hafez al- Assad, photos were everywhere. All the slogans [in public squares and big buildings] were militarized, everyone was wearing sort of military outfits [khaki or dark colors]. "*

"سوريا كانت بالسلاح محكومة، طلاب المدارس بالسلاح، الشرطي ما كنت فرق بين تايه وتياب بدلة العسكرية (أيامها كانوا الشرطة يلبسوا خاكي كمان) ... طلاب المدارس لابسين خاكي، صور حافظ الأسد معبية وتارسة كل حيطان البلد، كل شعارت عسكرية، كل الناس لابسه عسكري. "

I am grateful to all people who tried to save this collective memory, in particular Director Omar Amiralay for his documentary 'A Flood in al-Baath State', that shows how civil areas are militarized. The next 2:16 minute clip shows an example of a classroom and the discourse at school but also the ideological education:

Figure 4 A photo from the documentary 'A Flood in al-Baath State' by Omar Amiralay, 2003.

Schools and education discourse is just one exmaple on how civil arenas are militarized, but also the public acceptance of military institutions reflects the degree to which the society is militarized.

To deem what the militarization of social life means, it is necessary to examine here the experiences of women, Enloe (1983) argues that militarization affects women's lives both in the private sphere of the household and the public sphere of states, markets, and institutions. As for the public sphere, research shows that higher military spending crowds out expenditures on civilian needs such as education and health. Research also links militarization with what Connell (1987) theorized as forms of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasized femininity', which may perpetuate violence against women. Additionally, imposition of rigid conceptions of gender roles, for example, the added school subjects for girls

aging between 13 and 15 years old, such as householding including cooking and sewing.

Figure 5 Girls wearing a khaki-colored school suit, Damascus, in September 1990.

For the women activists, khaki school uniform was one of the most direct and burdensome ideological manifestation of militarization. The impact of khaki colour and its connotation to military uniform accompanied their memories. Cynically, Maya remembers other girls' attempts to make the uniform look feminine, she says,

" *I remember schoolgirls attempting to make the khaki uniform look nicer and feminine. Making the uniform tighter on the waist to show their silhouette. I remember my reaction as: What were they trying to do? Whatever you try, at the end, you are wearing a military uniform.* "	" بتتذكر محاولات الصبايا بالإعدادي، لكيف يتلاعبوا بالبدلة العسكرية لتتطلع فمنن (أنثوية) ولتطلع أحلى ويبين شكل جسمون ويبين خصرون (...) بتتذكر ردة فعلي: أنو قد ما خصورتوها (للبدلة العسكرية) شو رح يصير! أنت بدلة عسكرية شو عم تحاولي تعملي؟ "

Some schoolgirls tried to accessorize the khaki uniform as Zero remembers, she says,

" *A friend primped the uniform sometimes by adding a rose or a small colorful scarf. One day the military training teacher slapped her on the face in front of all students because she was messing up with the uniform.* "	" كان عندي رفيقة تحط وردة أو فولار(شال ملون صغير). سفقتها (صفعها) مدربتها العسكرية كف قدام كل الباحة ليش جاي (على المدرسة) وحاطة وردة بجيبة البدلة. "

On the other hand, the school uniform was promoted as 'we are all equal'. Zero hated the khaki uniform at that time not because she thought it was a kind of military uniform but she adds,

" *because we are dressing up like each other, that annoyed me. I always asked why we cannot wear normal clothes? we had to wear that thing all the time* "	" أنو كنا نلبس متل بعض كان كتير يضايقني. ودائماً عندي شعور أنو ليه الواحد مافينو يلبس آواعي (ملابس) ، آواعي عادية وأنو مضطرين نلبس هاد الشي طول الوقت. "

Sadly, young women at school tried to resist dominant discourse by customizing the school uniform even though that might have led to a painful punishment by the female military trainer of the school who is responsible of keeping order. The impact of khaki was not only emotional, but also physical. Maya, Zero and Nisreen shared the memory of the fabric feeling on their skin, which was raw, rough and thick. As Nisreen says:

" *Militarization is the khaki color that I avoid wearing today though I love it. I still remember the feeling of the khaki suit on my body, especially in summer, sweating, the color is disgusting. I did not feel comfortable.* "	" العسكرة كانت اللون الزيتي يلي بتفادي البسه اليوم رغم إني بحبه(...) لهلق بتذكر وقت كنت ألبس البدلة العسكرية، كيف بالصيف هيك حدا عرقان، قرفان من اللون، ماني مرتاحة بلي لابسته وبهاد اللون. "

The khaki school uniform was used in Syria until 2003-2004 (I was still living in Syria). That changed after Bashar al-Assad (current president) came to power. The changes were promoted as reforms. The khaki was replaced by another uniform with different colours but still reinforce gender stereotype role in a way, it is now blue and grey for males, pink and grey for females. For Maya, these classes were unteachable, and questions were not allowed, she says:

" *The subject of nationalism was militarized, it was an ideology class, an indoctrination class. Teachers were (Baath) party members or acquaintances of authority.* "	" كانت مادة القومية معسكرة، كان صف أيديولوجية، صف تلقين(...) كانوا المعلمين من رفاق الحزب أو معارف السلطة. "

Such militaristic nationalism discourse from school encourages polarization in which group identity is defined as being in opposition to the 'other.' Nationalism affects civilians who begin to identify with 'us' and not 'them', in the Syrian context that binary discourse can be interpreted, for example, as Arabs versus Kurds, capital vs other cities, Alawites versus Sunni (sects) ... etc, as the virtues of one culture, race or ethnic group and the defects of the 'other' are both exaggerated. When nationalism is linked to militarism, the 'other' becomes the 'enemy' (Burke 1998). This is cyclical; military ideology creates an 'enemy' out of difference and then uses the existence of this enemy to justify continued militarism and legitimised violence. It is crucial to mention that nationalism was also embedded in the constitution, it was an Arab state although Arabs formed only a percentage of the population, as well as Muslim state (this was also emphasized by judiciary, where Islamic sharia was used to govern personal status of all sects up until mid 2000s).

3.2 Institutionalized Violence

As Burke (1998) demonstrates that the military system of belief contends that one of the main ways of controlling a society and ensuring social stability is through the use of organized violence and force. Thus, the government sees force as a legitimate means to an end, or, in fact, an end in itself, and the society is anesthetized to it and eventually comes to accept it. This is reinforced in civil life by media which glorifies war, and portrays violence as necessary, combat as exhilarating and aggression as natural. As violence becomes accepted, it is minimized through language which distorts and sanitizes its impact. The violence that women activists experienced and witnessed before and after the uprising of 2011 is directed to their body and existence in public spaces, according to Maya, her sexuality was neutralized, 'I was not romantic'. She explains how emotions were influenced by militarisation, she also explains that militarism and patriarchy intersect with the tribal and masculine norms of emotions, mentioning that ideological struggle underestimated romance and emotions. In addition, she highlights how militarism extended to the law, like the family law[17],which is discriminatory against women when it comes to marriage, for example. She adds,

'' *Personal Status Laws are militarized, and they torture you if you think of getting married or have sex out of wedlock. In all cases, it was a blocked road. Consequently, the military and fighting logic used to underestimate emotions, romance and attachement, and glorify tribalism, masculinity and religious hegemony.* ''

"عسكرة قوانين الأحوال الشخصية، يلي بتفرمك فرم اذا بتفكري تتجوزي أو تفوتي بعلاقة وماتتجوزي، بجميع الأحوال كيف ماطلعتي عليها هي طريق مسدود. وبالتالي المنطق العسكري والنضالي كان بيسخف المشاعر والرومانسية وبيسخف الارتباط العاطفي، وكل المنطق القبلي والذكوري والديني متفقين (مع هذا المنطق). "

referring to how violence against women has been institutionalized in law.

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[17] In her Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Esther van Eijk's (2013) understanding of the development of legal pluralism in Syria from the late Ottoman period, through the French mandate period to independence and the consolidation of Ba›th power, leans on established research. The plurality of family law is seen as a continuation of the millet system where recognized religious communities administered their own «family» affairs. The 1953 personal status law in Syria covered all citizens but those belonging to specific and recognized religious categories were given certain exceptions and were allowed to set down their own codes. The Druze, like Christians, do not allow polygamy and for the latter only marriage performed in church (or by clergy) is recognized by the state. The great strength of van Eijk›s book is that she follows the parallel development of the codes of those fully covered by the state law and those covered by the exceptions. Issues of betrothal, marriage and the dissolution of marriage (or annulment for the Catholics) for the Syrian Christians was devolved to their churches and religious courts. But all Syrian citizens were - at least in theory - subject to the state law for inheritance until 2006. In that year, the Syrian parliament passed a new personal status law for the Greek, Armenian, Syrian, Assyrian, and Roman Catholics and the Maronites. The most important changes for the Catholics included the right to adopt and that women and men would inherit equal shares.' (Rabo 2013)

For Leen, the memory brings her back to an experience of violence within the family, manifested by an encounter with her mother, only for her request to change the TV channel that was broadcasting an old speech of the dead leader, she says:

" I was 15 years old in 2011, when Hafez al-Assad [former president, and father of the current president, who died in 2000] appeared on TV in one of his old memories, I wanted to change the channel but my parents did not allow me because Hafez al-Assad was on the screen. I complained by saying 'enough with Hafez al-Assad'. I remember, my mother hit me that day. "

" كنت صف تاسع (15 سنة) في عام 2011 ، كان طالع شي لحافظ الأسد [الرئيس السابق ووالد الرئيس الحالي الذي توفي عام 2000] على التلفزيون ، كنت بدي غير القناة وأمي ماعم تخليني، لأنو حافظ الأسد كان طالع. فقلت: أي خلصونا وإذا حافظ الأسد! بتذكر وقتها اكلت قتلة مرتبة (عنفت). "

The background of that fear is a famous saying: 'Walls have ears' referring to a long history of a surveillance and lack of freedom of expression even inside people's houses, and the fear of being arrested for criticizing or even showing any sign of disrespect to the 'the Leader Father', the Party, the Army or the Mukhabarat (secret intelligence services), which all could cost a person and his/ her family heavy dues.

In public spaces, violence spread on a different level of fears of anyone who could be a secret intelligence agent; a collaborator with Mukhabarat. Zero shares a lot of stories, experiences, and memories on this. For example, discovering that most of the lottery sellers at street were mukhabarat. She says,

" We were living in a tight vicious circle of institutionalized violence that was adopted by the state's institutions that used [intimidation and terror] as a psychological approach [to control people]. Given our relationships with the Mukhabarat, army and security officers, even the lowest ranking ones, we weren't living in a civic state in my opinion. "

" كنا شعب عايش بدوائر عنف مستمرة وطويلة وممؤسسة، يعني الدولة بتتبناها بمؤسساتها وبنهج نفسي، حتى نحن نفسياً كأفراد كنا عم ينشغل علينا وعلى علاقتنا مع المخابرات ومؤسسات الجيش والضباط وكيف قيمتهم بالمجتمع (...) نحن ماكنا دولة مدنية أنا هيك بشوف. "

The widespread use of militaristic language outside the military contexts and the normalization of the effects of violence that accompany this are indications of societal acceptance of militarism. Violence consequences of militarism are also made tolerable through a process of sanitization (Khalid 2014). The public space was for men, but not any men, the state masculine mukhabarat men, as Zero mentions,

" The pre-revolution discourse was that without the mukhabarat in Syria, you could have seen Israelis and Muslim brotherhood militants in the streets bombing here and there and causing chaos. The well-deployed and protective mukhabarat and army made Syria secure and allowed Syrians to walk in the streets safe. "

" كان الخطاب قبل الثورة، انو لولا جهاز المخابرات يلي بسوريا كنتو شفتوا اسرائيل والأخوان المسلمين عم يسرحوا ويمرحوا ويفجروا هون وهون، وهي منح الامن وآنو منعم لشو مايدك هي بسبب عنا مخابرات وجيش منشر وحامي الحمى. "

(chapter 1). For Maya, the institutionalized violence under militarism was not only reflected in the law and schools but also in the streets, through the authority of any military member and his ability to dominate the street. She says:

''There were many embassies where I lived, and in front of them, there used to be military guards. In intermediate and high-school, I used to take the longer, colder way to school in the middle of winter to avoid walking alone in the alleyway (which was shorter and warmer due to being shielded by highrises) because the military guards used to catcall and harass passersby out of sheer boredom.''

‟عنا بالحارات كان في كتير سفارات، فابالتلي كلها كولبات مليانة عساكر، يعني طريق البيت للمدرسة بالاعدادي والثانوي، الصبح بشباط وآذار الساعة سبعة الصبح، الهوا الزمهرير يلي كان يسفق على الاوتستراد ... كنت فضل اطلع امشي على الاوتستراد بهاد الزمهرير يلي عم قص المسمار ووصل دموعي شارة وأنفي محمر وأصابيعي مجمدة، على أنه امشي بالحارة {طريق أقصر ومسكر بين الأبنية} يلي كلها عساكر، آنا صبية لحالي رايحة وجاي {على المدرسة}، وهم ضايق خلقهم عم يلطشو الرايح والجاي. ‟

These are just few examples from women activists' experiences and memories of how a militarized society has internalized such violence and accepted it as long as the same militaristic state remains in control.

3.3 Women, Militarism and Arms

❝ *I see my own experience as a breach of the system and a power gain. This is usually rare.*❞
Zero

A very controversial area of debate on women and militarism is the role of women in military. According to Burke, 'greater participation in the military as an appropriate means to achieving women's liberation must be questioned' (1998, p.7). However, military as an institution built on masculine ideals such as aggression can hardly be expected to play a sincere part in women's emancipation (Ibid). In the Syrian context, women in military have different layers that start with the military training classes at school and summer camps for girls and boys during the secondary stage. Before the uprising of 2011, girls were able to join the formal military after secondary school by enrolling in the Military Academy. According to Zero, opening the space for women to join the army by establishing the Military Academy for girls and giving certain positions in both institutions, the military, and the police, 'was not to give power to these women but to increase the male power', in a sense, to have an

easier access to women (body and private spaces) through women in the military. After the uprising, women got involved in militarization in different forms in non-governmental entities, first, within the opposition armed groups, basically the Free Syrian Army (FSA), second, within the Kurdish armed forces, third, with al-Hisbah (ISIS women police forces), and fourth, with the National Defence Militias (under governmental support) (which is not covered in this research).

Firstly and from an oppositional experience, Zero used to introduce herself as an FSA member from 2011 to 2013. Her perspective of 'legitimacy' of being armed after the uprising was because weapons were only owned by the state and the state's men and for a long time. She says:

" The military doctrine was portrayed as the centre of our existence, it put us under the illusion of being in persistent danger, and in need of its protection. The regime created an aura of a sacred doctrine [militarism] and claimed being the source of all good in our society, and whatever goes wrong is due to the lack of sufficient support for it. "

"وضع المنظومة العسكرية كأولوية، وتهيجنا نحن أنو دائماً بخطر، وأنو هالمنظومة هي الحماية تبعنا وحوليها هالهالة المقدسة كمنظومة أساس لكل ما ينتج في المجتمع من شغلات جيدة، وقت بتصير سيئة بكون لأنو مافي دعم كاف لهالمنظومة، كانت المحور (بحياتنا). "

Figure 6 Photo of establishing "Eastern Ghouta Women's Brigade for Freedom." 2013.

In other words, and according to Zero, the regime has systematically militarized the society and made it loyal to it. By being part of the military, Zero thought she was rejecting the social stereotype of women being pacific or unfit to military. Her role as a focal point for establishing the new group and arming them, including promoting them in graphic designing posters and printing maps, gave her power as she concludes,

"My knowledge gives me power over them [men]." "معرفتي عطتني قوة عليهم."

The second form of women's involvement with military is women in the Kurdish armed forces, for Nisreen's involvement was more ideological because of the ethnic aspect. She says:

" We are distinguished and proud that we were the pioneers in forming women military forces in Syria. It was not a negative side somehow, because those women fighter were known for defending other women."

"منتميز ومنفتخر بهالجانب أنه نحن كنا سباقات أنو عنا حالة العسكرة النسائية في سوريا، وهي ماكانت حالة سلبية نوعاً ما، لأن هدول النساء (المقاتلات) كانوا معروفات أنو كانوا عم يدفعوا عن نساء أخريات."

That aspect has a direct impact on militarization, especially during wars, when [Kurdish] women take part in fighting. Since she was a child, she remembers having women fighters at her home, but she also remembers how sad and miserable they looked;

" I remember that they always had yellow faces due to stress and fear."

"بتذكر قديش هدوك النساء كانوا تعيسات ومتعبات (...) ووجوهن كانت صفرا يمكن من الخوف ومن التوتر."

The peak of Kurdish women fighters was during the battle of 'liberating Kobani'[18] from ISIS in 2015. Romanticized, and often summarized superficially as a population fighting Islamists, the Kurds have a tradition of self-defence extending across several national borders (CrimethInc). For Nisreen, Kurdish women fighters influenced her positively, she thanks them because she has a strong personality today. She adds:

" The involvement of Kurdish women in militarization is a strength for us as Kurdish women compared to other Syrian women, because we did not have sufficient involvement in civil society (...) even the ones, who were engaged on the political level, were few and an image."

"انخراط النساء الكورديات في العسكرة بيولد نقطة قوة النا، كنساء كورديات مقابل النساء السوريات الاخريات، نحن ماكان إلنا الوجود المدني الكاف (...) حتى يلي كن ناشطات بالمجال السياسي كان شكلي و عددهن قليل."

The interview with Nisreen gives more insight into how Kurdish military women are perceived by Kurdish non-military women, especially after the liberation battles and away from that nationalistic

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[18] 'Kobani became a ground of resistance as ISIS was approaching, taking villages on the outskirts of the city thanks to their recently obtained military superiority. ISIS was especially keen to capture Kobani, as it occupies the most direct route between the Turkish border and the de facto ISIS capital of Raqqa. In addition, Kobani was also the launching point of the revolution in Rojava. The YPG and YPJ offered a heroic resistance with the little firepower they had, mostly small arms supported by rocket-propelled grenades and the higher-calibre Russian Dushkas mounted on the backs of pickup trucks. As they retreated further and further into the city center of Kobani, the YPG and YPJ were celebrities, thanks, in part, to the West's romanticization and objectification of YPJ women fighting the bearded hordes of ISIS' (CrimethInc)

moment of 'we; the Kurds, the Kurdish women' against 'they; the Arabs, the Arab women'. For Nisreen, Kurdish women fighters' efforts have been exploited and appropriated by other male fighters. In addition, they are not treated as women during their fighting against ISIS. Nisreen adds that she knew some of them and they shared a lot of stories about their oppressed femininity at fighting times, saying,

" Locally, these female fighters were seen as any other military person (man) and they did not have any special needs (...) In a visit to their centres, I discovered that they were not able to admit that they are having their monthly period, that they (say) we are tired or unable [to serve] today, or I was in pain as a result of the period, they were not talking about this thing. "

"»محلياً كانوا المقاتلات بينشافوا متلهم متل العسكري (الرجل) ماعندهم أي احتياج خاص (...) في زيارة لمراكز تواجدهن اكتشفت أنو ماكن قادرات يعترفن أنه عم تجيهن الدورة، أنه (يقلن) تعبانة أو مافيني اليوم أو عم اتوجع نتيجة الدورة ماكن فيهم يحكوا عن هذا الشي.«"

Figure 7 All-female militia fighting against the Islamic State stand in formation. Photo courtesy of 'The Daughters of Kobani' 2015.

Indeed, women fighters were used but this didn't grant them and privileges, on the contrary, after the cameras went off the battle ended, they went on to pay a hefty social price for being fighters. One of central tenets of the ruling Kurdish Party, the PYD, is equality of men and women. Based on that principle, the all-female Women's Protection Unit (YPJ) militia fights alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). For more context about the Kurds role in the Syrian conflict, the following video: 'How the Kurds became a key player in Syria's war' by Vox.com, provides a well visual explanation of the development of Kurdish role in Syria since 2011:

Figure 8 A photo from the video "How the Kurds became a key player in Syria's war" by Vox, 2018.

The third form of women involvement with non-governmental entity was within ISIS's factions in al-Hisbah[19], a division that included an all-female unit was called al-Khansaa Brigade. This unit was known for its brutal torture of women for offenses as simple as not wearing a headscarf or being outside without a male chaperone (Vonderhaar 2021) this is another example of how women's role in militarism just serves and increases the male power over women's bodies by maintaining the masculine patriarchal system. Leen experienced life under ISIS rule for seven months. She used to comply to the dress code they imposed because she was very curious to go out and to witness what was happening in her city, al-Raqqa. She says:

'' *My sister did not go out of the house for three months after ISIS took control over the city because she refused to wear the niqab (face veil). I was curious to know what was happening, so I used to go out wearing the niqab and abaya.* ''

'' أختي ماطلعت من البيت لمدة ثلاثة أشهر بعد استيلاء داعش {على المدينة} لأنها رفضت ارتداء النقاب أو متل ماهم طلبوا. أنا عندي فضول بدي أعرف شو عم يصير، كنت عم اطلع مع اللباس يلي هن طلبوه: النقاب والعباية. ''

Leen shares violent stories about al-Hisba controlling women in private and public spaces, for example, recruitment of young women as ISIS brides, forced marriages to ISIS militants, not allowing

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[19] 'Founded in February of 2014, the group of roughly 60 single women aged 18-25 patrolled ISIS controlled areas of Syria and Iraq. They enforced Sharia Law throughout Raqqa, Mosul, and even in refugee camps as ISIS lost territory and power. Paid $230 a month, a member of al-Khansaa Brigade also received food, shelter, and basic firearms training. While their main purpose was to search women at checkpoints – a security technique implemented to catch men attempting to sneak through in women's clothing – the women also oversaw brothels of Yazidi slaves. Yazidi girls captured as sex slaves were subjected to daily physical abuse and rape, and some were sold to ISIS fighters for as little as $30. That these brothels were monitored by other women speaks to the power dynamic between Brigade members and the captured girls, as well as the religious tensions between the Yazidi tradition and other sects of Islam. Members of al-Khansaa Brigade also strictly enforced the dress code for women in the organization. Such violations included not wearing a headscarf, exposing their hands, or wearing head coverings with designs on them. While some punishments included public floggings, other times women simply disappeared.' (Vonderhaar 2021)

women to uncover their faces even inside women-only places, control over the personal property like personal phone which they might want to check at any moment without any objection. For Leen, the situation was impossible especially when she needed to go to another city to attend university classes, because she was not allowed to go to public spaces without a male chaperone or medical reason to leave the city, in addition, she was younger so there was the threat of being forced to be married. She adds,

" When the situation became more dangerous, my father gave me two options, either to leave the university [stay home] or to travel to another city and not come back to al-Raqqa. "

" وقت صار الوضع أخطر، أبي قلي يا إما تتركي الدارسة [البقاء في المنزل] أو تروحي وماعاد ترجعي للرقة. "

She left the city until it was liberated from ISIS.

Figure 9 A photo of Al-Khansa Brigade specialized in enforcing women's laws (Al-Jazeera Net), 2015.

The intervention of the army and militarization in civilian life is nothing but a justification for repression and the use of violence to maintain the status quo socially and politically. In this context the status quo is a patriarchal state and armed authorities that are premised on binary gender divisions. These are configured around masculinities and femininities in society and that are also reflected in militarism. Thus, the gendered assumptions of patriarchy and militarism inform and reinforce each other. The role of women in the army remains controversial because some women found in this a direct participation in the resistance against state oppression, as in the case of women's groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army, as well as the participation of Kurdish women in the expulsion of ISIS and the liberation of their areas. However, the involvement of women in the army and armed forces remains a place of discussion and criticism about how this can serve and increase the power of males by maintaining the patriarchal system, by reaching women in the private sphere, as is the case in the example of al-Hisbah within ISIS forces, but also in the case of all the examples mentioned.

CHAPTER 4
Bodily impact

Figure 5 Addiction by Sulafa Hijazi, 2013.

This chapter explores the narratives on the bodily impact, including the psychosocial issues caused by the experience of living in a militarized society and later under an armed conflict. The expression of 'psychosocial issue' is used for descriptive and informative purposes, and it alludes to the combination of psychosocial harm and confrontation strategies that have arisen from the experience of women activists. This chapter does not cover the true magnitude of these issues in women activists and must not be understood as a complete reading of the situation; instead, it emphasizes the most relevant aspects of these women activists' lived experiences by coming close to their experiences, and to trace the connections between military manifestations in the public sphere and their daily lives, including their activism. They were open to voice their worries and anxiety about their lives, body, and emotions. They also spoke about their experiences of loss and pain in the armed conflict: stories of receiving a death threat, being arrested and the time spent in detention, sharing details about memories of injuries, memories with bullets and missing chances of receiving them, or of 'dancing with snipers' (learning how to cross open fire exchange area). Therefore, this chapter covers and organises the conversations into the following analytical categories of psychosocial issues: identity, body and emotions, and psychosomatic aspects

4.1 Identity

> " *For a long time, they considered me as their male-mate.* "
> **Zero**

In this section, identity is understood as how women activists refer to themselves and how others refer to them, to their gender identity that arises, changes, and evolves depending on its context. Identity can also be understood as individual identity and social identity. According to Anastasio Ovejero (2015), these two concepts feed and support each other, our identity is built from and by our socialization at home and in education, community, and workspaces. For women activists, these spaces have been influenced by patriarchal and militarized norms that have tried to devalue their actions, voices, and knowledge (López 2020). For Zero, who used to live with men (because of her role in the Free Syrian Army), she felt besieged all the time; she did not have any private space and used to sleep on the couch for months. She had to cover herself to avoid any disturbance to the atmosphere because all the men around were coming from a religiously conservative background. They never lived with a woman who was not from the family. In the end, they gave her a room; they were seven men in a room, and

" *I by myself in a room as big as their room.* "

" أنا لحالي بغرفة بحجم غرفتهم. "

She shared an experience of how a woman's body and needs might become a shock for men. She says,

" I was a shock to them, [we used to pray all together] when someday, they call me to join, I said: I am in my period [when women menstruate, they do not pray], they got confused. After that, when I do not join the prayer, they did not call me at all. "

" أنا كنت صادمة الهم، مرة وقت الصلاة، نادولي لصلي معهم، قلت: جايتني الدورة. كلهم تلبكوا. من بعدها اذا مارحت ع الصلاة من حالي ماعاد نادولي. "

The dilemma that Zero lived because she was not originally from Douma[20] where she moved in after the 'revolution' and where she became a member of the Free Syrian Army, and she had a slighter freedom compared to other women (who are under family and community norms). However, she had to act according to the social norm as a woman, at least in public spaces, which entailed wearing the hijab in the street, and receiving marriage proposals to guard her as a woman who lived independently. She says,

" We, the women who are not from the region, like Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil[21] and Um Sameeh have been treated differently than the women from the region, who are under family and community ties. "

" نحن ، الغريبات عن المنطقة، مثل رزان زيتونة وسميرة خليل وأم سميح ،كان التعامل معنا مختلف عن نساء المنطقة، يلي بتحكمهن روابط عائلية ومجتمعية أكتر."

such as the freedom of movement by themselves alone or without men or living independently from the family. She concludes that she managed to keep living in her way because of her close work with the armed groups, which gave her power and privileges in private spaces. Paradoxically and because of her activism in the 'armed resistance', a predominantly male space, which, according to her, is not welcoming women, she was treated as a companion by other men; and both women and men, called her Abu al-Shabab (male-mate). She adds, 'I remember, women in the neighborhood were saluting me with 'zagruda- زغرودة '[22], as they used to do for the Free Syrian Army [men when they used to leave to battlefield]' when she used to go to the frontline as a war reporter (later she changed her role, but the town kept welcoming her as part of the FSA). Only she and other women had a wireless phone and have a nickname for military operations. Her name was Zero. Nevertheless, the FSA's soldiers were calling her 'brother' even though 'my voice sounds like a woman'. She adds,

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[20] A rebel city near Damascus

[21] Four brave Syrian activists Samira al-Khalil, Razan Zaitouneh, Wael Hammadeh, and Nissern Hammadi were snatched from their place of work in the city of Douma, Eastern Ghouta in 2013. They have not been seen since. The Douma Four, as they are now known, are prominent human rights defenders who were active in the Syrian revolution of 2011. Their commitment to democracy, equality, and justice made them an inspiration to so many Syrians who share that struggle. (TheSyriaCampaign)

[22] Zagruda is a voice or sound, high-pitched and piercing. Usually, people in Syria using that sounds in joyful events or when a person meanly men go for a battlefield and most probably, they might come back as martyrs. (Researcher's explanation)

The previous story is just an example, and, in my opinion, it requires urgent reflection on the possibilities and resources that some women activists have for their recognition in the community. Zero's engagement with armed resistance showed different stages of the refusal of her identity as a woman or dealing with her as a male- mate to mitigate her untraditional role.

One of these discursive norms may be the notion of gender, which the World Health Organization[23] has defined as the combination of roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that society assigns to men and women. Inequalities are enforced via the male-female dichotomy, historically favoring the experiences of bodies conceived as males, constructing their hegemony over women's bodies, and over the bodies of those who do not conform to this binary.

Through Zero's experience and her sharing of some other stories about women who challenged the traditional behavior and role expected of them in the public sphere, such as Razan Zaitouneh, Samira Khalil and Um Sameeh, in addition to the society adherence to reading them as women in a stereotyped role and identity, we see the limited personal freedom they have and how some of them are even subject to death threats, same as what happened with Zero, or kidnapping and disapperance, such as what happened with Razan and Samira, or intimidation, such as what happened with Umm Sameeh. As conclusion of this part, all of this creates fear inside not only these women, but they become an example to other women who might dare to resist the status quo. In another dimension, this kind of violence towards them may push women activists out of the public sphere.

4.2 Emotions and Body

Feminist philosophers have shown us how the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate femininity and body. Emotions are associated with women, represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement (Ahmed 2014). In these terms, the body is not limited to identify as living organisms only. The body is also the first ter-

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[23] World Health Organization. Health Topics: 'Gender'. https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/gender-equity-and-human-rights

ritory for resistance and power, the space into which our identity is carved, the place where feelings, thoughts, words, actions, and relationships come together (López 2020).

In this section, I argue that emotions and body are intertwined and cannot be read one without the other, and these two aspects affect each other constantly. In Spinoza's terms (1959), emotions shape what bodies can do, as 'the modifications of the body by which the power of action on the body is increased or diminished' (Ahmed 2014). In this sense living under the military and later the conflict, forced women activists to react to and maneuver towards power used on them, for example, not to leave the house for months or to dress in a certain way. In fact, the bodily reaction makes space for emotions to emerge as well like stress or depressions as it is in many women activists' cases. For Nisreen, ethnicity and gender interlock with her understanding of her body, as a result of 'the stress' of the last ten years, she says,

''I feel myself aging, when I look at myself in the mirror, I see myself old, I feel that war is clear on our faces, the war here was double on us as Kurdish women, first, the war that all Syrians were facing, and the second was on Kurdish women because of the Kurdish women fighters and the pressure on us to look like them.''	''حاسة حالي عم اكبر، كلما طلعت علي حالي بالمراية بشوف حالي عم اكبر، بحس آنو اثار الحرب واصحة ع وجوهنا. هون الحرب كانت مضاعفة علينا كنساء كرديات، آول شي الحرب ع كل السوريين، وتاني شي لان كان في مقاتلات كرديات عم يقاتلوا كان علينا ضغط نكون متلهن. ''

In this example, emotions evidently shape the surfaces of bodies, the feeling of being old and seeing that on the face, is certainly another proof on how emotions and body are intertwined and cannot be separated.

Earlier in chapter 3, I mentioned how Maya's relationship with her body was impacted by militarization, by saying,

'' *My relationship with my body, my femininity, and my sexuality was impacted [negatively] by militarization.* ''	''علاقتي بجسمي وأنوثتي وجنسانيتي تأثرت بالعسكرة. ''

By that she was referring to self-oppressing her body or femininity in order to be taken seriously. Repeatedly, she mentioned how she became aware of her body as a stereotyped female body with certain social expectations. To mitigate such indirect oppression, she used to wear clothes with dark colors, wide, not attractive. Maya adds,

> " *Wearing clothes in a way to be taken serious (...) avoiding wearing nicely or feminine, because that was kind of an accusation (...). Maybe dressing like a boy was kind of pushing away any suspicions [of being feminine].* "

<div dir="rtl">

" إلبس تياب لأتاخد بشكل جدّي (...) كنت اتجنب البس تياب حلوة أو أنثوية ، لأن هاد كان نوع من الاتهام، أنه عم تتحلي(...). يمكن كنت البس متل حسن صبي كنوع من دفع أي شكوك "

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Maya was not the only participant who recognized and linked her practice in the public sphere as a means of avoiding direct confrontation with the existing social order, which is saturated with a toxic masculine military ideology.

4.3 Psychosomatic

> " *I am always anxious and stressed.* "
> **Leen**

As Martha Bello and Ricardo Chaparro (2011) underline, the harm and confrontations inflicted on the body lead to conditions such as physical injuries, damages to sexual integrity, self-care practices such as exercise, eating habits and sleep that will later create psychosomatic issues. That resonates with Nisreen's experience of becoming 'asocial.' She says:

> " *It is a burden emotionally and psychologically, we [women activists] have to be careful with our romantic relations. It is hard to live the way I wish, so I took a decision to not have a romantic relation. We cast out because we are activists and feminists (...) I think; because of that stress, I have health issues including my chronic illness.* "

<div dir="rtl">

" كان علينا عبء عاطفي ونفسي ، أنو نكون حذرات في علاقاتنا الرومانسية. وكان صعب عيش متل مابدي ، لهيك أخدت قرار أنو مايكون في علاقة رومانسية. نُبذنا لأننا ناشطات ونسويات (...) بعتقد نتيجة لهذا الضغط عندي مشاكل صحية بما فيها مرضي المزمن. "

</div>

Psychosomatic issues are psychological changes that originate in or affect a person's body, according to Bello and Chaparro (2011), the armed conflict and socio-political violence - in Colombia - have been an axis around which women's and men's psychosomatic behaviors as habitual gestures, for example, the way of speaking, can be understood. The high levels of direct, structural, and cultural violence create emotional and sometimes mental distress in individual and social life. They state that this is since 'the systematic violation of human rights diminishes dignity and social and spiritual support, putting people and their communities in extremely vulnerable positions without protection' (López 2020). The dynamics of the conflict can be traced through time and space, that is to say, the unity of

the body with the space that it inhabits: thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of the body (López 2020). During the interviews, the women activists told stories of changes in their alertness and sleep, aging, fear all the time, feelings under stress, tiredness, anxiety and fragility. As Nisreen says,

" Maybe during wartime or stress time, there is that kind of feeling that life is passing by, fast and in vain, do people who do not have war feel the same? I felt my life is passing without any accomplishments. "

"يمكن وقت الحروب أو أوقات التوتر ، في شعور إنه الحياة بتمر بسرعة وبلا جدوى ، هل بحس الأشخاص يلي ماعندهم حرب بنفس الشيء؟ أنا حاسة أنو حياتي عم تمر دون أي إنجازات. "

Within feminist approaches, fear is shown to be structural and mediated rather than an immediate bodily response to an objective danger (Ahmed 2014). Rather than seeing fear simply as an inevitable consequence of women's vulnerability, feminist critics argue that fear responds to the threat of violence (Ibid). The threat itself is shaped by the authorization of narratives about what is and what is not threatening, and who are and who are not the appropriate 'objects' of fear. As Elizabeth Stanko (1990) argues, women's access to public space is restricted by the circulation of narratives of feminine vulnerability. Such narratives are calls for action: They suggest women must always be on guard when outside the house (Ibid). They not only construct 'the outside' as inherently dangerous, but they also posit home as being safe. So, women, if they are to have access to feminine respectability, must either stay at home or be careful in how they move and appear in public (Ahmed 2014).

One significant factor is their overly high workload in their communities and prolonged exposure to stories of the painful experiences of the people they accompany, whose effect accumulates over time and leads to apathy (López 2020). As Zero shares,

" People complain around me that I am not kind, I do not cry. Actually, I lost my ability to cry, I do not know how to cry. Usually, I am touched by what people tell, but I do not show empathy. However, I offer support directly or indirectly by referring to other groups that can support. "

"الناس حوالي بيشتكوا من إني مو لطيفة ، وما ببكي، صراحة فقدت قدرتي على البكاء ، وأصلا مابعرف أبكي. يعني مثلاً بتأثر بشو بقولوا الناس ، بس مابظهر تعاطف. بس بالمقابل ، بقدم الدعم بشكل مباشر أو غير مباشر، بوصل الناس مع المجموعات التانية التي ممكن تقديم الدعم. "

Activism is also carried out in fear, hate, pain, and anger, as Sarah Ahmad extensively argues in her book The Cultural Politics of Emotions. Fear is one of the emotions that is constantly repeated during the conversation with the women activists. According to Ahmed, fear involves shrinking the body; it restricts the body's mobility precisely insofar as it seems to prepare the body for fight. Such shrinkage is significant: fear works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space. In this way, emotions work to align physical space with social space. It is not that fear begins in a body and then

restricts the mobility of that body. As she mentioned in the book, the response of fear is itself dependent on particular narratives of what and who is fearsome that are already in place (Ahmed 2014). For Leen, who is trying to change her daily routine, the fear of being criticized because of her appearance, of not wearing a hijab, locked her inside. She adds,

" The place (Raqqa city) does not give that much option for outdoors entertainment for women. (...) So, all activities to break out boredom are taking place at home. "	"البلد هون مافيها كتير من خيارات الترفيه برا للنساء(...) لهيك كل نشاطاتي بعملها بالبيت لحتى ما مل. "

These feelings are connected to physical problems, such as insomnia, neck pain, headaches, a rash of blisters, and even developed towards chronic illness, as some participants state. When women activists feel physically exhausted, they begin to seek to reduce their tiredness through distancing themselves from any activity that might trigger them, for example, following social media or news, as Maya did,

" Since I left Syria, I am not involved [in public political activities anymore], I gradually took distance from public matters. "	"من وقت ماتركت سوريا، مابقى شاركت كتير، وصرت بعد شوي شوي. "

One of the unseen presses on women activists that was brought to the conversation by Zero and Maya, is the importance of reemphasizing women activists' humanity and not idealizing them as 'superheroes.' Zero points out the burden of being a notable in the public sphere and the social expectations on women activists, and the emotional and mental load that comes with it. She says,

" So if you are not a heroine, your activism will not be accepted because your regular activism is not enough to contest with the heroes who are everywhere. You have to be the best in everything, and you should not get tired or sick. "	" اذا ماكنتي بطله، فنشاطك مابينقبل، لان النشاط العادي مابينافس باقي الأبطال الموجودين بالساحة، لازم تكوني آحسن وحدة وما بتتعبي ومابتمرضي. "

One of the psychosocial issues that women activists face is found in the intensity of their practices; they describe it as needing a lot of space and time; some even describe it as non-stop work. The overly heavy workload makes it difficult for women activists to go through the emotional processing necessary to guarantee their wellbeing and mental health. (López 2020). The participants already decided to start self-care practices and be aware of their bodily and emotional needs. For example, Maya gradually took distance from public life since she left Syria and is now doing more activities that are

not directly related to Syria. Zero is planning to take time off to recover after her burnout and to spend more time with her family, and Nisreen is trying to focus on her personal growth by following more trainings in media and search for opportunities to pursue her education. These decisions came after at least ten years of direct confrontation with militarism because of the armed conflict but for some of the participants, Zero and Maya, because of their longer experience with militarization before the 'revolution', the burden was doubled because their experiences under militarism extended to be against the militarized regime and for them what happened before and after the 'revolution' is just an uninterrupted circle of violence.

In this chapter, the question of gender identity and the body embedded emotions was intertwined in the participants' expression of their journey to deconstruct these two concepts under the context of militarism. In parallel, women activists were mixing up how their awareness of their gender identities and their bodies affected their behavior and decisions in the public sphere. Moreover, that awareness was inseparable from how they physically and emotionally felt as a result of a determination to adapt to the social expectation of them as women.

For women activists, the high expectations of them to be 'superheroines', always strong and available to support the most vulnerable, was stressful and doubly burdensome. These unspoken expectations delayed many of them in making the decision to begin their recovery journey, to take care of themselves without feeling guilty, to leave their place vacant or to abandon the help of those who are in need.

Figure 11: Syrian woman activist. 2020. Feminism.

Conclusion: To Recover, to Heal

It was not easy for me to reach an adequate conclusion of this research. The material experiences of female activists under militarism, especially at schools, deserve more contemplation and delving into other details that are associated with all those manifestations of military khaki clothing, strictness, restriction, national and military school classes, and the extension of this military ideology to social life outside government institutions, from the spread of the manifestations of a military or security men with the right to control the public space, to creating a general fear of doing anything wrong towards the leader and the party. The 'revolution' broke the fear but only for a short time, as militarization came back in its material form; arms, that directly control people's lives and impose more oppression on women and silence them, especially the women activists who were in direct confrontation with the armed authorities in different places.

In the context of militarization and armed conflict, it is important to pay attention to and understand the psychological issues of women activists, because their presence in the public sphere, in a toxic masculine atmosphere, is a political act of resistance in the face of war and any form of oppression. By understanding and deconstructing these psychological issues, it helps to explore the patriarchal norms that dominate how emotions, bodies, and non-normative gender identities are perceived. That has been said, in this conclusion, I think it is important to share the lesson learned from these four women activists' lived experiences, that highlights not only the gaps but also the alternative ways to cope and survive such high oppressed context. Day-to-day, doing their work requires them to have certain conditions and abilities for which they are not necessarily prepared to or do not have access to external support to mitigate.

Identifying the harm and confrontations caused by psychosocial issues for women involved in activism allowed an analysis of the complexity and depth of the subjectivities of those who lead communities, movements and initiatives and confront patriarchy. The identification of visible and invisible harm and talking about it publicly might facilitate developing an early response strategy for situations such as burnout. The participants talked about exhaustion as emotional in the first place and then moves to become physical exhaustion, in the words of Carlos Beristain (2010), it is a state of 'extreme emotional exhaustion and primitive defense mechanisms (emotional distance, cynicism, etc.); but also, symptoms such as depersonalization (insensitivity, questioning of one's own values) (López 2020).

What is needed, according to the participants, is, first, self-care. This can be facilitated by having the

space to create their own 'standards 'for their lives,' to believe in them, and to use that to evaluate themselves based on that only and not try to fit the unrealistic social expectations. Along these lines, Maya states more practice of self-autonomy;

> *" To avoid internalizing the society standards, which they already know are unjust, they [women activists] should put their own standards and compare them to society standards, to differentiate between them and avoid mixing them. "*

> " يتجنبوا امتصاص معايير المجتمع، يلي بيعرفوا سلفا انها مانها عادلة، وانو يكتبو معاييرهن الخاصة ويقارنوها مع معايير المجتمع، للتفريق بيناتها ولحتى ماتختلط عليهن. "

Second, another important step for women activists is to be aware of one's own limitations and not fear taking a break to recover and to create or to be in a circle of support, as Zero recommends:

> *" To be aware of our role (...) and to build feminist support circles, it helps to mitigate the pressure of being a heroine. Because there will be others to share the mission with, therefore, it will not be necessary to play this role alone, which keeps women activists always on alert. "*

> " نكون واعيات لدورنا (...) ونبي دوائر دعم نسوية، هذا بساعد على تخفيف الضغط أنو تكوني بطلة، باعتبار رح يكون في أشخاص تانين عم يشاركوا بالمهمة، فا مابكون في حاجة لتلعبي هالدور لحالك، وهذا يلي بخلي الناشطات بحالة تأهب. "

Third, to live one's own experience as it is, as Nisreen recommends,

> *" Try to have enough tools to face any challenge. Additionally, to have allies from other actors, such as the other gender, other sectors or other working fields. "*

> " أنو تمتلكي الأدوات الكافية لمواجهة أي تحدي، وآنو يكون في حلفاء من كل الجهات النشطة، من قطاعات تانية، جندر التاني، أو من مجالات عمل تانية. "

While, Leen, the youngest participant, hopes that her activism will serve social change, and says to other women activists,

> *" To stick to their way of thinking and they will change [the environment around], in the short term or longer term, they will make a change. "*

> " الاصرار على كيف بفكروا ورح يصير تغير، على المدى القصير أو الطويل، رح يصير التغيير. "

These recommendations and advice opened the door to many other questions, about how to create transnational feminist solidarity and support to keep women able to stay in the public sphere safe and healthy, especially in difficult contexts such as militarization. Finally this research is an attempt to re-read the history, power relation, masculinity, and hierarchy on women body from women's per-spectives.

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VIDEOS, PHOTOS AND ART WORKS' LIST

» Cover photo is a personal property Rula Asad, Damascus 1999

» Figuer 1: Hijazi, Sulafa. 2011. Masterbation.

   https://sulafahijazi.com/Artwork/Ongoing.html?fbclid=IwAR3SY6aW8NQa_vzEjf-9Dzal-U5r_MFrVeJ9Vd89r1S1x-P9hyGyMMudV9-M

» Figuer 2: Hijazi, Sulafa. 2013. Waxing.

   https://sulafahijazi.com/Artwork/Ongoing.html?fbclid=IwAR3SY6aW8NQa_vzEjf-9Dzal-U5r_MFrVeJ9Vd89r1S1x-P9hyGyMMudV9-M

» Figuer 3: Hijazi, Sulafa. 2013. Dall.

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» Figuer 4: A photo from the documentary 'A Flood in al-Baath State' by Omar Amiralay, 2003.

   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE5YWTMpLCo&list=PL8SZ_a8IKmnibdn5A-Jkq0VpW39w3IXoXO&index=3

» Figuer 5: 1999. "Girls wearing a khaki-colored school suit." Damascus:

   https://www.community.arageek.com/blog/damascene-memories , September.

» Figuer 6: 2013. Photo of establishing "Eastern Ghouta Women's Brigade for Freedom".

   https://www.facebook.com/freedomgouta/photos/basw.Abp2YStuvzVl9p6jlDz86gT-TuwbY4mKYFcyxkavF_qaKQTr6guphVs22GEkmODMo502DRJs1sWN-oA5AYksqUgYqYQSILAN9HA_HPOapjeXSD8mC1xgPVY94JSWJHq3gjcDuVtltg-Way0lkkeOGVwNHy1cjcbKtuSqwNGbIYwoyqWgkipbuebh5jG0b7ieBShxls--7GE-7pIl6 .

» Figuer 7: 2015. "All-female militia fighting against the Islamic State stand information." Photo courtesy of 'The Daughters of Kobani'. https://www.military.com/off-duty/books/2021/02/18/daughters-of-kobani-tells-riveting-story-of-women-combat.html.

» Figuer 8: A photo from the video "How the Kurds became a key player in Syria's war" by Vox, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gaKwjvxukvg

» Figuer 9: A photo of Al-Khansa Brigade specialized in enforcing women's laws (Al-Jazeera Net), 2015.

» Figuer 10: Hijazi, Sulafa. 2013. Addiction

   https://sulafahijazi.com/Artwork/Ongoing.html?fbclid=IwAR3SY6aW8NQa_vzEjf-9Dzal-U5r_MFrVeJ9Vd89r1S1x-P9hyGyMMudV9-M

» Figuer 11: Syrian woman activist. 2020. Feminism